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JOINT FORCES STAFF COLLEGE

JOINT ADVANCED WARFIGHTING SCHOOL



INFLUENCE AND INTERESTS: HOW A BELLIGERENT DICTATOR RESISTS

CURRENT METHODS

by
Victor A. Hill
Commander, USN

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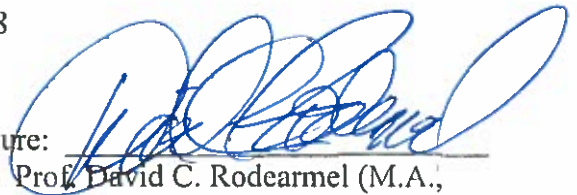
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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in partial satisfaction of the requirements of a Master of Science Degree in Joint Campaign Planning and Strategy. The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Joint Forces Staff College or the Department of Defense. This paper is entirely my own work except as documented in footnotes.

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Abstract

North Korea poses a significant security threat to the United States (US). Wars and occupations have shaped North Korea's strategies and tactics to provide security for its regime and country. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has attempted to implement a nuclear nonproliferation policy. China and Russia have made feeble attempts to influence North Korea's behavior, skirting many of the United Nations Security Council sanctions on North Korea. Despite the efforts of six United States administrations, North Korea continues to develop its nuclear weapons program. It appears as if the Kim Regime is immune to current diplomatic methods. As the US evaluates its options, full scale military action, limited airstrikes, regime change, maintaining the status quo, and even normalizing relations are all available. In order to provide security for the US and its allies, the US must evaluate its North Korea policy and change its course of action to find a North Korean solution. After examining all of the courses of action, normalizing relations with North Korea may be the most viable option.

Dedicated to Tanya. Thank you for the help.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: History	2
Chapter 3: Policy and Strategy of the United States	4
Ronald Reagan (1981-89) and Bush (1989-93)	4
Clinton Administration (1993-2001)	5
Bush Administration (2001-09).....	7
Obama Administration (2009-17).....	9
Trump Administration (2017-present).....	12
United States Strategy Summary	15
Chapter 4: China Strategy	16
China’s Continued Support of North Korea	16
China Summary	19
Chapter 5: Soviet Union / Russia Strategy	21
Russia Summary	25
Chapter 6: Decoding North Korea.....	26
History.....	27
Internal Threats.....	28
External Threats	32
Decoding North Korea Summary	34
Chapter 7: Possible Courses of Action	35
Full Scale Military Action.....	36
Limited Airstrikes	38
Regime Change	40
Maintain the Status Quo.....	40
Normalize Relations-Lift All Sanctions	41
Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations.....	44
Bibliography	47
Vita	52

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Chapter 1: Introduction

The precarious environment the world finds itself regarding North Korea, formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), did not appear overnight. The situation has been building from the conclusion of the Second World War. North Korea's nuclear weapons program poses a direct threat to the United States (US), destabilizes the region, and risks the further proliferation of nuclear weapons, without a clean response for stopping the nation. To date, it appears that North Korea has been resistant to the United Nations (UN) and US diplomatic attempts to stop their nuclear weapons development program. Some argue that China may be the only state that has the ability to influence North Korea diplomatically. President Donald Trump articulated this belief in several speeches on the issue.¹ If those diplomatic efforts are unsuccessful, the world faces a belligerent dictator who is unresponsive to current diplomatic methods and risks nuclear proliferation that may force the world into a new nuclear paradigm. With current strategies for North Korea failing, the US must evaluate all available options. Full scale military action, limited airstrikes, regime change, maintaining the status quo, and even normalizing relations are all available options. In order to provide security for the US and its allies, the US must evaluate its North Korea policy and change its course of action because current methods are not working. After examining all of the courses of action, normalizing relations with North Korea may be the most viable option.

¹ Steve Holland and Christian Shepherd, "In Beijing, Trump presses China on North Korea and trade," *Reuters*, November 8, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-trump-asia-china/in-beijing-trump-presses-china-on-north-korea-and-trade-idUSKBN1D9034> (accessed November 20, 2017).

Chapter 2: History

The Korean Peninsula has a tumultuous history of defeat and occupation that rivals any nation around the globe. Local folklore even states “the country has been invaded at least six hundred times in the last three millennia.”² The conclusion of the First Sino-Japanese war of 1894-1895 transferred Korea to the sphere of Japanese influence.³ Japan formally annexed Korea in 1910, and Japanese occupation did not end until the Japanese defeat in World War II (WW II).⁴ Although the end of WWII brought an end to Japanese colonial rule, it ushered in another era of occupation when the US and the Soviet Union (USSR) divided the Korean Peninsula.⁵ Disagreements between the communist north and the anti-communist south led to the establishment of two separate governments and the Korean War despite the fact that the occupation was supposed to be temporary.⁶

The Korean War stemmed from both internal and external pressures. The US pushed for the containment of communism as tensions rose between the north and the south. The major post-WWII powers took up sides. The US aligned with the anti-communist south, and China and the USSR aligned with Kim Il Sung and the communist north.⁷ The Korean War exceeded the violence of most previous conflicts on the peninsula, but only ended with the Korean Armistice Agreement. No formal peace treaty

² Allan R. Millett, “Introduction to the Korean War,” *The Journal of Military History* 65, no.4, October 2001: 921.

³ Shannon Tiezzi, “Chinese Strategists Reflect on the First Sino-Japanese War,” *The Diplomat*, April 18, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/04/chinese-strategists-reflect-on-the-first-sino-japanese-war/> (accessed December 28, 2017).

⁴ Wand Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), xv.

⁵ Haruki, xv.

⁶ Haruki, xv-xvi.

⁷ Haruki, xvi.

was ever signed.⁸ And for all the violence, no significant change in the borders or the peninsula governments resulted. The war did solidify a relationship between North Korea and China that persists today, even though the strength of that relationship could be brought into question.⁹

Much of the the Kim Regime's distrust of outside actors developed from the history of betrayal and subjugation on the Korean Peninsula. The regime pushed to establish a powerful military that possessed nuclear weapons because they felt a nuclear capability could provide security for the regime, defend against an invasion by the US and South Korea, and mandate recognition and influence on the international stage, versus being silenced and ignored by the global powers.¹⁰ The military buildup the regime views essential to their survival, is the exact cause for US and South Korea concern. This difference in perspective is not an easy situation to resolve, as both major actors see a single item as the condition from which they will not yield. North Korea sees nuclear weapons as the essential item that can maintain the regime, while the US sees the nuclear weapons as the condition they cannot allow. With this impasse between the two powers, a situation has arisen where each side believes they must continue to escalate hostilities in order to match each of the moves made by the opponent through a series of policy and strategy decisions.

⁸ Haruki, 286-290.

⁹ Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc, 2009), 12.

¹⁰ Mark Bowden, "How to Deal With North Korea: There are No Good Options, But Some are Worse than Others", *The Atlantic*, 2017.

Chapter 3: Policy and Strategy of the United States

The United States policy and strategy regarding North Korea started before the Korean War as part of the broader US containment strategy. On the peninsula, the mechanism was intended to contain communism and stabilize hostilities. The Korean Armistice brought an end to the shooting, but it did not weaken United States resolve to stop communism or to stand with and protect South Korea. The United States policy for North Korea began as containment, but as the Kim regime moved to become a nuclear state the United States policy focused on nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Although all of the post-Cold War United States Presidents and their administrations have held to this policy, they used very different strategies to achieve and measure success. These differences in strategies between administrations gives the perception of sporadic and inconsistent policy. More consequently, the lack of a persistent United States strategy to achieve the policy goals for North Korea has caused misunderstandings, created miscommunications, and resulted in distrust between the two nations. North Korea has become a security risk for the US that cannot be ignored.

Ronald Reagan (1981-89) and Bush (1989-93)

The Reagan and George H.W. Bush Administrations upheld the policy of nonproliferation and made significant efforts to further that policy. During these administrations, North Korea appeared to respond to international pressure in regards to nuclear weapons. North Korea signed the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985. As the Cold War drew to an end, other significant changes occurred on the Korean

Peninsula and in the rest of the world. President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev announced the withdrawal of tactical nuclear weapons abroad in 1991.¹ The announcement signaled the withdrawal of nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula. In 1992, North Korea and South Korea both signed the South-North Joint Declaration on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.² Despite several issues with North Korea in its compliance with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), North Korea appeared to be yielding to international pressure and bringing its nuclear programs into compliance. The diplomatic strategies and international efforts employed by the Reagan and Bush Administrations seemed to effectively achieve the United States policy objectives of nonproliferation and denuclearization.

