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**North Korea's Asymmetric Warfare Strategy:
The Critical Role of Nuclear Weapons in National Security Objectives**

Charles L. Kern*

*Mr. Charles Kern is a 2018 graduate of Webster University's Master of Arts in International Relations Program. Email: charles.jinae.kern@gmail.com

Abstract

North Korea's nuclear weapons and Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) programs make it a threat to the entire world. Traditional efforts by the international community to prevent nuclear weapons proliferations fail to work with North Korea. Why is North Korea not giving up its nuclear weapons program? This paper demonstrates that North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear weapons program because it is critical to successful completion of its national security objectives. Subject matter expert statements identify these objectives as: international recognition, regime survival, economic improvements, and reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Using qualitative analysis, this paper concludes that North Korea's nuclear weapons program feeds its national identity concept as a strong and prosperous state and promotes nuclear parity with enemy states. Nuclear weapons provide North Korea a low-cost alternative to negate the strength of neighboring conventional state militaries, while also reducing the threat of an internal coup by reducing the lethality of its conventional military in favor of an unconventional military force. Nuclear weapons provide North Korea leverage to gain economic support from other states vital to sustain a budget used to fund its unconventional weapons programs and buy the loyalty of senior government officials. Most importantly, North Korea requires nuclear weapons for long-term sustainment of the North Korean regime while slowly subverting South Korean society to promote North Korea's ultimate objective of Korean reunification as a communist state.

Key Words: Asymmetric Strategy, Deterrence, Proliferation, Unconventional Warfare.

Introduction

North Korea's quest for nuclear weapons began in the 1950s when it acquired nuclear technology from the Soviet Union. Despite decades of international condemnation North Korea continues to advance its nuclear weapons program because: 1) Nuclear weapons provide North Korea official recognition by the international community. 2) Nuclear weapons ensure regime survival. 3) Nuclear weapons provide leverage to gain economic support from other states. 4) Nuclear weapons promote Korean reunification as a communist state. This research paper begins with a review of the scholarly literature to situate this argument within the nonproliferation framework to explain why states choose to acquire nuclear weapons, and how the international systems attempts to stop nuclear proliferation. Without directly addressing North Korea, the literature review provides a foundational understanding for some of North Korea's motivations. It then uses subject matter expert statements to identify North Korea's national security objectives and then leverages a combination of scholarly literature, government data, and news events to explain how nuclear weapons are critical to the successful achievement of each objective. It concludes by identifying gaps and how this paper adds to existing literature.

Literature Review

Much of the scholarship of nuclear proliferation centers on two basic questions: 1) Why do states acquire nuclear weapons? And 2) How can states be stopped from acquiring nuclear weapons? The issue of why states acquire nuclear weapons is further divided into three separate categories: One group focuses on the deterrent security aspect (Mearsheimer 2001; Sagan and Waltz 2012; Mehta and Whitlark 2017; Cha 2002; Kapur 2007; Horowitz 2009; Sagan 1996). Deterrence is the most prominent theory used to explain why states acquire nuclear weapons. Two of the most outspoken deterrent advocates are Mearsheimer (2001) and Sagan and Waltz (2012). While all members of group one support the deterrence theory, they have nuanced differences in its application.

Krieger and Roth (2007, 278) summarized Mearsheimer's perspective while reviewing several of his books. According to their review of *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics*, Mearsheimer concludes that despite the presence of nuclear weapons, states will continue engaging in power struggles without using nuclear weapons because states recognize their destructive power. Instead, conflicts will occur at the lower levels of conventional warfare. Sagan and Waltz add support to Mearsheimer's findings. Gavin (2012, 574) reviewed Sagan and Waltz's *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: An Enduring Debate*. He summarizes that Waltz, like Mearsheimer, believes the international system should not fear nuclear weapons. Additionally, he believes their deterrent value makes their proliferation inevitable. Also, like Mearsheimer, Waltz believes both state and non-state actors are unlikely to use them because their destructive nature makes the cost of using them too great.

Markova (2008, 117) reviewed Kapur's *Dangerous Deterrent, Nuclear Weapons Proliferation and Conflict in South Asia*. Based on Markova, Kapur's study on the impact of nuclear weapons acquisition by India and Pakistan identified trends supporting Mearsheimer and Waltz. Kapur notes that while nuclear parity between India and Pakistan produced nuclear stability, it also resulted in increased conventional conflicts. How he differs from both

Mearsheimer and Waltz, is Kapur notes that despite the nuclear stability created in the conflict between India and Pakistan, the presence of nuclear weapons increased regional instability. Based on Waltz's theories, regional stability would increase with proliferation to other regional states. Mattiacci and Jones (2016) contradict Waltz noting the rate of nuclear proliferation is too slow to produce regional and international stability because "relatively few states have established nuclear programs over the last few decades" (555).

