

**The Chinese Balancing Act:
Beijing's Reaction to a Nuclear North Korea**

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Abstract

As China prepares to embark on their treacherous road to democracy and international superiority, the current administration within the Chinese government understands that they will be forced to handle numerous contentious issues. These obstacles may include domestic political strife, human rights debates, air-pollution remedies, over-populated cities, the *hukou* system, and much more. However, another situation may prove to be even more difficult to solve than any of these aforementioned predicaments, and could shape China's future status in the world depending on its outcome. The circumstance that I am referring to is that of a nuclear Democratic People's Republic of Korea. More specifically, the precarious position that a nuclear North Korea forces China into. This situation is extremely difficult because it comes down to a simple decision regarding whether or not China will continue to support their longtime ally, even though their relationship with North Korea has begun to hinder China's credibility around the globe.

As it currently stands, there are many different perspectives regarding this specific decision that China's Politburo must face in the near future. While the perspectives come in all different forms, and with varying theories and suggestions, the two ends of the spectrum have started to solidify themselves. One side argues that the threat of North Korea is both imminent and extremely serious. Therefore, this faction would endorse a more aggressive approach, and would call for immediate action. These actions could be strategic economic and trade sanctions, but may also include military behavior. The other position suggests that while North Korea may seem like a military threat, in

actuality, overly aggressive actions would bring about the worst possible results for all parties concerned. Therefore, this camp would advocate for letting the DPRK run its course. They would project that due to the DPRK's infrastructure deficiencies and economic struggles, their demise or reformation would occur much before a North Korean attack could materialize.

For this paper, I have put myself in the position of The Communist Party of China's General Secretary, Xi Jinping. By doing this, I have been able to come up with my own perspective on this dilemma. As a result, I have also been able to produce a suggestion to Beijing on how to handle this extremely complicated situation. In order to ensure that my proposition is both pragmatic and possible, I have analyzed the history of the Sino-DPRK relationship, as well as dissected the many different opinions presented by the academic and media communities. I hope that the general public will be able to use this research in order to gain a deeper understanding of the Sino-North Korean relationship. Additionally, I hope that my findings will be able to assist those interested in the subject in producing a thought-out and strategic plan that could finally de-nuclearize the Korean peninsula, without harming China's current political and economic trend.

Introduction

China has successfully completed the first stages of its remarkable journey from an autarkic country, fraught with poverty and a depleted infrastructure, to Asia's most dominant nation and the world's second largest economy. Along this journey, the

Chinese political climate and philosophy has changed from a closed-off communist regime, to a nation that has tied itself to the global financial system and created its own stock markets. While making this transition, China has allowed itself to develop new relationships with countries that live under varying political and economic systems. Even those countries that wouldn't have considered interacting with China during the Maoist era have begun to form political and economic relations with China.

Historically plagued by years of warring feudal kings, dynastic clashes, and invasions from the north and east, China has lived through many stages of domestic and international political strife. However difficult and unpredictable China's different political relationships have been in the past, few have been as relentless, erratic, and painful as the one that currently exists between The Peoples Republic of China (PRC) and The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).

As a result of China's well-chronicled allegiance with North Korea, China has perpetually been forced into precarious, and sometimes unwinnable situations. While this constant defense of North Korea by Beijing is expected, China has become frustrated with having to repeatedly support the somewhat-renegade actions of North Korea. Now that China has shifted away from its previous Maoist ideologies, and have started to embrace globalization and reform as their path to a successful future, the Sino-North Korean alliance has wavered. Furthermore, the United Nations (UN), and specifically the United States, has started to put pressure on China to leverage their influence within the Korean peninsula in order to contain the North Korean government and reign in their unpredictable activity. China is currently North Korea's only secure lifeline to the

outside world and is currently the DPRK's number one trading partner¹. This fact suggests that if China were to acquiesce to Western countries' requests to cut off this economic aid, it would undoubtedly drive the country into widespread famine and lead to a collapse of the regime.