Clinton Administration (1993-2001)

The Clinton Administration faced significant advances in North Korea's missile and nuclear weapons programs. Shortly after taking office in 1993, North Korea threatened to pull out of the NPT in response to IAEA demands for special inspections.³ The Clinton Administration maintained the policy of nonproliferation and successfully prevented North Korea from exiting the NPT through several rounds of diplomatic talks.⁴ Although North Korea did not exit the NPT, they secretly continued development of their nuclear weapons program, leading to former President Jimmy Carter being sent to

¹ Kelsey Davenport, "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy," The Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron> (accessed December 03, 2017).

² Davenport.

³ Davenport.

⁴ Davenport.

Pyongyang to negotiate a deal with North Korea.⁵ During this period, Kim Il Sung died, but “the Clinton Administration successfully established a deal...which offered \$4 billion worth of nuclear, energy, economic and diplomatic benefits in exchange for halting North Korea’s nuclear program.”⁶ The Clinton Administration was not able to get North Korea to stop the development of its nuclear weapons program through diplomatic talks alone. Therefore, aid was offered in order to get North Korea to agree to compliance. Although North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear weapon development, they continued to develop its ballistic missile program and even shared technology with Iran and Pakistan throughout the mid and late nineties, resulting in more sanctions and diplomatic talks.⁷ The Clinton Administration continued to hold to the nonproliferation policy and utilized diplomatic talks, sanctions, and even aid in an attempt to coerce North Korea into compliance.

The strategies utilized by the Clinton Administration yielded mixed results. Although diplomatic talks, sanctions, and aid successfully brought North Korea back to the table for diplomatic discussions, North Korea made significant advances in its ballistic missile and nuclear programs. These advances demonstrate the limited success of the Clinton Administration to enforce their policy of nonproliferation. It is important to note that even though the strategies utilized by the administration did not reach the policy objectives, they kept North Korea at the negotiation table. Without keeping the

⁵ Davenport.

⁶ Abby Hamblin, “North Korea: How Obama, Bush, Clinton dealt with the rogue nation, *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, August 10, 2017, <http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/opinion/the-conversation/sd-north-korea-obama-past-presidents-20170810-htlstory.html> (accessed October 29, 2017).

⁷ Davenport.

diplomatic channels open, there is no chance of finding a peaceful solution to the problem. In that regard, The Clinton Administration's strategies proved effective.

Bush Administration (2001-09)

The administration of George W. Bush continued the policy of nonproliferation and attempted to take a stronger stance against North Korea. The first year of the Bush Administration was full of rhetoric by both sides with hostilities reaching a new height as President Bush used his 2002 State of the Union address to criticize North Korea for "arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens."⁸ This was the first State of the Union address after the 9/11 attacks on the US. Although North Korea was not the focus of the address, the President characterized North Korea as part of an "axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world."⁹ The threats and the rhetoric intended to coerce North Korea back to the negotiation table and into compliance with the policy of nonproliferation failed to have the intended effect. Instead, North Korea cancelled future talks, continued to transfer missile technology to Yemen and Pakistan, withdrew from the NPT, and continued to secretly develop its nuclear weapons program.¹⁰ Due to the actions of North Korea, the Bush Administration imposed additional sanctions on North Korea in an attempt to coerce them to return to the negotiations table.¹¹ After initial resistance by North Korea, they ultimately returned to negotiations, giving the appearance that the diplomatic actions taken by the Bush Administration yielded success. Mid 2003 brought the first Six Party Talks (China,

⁸ George W. Bush, State of the Union Address, January 29, 2002, <https://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2002/01/20020129-11.html> (accessed October 29, 2017).

⁹ Bush.

¹⁰ Davenport.

¹¹ Davenport.

Japan, Russia, and South Korea) that ushered in a period of relative cooperation by North Korea that gave further evidence that the diplomatic efforts taken by the Bush Administration delivered a positive effect.¹² In 2006, North Korea demonstrated that although they appeared to be cooperating, in reality, development of its ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons continued. North Korea test fired multiple ballistic missiles and conducted an underground nuclear test.¹³ These actions not only drew the attention of the US but the entire international community, resulting in the passage of United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1718 that imposed an arms embargo, froze assets and banned travel on persons involved in the DPRK's nuclear program.¹⁴ These events forced the US and the international community to re-evaluate the diplomatic actions taken. The Bush Administration along with the other members of the Six Party Talks added significant aid packages to their diplomatic efforts in order to convince North Korea to comply with the disassembly of its nuclear facilities and the other conditions set forth in UNSC Resolution 1718.¹⁵ Once again, North Korea responded to the diplomatic efforts and again appeared to comply with the requirements of the international community. The diplomatic model of North Korean compliance in exchange for the easing of sanctions and aid continued for the remainder of the Bush Administration.

As the policies and diplomatic methods used by the Bush Administration are examined, it is clear that the verbal rhetoric and threats did little to dissuade North Korea from its ballistic missile and nuclear weapons ambitions. These actions yielded the

¹² Hamblin.

¹³ Davenport.

¹⁴ "Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006) Resolutions," *United Nations Security Council Subsidiary Organs*, <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1718/resolutions> (accessed December 27, 2017).

¹⁵ Hamblin.

opposite effect, and actually motivated North Korea to take action to protect themselves against United States aggression. The use of sanctions did little to change the situation. Although the sanctions brought North Korea back to the negotiations table, North Korea continued to secretly develop ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. Where the Bush Administration saw the biggest change in North Korean behavior was after North Korea tested its first nuclear weapon. This event caused the Bush Administration to identify alternate methods to influence the behavior of North Korea. The combination of diplomatic talks and the fuel aid packages most significantly influenced the behavior of North Korea and ushered in a period of apparent compliance. Although the Bush Administration utilized ineffective methods in the beginning which led to ballistic missile tests and the test detonation of a nuclear weapon, the administration was able to find alternative diplomatic measures to better achieve their North Korea policies.

Obama Administration (2009-17)

North Korea conducted a rocket launch and its second nuclear test shortly after Obama took office, forcing the administration to face the North Korea situation.¹⁶ The Obama Administration held to the policy of nonproliferation but utilized a very different philosophy to handle the situation. “President Obama’s world view begins with the assumption that United States interests are better served by multilateral diplomacy and collective security.”¹⁷ This world view set different priorities in foreign policy for the

¹⁶ Hamblin.

¹⁷ C. Kenneth Quinones, “The Obama Administration’s North Korea Policy,” *Dr. C. Kenneth Quinones*, June 26-27, 2009, <http://www.ckquinones.com/wp-content/uploads/2009/05/obama-nk-policy-0609.pdf> (accessed December 19, 2017).

Obama Administration and significantly shaped the North Korean strategies. Rather than face the nuclear weapons situation in North Korea as an isolated problem, the Obama Administration looked at the nonproliferation of nuclear weapons from a global perspective in which North Korea was simply one small piece.¹⁸ The Obama Administration also modeled their foreign policy after the Henry Kissinger model of “engagement” over “confrontation” where the focus is on building partnerships through diplomacy rather than through coercion or the use of force.¹⁹ Prior to North Korea’s second nuclear test in May 2009, President Obama spoke in Prague and publicly condemned North Korea’s missile tests and encouraged North Korea to abandon its pursuit of weapons of mass destruction.²⁰

When North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in May of 2009, the Obama Administration encouraged and facilitated an international response. The UN Security Council met and released a statement condemning the test and later adopted UNSC Resolution 1874, further restricting arms sales and financial transactions with North Korea.²¹ In an attempt to keep diplomatic talks open, the Obama Administration sent former president Bill Clinton to North Korea. Although this visit was primarily to seek the release of two United States journalists held by North Korea, Clinton was able to meet with Kim Jong Il, and work on strengthening bilateral confidence.²² Despite the Obama Administration’s preference to utilize a multilateral approach, the United States State Department released statements that the US was ready to enter bilateral discussions

¹⁸ Quinones.

¹⁹ Quinones.

²⁰ Quinones.

²¹ Davenport.

²² Davenport.

with North Korea, further demonstrating the Obama Administration's dedication to the diplomatic process.