Mehta and Whitlark (2017, 519-520) observe that not all states need to develop a nuclear weapons program. States like Japan and South Korea can leverage their latent nuclear capability to create the same deterrent benefits of a weaponized program. Based on Virtual Deterrence Theory, latent nuclear programs derive a deterrent capability based on the reduced timeline needed to transition from a latent capability to a fully developed and weaponized program. However, a flaw within this theory is latent nuclear states are vulnerable to pre-emptive strikes due to the time required to transition from a latent to fully weaponized nuclear program. As a result, Mehta and Whitlark also identify that Latency Provocation Theory claims latent states do not have a viable deterrent without a retaliatory strike capability (2017, 520). Cha (2002, 216) contends that modern deterrence is different than the Cold War version. He argues that the United States versus Soviet Union scenario of Mutual Assured Destruction is outdated. Instead, he describes modern deterrence as "first strike uncertainty."

Horowitz (2009, 235, 252) generally agrees with the concepts of deterrence and the stability nuclear weapons give the international system. However, he contends the presence of nuclear weapons alone does not create stability. Instead, the experience of state leaders knowing how to use their nuclear weapons during negotiations creates stability. Based on his research, the most dangerous period for nuclear power states is soon after a state gets nuclear weapons. During this timeframe leaders are most likely to get into a conflict based on a lack of nuclear negotiating experience. Overtime stability returns as state leaders become more experienced and confident leveraging their nuclear weapon capabilities. Kapur's study contains data eluding to Horowitz's findings. Overlaying Pakistan's nuclear weapons development timeline on top of the timeline of its conflict with India notes that Pakistan became emboldened as its latent nuclear program neared weaponized status. Once the program became weaponized, Pakistan's attacks against India became far more aggressive (Markova 2008, 120). It is also interesting to note that with Kim Jong Un's significant progress in developing North Korea's weapons program he has also become more vocal and confrontational with the newly elected administration of President Donald Trump. Both Kim and Trump exchange caustic remarks about each other's character and the size and willingness to use their "nuclear buttons". Combined, these observations support Horowitz's already compelling findings. Horowitz's findings may also provide a unique perspective to the failure of several US presidential administrations to denuclearize North Korea. Based on his findings, authoritarian states (like North Korea) may have an advantage over democracies when leveraging their deterrent capabilities. Continuity of autocratic state leadership implies long-term knowledge and increasing expertise in leveraging their nuclear deterrent force. Yet, rapid turnover of heads of democratic states implies a constant status of relearning nuclear deterrent negotiating skills.

The second group examines the effect of the international system on nuclear proliferation (Kroenig 2009; Monteiro and Debs 2014). This group shows that the natural organization of the

international system decides if states will choose to share and acquire nuclear weapons technology. Because more than half of the states with nuclear weapons are current, emerging, and former superpowers (United States, China, Russia, and United Kingdom), they have a prominent role in this process. According to Kroenig (2009, 127) understanding why states choose to develop a nuclear weapons program first requires understanding what motivates proliferation. Based on the concept that nuclear weapons negate the conventional military capabilities of other states he found three trends: First, powerful states are unlikely to proliferate nuclear weapons to significantly weaker states; Second, as an act of bandwagoning, states are more likely to proliferate weapons to states with which they share a common enemy; Third, states vulnerable to pressure from superpower states are less likely to proliferate weapons. Kroenig's findings help explain the motivation for communist states (Soviet Union and China) proliferating nuclear technology to North Korea. Monteiro and Debs (2014, 50) found similar results. However, based on their research, they concluded two types of states acquire nuclear weapons: Powerful and highly threatened states that feel their security depends on a robust deterrent capability (for example Israel); and weaker states protected by a superpower ally whose motivations and long-term resolve to continue protecting the weaker state are uncertain (North Korea and its uncertain relationship with China and Russia).

A third group focuses on state leadership and what influences its decision-making process (Hymans 2008; Solingen 2007; Way and Weeks 2014). This group demonstrates that despite the anarchy in the realist perspective of the international system, the number of states with nuclear weapons is small and expanding slowly because states that acquire nuclear weapons are driven by unique situations. Hymans (2008, 263) defines a national identity conception as the belief a state's leader holds of his/her state's standards and how it compares to other states in the international system. He finds those leaders he categorizes as "oppositional nationalists," are most likely to seek nuclear weapons. Hymans defines an oppositional nationalist as someone who believes their state's interests and values are significantly different and superior to other states. Lieber (2017, 255) reviewed Hymans' *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions, and Foreign Policy*. Lieber summarizes that oppositional nationalists are uncomfortable dealing with others they see as key comparison states. That discomfort produces the "fight or flight" syndrome, which heavily influences their determination of whether they should develop nuclear weapons. North Korea's Kim Family Dynasty are an example of leaders with an oppositional nationalist national identity conception (Hymans, 2008, 265).

Lantis (2008, 351) reviews Solingen's *Nuclear Logics: Contrasting Paths in East Asia and the Middle East*. Unlike Hymans, Solingen does not look at personality types. Instead, she examines the importance of national security issues in shaping leadership decision-making by comparing the differences in how states in East Asia and the Middle East work through the process of deciding if they should or should not acquire nuclear weapons. Solingen concludes that political survival and economic growth have significant influence on the decision-making processes to determine if nuclear weapons are or are not in the best interest of each state.