From China's standpoint, the decision to enforce these sanctions on the DPRK isn't as clear-cut as one may initially believe. On the contrary, many academics and government officials throughout China argue that aiding North Korea is important in order to avoid "compromising its own long-standing interests in regional stability and the maintenance of a China-friendly peninsula"². Throughout this paper, I will recount the initial emergence of the Chinese-North Korean political friendship and military alliance, and exhibit the effect that China's ideological divergence has had on their relationship. I will conclude my thesis by detailing the current state of the relationship, and specifically how China is handling the aforementioned decisions regarding whether or not to retain ties with North Korea, or to fully emerge as a western ally and allow the DPRK to be swallowed up by the U.S.-allied, South Korea.

The Korean War

The end of World War II in 1945 signified a victory for the Allies who primarily consisted of The United States, Russia and Great Britain, over the Axis who were comprised of Germany, Italy, and Japan. This conquest represented a large shift in the

¹ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 191, Table 9.2

² Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 149

way that the world was divided; Europe was split up amongst the victors. Specifically, western countries were allowed to return to pre-war sovereignty, while the USSR was given influence within the eastern portion. Additionally, The United Nations was created as an international instrument intended to help prevent conflicts from mounting into World Wars. While this division of previously Axis-occupied land was taking place in the western hemisphere, the same activity was being performed in the east. The previously Japanese-occupied Korean peninsula was split up at the 38th parallel. The northern half was allotted to the USSR and deemed socialist. This portion of the peninsula eventually blossomed into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In contrast, the region south of the 38th parallel was left to the United States, and ultimately became the Republic of Korea (ROK)³.

As this rampant partitioning was transpiring throughout the globe, China was engulfed in a division of its own. This discord was a civil war between Mao Zedong's Communist Party, and Chiang Kai-shek's nationalist *Kuomintang* (KMT) party. Although the two sides agreed to a truce in order to fend off the Japanese invasions prior to the civil war, the nationalists and the communists had a long-standing hatred towards each other, and their differing political views didn't help mend the disagreement. After the Japanese threat was thwarted, internal fighting resumed. In 1949, Mao and his troops drove Chiang Kai-shek and the rest of the KMT to Taiwan, which was officially known as the Republic of China (ROC)⁴. During the civil war, Mao's distaste for the Americans was ignited because the KMT was backed throughout the fighting by the United States. Moreover, due to the difference on fundamental political principles, this feeling of

³ Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*

⁴ Jian Chen, *China's Road to the Korean War*

animosity towards the U.S. was continued after the war had concluded.⁵ While the KMT was aided by the west, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) was supported by North Korea throughout the war. Thus, when victory was achieved, Mao was indebted to the DPRK. After the expulsion of the KMT from China, peace finally emerged in East Asia, and gave all the victorious nations a chance to regroup after a strenuous period of battle. Japan had been defeated, and Russia, China and the United States each had their own section of East Asian to mold as they saw fit. This calm, however, wouldn't last for an extended period of time.

The communist-socialist vs. democratic-capitalist governing style has long been a contentious topic throughout history. When the Korean peninsula was split up at the close of World War II, and one segment was specified as communist, and the other stipulated as more right wing, tensions were bound to arise. While reunification negotiations discussions began to surface in the late 1940s, the tension between the two sides was steadily increasing, and ultimately resulted in the Northern communists invading the southern region and officially sparking the start of the Korean War in 1950⁶. Although most historians believe that this is how the Korean War originally began, some academics, such as professor Bruce Cummings from the University of Chicago argue that it isn't clear who first invaded whom, and what actually sparked the war. Regardless of how the war began, as soon as it did officially start, the United States (with the support of the United Nations) went in to defend the south. General MacArthur and the U.S. troops were easily able to fend off the North's incursion into the south, and were able to regain control of Seoul, the capital of the region south of the 38th parallel. However, the U.S.

⁵ Paul M. Edwards, *Historical Dictionary of the Korean War*

⁶ Paul M. Edwards, *Historical Dictionary of the Korean War*

did not cease fighting once they were able to secure and stabilize South Korea. Rather, the U.S. troops attacked, and were sent north of the 38th parallel, and ultimately drove the North Korean army into the northern most regions of the peninsula, encroaching on China's border.