Although the US opened the door for the diplomatic process, they levied conditions, and North Korea continued with its provocative behavior through the sinking of a South Korean ship and firing artillery rounds at a South Korean island in 2010.²³ The North Korean actions sparked additional financial and trade restrictions by the US, but the Obama Administration continued to push for a diplomatic solution. The administration facilitated two separate visits to North Korea by former president Jimmy Carter in 2010 and 2011, followed by several rounds of US and North Korean talks in 2011 to discuss conditions for resuming the Six Party Process.²⁴ Even though North Korea demonstrated provocative behavior during this period, it appeared that the diplomatic processes pursued by the Obama Administration yielded positive results.

In December 2011, Kim Jong Il died, and his son, Kim Jong Un became the new leader of North Korea. Despite the change in leadership, the US and North Korea met in late February, and the Obama Administration agreed to deliver food aid to North Korea in exchange for stopping future nuclear tests.²⁵ Although Kim Jong Un initially appeared to be willing to bring the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile programs into compliance with an agreed upon moratorium, North Korea rapidly violated that moratorium by conducting two satellite launches in 2012, followed by a nuclear test in February 2013.²⁶ This demonstrated the technological advances made by North Korea, but

²³ Davenport.

²⁴ Davenport.

²⁵ Hamblin.

²⁶ Davenport.

also led to two additional UNSC Resolutions (2087 and 2094) that imposed additional measures to further restrict North Korea's ability to produce nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles.²⁷ Despite these diplomatic efforts, North Korea continued its ballistic missile tests through 2014 and 2015 drawing additional sanctions by the US.²⁸ In 2016, North Korea drastically increased its ballistic missile and nuclear tests, completing 11 ballistic missile tests and two nuclear tests.²⁹

The strategies and tactics utilized by the Obama Administration to further promote their policy of nuclear nonproliferation can only be seen as a failure. The Administration failed to see the changes in the strategic environment resulting from the leadership change in North Korea. To be fair, the May 2009 nuclear test by North Korea cannot be attributed to the Obama Administration because it is unclear if the nuclear test was already planned or if it was designed to be a signal to the new United States administration. Even if this occurrence is set aside, North Korea conducted numerous ballistic missile tests and three additional nuclear tests during the Obama Administration. This demonstrates that the strategies utilized by the administration were unresponsive to the new strategic environment and ineffective in achieving the objectives of the policy.

Trump Administration (2017-present)

The Trump Administration is utilizing many of the same policies tried by other administrations, but they have also increased the pressure on both North Korea and

²⁷ Security Council Committee Resolutions.

²⁸ Davenport.

²⁹ Davenport.

China. This increase in pressure has raised tensions and has potentially made the situation more hostile.

One of the primary methods the Trump Administration is using to stop North Korea from further development of its nuclear weapons and ballistic missile program is by applying political pressure on China so that China would coerce or compel North Korea to stop its nuclear weapons and missile development programs. In order to apply pressure on China, the Trump Administration took a multifaceted approach. First, the administration needed to convince China that the current situation with North Korea has escalated to new levels. To do this, President Trump not only engaged Chinese leadership directly, but also increased his public statements that the US is prepared to take military action over the issue.³⁰ The threat of war on the Korean Peninsula is not in China's best interest. A direct conflict between the US and North Korea would not only bring war to China's border, but it could also destabilize the region and world markets, threatening China's economy and security. Trump's "fire-and-fury" statement could be aimed at Chinese leadership as much as North Korea.³¹ The second part of the Trump Administration's multifaceted approach is to apply economic pressure on China. The administration has done this through sanctions on a "Chinese bank for allegedly laundering money for North Korea."³² Sanctions against Chinese banks and businesses are an indirect way of applying pressure on China's leadership. Anthony Ruggiero argues, "Beyond drying up funding for North Korea's nuclear-weapons program,

³⁰ Uri Freedman, "Why China Isn't Doing More to Stop North Korea," *The Atlantic*, August 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/north-korea-the-china-options/535440/> (accessed October 10, 2017).

³¹ Freedman.

³² Freedman.

economic penalties could drive a wedge between Chinese banks that covet their access to the United States financial system and Chinese leaders who indulge North Korea. If the banks fear they will be the next target of United States sanctions, they will pressure political leaders to change course.”³³ This indirect pressure on Chinese leadership may be the difference in methods used by the Trump Administration compared to the methods used by previous administrations.

In the first year of the Trump Administration, North Korea does not appear to be compliant. North Korea conducted at least ten ballistic missile tests and one nuclear test in 2017.³⁴ This resulted in additional UN Resolutions as well as stiffer United States sanctions.³⁵ Despite continued noncompliance, the Trump Administration continues to work toward a diplomatic solution. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson works tirelessly toward the goal of opening diplomatic channels while continuing to condemn North Korea’s behavior. In December 2017, Secretary Tillerson said, “We’re ready to have the first meeting without preconditions.”³⁶

Despite the different strategies utilized by the Trump Administration, North Korea does not appear to be changing its behavior. Diplomatic efforts do take time to yield the intended result, but the Trump Administration is not overly patient. The administration’s efforts to encourage China to take a larger role have produced some results as China has voted for the latest two rounds of UN Resolutions. This is a step in

³³ Freedman.

³⁴ Davenport.

³⁵ Security Council Committee Resolutions.

³⁶ Robbie Gramer, “Tillerson Open to Talks with North Korea,” *Foreign Policy*, December 12, 2017, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/12/12/tillerson-open-to-talks-with-north-korea-asia-state-department-china-pyongyang-nuclear-weapons-program-nonproliferation-diplomacy-pressure-campaign/> (accessed December 20, 2017).

the right direction, but it is too early to determine if the strategies set in place by the Trump Administration will achieve their political objectives.

United States Strategy Summary

The United States policy for North Korea has changed very little since the Reagan Administration, but the strategies and tactics utilized to achieve the objectives of that policy have shifted frequently. This lack of consistency has resulted in mixed results. Each administration saw periods where North Korea appeared to comply with the NPT and other agreements, but the overall trend is that North Korea continued to develop its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles despite the efforts made by the US and the international community. Therefore, the United States policy for North Korea is not meeting the overall United States objective of security for the US and its allies. In order to provide the desired security, the US must find a strategy that achieves the objectives of its current policy of nonproliferation of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles or it must shift its policy in order to better achieve the larger policy goal of security for the US and its allies.

Chapter 4: China Strategy

In order to understand China's difficult position with North Korea, one must examine China's strategic position. The two countries have been linked together ever since China stood with North Korea during the Korean War.¹ Although China was unable to accomplish its goal of a unified Korea under the control of a communist government, it was able to preserve a communist government in the North. This is important for several reasons. First, in the era where there was a continuous conflict between communism and anti-communism, North Korea stood as a buffer between communist China and the rest of the anti-communist Western world. Had the United States (US) won the Korean War and established a non-communist government over a unified Korea, China would have faced an enemy on their 880-mile border vice a friend. This would have posed a significant problem for the stability of a relatively new communist Chinese government. Second, China was able to maintain an ally in the region. Although this ally was small, North Korea did have a military, and could prove beneficial to China if they required additional military forces.

China's Continued Support of North Korea

As the Cold War ended, and the Western fear of communism dissipated, China's strategic need for North Korea has decreased. Economic globalization intrinsically ties the economies of China and the US, reducing to some degree the tension between the two nations. The leadership of North Korea has also become more unpredictable, destabilizing the region, and causing China to question the actions of its small ally.

¹ Wand Haruki, *The Korean War: An International History* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2014), 16.

Although the strategic need may have decreased, there are still several reasons why China continues to support North Korea.

First, even though North Korea is a small ally, they are still an ally. China does not have many allies; therefore, every ally is important if China intends to be the regional power in Asia.² As China works towards the expansion of its regional and global influence, allies and economic trade partners will become ever more critical. The more nations that are within the sphere of influence of China, the stronger its position becomes in the international arena. As China continues along its path to become a peer to the US, they will continue to spread their influence and gain favor with nations that provide a strategic advantage.

Second, standing by North Korea demonstrates China's resolve to support its allies. This demonstration of support could convince other states to side with and rely on China if the smaller states believe that China provides security and will come to their defense if needed. As China's sphere of influence expands, so must its responsibilities to its allies. Standing beside and being loyal to those allies, even in difficult situations, is a critical step in demonstrating resolve and credibility as a partner.

Third, the collapse of the North Korean government could destabilize the region. This destabilization could create a significant refugee problem for China and possibly even lead to the loss or theft of nuclear weapons.³ The refugee problem would be an

² Mark Beeson and Fujian Li, *China's Regional Relations: Evolving Foreign Policy Dynamics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2014), 126.