Way and Weeks (2014, 716) support Hymans' concept of an oppositional nationalist personality. They also support Solingen's assessment that national security concerns have a determining factor in the decision to acquire nuclear weapons. In their 2014 study "Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation," Way and Weeks note a connection between

what they call “personalist dictators” and nuclear weapons. They conclude that personalist dictators want nuclear weapons because they provide security against external interference by other states without the expense of developing and maintaining a conventional military. They simultaneously create domestic stability by negating the threat of an armed uprising or military coup presented by conventional militaries. Way and Weeks theory sounds strikingly similar to Cha’s explanation of modern “first strike uncertainty” deterrence.

Sagan's (1996, 57,63,64,73,74) “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb,” uses historical examples of nuclear proliferation to develop three distinct models explaining the benefits nuclear weapons provide states. His explanation significantly expands the theoretical aspect of why states acquire nuclear weapons and gives a framework supported by researchers from all three groups. Based on his research he determined: 1) Nuclear weapons develop a state's sense of identity and how they believe other states see them. 2) Nuclear weapons create security for states to avoid aggression by other states. 3) Nuclear weapons help states achieve national security objectives.

Sasikumar (2017, 243-245) supports Sagan's theory that nuclear weapons develop a state’s sense of identity. Using India's experience with its nuclear weapons program, Sasikumar builds a compelling argument that nation states apply basic practices used in commercial branding to develop the picture they want the international community to see. Using commercial and national examples which support and contradict her theory, she explains that states apply a brand to themselves through their actions and statements made by politicians, diplomats, and use of the media. The combination of these efforts, helps other states develop a common picture of that state. Like commercial products reviewed in periodicals like *Consumer Reviews*, *Anholt-GfK Nation Brands Index* ranks countries based on exports, governance, tourism, immigration, and investments. Beginning in 1968, the international community established the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty to assign one of two labels, or “brands,” on all states: Nuclear Weapons States and Non-Nuclear Weapons States.

Kroenig (2009) reinforces Sagan’s models that nuclear weapons promote security and achieve national objectives. Hymans (2008), Way and Weeks (2014), Horowitz (2009), Sagan and Waltz (2012), and Mearsheimer (2001) also support the concept of nuclear weapons providing security for a state. Horowitz (2009) is the more cautious, noting the instability created soon after acquiring nuclear weapons. Kapur (2007) also notes that despite the benefits to the state, its actions create regional instability.

Finally, Solingen (2007) argues that economic growth is a consideration for states wanting nuclear weapons. However, de Villiers, Fardine, and Reiss (1993) citing South Africa’s experience note that economic sanctions applied by the international community counters the prospects of economic advancements. They also emphasize that South Africa and many other states maintain security without nuclear deterrence.

The debate over how to prevent nuclear weapons proliferation focuses on the influence of the international system (Ruble 2009; Mattiacci and Jones 2016; de Villiers, Fardine, and Reiss 1993). They explore the psychological and sociological impact of the state leaders and the international system to explain why states generally tend to follow the established norms of the

international system. Janne Nolan (2012, 761-762) reviewed Rublee's *Nonproliferation Norms: Why States Choose Nuclear Restraint*. According to Nolan, Rublee theorizes that psychological influences within a state, such as leadership opinions, determine a state's decision to become a nuclear or non-nuclear state. She further adds that norming influences of society and a desire to be a legitimate and law-abiding member of the international system keeps most states from pursuing nuclear weapons. Sasikumar (2017) would attribute Rublee's findings to the desire to be branded as non-nuclear weapons states. However, Hymans (2008) would insist that "oppositional nationalists" see themselves as different, yet superior to other members of the international system. Therefore, they are immune to the norming influence that keeps other states from pursuing nuclear weapons.

Mattiacci and Jones (2016, 532,544,555) show how the existence of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty hinders state progression away from their current nuclear weapons status. They observed that after signing the treaty, most states do not completely reverse their status. Several non-nuclear weapons states began development of a nuclear weapons program, but then abandoned their efforts and decided to return to their previous status. The rationale for some decision reversals include the loss of the security dilemma that supported acquiring nuclear weapons (Brazil and Argentina), the cost of creating and/or maintaining nuclear weapons (Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine), and pressure from superpower states and the rest of the international system (South Korea). Two noted exceptions to the trend of states returning to their previous status are India, which gave up its program only to re-establish it later, and North Korea which completely pulled out of the treaty in 2003. Of note, North Korea had already begun developing a nuclear weapons program long before signing the treaty. Solingen (2007) would agree that the economic impact of potential sanctions and maintenance of a weapons program are important considerations for states. Way and Weeks (2014) add that "personalist dictators" are likely to respond to standard pressures of the international system. Hymans (2008) would point to North Korea as an example of how "oppositional nationalists" are immune to the standard pressures of the international system. Horowitz's study also implies that the standards of the international systems may also not be effective against authoritarian regimes with established nuclear programs (latent or weaponized).