As U.S. troops advanced further and further north into the Korean peninsula, Mao and his newly unified People's Republic of China had a choice to make. They could let the USSR-backed north fight against the U.S.-backed south, and let those nations control the destiny of the Korean peninsula. On the other hand, China could repay their debts to North Korea for helping China defeat the nationalist party, and intervene on the DPRK's behalf. While it is clear that China does eventually decide to cross the Yalu River, (the small river that separates China and North Korea) and joined the North Koreans to fight against the Americans, the reason behind Mao's decision is something that is still debated.

In Allen Whiting's book, "China Crosses the Yalu", published in 1960, Whiting concludes that because of the U.S. and United Nation's attack deep into North Korea, China had no choice but to assist the Soviet and North Korean troops in order to both defend the northern section of the Korean peninsula, but also protect against the possible infiltration from the western forces into Chinese and Soviet territory⁷. While this is undoubtedly an important reason why China felt compelled to enter the Korean War, it is not the main rationale in Mao's final decision to cross the Yalu River. As we learn from more recent iterations chronicling the PRC's support of the DPRK during the Korean War, the main motive that compelled Mao to fully support North Korea was his anti-

⁷ Allen S. Whiting, *China Crosses the Yalu*

imperialist mission, and the idea of obliterating the U.S. forces on their border was too attractive to ignore. One of the authors of these books, Shu Guangzhang, acknowledges Whiting's assumption. He states, "Whiting argues that the CCP leadership merely responded to what seemed an unambiguous, compelling threat to its security"⁸. However, he eventually sides with Chen Jian, another author and historian who researched China's decision to enter the war. "Chen asserts, they (China) were deluded into thinking more about opportunity than danger in dealing with the Korean Crisis"⁹. The opportunity that Chen alludes to is the possibility of creating a fully communist Asia, and driving out the imperialist powers once and for all¹⁰.

Even though China wanted to eliminate U.S. and UN forces from the region, they were severely overmatched when it came to technology and weaponry. However, this obstacle didn't seem to faze Mao when it came to his decision-making. "Shaped by communist ideology, as well as Chinese political culture and military history, Mao's belief in human superiority over technological superiority suggested his romantic attitude toward the threat and use of force"¹¹. Mao wrote specifically on this matter, "Weapons are an important factor in a war, but not the decisive factor, it is people, not things, that are decisive"¹². This thought process proves that while the imminent threat of U.S. troops knocking on China's door, just directly south of China's Liaoning province, was a

⁸ Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism – China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, p. 3

⁹ Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism – China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, p. 8

¹⁰ Chen Jian, *China's Road to the Korean War*

¹¹ Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism – China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, p. 11

¹² Shu Guang Zhang, *Mao's Military Romanticism – China and the Korean War, 1950-1953*, p. 11

major factor in Mao's decision to enter the war, it turns out that it was his revolutionary frame of mind, and confidence in China's ideological superiority over the imperialists, that finally led him to cross the Yalu river, and join the North Korean forces in 1950.¹³

After three long and bloody years of fighting, North Korea and the communist Chinese forces agreed to sign a cease-fire Armistice Agreement with the United Nations and the United States on July 27th, 1953¹⁴. While this armistice was finally agreed upon and resulted in the 38th parallel re-drawn, the war was never, and has never been officially proclaimed over. However, in the minds of the North Koreans, as well as the Chinese, the communists prevailed victorious in the Korean War, and were able to successfully drive out the U.S. "imperialists". It is because of this great victory over the west that strengthened the already strong relationship between Mao and the People's Republic of China, and Kim Il Sung and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

Since the Korean War, this unique bond between the DPRK and the PRC has remained seemingly secure throughout all the different political dilemmas. Premier Zhou Enlai of China explained the inexplicably strong alliance between China and North Korea by stating,

China and Korea are neighbors linked by mountains and rivers. There exists a traditional militant friendship between the Chinese and Korean peoples. This friendship cemented in blood was forged and has grown in the course of a protracted struggle against our common enemies, US and Japanese imperialism. The militant friendship between the Chinese and Korean peoples is the embodiment of the intimate relationships of our two peoples who share weal and woe and are as closely linked as lips to teeth. Common interests and common problems of security have bound and united our two peoples together.¹⁵

This excerpt from Premier Zhou Enlai shows how strongly the Chinese government feels about the relationship between the two countries. Moreover, he noted that in addition to

¹³ Paul M. Edwards, *Historical Dictionary of the Korean War*

¹⁴ Paul M. Edwards, *Historical Dictionary of the Korean War*

¹⁵ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 95

a militant relationship that was “cemented in blood” during the Korean War, the reason behind the two countries having an even deeper connection is because of their common interests.