³ Uri Freedman, "Why China Isn't Doing More to Stop North Korea", *The Atlantic*, 2017; Mark Beeson and Fujian Li, *China's Regional Relations: Evolving Foreign Policy Dynamics* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc, 2014), 126.

enormous burden on China. The people of North Korea are already impoverished and suffering. If the Kim Regime collapsed, it could induce a panic among the people, and many of them would turn north towards a friendly China vice turning south towards a potential enemy in South Korea. Despite the ethnic and cultural ties between North and South Koreans, the two countries are separated by one of the most heavily guarded demilitarized zones in the world. Crossing this demilitarized zone could prove deadly for any who try because they face deadly forces on both sides of the line.⁴ In the chaos that could ensue after a regime collapse, weapons in the arsenal of that nation could be lost and find themselves in the hands of radicals or other groups that have not always seen neighboring countries as friends or allies.⁵ When nuclear weapons or other potential weapons of mass destruction are involved, China will want to maintain as much stability in that region as possible to reduce the domestic threat of those weapons. Moreover, the collapse of the North Korean government could even lead to a less favorable situation for China. A unified Korea that is friendly to the US could even allow United States military troops farther north on the Korean Peninsula.⁶ The US having influence or even a potential ground base that close to the Chinese border would be a significant security concern for China.

Fourth, the current situation with North Korea gives China power on the international stage as they are the “only ones” who can talk to the Kim Regime and are

⁴ “How a North Korean soldier defected across the DMZ,” BBC News, November 14, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40273728> (accessed December 19, 2017).

⁵ Doug Bandow, “Who Swallows North Korea after Its Collapse?,” *Scout*, November 12, 2017, <https://scout.com/military/warrior/Article/Who-Swallows-North-Korea-after-Its-Collapse-110400619> (accessed December 19, 2017).

⁶ Beeson and Li, 126.

able to facilitate negotiations.⁷ China has routinely demonstrated its ability to get North Korea to the negotiating table through the Six Party Talks. This ability not only demonstrates their power and influence in the region, but also demonstrates that China has diplomatic channels not open to other major powers. In the arena of major powers, every sphere of influence that one nation possesses that their competitor does not is significant. China will continue to endeavor to expand that sphere of influence, and they will utilize that influence to their advantage on the international stage.

Finally, although the West has expressed concern over North Korea, the region has been relatively stable. This stability in the region is favorable for China. The stability allows China to focus its efforts on other issues. Additionally, although relations between China and North Korea are not always perfect, North Korea is not threatening China with weapons. It is in China's favor to continue its alliance with North Korea vice alienating them and possibly creating an enemy that shares China's border and possesses nuclear weapons.

China Summary

The situation with North Korea places China in a very difficult situation diplomatically. In an era when China is trying to expand its influence while improving its relations with the US, the North Korean nuclear problem is not ideal. As of now, North Korea's nuclear weapons are pointed at the US, not China.⁸ Therefore, North Korea is not

⁷ Beeson and Li, 126.

⁸ Evans J.R. Revere, "Dealing with a nuclear-armed North Korea: Rising danger, narrowing options, hard choices," *Brookings*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-a-nuclear-armed-north-korea/> (accessed December 20, 2017).

a significant threat to China. The US must be very careful not to place too much pressure on China to intervene in this scenario because there is a good chance that China will side with its long-time ally. If the US was not threatening war on the peninsula, China's security would not be threatened, and it is probable that China would do little if anything to influence North Korea in this situation. From China's point of view, United States power and influence in the region represents a greater threat to the security of China than a nuclear capable North Korean Regime. As the situation progresses, it can be expected that China will expend the minimum required diplomatic effort to appease the pressure from the US, while doing everything they can to continue its support of North Korea. Essentially, China will continue to tenuously balance between the diplomatic pressures from both the US and North Korea and reap the advantages such a position confers.

Chapter 5: Soviet Union / Russia Strategy

The Soviet Union/Russia have long political, economic and military ties to North Korea, but those ties are not without issues. The Treaty of Peking established a common border between the two states in 1860, and the border is economically porous.¹ Through the early 1900s, thousands of Koreans lived and worked in the Primorskiy Region.² Russia and Korea have not been at war with each other, and they share a mutual concern for the security in the region. After the conclusion of World War II (WWII), the Soviet Union occupied North Korea while the United States (US) occupied South Korea until a new government could be established. As previously discussed, these elections never happened, and eventually, the Korean War broke out. Although the Soviet Union did not provide as many physical troops to North Korea as China, they did provide air power and a significant amount of military equipment.³ Despite strains in their relationship, both countries continue work to improve political and economic ties. By examining and analyzing the relationship between these two nations, strategists can gain insights to help them propose potential solutions to the complex problem of North Korea.

After the Korean War, the Soviet Union played a significant role in North Korea's early nuclear program. The two countries signed a nuclear cooperation agreement in 1959. This cooperation resulted in the development of multiple research centers, the training of North Korean nuclear specialists, and the sale of nuclear fuel supplies to North

¹ Larisa V. Zabrovskaya, "The Korean Peninsula and the Security of Russia's Primorskiy Kray (Maritime Province)," in *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia*, ed. James Clay Moltz and Alexander Y. Mansourov (New York: Routledge, 2000), 180.

² Zabrovskaya, 180.

³ C. Shen Zhihua, "Sino-Soviet Relations and the Origins of the Korean War: Stalin's Strategic Goals in the Far East," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 2, no. 2 (spring 2000), 44-68.

Korea.⁴ The focus of this assistance was to develop nuclear power within North Korea. However, Kim Il Sung made the decision to leverage this assistance to pursue nuclear weapons with the intent of creating a balance of power with South Korea.⁵

The Soviet Union maintained close political, economic, and military ties to North Korea until the Soviet Union collapsed in the early nineties.⁶ Even after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia maintained political ties with North Korea. Due to the economic issues within Russia, the Russian government could not provide the level of economic support once enjoyed by North Korea. For instance, bilateral trade between the two countries went from “\$3.5 billion in 1988 to less than \$100 million in 1995.”⁷ Social changes in Russia after the fall of the Soviet Union and North Korean tests of ballistic missiles through the 1990s caused significant strain on the relationship between the two countries.⁸ In an effort to have a more balanced policy for the Korean Peninsula, Russia established political and economic ties to South Korea that further strained the North Korean relationship.⁹ Russia significantly reduced economic ties with North Korea while increasing economic ties with South Korea, creating a significant security threat for

⁴ Georgiy Kaurov, “A Technical History of Soviet-North Korean Nuclear Relations,” in *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia*, ed. James Clay Moltz and Alexander Y. Mansourov (New York: Routledge, 2000), 15-20.

⁵ Valery I. Denisov, “Nuclear Institutions and Organizations in North Korea,” in *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia*, ed. James Clay Moltz and Alexander Y. Mansourov (New York: Routledge, 2000), 23.

⁶ Zabrovskaya, 181-184.

⁷ James Clay Moltz, “The Renewal of Russian-North Korean Relations,” in *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia*, ed. James Clay Moltz and Alexander Y. Mansourov (New York: Routledge, 2000), 197.

⁸ Zabrovskaya, 181.

⁹ Zabrovskaya, 185.

North Korea.¹⁰ Even as Russia worked with South Korea, they continued diplomatic talks with North Korea in an effort to improve relations and reassure Pyongyang.¹¹

As international tensions have steadily increased over North Korea's ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs, Russia maintains its policies and views on the situation. In 1994, Russia proposed that the key to resolving issues on the Korean Peninsula was "1) Improving relations between the North and the South, 2) Substituting the armistice with a peace structure, and 3) Adopting confidence building measures on the Korean Peninsula."¹² Russia promotes these same ideas today as they encourage "direct diplomacy between Pyongyang and Seoul."¹³ Although Russia proposed and held to these views, Russia was left out of the majority of talks that took place between the US and Pyongyang throughout the 1990s.¹⁴ Despite being left out of the initial talks, Russia continues to seek greater degrees of influence in the region.

Russia leverages the situation to re-assert its influence in the region as tensions continue to rise between the US and North Korea. They are attempting to facilitate a diplomatic solution to the issues. "On May 25 [2017], Putin offered to send an emissary to Pyongyang to ascertain North Korea's intentions, and relay North Korea's conditions for diplomacy back to Seoul."¹⁵ Finding diplomatic solutions to the conflict between North and South Korea would reduce one threat to the Kim Regime and could lead to

¹⁰ Moltz, 197.