De Villiers, Fardine, and Reiss (1993, 99, 101-102) examined the history of South Africa's nuclear weapons program and eventual decision to give it up. In the late 1950's, South Africa secretly acquired uranium for its weapons program from the same mines used to supply uranium for the United States' Manhattan Project and continued being mined for two decades after World War II supporting the nuclear weapons programs for both the United States and the United Kingdom. Discovery of the program by the international community in 1977, resulted in sanctions against South Africa and its political isolation. In 1990, recently elected President F. W. de Klerk chose to cancel the program to end the political isolation and sanctions. This decision coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, which removed the original security dilemma South Africa's leaders felt justified the weapons. Rublee (2009) and Mattiacci and Jones (2016) suggest that South Africa was responding to pressures of the international system to return to their status as a law-abiding state. Kroenig (2009) singles out the influence of the superpowers initiating sanctions that ended South Africa's program. Solingen (2007) highlights that South Africa's decision was a domestic policy issue based on the negative economic impact nuclear weapons had on the

economy. Hymans (2008) would again point to North Korea as an example of how “oppositional nationalists” are immune to the standard pressures of the international system.

This literature review demonstrates that states choose to acquire nuclear weapons based on perceived benefits they provide in international status, state security, and economic growth. It also identifies that proliferation is a slow process because not all states have the same perception and vision of the benefits of nuclear weapons. Those states which desire nuclear weapons face unique circumstances such as leadership personalities, relationships with surrounding states and superpowers, which drives them to seek their benefits. Normed ethical standards of the international system tend to dissuade states from seeking nuclear weapons and tend to retain balance. However, the established norms may not be effective in two unique cases. 1). “Oppositional nationalists” because they view their state standards as superior to other member of the international system, and 2) Authoritarian governments with an established nuclear program (latent or weaponized), because they may have an advantage over democracies due to their long-term experience leveraging their nuclear deterrent capability. Existing literature does not address either of these situations.

Main Arguments

Nobody truly knows North Korea’s strategic objectives. However, subject matter experts likely have the most insight into those objectives based on firsthand knowledge of the North Korean government. Based on personal experience conducting negotiations with North Korean officials during the 1990’s, Former Secretary of Defense William Perry believes North Korea’s top three goals are international recognition, regime survival, and economic improvements. He feels Korean reunification is another goal, but it is a lower priority (Perry 2017). Minister Thae Yong-Ho, served as a career diplomat for the North Korean government until defecting to South Korea in 2016. During a November 1, 2017 speech to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs, Thae confirmed that like his predecessors, Kim Jong Un believes a nuclear weapons program is vital to achieving North Korea’s national security objectives. Although Thae does not specifically outline those objectives, he does make specific references to regime survival and removal of the democratic governance of South Korea (Thae 2017). Based on these statements, it is reasonable to assume North Korea’s top four national strategic objectives are: international recognition, regime survival, economic improvements, and reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

International Recognition

Sagan (1996, 73-74) observes that nuclear weapons develop a state’s sense of identity and how it believes other states see it. North Korea perceives itself as a *kangsong taeguk* (strong and prosperous power) state (Cha 2002, 228). For North Korea, nuclear weapons are the international standard used to demonstrate the highest level of state strength. Achieving this benchmark has been a continuous goal for all three generations of the Kim Family Dynasty. Achieving this benchmark serves as a badge for North Korea to wear validating its self-perception and state ideologies.

The 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, divided the world into two categories: nuclear weapons states and non-nuclear weapons states. The small, yet distinguished group of nuclear

weapons states, contains all of those that either formerly, currently, or may soon claim the title of being a world superpower. Three of these states border North Korea. Russia and China share a natural border with North Korea, while the United States has a significant military and economic presence within South Korea. The United States also forward based nuclear weapons in South Korea until 1991 (Lee 2014, 210). As a result, North Korea compares itself to its neighbor states and feels it also needs a nuclear weapons program to display as a badge symbolizing its strength and prosperity.

Nowhere is North Korea's pride in its nuclear weapons program more visible than its military parades and concerts held to promote the strength and unity of the country. A notable example is the April 2017 concert honoring the birthday of North Korea's eternal leader, Kim Il Sung. During that concert, the Moranbong Band performed in front of a display showing a computer-simulated missile attack engulfing an American city in flames. This graphic depiction of North Korea's pride in its nuclear weapons program occurring at Kim Il Sung's birthday celebration is not a coincidence. It demonstrates the crowning achievements of the current leader in advancing the dreams of his predecessors. Kim Il Sung establish the goal of developing a nuclear weapons program, while his son (Kim Jong Il) and now his grandson (Kim Jong Un), are responsible for taking the greatest steps to see the goal achieved. These celebratory events use propaganda to promote esprit de corps, regime ideologies, and self-identity concepts among the North Korean population. The events host senior regime officials, visiting foreign nationals and journalists.

Kim Jong Un's openness to demonstrating North Korea's nuclear weapons programs via media broadcasts, which include rocket launches monitored by foreign journalists, is his way of trying to obtain international recognition for its nuclear weapons technology advancements. Duncombe (2016, 625) reports that representation and recognition are as important in international relations as they are in human psychology. The act of recognition helps state actors validate their identity and value. North Korea seeks recognition by the United States --which it considers its top competition-- for its achievement (Hymans 2008, 226). This is evident in Kim Jong Un's 2018 New Year's address to the citizens of North Korea. In the message, Kim claimed that in 2017, North Korea had achieved its historic goal of becoming a nuclear power and achieved nuclear parity with the United States (Stiles, 2017). Obtaining official recognition by the United States would not only validate its own perceptions of itself as a strong and prosperous state, it also validates North Korea's ideologies of *Juche* (self-reliance) and *Songun* (military first). On an equally important level, recognition by the United States that North Korea has a viable nuclear weapons program is necessary for this program to serve as a legitimate deterrent against international aggression and ensure survival of the Kim Dynasty.