There are two common interests that he is alluding to throughout his speech: their shared disdain for the US and Japanese imperialists and the North Korean and Chinese belief in a similar political ideology. Both Mao and Kim Il Sung both believed in a type of Marxist-Leninist socialist structure in order to sufficiently govern their people. Moreover, these two leaders both believed in altering their philosophy to adapt to their people and specific political situation as best they could. It is this type of finagling that allowed China to shift from Maoist socialism to Deng Xiaoping’s “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics” in the late 1980s¹⁶. Before Deng rose to power, both Mao and Kim Il Sung believed that the only way to fully indoctrinate their people was to create a socialist country based off of self-reliance and political independence.

In the DPRK this specific philosophy was known as *juche*. *Juche* is widely accepted as the key term when trying to grasp the philosophical outlook in all areas of life in DPRK¹⁷. Translated as self-reliance, *juche* has been the philosophical theory that has been supported since 1950, but it wasn’t until 1972 when it was put in the DPRK constitution as the “guiding principle of politics”¹⁸. Mao had an almost identical philosophy that was perpetuated throughout China starting in 1945. This philosophical idea was called, *zili gengsheng*. This slogan is also translated as “self-reliance”, and Mao supported this theory whole-heartedly. He advertised to his party saying, “We stand for

¹⁶ Scott Snyder, *China’s Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 149

¹⁷ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 33

¹⁸ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 33

self-reliance. We depend on our own efforts, on the creative power of the whole army and the entire people”¹⁹. While the rest of the world was globalizing, and connecting with foreign countries to bridge cultural and economic gaps, both China and North Korea wanted to focus on building their empires internally as best they could, with little assistance from the rest of the world. It is because of this shared philosophy, and their hatred of the US that brought these two nations into a bond that has been characterized as “sealed in the fresh blood”²⁰. Kim Il Sung echoed Zhou Enlai’s previous description of the link between the North Korean and Chinese peoples. He remarked,

We are very pleased with the invariable, continued development of the great Korea-China friendship, which has a historical tradition. Korea-China friendship is an invincible one that no force can ever break. It will further flourish down through generations. It will last as long as the mountains and rivers to the two countries exist.²¹

These two powerful leaders’ quotes about the relationship between the two Asian autarkies demonstrate how secure this relationship once was. However, as time has passed since the Chinese crossed the Yalu to defend the North Koreans and drive the imperialists back across the 38th parallel, the relationship has had to withstand many instances of tension and pressure.

A Friendship Ignited

Since the Korean War came to an unofficial close in 1953 with the signed Armistice Agreement, not only has the DPRK had friendly relations with the Chinese, but it has also maintained a strong alliance with the Soviets. This three-way communist

¹⁹ Henry Yuhuai He, *Dictionary of the Political Thought of the People’s Republic of China*, p. 682

²⁰ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 94

²¹ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 95

consortium was made official in July 1961 when the Soviet Union, China, and the DPRK all agreed to sign the Treaty of Defense and Mutual Assistance²². Additionally, at the close of the Korean War, Kim Il Sung went to Beijing and signed an agreement in order to secure a grant of 800 million RMB (approx. USD 125 million) in order to help bolster the crippled North Korean economy, and nullify all of the DPRK's debts to China that they accumulated during the Korean War. By 1976 it is estimated that North Korea had received USD 967 million in grants and loans from China, and USD 1,534 million from the USSR²³. The treaty and the economic cooperation solidified the communist partnership, but this alliance, like any, wasn't void of hiccups.

As the Cold War between the USSR and the US pressed on, China began to move away from the *zili gengsheng* philosophy that Mao had made the standard practice, and began to look outside of its borders in order to globalize, modernize, and most importantly, pull itself out of poverty. Mao's "Great Leap Forward" and "Cultural Revolution" were performed with this type of *zili gengsheng* in mind, but instead of building a powerful and stable country, it produced widespread famine, corruption, nepotism, and death²⁴.