¹¹ Moltz, 199-202.

¹² Evgeniy P. Bazhanov, "Russian Views of the Agreed Framework and the Four-Party Talks," in *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia*, ed. James Clay Moltz and Alexander Y. Mansourov (New York: Routledge, 2000), 230.

¹³ Samuel Ramani, "Russia's Korea Strategy," *The Diplomat*, July 15, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/07/russias-korea-strategy/> (accessed December 22, 2017).

¹⁴ Chikahito Harada, *Russia and North-east Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 63.

¹⁵ Ramani.

economic and trade agreements that could be mutually beneficial. As Russia works towards a diplomatic solution, they also continue to encourage the US to give the Kim Regime “additional assurances and confidence that the United States is not in the regime change business”.¹⁶ Russia holds to the view that a diplomatic solution requires the US and the international community to reassure the Kim dynasty. This would increase the confidence of Kim Jong Un in the security of his country and thus reduce tensions and potentially make Kim more willing to negotiate a settlement to the situation.

Although Russia voted in favor of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanctions after North Korea’s latest nuclear weapons test, they continue to find ways to help North Korea, even if that meant skirting the sanctions. Russia increased its bilateral trade with North Korea, and allows North Korean ships filled with fuel oil to depart Russian ports and return to North Korea even though the North Korean ships declared their intent to travel to other destinations.¹⁷ These actions serve to undermine the UNSC resolutions, but also serve to strengthen ties between Russia and North Korea. Russia also flew bombers over the region to demonstrate its ability to project power and influence in the area.¹⁸ As the rest of the world is stepping back from North Korea, it appears that Russia is taking a step closer. A nuclear North Korea is a threat to Russia, but it appears

¹⁶ Andrew Osborn, “Russia throws North Korea lifeline to stymie regime change,” *Reuters*, October 4, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-russia-analysis/russia-throws-north-korea-lifeline-to-stymie-regime-change-idUSKBN1C91X2> (accessed December 20, 2017).

¹⁷ Osborn.

¹⁸ Jamie Tarabay, “Russia’s power play in North Korea aimed at both China and US,” *CNN*, December 6, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2017/09/01/asia/russia-north-korea-analysis/index.html> (accessed December 20, 2017).

that leadership in Russia feels that a regime change forced by the US may be a larger threat.¹⁹

Russia Summary

It is unclear what Russia's ultimate goals are for the Korean Peninsula, but they continue to push for a diplomatic solution to the problem while attempting to re-assert their influence in the region. As long as the US continues to assert themselves as the dominant power in the region, Russia and China will maneuver to oppose the US. North Korea poses a risk to Russia, as does the US' dominant influence in the region. A conflict in the region would raise significant security concerns for Russia, especially if the use of nuclear weapons could not be ruled out. Russia is balancing a tenuous diplomatic situation as they attempt to improve relations with the US while regaining power and influence in the region. As tensions rise, and North Korea becomes more aggressive and unpredictable, it is difficult to say how long Russia can absorb the risk and continue its support for Pyongyang. With all of the risks considered, Russia continues to hold to the policy that a diplomatic solution is the most beneficial course of action with North Korea.

¹⁹ Osborn.

Chapter 6: Decoding North Korea

As strategists begin to unravel the issues with North Korea, it is easy to see that the situation is complex and has no clear linear solutions. Therefore, any attempt to make progress on the situation must take a comprehensive approach that accounts for second and third order effects. Due to the complexity of the problem, no single country will be able to derive an effective solution, that is to say that any viable solution will need to be multi-lateral in nature. Any solution will have to overcome the insecurities developed by the Kim Regime over the last seven decades.

As one analyzes the Kim Regime of North Korea, there are several assumptions to consider. First, the fundamental objective for Kim Jong Un is regime preservation. One must assume that Kim Jong Un will continue going to great lengths to maintain power, and as his regime is threatened, he will become more and more willing to utilize his full military capability in an effort to maintain his hold on power. Second, after witnessing how swiftly the United States (US) ably defeated Iraq, the world's fourth largest army, during the first Gulf War, the Kim Regime adopted the policy that nuclear weapons, and the deterrent they offer, were vital to their very survival.¹ Kim Jong Un feels that in order to preserve his regime, he must have nuclear weapons. If North Korea possesses nuclear weapons, the US would be much less likely to take military action for fear of the nuclear threat to its allies in the region, or worse, the threat to the United States homeland or its

¹ C. Kenneth Quinones, "Reconciling Nuclear Standoff and Economic Shortfalls," in *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival*, ed. Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2006), 76.

territories. To the Kim Regime, nuclear weapons provide the greatest layer of security from outside threats as well as provide a level of prestige for North Korea.

With the above assumptions in mind, North Korea's two primary national interests are likely: 1) Preservation of the Kim Regime, 2) Improved economic prosperity. One can also conclude that the Regime's secondary interests are unification of the Korean Peninsula, and a greater voice on the international stage (recognition of Kim Jong Un as rightful leader of the peninsula). By examining the current situation through the lens of North Korea's primary national interests, interesting patterns begin to form that are useful in helping formulate possible solutions to this complex situation.

History

To better understand the first national interest of regime preservation, it is important to look at the history of the regime and some of the tactics the regime utilized to build power and influence within their borders and around the world. The Kim Dynasty began with Kim Il-Sung. He came to power in September 1948 with the support of both China (Mao) and the Soviet Union (Stalin). Kim Il Sung was a formidable man. He gained experience in warfare by leading a guerilla unit fighting the Japanese invasion and later while serving in the Soviet Red Army.² He was also active in the communist Workers Party of Korea. After he became the leader of North Korea, he led his country through the Korean War. Although he failed to achieve his objective of a unified Korea, he was able to maintain control of his country and power, albeit with the continued

²Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2000), 4-5.

support of China and the Soviet Union. While Kim Il Sung was in power, North Korea experienced close political and economic ties to the Soviet Union and experienced a period of relative prosperity compared to its neighbor in the south.³ This prosperity took a severe hit with the oil shock in the early 1970s, and North Korea began to experience significant financial difficulties.⁴ Another major financial set back occurred after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. With economic ties to the Soviet Union dwindling, Kim Il Sung worked to further the economic prosperity of his country until his death in 1994.⁵ His son, Kim Jong Il took his place as the leader of North Korea. Despite new leadership and the chance to change course, economic conditions in North Korea continued to decline.

Internal Threats

In an effort to solidify the Kim Regime's control and to overcome the internal threat to the regime caused by social unrest, the Kim Regime perfected its internal propaganda and internal security/repression tactics to rally support for the regime. Kim Il Sung began using the tactic of internal propaganda to further the Kim Regime's needs, and the tactic continues today under Kim Jong Un.⁶ According to Korean mythology, Mount Paektu is the birthplace of Dangun, who was part god and the founder of the first Korean Kingdom. The propaganda narrative advocates that the Kim Regime descended from that same sacred mount, giving the regime God-like status and making the regime

³ Oh and Hassig, 50.

⁴ Oh and Hassig, 51.

⁵ Oh and Hassig, 54.

⁶ Robert Daniel Wallace, *North Korea and the Science of Provocation: Fifty Years of Conflict Making* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co, Inc, 2016), 33-34.

the rightful leader of the unified Korea.⁷ North Korea is also a dynastic communist government, making it unique even amongst other communist governments.⁸ The established idea of their leader being a god or a higher being combined with the totalitarian communist government solidifies the Kim Regime's hold on the people.⁹

The economic state of North Korea is another factor that threatens the survival of the Kim Regime. The regime continually focuses their limited financial resources on military and other security measures, which they feel are vital for their survival against outside actors. This forces the regime to make sacrifices in other areas. It is often the state-run social programs that suffer the most, leaving the people in a state of poverty and suffering.¹⁰ In order to keep the people pacified and distracted from the difficult social and economic conditions within North Korea, the Kim Regime continually rallies the people behind the flag, playing on patriotism, to resist a common foe.¹¹ Jean Bodin, a 16th Century French political philosopher states, "The best way of preserving a state, and guaranteeing it against sedition, rebellion and civil war is to keep the subjects in amity one with another, and to this end, to find an enemy against whom they can make common cause."¹² Although this tactic is the work of Bodin from the mid-1500s, North Korea employs it today. It is not uncommon for the government of North Korea to utilize provocative actions such as missile launches or nuclear threats to elicit a strong response

⁷ Mark Bowden, "How to Deal With North Korea: There are No Good Options, But Some are Worse than Others", *The Atlantic*, 2017, 3.