Regime Survival

From a geopolitical perspective, North Korea's leadership considers itself surrounded by enemy, or at best uncertain allies, which have much stronger and technologically advanced conventional militaries. All of them either currently have or had a viable nuclear weapons program. Russia and China both maintain a nuclear weapons program; South Korea and Japan maintain a latent nuclear program, plus access to a de facto nuclear weapons program based on their alliances with the United States.

Russia is the neighbor with which North Korea has historically had the warmest relations and depended most for economic support. However, Russia's political and economic support has been inconsistent. North Korea's origins depended heavily on Russia's support. The Soviet Union trained and equipped Kim Il Sung, and his paramilitary forces as they fought against the Japanese forces occupying the Korean Peninsula and China. After World War II, North Korea was under the protection of the Soviet Union, which assisted with the establishment of its communist government and supported Kim Il Sung as its leader. Economically, it was North Korea's main source of income for the first forty plus years of its existence by accounting for up to fifty-three percent of North Korea's trade (Person 2017; Zakharova 2016, 152). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, tension between the two states increased as North Korea's debt to Russia exceeded \$214 million dollars. In 2013, relations between the two states warmed as North Korea's trade deficit with Russia decreased from \$214 million to \$94 million (Zakharova 2016, 156). Relations between the two countries continues to warm with Russia declaring 2015 the "Year of Friendship." Russia and North Korea have increased their cultural, diplomatic, and economic ties, with Russia considering forgiving most of North Korea's remaining debt and assisting with reconstruction of North Korea's infrastructure (Neberai 2015, 10). However, trade between Russia and North Korea is currently fifty percent less than China-North Korea trade, and fifteen percent less than inter-Korean trade. Reasons for the low trade rate include: distrust of North Korea, lack of infrastructure, international sanctions, and economic stagnation (Zakharova 2016, 156). This cycle of inconsistent political and economic support from Russia has North Korea uncertain of Russia's intent and long-term resolve to support North Korea.

Since the end of the Cold War, North Korea receives most economic support from China. Yet there is a long history of political mistrust between the two states. Prior to the creation of North Korea, China nearly executed Kim Il Sung under suspicion as being a member of a pro-Japanese Korean group. Additionally, formerly classified documents obtained after the fall of the Soviet Union reveal that North Korea blames the tactics China used during the Korean Conflict as the reason the war ended in an armistice. The relationship between Kim Il Sung and Mao Zedong became so tense that Mao characterized Kim as being a traitor to communism like Hungary's Imre Nagy and Joseph Broz Tito of Yugoslavia. North Korea views Chinese modernization of its economy as abandoning communist ideology and has purged officials from its own government viewed as too pro-Chinese (Person 2017). Despite China's emergence as North Korea's Post-Cold War economic trading partner, the political relationship between the two states remains cold. North Korea's saber rattling creates domestic and international tension for China which see itself as a major player in the international community; yet, it faces international criticism for not being able to control North Korea. China believes North Korea specifically times some of its more aggressive actions to be an embarrassment to China and overshadow some of China's major domestic events. As a result, some Chinese scholars warn that it should cut ties with North Korea to avoid further damage to its international reputation and strategic interests (Noesslet 2014, 1309, 1317). North Korea's leaders have referred to China as a "turncoat and our enemy" and even executed members of the Kim family seen as too close to China (Noesslet 2014, 1319). Kim Jong Un executed Jang Song Thaek, his highly respected and influential uncle executed in 2013 for charges which included selling North Korean resources to China. Kim Jong Nam, who lived in Macao under the protection of the Chinese government was executed in 2017. Kim Jong Nam

was an advocate of North Korea adopting Chinese economic reforms and viewed as a potential replacement for Kim Jong Un (Lee 2013, 99).

Of its three nuclear weapons state neighbors, North Korea views the United States as the biggest threat. The Korean War ended with the signing of the armistice agreement. Signed on July 27, 1953, by representatives from China, North Korea, and the United States. The armistice was meant to be a temporary ceasefire to end the conflict, US military personnel based in South Korea remain there to maintain the armistice agreement. North Korea seeks to establish a formal replacement for the armistice agreement that will lead to the withdrawal of all United States troops from South Korea (Terry 2013, 72-73).

North Korea considers South Korea an illegitimate and enemy state created by the United States. Although North Korea views the South Korean government as an enemy; it views the South Korean people as family members needing protection from their hostile government. North Korea believes it is a legitimate continuation of the dynastic rule that governed the Korean Peninsula for more than 1,000 years.