Because of these atrocities brought upon China by its close-minded leadership, China knew it had to make a change. The first significant change came about when China agreed to normalize relations with the United States by "ending hostilities that had existed between them since the start of the Korean War"²⁵. This shift was a huge change from the previous era. This agreement to normalize relations with the U.S. showed both the USSR and the DPRK that the Chinese were beginning to open their doors and begin

²² Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 95

²³ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 106

²⁴ Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 149

²⁵ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 96

relations with other countries outside of their previously arranged socialist conglomerate. While Pyongyang wasn't ready to turn on China, this was the first step in creating the type of Sino-DPRK tensions that exist today.

After China and the United States normalized their relations in the early 1970s, the Cold War grew tenser as the years passed. Throughout this time, North Korea remained reliant on the friendship to the Soviet Union and, to a lesser extent, China, to help aid their country. However, as the USSR felt the end of its socialist empire collapsing around them, they decided to normalize relations with China in 1989 just as Deng Xiaoping was allowing China to enter the international marketplace and prosper economically. This normalization, and the successive disintegration of the USSR in 1991 forced Pyongyang into a difficult position.

First off, the DPRK could no longer rely on a dismantled Soviet Union to provide a security blanket for their section of the Korean Peninsula. Secondly, the USSR ceased their economic assistance to North Korea in 1990 following the normalization of its diplomatic relations with South Korea, so this hurt North Korea economically²⁶. Lastly, the DPRK was weary of the Chinese who were gradually moving away from the shared Marxist-Leninist ideology and were starting to transform economically and politically. Therefore, North Korea began to feel relatively isolated. Instead of following the examples that China nicely laid out for the DPRK, Kim Jung Il decided not to open up his country, but rather to reinforce their *juche* philosophy. In his speech titled "Our Socialism Centered on the Masses Shall Not Perish", Kim Jung Il said, "The prevailing complex situation requires that we should maintain the *juche* stand still more firmly in the

²⁶ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 106

revolution and construction”²⁷. This is an important period in the history of North Korea, and particularly in the relationship that has existed between the Chinese and the North Koreans.

A Change in Leadership

As Kim Il Sung grew older, he began to groom his son, Kim Jung Il, to take over in power and assume control of the North Korean regime. As early as the 1970s it became apparent that this hereditary succession was Kim Il Sung’s plan. Samuel S. Kim asserts that, “by 1980 Kim Jun Il was officially designated as his father’s successor”²⁸. This indication was a cause for concern for the Chinese, especially due to the fact that the younger Kim lacked the type of *guanxi* (translated in Mandarin as “relationships” and “connections”), that his father wielded with ease. This *guanxi* allowed Kim Il Sung to masterfully facilitate relations with many of the top Chinese leaders, such as Mao Zedong, Zhou Enlai and even Deng Xiaoping. Kim Jung Il’s lack of Chinese *guanxi* (connections with the Chinese leadership) wouldn’t have hurt him as much if the Chinese didn’t have to give their official endorsement on Kim Jung Il’s rise to power. While the elder Kim was in power, he focused on North Korean foreign policy and international relations. Meanwhile, Kim Jung Il was left to administer the domestic politics and situations that erupted throughout the nation. This left the North Koreans with a positive feeling about the younger Kim, but because there hadn’t been a heredity succession

²⁷ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 97

²⁸ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 101

within the communist nations since the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, the Chinese were more apprehensive of the soon-to-be new leader of North Korea, Kim Jung Il²⁹.