⁸ Steven Saxonberg, *Transitions and Non-Transitions from Communism: Regime Survival in China, Cuba, North Korea, and Vietnam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 119.

⁹ Saxonberg, 119.

¹⁰ Oh and Hassig, 55-58.

¹¹ Wallace, 16.

¹² Jean Bodin, *Six Books of the Commonwealth*, trans. By M.J. Tooley (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955 [1606]), 168.

from outside nations. The regime is able to filter all information disseminated to the people through tight control of all media within North Korea. To effectively elicit fear from the North Korean people, the regime simply does not allow their provocations to be seen by their people, yet they allow the threatening responses from outside actors to filter through their media. This makes it appear as if there are unprovoked threats against North Korea, eliciting fear from their people and uniting them against those threats. By over reacting to North Korean threats, the US has played right into the narrative of the Kim Regime, and presents itself as the foe that the North Korean people can stand against. The Kim Regime also tells the people that although it is bad in North Korea, it is much worse in the rest of the world, and there is no external media to contradict this.¹³ This diversionary propaganda allows Kim Jong Un and his regime to continue building their military power in order to add security for the regime.

The Kim Regime has also found a way to gain aid for their people in order to help settle internal unrest. The regime has found that if they threaten to break a nuclear treaty or provoke outside actors that those same outside actors will often offer aid as part of the agreement to return to the negotiation table.¹⁴ Some argue that Pyongyang's nuclear weapons are merely "bargaining chips" to be "traded" for aid.¹⁵ This tactic allows the

¹³ Tania Branigan, "Hope, pride, fear: how North Koreans feel about their homeland," *The Guardian*, August 10, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/10/hope-pride-fear-how-north-koreans-feel-about-their-homeland> (accessed December 19, 2017).

¹⁴ Ross Logan, "UN gives North Korea 4.5M in aid despite slapping Kim with nuclear sanctions," *Express*, August 15, 2017, <https://www.express.co.uk/news/world/841630/north-korea-news-drought-united-nations-aid-sanctions-us-weapons> (accessed December 20, 2017).

¹⁵ Evans J.R. Revere, "Dealing with a nuclear-armed North Korea: Rising danger, narrowing options, hard choices," *Brookings*, October 4, 2016, <https://www.brookings.edu/research/dealing-with-a-nuclear-armed-north-korea/> (accessed December 20, 2017).

Kim Regime to continue to funnel internal money to their military programs and employ external aid to provide for the basic needs of the people.

Additionally, the Kim Regime utilizes brutal violence and restrictions on travel to control their people. Just as the regime significantly restricts the information and people that they allow into the country, they also severely restrict the information and people that exit the country. One example is when several North Korean workers who worked legally in Russia attempted to board a plane for South Korea. They were arrested by the Russians and promptly executed when turned over to North Korean officials.¹⁶ Although Russian officials did not agree with the execution, they did facilitate the detention of the individuals trying to escape North Korea. Another example of this was in November 2017, when a North Korean soldier was shot multiple times as he made his escape across the demilitarized zone (DMZ).¹⁷ Although this soldier survived and made it to a South Korean hospital, the incident demonstrates that the regime is willing to utilize lethal force to prevent its citizens from leaving.

Senior political and military leaders are not immune from the scrutiny of Kim Jong Un. Since he began his rule, Kim has “executed at least 140 senior officials, usually killing them with machine guns and even flame throwers.”¹⁸ Kim Jong Un even executed

¹⁶ James Clay Moltz, “The Renewal of Russian-North Korean Relations,” in *The North Korean Nuclear Program: Security, Strategy, and New Perspectives from Russia*, ed. James Clay Moltz and Alexander Y. Mansourov (New York: Routledge, 2000), 207.

¹⁷ Katherine Lam, “North Korean soldier is shot while defecting across DMZ, South says,” *Fox News*, November 13, 2017, <http://www.foxnews.com/world/2017/11/13/north-korean-soldier-is-shot-while-defecting-south-says.html> (accessed December 30, 2017).

¹⁸ Choe Sang-Hun, “North Korean Leader’s Top Enforcer Is Now the One Getting Purged,” *The New York Times*, February 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/03/world/asia/north-korea-purge-kim-jong-un-kim-won-hong.html> (accessed December 30, 2017).

his own uncle on charges of plotting against the government.¹⁹ These are examples of the great lengths that Kim Jong Un will go to in order to solidify and preserve his regime and his position as leader.

Internal threats can pose a significant problem for Kim Jong Un and his regime. He has developed a system that uses political intrigue, purges of senior officials that pose a threat to Kim, and propaganda to help legitimize his rule and to guarantee that he remains as the head of the country.²⁰ Violence and strict laws also do their part to keep the population from rising up against the regime, but the true key to the Regime's success is the near complete isolation of the North Korean people from outside information and influence. The people only know what they are told. It is doubtful that the people would be willing to accept such substandard living conditions if they knew what lay outside of their borders.

External Threats

External threats play a significant role in the behavior of the Kim Regime. Whether these threats are real or perceived, they affect the decision-making process employed for the last seven decades. Analyzing the external threats allows strategists to begin to see that the decisions made by the Kim Regime are rational when the situation is seen from the North Korean perspective. Understanding the rationale behind the decisions allows patterns to become more apparent, makes North Korean reactions more

¹⁹ Sang-Hun.

²⁰ Saxonberg, 122.

predictable, and reduces the fear that is brought by facing an unstable and unpredictable leader that possesses nuclear weapons.

The US has been a threat to the communist Kim Regime since before the Korean War. As previously discussed, the United States policy to contain communism pitted the US against the Kim Regime until the end of the Cold War in the early 1990s. United States military support and protection began with the Korean War. This support threatened the security of North Korea, especially after the fall of the Soviet Union where North Korea lost one of its two protectors. Once the Soviet Union collapsed and North Korea was no longer under their protection nor received Soviet financial support, the Kim Regime felt vulnerable despite the protection of the Chinese nuclear umbrella. Although North Korea and China are allies, there is a historical distrust between the two nations. Even as United States focus shifted away from the containment of communism, North Korea began to develop nuclear weapons to replace the security once provided by the Soviet Union to balance the threat posed by the US. After the first nuclear test, North Korea claimed that the “nuclear test was entirely attributable to the United States nuclear threat, sanctions and pressure.” North Korea “was compelled to substantially prove its possession of nukes to protect its sovereignty.”²¹ Whether the US was an actual threat or a perceived threat, North Korean leadership made decisions that they assessed they needed to balance that threat.

The external threats to North Korea have driven its decision-making process, causing them to seek nuclear weapons in order to provide the needed security that was

²¹ Kelsey Davenport, “Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy,” The Arms Control Association, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/dprkchron> (accessed December 03, 2017).

lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union. Understanding that security from external threats is a key issue in the complex problem with North Korea allows strategists to begin to predict the behavior of North Korea in any debate associated with its nuclear weapons program.

Decoding North Korea Summary

North Korea's precarious history continues to inform the decisions made by the Kim Regime. The actions taken by North Korea are rational and even predictable when seen through the lens of the primary national interests of regime preservation and improved economic prosperity. North Korea continues to develop nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles in order to replace the security that was lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union. North Korea utilized internal money for those military programs, leaving few financial resources to provide for the people. This caused the Kim Regime to develop their cycle of provocation where the regime would threaten drastic actions causing the international community to offer aid as an incentive to stop their provocative behavior and return to talks in diplomatic channels. Although many predicted that the North Korean government would collapse, the regime remains in power today. The conditions for the people within North Korea are not ideal, but the regime isolates the people from outside influence. They utilize propaganda and force to maintain control. These complex processes used by the Kim Regime demonstrate that Kim Jong Un is a rational actor that is trying to preserve his regime and provide security for North Korea.