Japan has a long and tenuous relationship with the Korean Peninsula. Japan invaded the Peninsula on multiple occasions throughout history. However, Japan's occupation of the Korean Peninsula from 1910 until its 1945 defeat in World War II produced significant distrust of Japan. Japanese brutality during this period, which included the enslavement of Korean women as "comfort women" for Japanese military forces remains an emotional topic for Koreans. North Korea's kidnapping of thirteen Japanese citizens to provide language Japanese cultural and language training to North Korean agents enhances tension. North Korea's denial of these kidnappings for nearly three decades creates significant distrust between the two states, making diplomatic or economic concessions unlikely (Park 2007, 253). Like South Korea, Japan's military alliance with the United States is troubling to North Korea. As a result, one of North Korea's conditions during the Six-Party Talks to end its nuclear weapons program was for Japan to sign a non-aggression pact with North Korea. Ironically, North Korea's nuclear program and repeated launch of missiles toward, and in some cases over, Japan is a contributing factor in Japan's decision to re-establish its military.

North Korea's ICBMs have a variety of ranges, making them a worldwide threat. While the accuracy of these missiles is unknown, they serve as both a countervalue and counterforce deterrent against international aggression. North Korea conducts missile tests, by launching them into international waters without striking a specific target. This promotes significant debate within the international community on whether the missiles reach their maximum distance. North Korea's most impressive display of accuracy was its launch of the Hwasong-15 ICBM. Due to the maximum range of the missile, it was launched with a very high arch allowing it to reach an altitude significantly higher than the international space station and then impact in the ocean without flying over Japan. However, it is not known if this was intentional. Therefore, questions of ICBM accuracy, make North Korea's nuclear weapons program a countervalue deterrent against aggression by striking against the population centers of the United States, Russia, China, or Japan. As a deterrent against South Korean aggression it is a counterforce capability. Due to the proximity of Seoul, North Korea's program is ready to strike against the South Korean military headquarters and other government facilities. The targeting Seoul's civilian population, which

North Korea seeks to protect, is an unintended consequence of living among and supporting the South Korean government.

Internally, North Korea's leaders face the challenge of balancing the need for a conventional military force capable of defending it against aggression by other states, while knowing history is full of examples of military coups overthrowing brutal and unpopular heads of state. In 1962, North Korea adopted the "Four Points Military Guidelines" to modernize and increase the size of its military by arming the entire population to defend the country (Lee 2014, 212). As a result, North Korea now has the 4th largest standing military in the world with more than 1.1 million people (Albert 2018a). The size of its military alone presents a significant internal security threat. To counter this threat, senior leaders live a lavish lifestyle and receive monetary rewards for their loyalty. Those considered a threat are removed from their positions of influence by relieving them of their duties, retirement, demotion, or execution. In less than two years of assuming leadership of North Korea, Kim Jong Un replaced more than forty-four percent of North Korea's most senior military, party, and government officials with individuals more loyal to him. Individuals replaced include those who loyally served his father and assisted with the successful transition of power to Kim Jong Un (Lee 2013, 97). Graphic examples of executions included reports of senior military leaders shot by anti-aircraft guns and mortars.

Nuclear weapons present a low cost protective measure to defend against a potential coup by removing the need to maintain a strong conventional military force (Way and Weeks 2014, 716). North Korea currently places more emphasis on development of its unconventional than conventional warfare capabilities. It has expanded its arsenal to include cyber warfare, electronic warfare, unmanned aerial vehicles, and of course its nuclear weapons program. Its conventional force receives significantly less modernization emphasis and remains based on old and largely Soviet era equipment. Financing the development and sustainment of its military alone is a significant burden on North Korea. Therefore, it also turns to nuclear weapons to help fill that gap.

Economic Support

North Korea uses its nuclear weapons program as a bargaining chip to gain economic support from the international system. It defies international norms and promises to return to the normal expectations of the international community in return for economic support. The money it receives supports further weapons program development, lavish lifestyle of its leaders and bribing senior government officials.

North Korea is not a member of the World Trade Organization, and its centrally controlled government does not publish data considered reliable enough to make an accurate assessment of its economic power. However, based on 1999 data the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) estimates North Korea has a Gross Domestic Product of \$40 billion USD ranking it 118 in the world. Its estimated budget is \$3.2 billion USD, with expenditures of \$3.3 billion USD, and a debt of \$5 billion USD (The World Factbook 2017). One third of its revenue is estimated to come from international aid (Habib 2011, 52). Ironically, economic compensation is a featured element of denuclearization discussions with North Korea. Breakdowns in discussions tend to focus on slow economic support to North Korea.

In 1994, the United States and North Korea negotiated the Agreed Framework. As part of the framework, North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for \$400 million USD in energy aid, including two proliferation resistant light-water reactors. The framework lasted until 2002, when both sides alleged violations of the agreement. Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly claims North Korea admitted to possessing a uranium-enrichment program. Additionally, the United States was slow to deliver the promised energy aid, and construction of the light-water reactors was at least five years behind schedule (Manyin, and Nikitin 2008, 4; Davenport 2017).