In order to combat this problem, in 1983 Kim Jung Il chose to make his first trip outside of North Korea, and the country of his choice was China. During his trip he met with many of China's top officials, including Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang (State Council Premier) and many other members of the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) Politburo. Throughout his trip, he consistently remarked and reiterated how strong the bond between the two nations was. Kim Jung Il said,

It has now become a tradition for the Chinese and Korean leaders to meet and exchange views as if they were real brothers since we don't have to follow the formalities of diplomatic protocol. It is not because we are geographic neighbours but because our minds are united by a close friendship and our mutual trust is truly profound. Our two countries and peoples have shed so much blood and sacrificed so many lives for the great tasks and mutual interests of the two countries that the friendship, which has been sealed in fresh blood, shall never change.³⁰

This obvious loyalty that Kim Jung Il reserved for China, won over government officials during his first trip to China, and he received their endorsement to lead the next generation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

In addition to exchanging pleasantries with the distinguished members of the CCP's Politburo, and reemphasizing the strength of Sino-North Korean relations, Kim Jung Il spent the majority of his trip to China studying their open economic policy, which led to North Korea's establishment of the Joint Venture Law³¹. After the implementation of this North Korean open economic policy, Kim Jung Il used massive investments from China and Japan to help modernize North Korea's limited infrastructure. In the 1980s, it was estimated that China had USD 40 million invested in joint venture enterprises within

²⁹ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 101

³⁰ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 102

³¹ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 104

the DPRK³². After Kim Jung Il's recent death, Kim Jung Un, his son, claimed the throne and has continued to build off of the framework set forth by his father and grandfather, especially as it pertains to the DPRK's economic relationship with China.

Economic Reliance

Beginning with China's agreement to terminate North Korea's debt following the Korean War, North Korea and China have expanded their relationship from purely militant, to trade allies as well. Because China's open economic policy reform gained more interest, and thus capital, from the western nations, they were able to grow rapidly. However, North Korea was not as lucky when they attempted to open up to allow foreign investments. This lack of foreign capital from across the globe, paired with the stoppage of Soviet contributions after the collapse of the USSR, made North Korea extremely vulnerable and especially reliant on China. Specifically, North Korea needed crude oil from China in order to keep the state running. China had a plethora of oil, and due to their storied partnership, the fact that China had recently normalized relations with South Korea (1992), and coupled with China's fear of North Korea falling to an imperialist-allied South Korea, China agreed to export their crude oil to the DPRK at a cheap 'friendship' price of USD 4.50 per barrel in order to stabilize North Korea and to restore faith in the Sino-North Korean partnership³³.

In addition to crude oil, China also supplied grain to North Korea, because grain is necessary to help sustain the population. In 2005 it was recorded that China exported a

³² Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 105

³³ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 106

whopping USD 273 million worth of oil, and USD 78 million worth of grain. In total, China exported a little more than a billion US dollars worth of trade to the DPRK in 2005³⁴. These statistics show how completely reliant North Korea is on the Chinese economic assistance that China has continually provided since the end of the Korean War. Snyder analyzes the situation by saying, “Despite China’s desire to put the relationship onto a more market-oriented basis, it continued to aid and trade with North Korea in an effort to forestall the latter’s collapse and to keep refugees from flowing into China at the height of the famine”³⁵. Snyder goes on to show, “that approved Chinese investments in North Korea doubled from \$67 million for nineteen projects during the first ten months of 2005, to \$135 million for forty-nine projects through October 2006.”³⁶

These trade statistics clearly exhibit how the economic reliance and overall assistance provided by China to North Korea has not slowed down. Rather, it has turned up even more as the DPRK digs itself deeper into a hole with the remainder of the world, and thus must continually turn to China for support. Despite the burden that this constant outflow of goods from China to North Korea may put on China, especially as it tries to navigate its way to economic superiority, China still believes their aid to be “‘strategic’ in nature”, because they are fully convinced that if they withdraw their assistance, then North Korea may collapse due to political instability or an economic crisis³⁷.

While it is well documented how much economic aid China provides to North Korea, (estimated \$6 billion in trade in 2011) it is less understood how China can simultaneously gain economically from North Korea. This gain comes from the amount

³⁴ Scott Snyder, *China’s Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 115, Table 5.3

³⁵ Scott Snyder, *China’s Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 115

³⁶ Scott Snyder, *China’s Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 117

³⁷ Scott Snyder, *China’s Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 112

of Chinese investment that is currently invested inside the DPRK, specifically related to mineral resource development within North Korea's northern region³⁸.