Chapter 7: Possible Courses of Action

North Korea presents a complex problem for the United States (US) and the rest of the world. As strategists attempt to understand the complexities of the situation, they must first identify an end state that is acceptable, and then determine the cost associated with achieving that desired end state. A recent Gallup Poll indicates that “a majority of Americans support military action against North Korea if economic and diplomatic efforts fail.”¹ An examination of several aspects of this poll must occur. First, criteria must be set to determine if diplomatic and economic efforts succeed or fail. Second, the US must identify the individual responsible for determining the efficacy of its economic and diplomatic efforts. Finally, the US must assess United States will in an armed conflict as United States casualties mount despite the historical trend seen in wars like Vietnam. As previously discussed, every administration since Clinton engaged North Korea in diplomatic discussions and imposed economic sanctions. These actions have done little to halt the development of North Korea’s ballistic missile and nuclear weapons programs. The strategic environment has changed, and the US must evaluate all available courses of action to determine the viability of those courses of action in this new strategic environment. If economic and diplomatic efforts fail, is military action the only option available to the US?

¹ Reuters Staff, “U.S. majority backs military action vs. North Korea: Gallup poll,” *Reuters*, September 15, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles-usa-poll/u-s-majority-backs-military-action-vs-north-korea-gallup-poll-idUSKCN1BQ1LP>, (accessed October 30, 2017).

Full Scale Military Action

Most Americans are accustomed to conflicts where the power of the United States military overwhelms their opponents, inflicts significant damage to the enemy, and experiences relatively few casualties. This type of conflict can be seen in both Gulf Wars and in Afghanistan, but would an armed conflict with North Korea yield the same results? To answer this question, one must examine the military capability of North Korea.

North Korea has an extensive artillery and rocket capability that is capable of holding significant portions of South Korea at risk. Sources estimate that North Korea has 2,250 self-propelled artillery, 4,300 towed artillery, and 2,400 rocket projectors.² Estimates also assert that North Korea has over one thousand missiles capable of striking targets at varying distances.³ With an estimated 8,950 pieces of equipment and over one thousand missiles that can strike different portions of South Korea, North Korea poses a significant threat. There are over 9.8 million people in Seoul and over 230,000 Americans, including 23,468 United States service members, living in South Korea.⁴ If the US initiated a campaign against North Korea, it is reasonable to expect North Korea to retaliate. Several assumptions must be made regarding the information and intelligence available to North Korean leadership. First, the United States military is the strongest military in the world, and the US will not hesitate to utilize that military might. Second,

² GFP, "2017 North Korea Military Strength," *Global Fire Power*, 2017, https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.asp?country_id=north-korea, (accessed December 13, 2017).

³ Elenore Albert, "North Korea's Military Capabilities," *Council on Foreign Relations*, November 30, 2017, <https://www.cfr.org/background/north-koreas-military-capabilities>, (accessed December 13, 2017).

⁴ Oliver Holmes, "What is the US military's presence near North Korea?," *The Guardian*, August 9, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/09/what-is-the-us-militarys-presence-in-south-east-asia> (accessed December 13, 2017).

North Korean leadership knows the relative strength of United States and South Korean forces on the peninsula because that information is widely published through public sources. Third, North Korean leadership knows it would take days if not weeks to maneuver additional naval support to the region. With those three assumptions, it is fair to assume that North Korea understands that it has a very short window of opportunity before the full military might of the US is brought to bear against them. To seize this opportunity against the world's most powerful military, North Korea would have to utilize a massive and rapid strike in an attempt to inflict significant damage and induce as many casualties on the US and its allies as quickly as possible in hopes that the human loss of life would prove too costly for the US to continue the engagement, as was seen in the Vietnam War. If North Korea chose to only use its artillery, rocket forces, and missiles and to focus its strikes in the vicinity of Seoul, civilian casualties could soar to over a million killed and wounded, and the United States military casualties could be in the thousands if not tens of thousands. It must also be noted that "North Korea ranks fourth among the world's largest militaries with more than 1.1 million personnel in the country's armed forces," and also possesses in excess of fifteen nuclear weapons.⁵ If North Korea decided to use its nuclear weapons or to coordinate its artillery and missile strikes with a land assault, the casualties would be significantly higher. Assuming that other nations such as China and Russia did not enter the war on the side of North Korea, the military might of the US would eventually prevail, but would the US and its allies be willing to accept potential casualties of this magnitude? The answer to this question is most likely no. It is also important to note that this option is only viable until North Korea

⁵ Albert.

has ballistic missile technology capable of reaching the continental US. Once North Korea can threaten United States soil with nuclear weapons, it is unlikely that the US would risk a conflict of this magnitude because too many American lives would be at risk. So, what other options are available?

Limited Airstrikes

A slightly less provocative action would be to message North Korea heavily through public and diplomatic channels, and then to conduct limited strikes against North Korea's ballistic missile test sites or several of its nuclear weapons facilities. The intentions of the air strikes would be to demonstrate United States power, damage North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capabilities, and force North Korea to the negotiations table willing to comply with the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolutions and the nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). Although missions like this are not unusual for the US, it must examine the complexities involved.

North Korea has robust air defenses that must be avoided or destroyed in order to strike key ballistic missile and nuclear facilities in North Korea. The US would have to be able to get cruise missiles or aircraft through North Korean air defenses, considered "one of the densest air defense networks on earth."⁶ Although most of the air defenses are based upon older Soviet technology, they have been updated with digital controls making

⁶ John Reed, "What do North Korea's Air Defenses Look Like?" *Foreign Policy*, April 1, 2013, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/01/what-do-north-koreas-air-defenses-look-like/> (accessed October 30, 2017).

them a more formidable defense.⁷ United States capabilities can aid in overcoming North Korean capabilities, but the North Korean capabilities are still a formidable threat.

Although limited airstrikes are a viable option, there are risks associated with carrying them out. The first is that North Korea misinterprets the limited air strikes as an all-out attack by the US and responds with its full military might as previously discussed. Second, even if the airstrikes are successful at destroying portions of North Korea's nuclear weapons and ballistic missile development facilities, North Korea may not be willing to meet the demands of the international community. This would require the US and the international community to either take further military action to force compliance or re-evaluate the desired end state. Third, US airstrikes against North Korea could invoke the North Korea-China defense treaty, causing China to enter the conflict on the side of North Korea. Finally, North Korea could come to the table and agree to comply with the NPT and other UNSC Resolutions, but secretly continue to develop its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities as it has done in the past. Selecting airstrikes as the course of action requires diplomats and military planners to work together to ensure proper and effective messaging to reduce the risk of full scale war. Additionally, the intelligence community would have to identify the key nuclear and ballistic missile targets that would most hamper North Korea's continued program development. If the risks are overcome, limited airstrikes could be a viable option, but there is no guarantee that they will deliver the desired results, and the strikes could increase tensions with North Korea.

⁷ John Pappalardo, "This Is What Air War Over North Korea Would Look Like," *Popular Mechanics*, April 1, 2013, <http://www.popularmechanics.com/military/a11906/this-is-what-air-war-over-korea-would-look-like-15293363/> (accessed October 30, 2017).

Regime Change

The US and the international community could also formulate a plan to effect a regime change in North Korea. The intent of this type of plan would be to remove the potentially unpredictable Kim Jong Un and his regime in order to replace them with a government that is willing to comply with international laws and norms. Although this option initially appears to solve the problem, it potentially creates an entire list of new issues. First, who would determine the type of government in North Korea? China, Russia and South Korea all have vested interests due to proximity and political views. Second, who would assume the role of North Korea's leader? The new leader could view the US in an even less favorable light than the Kim Regime. Third, the collapse of the Kim Regime could induce a panic and create a refugee problem that affects all the countries in the region. Fourth, even with the establishment of a new government, it could take years for the government to function effectively. This was seen after the US toppled the Iraqi government in 2003. The turmoil of that government change is still being dealt with today. Finally, China has close ties and obligations to North Korea. Any action that resulted in a regime change would have to be agreed upon by China at a minimum. That could be a diplomatic negotiation that would be too complex to accomplish. While regime change is a viable course of action, the inherent risks likely to result from such an approach make it a less than desirable option.

Maintain the Status Quo

Another option available is to maintain the status quo. The US and the UN could continue to impose sanctions and pass Resolutions in an attempt to compel North Korea

into compliance. This option also has its risks. First and foremost, if North Korea continues on its current trajectory, it will develop a compact nuclear weapon that can be placed on one of its ballistic missiles. This would make North Korea a direct threat to every nation around the globe. If the status quo continues, the US would be North Korea's primary threat, and thus put the US at most risk of being attacked by a North Korean nuclear weapon. Second, the Kim Regime is in a very precarious situation. The economic sanctions, including trade restrictions, imposed on North Korea have left the country in severe economic distress. If Kim Jong Un continues his policy of building the military to protect his regime, the people of North Korea will be in even greater poverty. Although he claims that he is also working to build the economy, there is little to no economic growth. As the people become more and more discontent with the poverty in which they live, they may begin to put pressure on the Kim Regime for relief. Historically, the Kim Regime utilized the cycle of provocation in order to gain international attention that often resulted in aid that would appease the people.⁸ If North Korea has long range nuclear weapons, it is possible North Korea could choose more extreme options to provoke the US and international community.