In 2003, North Korea agreed to return to negotiations as part of the Six-Party Talks, between China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. Significant motivators for North Korea to return to negotiations were economic incentives, recognition of North Korea as a sovereign state by the United States and attempts to secure a non-aggression pact with the United States and Japan. By 2005, North Korea agreed to halt all nuclear programs and accept International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections. In exchange, all parties agreed to supply North Korea with emergency aid, which included one million tons of heavy fuel oil, and the United States and Japan agreed to continue working toward normalizing relations with North Korea. Negotiations ended in 2009 with expanded sanctions against North Korea due to a Taepo-Dong missile launch on April 2, 2009 (Davenport 2017). As part of the Six-Party Talks, North Korea received 330,000 tons of heavy fuel oil and 60,000 tons of fuel equivalent payments, such as steel products to renovate aging power plants, from the five other negotiation partner nations. The United States contributed 134,000 tons of the heavy fuel oil valued at \$146 million USD (Manyin, and Nikitin 2008, 2, 5).

In addition to the above assistance, between 1995 and 2007, the United States alone provided North Korea with over two million metric tons of food assistance valued at more than \$700 million USD to alleviate food shortages and famine. In total, the United States provided North Korea more than \$1 billion USD between 1995 and 2008 in humanitarian assistance and compensation as part of the 1994 Agreed Framework and the Six-Party Talks (Manyin, and Nikitin 2008, 1 2).

South Korea also provides significant economic support to North Korea in the form of inter-Korean trading and humanitarian assistance funding. Between 1989 and 2016 inter-Korean trade exceeded \$24 billion USD (Ministry of Unification n.d. a). This funding has two goals: stabilize the North Korean economy and maintain peaceful relations between the two states. From 1995 to 2007, the South Korean government provided more than \$10 million USD of food assistance in the form of 2,650,000 tons of domestic and foreign rice, plus 200,000 tons of Chinese corn. Between 1999 and 2007 the South Korean government provided 2,515,000 tons of fertilizer equal to more than \$6 million USD. The total value of the humanitarian assistance provided by the South Korean government and NGO's between 1995 and 2017 exceeded \$30 million USD (Ministry of Unification n.d. b). Of note, South Korea's government cut off nearly all aid assistance beginning in 2008 under the Lee Myung Bak. This resulted in heightened tensions between North and South Korea.

China is North Korea's most important source of assistance. China is not only North Korea's top trade partner, it also provides aid grants and investments. China's funding has three

goals: stabilize the North Korean economy and prevent collapse, attempt to provide China diplomatic leverage to encourage North Korea to continue denuclearization discussions, and obtain mineral rights to support China's economic growth (Habib 2011, 53-55). Trade with China is estimated at ninety percent of North Korea's total trade volume. Trade between the two states peaked in 2014 at \$6.86 billion USD but has decreased due to sanctions (Albert 2018b).

The economic support North Korea receives from the international community is vital to long-term sustainment. North Korea, depends on the economic and security benefits it derives from its nuclear weapons program to support its time intensive unconventional warfare strategy to achieve its ultimate national security objective of reunification under North Korean leadership.

Korean Reunification

Like North Korea's history with nuclear weapons, reunification of the Korean Peninsula is not a new objective. The preamble to the Korean Workers' Party's (KWP) charter declares that its task is to ensure "the complete victory of socialism in the northern half of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and the accomplishment of the revolutionary goals of national liberation and the people's democracy in the entire area" (Terry 2013, 75). This means North Korea has had almost 70 years to develop a strategy to remove interference by the United States and consolidate the Korean Peninsula as a communist state. Because South Korea's conventional military is stronger than North Korea's, execution of this objective requires asymmetric warfare to slowly subvert South Korea's perceptions making it more receptive to North Korea's leadership.

North Korea's asymmetric warfare model is a modification of the military doctrines used by the Soviet Union and China. From the Soviet Union it adopted a conventional arms capability, with a heavy emphasis on mechanized forces supported by mass indirect fires. From China it adopted Mao's use of unconventional warfare with guerilla networks (special operations forces), tunnel complexes, and political-psychological warfare (Kim, 2012, 56, 57). This unconventional warfare capability greatly enhances North Korea's aging conventional forces and is an invaluable tool for a long-term campaign to promote peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea has gradually opened its doors to western media to help establish its brand by controlling the images the outside world receives. Its goal is to demonstrate its domestic policies are promoting positive changes for its people. Western journalists are paraded around Pyongyang and shown images North Korea feels will support its self-image as a strong and prosperous state. Kim Jong Un and his wife, Ri Sol Ju, have abandoned the traditional styled Korean clothing in favor of western styles with Kim Jong Un wearing suits, and his smiling young wife sporting western styled dresses and carrying designer handbags. The country's premier military band, the Moranbong Band, also abandoned traditional style clothing and adopted dance routines and dress standards more like the all-girl pop groups of South Korea. Images of North Koreans enjoying rides at amusement parks and waterparks, and shopping at supermarkets with fully stocked shelves--including luxury items-- helps promote the image that North Korea has a developing economy and is no longer a repressive and backwards state. Although the images North Korea tries to present may not be totally convincing, they provide it some control over its branding and shapes its perception by South Koreans and the rest of the world. Other efforts are designed specifically to influence South Korea's foreign policies in favor of North Korea.

Kim Il Sung initiated efforts to create social unrest and promote a revolution in South Korea to reunify the Peninsula in the early 1960's. Leveraging special operations forces, North Korea began infiltrating South Korean society. Some individuals were used to subvert the South Korean population, while others were sent to conduct terrorist actions like assassinations. On at least two separate occasions, North Korean agents attempted to assassinate South Korea's President, viewed as the primary obstruction preventing unification. In 1968, North Korean agents attempted their first failed assassination when they infiltrated the grounds of the South Korean Presidential Compound. In 1974, a second failed assassination attempt against the same South Korean president resulted in the death of his wife (Terry 2013, 76, 77).

North Korea abandoned its more terrorist style actions and adopted a subtler approach involving subversive activities to slowly decrease hostility between the two states and promote increased support for North Korea. To execute this plan, North Korea inserts agents into South Korea with a variety of missions which include contacting pro-North Korean sympathizers, assassinating anti-North Korean activists, and collecting intelligence information. After arriving in South Korea, they may lie dormant for decades before assuming their assigned duties.

North Korea leverages the large number of defectors to infiltrate North Korean agents into South Korea. Since 1998, 31,339 people have defected from North Korea to South Korea. The number of defectors rapidly increased from 947 in 1998 to 2,914 in 2009 (Ministry of Unification n.d. c). That number has gradually decreased since Kim Jong Un cracked down on security to decrease the number of defectors leaving the country. However, the number of identified North Korean agents has increased. Between 2003 and 2013, South Korea arrested 49 North Korean spies, 21 of which entered the country disguised as defectors. Of those twenty-one, fourteen arrests occurred in 2014 (Kim and Park 2015). North Korean agents also easily move in and out of South Korea among the 100,000 visitors entering South Korea daily through the international ports of entry. As a result, significant concern exists over North Korea's level of penetration of South Korea (Taylor 2017).

In May 1991, Kim Young-Hwan, a recent college graduate responsible for promoting North Korean ideology on college campuses met North Korean agents who transported him to and from North Korea on a miniature submarine. While in North Korea he personally met with Kim Il Sung as a reward for his activism and strong support for the *Juche* ideology. After the meeting he returned to South Korea to continue his activism (Kang 2015). In 2011, South Korea arrested an assassin carrying poisoned needles as he was preparing to assassinate a defector who was an activist and outspoken critic of North Korea's government. The would-be assassin entered South Korea disguised as a defector in the late 1990s and remained inactive for more than eleven years until his arrest (Choe 2011).

Although South Koreans are aware that North Korea sends agents to South Korea disguised as defectors, South Korea has elected a former North Korean defector to its law-making body. From 2012 to 2016, Cho Myung-Chul served as an elected official in South Korea's National Assembly. Prior to defecting to South Korea in 1994, he served as an instructor at North Korea's most prestigious school, Kim Il Sung University, which teaches future leaders of North Korea's government (Taylor 2017). Although he was not a North Korean agent, one of the individuals Cho

Myung-Chul served with in the National Assembly was not only a pro-North Korean sympathizer, he was acting on behalf of the North Korean government.

In 2013, Lee Seok-Ki an elected assemblyman was arrested for leading a group of 130 people plotting to conduct a rebellion to support reunification with North Korea (Choe, 2013). Also arrested and charged with Lee for violating national security laws were three other members of the United Progressive Party, one of South Korea's minor political parties. Lee received a sentence of 12 of years in prison for his crime (Choe, 2014). The more frightening element is that this was not Lee Seok-Ki's first arrest for violating national security law. His 2002 arrest was also for pro-North Korean activities and while out of jail on parole when he twice travelled to North Korea, where he is suspected of meeting with North Korean officials (Kim 2013; Park 2013).

The extent of North Korea's influence into South Korea is unknown. Despite the fact Cho Myung-Chul was not a North Korean agent, the willingness of South Koreans to elect a former defector, popular support for a pro-North Korean political party, and a willingness to elect an individual with a prior arrest history for North Korean activism demonstrates that North Korea's unconventional warfare strategy is working. One could debate the ability of it to succeed; however, its presence exists and has produced observable results.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that North Korea is unlikely to give up its nuclear weapons program because it is a critical component of its national security objectives. International recognition that North Korea has developed an efficient nuclear weapons program feeds its national identity concept as a strong and prosperous state and promotes nuclear parity with enemy states. Nuclear weapons provide North Korea a low-cost alternative to negate the strength of neighboring conventional state militaries, while also reducing the threat of an internal coup by reducing the lethality of its conventional military in favor of an unconventional military force. Nuclear weapons provide North Korea leverage to gain economic support from other states vital to sustain a budget used to fund its unconventional weapons programs and buy the loyalty of senior government officials. Finally, and most importantly, North Korea requires nuclear weapons for long-term sustainment of the North Korean regime while its unconventional warfare strategy slowly subverts South Korean society to promote Korean reunification as a communist state. This paper has also identified two potential gaps in the literature. 1) How can the international system deter "oppositional nationalists" personality states from acquiring nuclear weapons? Horowitz's (2009) theory presents a second gap. 2) Does leadership continuity of autocratic governments present an advantage during nuclear negotiation over continuously changing leadership of democratic governments? Finally, this paper has added to the existing literature by describing the central role nuclear weapons play in achieving North Korea's national security objectives and how it supports unconventional warfare tactics to institute a South Korean societal revolution favoring North Korea.

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