Normalize Relations-Lift All Sanctions

The final option would be for the US to normalize relations with North Korea. This would be a multi-step process. First, the Korean War would need to be officially terminated, with both North Korea and South Korea recognized as independent

⁸ Mark E. Manyin and Mary Beth Nikitin, "U.S. Assistance to North Korea," *CRS Report for Congress*, July 31, 2008.

states. Additionally, North Korea must agree to the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. This would be an un-waivable condition. Once North Korea agreed to this arrangement, the UN and US would have to remove all sanctions and restrictions against North Korea. This would allow the US and the international community to help guide North Korea into the role of a responsible nuclear power while demonstrating the security of the Kim Regime. If the Kim Regime feels secure, it can begin to focus more effort on its economy and internal infrastructure. With assistance from the international community, North Korea can become a prosperous nation. The US was able to do this after World War II (WWII) with the former enemies of Germany and Japan, and with South Korea after the Korean War. All three of these nations have proven to be prosperous and self-sufficient states that add value to the international community. Although normalizing relations with North Korea may seem unorthodox, the US utilized this model with India. The Bush Administration revoked the Clinton Administration's policies and sanctions against India, and began to normalize relations.⁹ These diplomatic efforts resulted in a treaty between the US and India, as well as improved diplomatic relations between the two nations.¹⁰ This situation also provides the opportunity for the US to include China and Russia in the proposed solution. This could demonstrate the United States' commitment to diplomatic cooperation and foster greater trust in the region. In an attempt to add an additional layer of security and confidence to the Kim Regime, the US could encourage China to strengthen its mutual protection treaty with North Korea. This would serve to not only make North Korea feel

⁹ FP Staff, "India-US nuclear deal: All you need to know about the landmark agreement," *First Post*, June 13 2017, <http://www.firstpost.com/india/india-us-nuclear-deal-all-you-need-to-know-about-the-landmark-agreement-3596209.html> (accessed December 19, 2017).

¹⁰ FP Staff.

more secure, but also give China assurances that the US is not seeking to gain more power or influence in the region. Changes within North Korea would not occur quickly, and the US would have to be patient, and garner support from the international community. With a united effort, North Korea can become a responsible member of the international community.

Chapter 8: Conclusions and recommendations

North Korea poses a significant risk to the region and the rest of the world if it continues down its current path. The unsuccessful attempts to sway North Korea utilizing sanctions, deterrence, and coercion have only raised tensions. If the current policies and strategies are not working, the United States (US) must carefully consider all potential courses of action. They must even consider normalizing relations with North Korea. The US cannot consider the situation with North Korea as a zero-sum game. They must look for a solution that provides benefits for all parties involved. The most effective way to do this is to look at United States national interests, North Korean national interests, and then find common ground where negotiations can begin. The US demands that North Korea stop its nuclear weapons test program, while North Korea feels that it requires nuclear weapons for regime preservation. Both sides appear to be at odds over the issue of nuclear weapons, but this really isn't the case. The difficulty lies in how each side sees nuclear weapons. In order to find common ground, one must identify the true root of the problem and present a solution. If the stance of North Korea is stripped down, it is not the nuclear weapons that are the issue. It is the security provided by those weapons that the regime is seeking. The true test is identifying a solution to the North Korean security issue that does not require nuclear weapons. Military actions and regime change do not accomplish this, and maintaining the status quo only continues hostilities. For stability to return to the region, the Kim Regime must be confident that their tenure is secure from external threat. For this to happen, the US must stop the coercion attempts, and come to the bargaining table with some real options. In a drastic move, the US must cease hostilities toward the Kim Regime, normalize trade and

economic relations, and encourage the rest of the world to follow suit. Additionally, the US should push China to renew and expand its alliance/protection treaty with North Korea and guarantee further protection if they are attacked by the US or other outside actors. In trade for these changes, the US, China, Russia, and other allies should seek a new nuclear treaty with North Korea that stops North Korean nuclear weapons testing. Only when the US takes the first steps in de-escalating the situation will North Korea follow suit.

Another benefit of normalizing relations with North Korea is the effect that it will have on the Korean people. Under the Kim Regime, North Koreans are subject to horrific conditions and unrelenting propaganda. They have experienced little, if any, economic prosperity. The normalization of trade will open the door for economic and industrial growth within North Korea that will create jobs and prosperity for the people. Given time, this prosperity may lead to an increased middle class which in turn leads to social and political change.

It is also important to note that a nation will not necessarily utilize nuclear weapons simply because they possess them. When China was developing its nuclear weapons, the Soviet Union wanted to bomb China to destroy their facilities. The US opposed those actions, and China has become a responsible nuclear power. The same can be said for India and Pakistan. Both nations developed nuclear weapons to counter the other and to provide security for their respective countries. Is North Korea any different?

The US should continue to plan for and be prepared to utilize the military option, but for the North Korean problem, the risks associated with military action should be an absolute last resort. Utilizing a diplomatic approach, and normalizing relations with

North Korea would decrease tensions and significantly reduce the risk even if North Korea develops a nuclear weapon capable of reaching the US. When the actions of the Kim Regime are analyzed from the appropriate perspective, it can be seen that their actions are rational, and it can be expected that their actions will continue to be rational. Once the Kim Regime feels secure, the risk of them utilizing nuclear weapons will be significantly reduced.

Diplomacy offers the greatest probability of success. To ensure that this diplomatic process works, the US must utilize all aspects of United States national power to garner support from the international community, while holding its military in ready reserve, ready to respond if needed. With the help of the international community, North Korea can become a productive and responsible nation.

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Vita

Commander Victor A. Hill, a native of Silver City, New Mexico, graduated from the University of Arizona in 1999, earning a Bachelor of Science Degree in Biology and was commissioned through NROTC. He was designated a Naval Aviator in Aug 2001.

In June 2002, CDR Hill reported to his first operational fleet squadron, HSL-45, Naval Air Station North Island in San Diego, California. While attached to HSL-45, he deployed in USS OLDENDORF (DD 972) and USS FLETCHER (DD 992) as Detachment Training Officer and Assistant Maintenance Officer in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom. As Detachment TWO Maintenance Officer, he deployed in USS JARRETT (FFG 33) in support of Counter Narcotic Operations. After completion of his deployment, CDR Hill served as NATOPS Officer and was selected as CHSMWP Pilot of the Year.

In February 2006, he transferred to VT-28 at NAS Corpus Christi, Texas where he served as a flight instructor in the T-34C Turbo Mentor. CDR Hill served in many positions including Assistant Flight Leader, Flight Leader and later as Assistant Operations Officer. While attached to VT-28, CDR Hill was selected as Officer of the Year.

In July 2008, CDR Hill reported to USS MAKIN ISLAND (LHD 8) at Northrop Grumman Shipbuilding in Pascagoula, Mississippi. CDR Hill was among the initial crew of USS MAKIN ISLAND and participated in the ship's acceptance and maiden voyage. In July 2009, USS MAKIN ISLAND set sail for her homeport in San Diego, California. While underway, CDR Hill obtained his Combat Information Center Watch Officer, Officer of the Deck, and Command Duty Officer Qualifications. CDR Hill was also involved in USS MAKIN ISLAND's commissioning.

In August 2010, after helicopter refresher training, CDR Hill reported to HSL-49, Naval Air Station North Island, where he served as training officer, Detachment 2 Officer-In-Charge with a deployment in USS Ingraham (FFG 61), and the Squadron Maintenance Officer. While at HSL-49, Detachment 2 was selected as detachment of the year and CDR Hill was later selected as Maintenance Officer of the year.

In January 2013, CDR Hill reported to the US Naval War College in Newport, RI where he earned a master's degree and completed JPME Phase I. In April 2014, CDR Hill reported to JFCC SPACE J39 and later became the Division Chief. He is currently attending the Joint Advanced Warfighting School in Norfolk, VA. His awards include the Air Medal and the Navy Commendation Medal (three awards). He has accumulated over 2000 flight hours in three different Naval aircraft. CDR Hill and his wife have one son and two daughters.