Apart from the “steel, cement, minerals, and marine products”³⁹ that are exported *from North Korea to China* and the minimal Chinese investment within the DPRK, these statistics, analyses, and excerpts show that the Chinese government only continues this support to the DPRK in order to stabilize the longstanding Sino-North Korean relationship, and also to make sure that the Korean peninsula, which borders China, remains a friendly territory. Because of the threat that the DPRK poses to the western world, The United States and South Korea (as well as the United Nations) have started to pressure China to leverage its economic aid in order to achieve global political goals of a North Korean regime transformation⁴⁰. This pressure has most notably come from the UN insisting that the Chinese agree to the sanctions imposed upon the DPRK by the UN. In addition to the economic dilemma that currently exists for the Chinese government, there is one other activity that North Korea constantly (and illegally) partakes in that continually irks China, and that is the building of its nuclear weapons program.

The Nuclear Crisis

North Korea has been abandoned by the majority of the world, and is unquestionably supported solely by China in order to strategically secure the Korean peninsula as a buffer between China and the western-allied nations. Since the 1950s,

³⁸ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

³⁹ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 108

⁴⁰ Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas*, p. 110

North Korea has conducted itself on the philosophy of being self-reliant, and that meant being able and ready to defend itself against all attackers. Because of this, the DPRK has constructed their nation by allowing their domestic politics to be on draconian, and have built up a reputation of neglecting human rights laws and UN sanctions. This is why, in the late 1950's, North Korea decided to enlist the Soviet's help in order to learn about nuclear physics, and then prepared to develop its own nuclear weapons program⁴¹.

Christoph Bluth explains that the idea to pursue nuclear weapons was decided both after the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 (Kim Il Sung declared a new self-reliant military policy), and after the United States installed nuclear weapons in the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Due to these two occurrences, it is estimated that somewhere between 1966-67 Kim Il Sung gave the order to begin the development of their nuclear weapons program⁴².

As time passed, North Korea's nuclear weapons program has gradually increased and improved. However, just as their program was about to grow even further, the DPRK encountered a fiscal obstacle. North Korea was unable to pay the Soviet Union for four light water reactors, and thus couldn't continue to develop their nuclear weapons. Therefore, the DPRK had no choice but to reluctantly sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on December 12th, 1985⁴³.

Since the signing of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, there have been many more instances of instability. Many of these crises have arisen due to North Korean threats, which cite their possible withdrawal from the NPT. The first withdrawal resulted

⁴¹ Christoph Bluth, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula*, p.111

⁴² Christoph Bluth, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula*, p.112

⁴³ Christoph Bluth, *Crisis on the Korean Peninsula*, p.114

in the implementation of the six-party talks between Russia, China, Japan, The United States, South Korea and North Korea. The six-party talks were convened in order to denuclearize the Korean peninsula, and provide guidelines on how North Korea can conduct its international trade, as well as how to peacefully use its remaining nuclear energy. While the DPRK's threat to withdraw from the NPT in 2003 raised tensions to an uneasy level, no North Korean actions have been as frightening to the western world, or provoked as strong a response, as the three nuclear tests that North Korea has performed within the past decade.

The first of nuclear test was launched on October 9th, 2006⁴⁴. This test sufficiently rocked the western world, and prompted the United Nations to impose strict sanctions upon the DPRK. These sanctions were assembled by the UN and issued under the "U.N. Resolution 1718"⁴⁵. These restrictions included prohibiting North Korea from testing more nuclear weapons, and launching ballistic missiles. The DPRK also incurred trade sanctions from this UN Resolution. The North Koreans could no longer import or export any type of material that could be tied to the building and development of military operations or nuclear weapons. Additionally, North Korea could no longer import luxury items into its country. Lastly, the resolution forced North Korea to re-enter into the six-party talks that were established in 2003. While these sanctions were strict enough to curb North Korea's nuclear development for a short time, they could not prevent North Korea from continuing its' quest for functioning nuclear weapons.

The creation of this initial resolution, while it obviously did not accomplish what it set out to rectify, signified a huge shift in China's foreign policy towards North Korea.

⁴⁴ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

⁴⁵ <https://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2006/sc8853.doc.htm>

China not only signed off on the sanctions (after a time of domestic deliberation and pressure put on by the UN), but also publicly criticized the North Korean's actions⁴⁶.

These sanctions and criticisms may have alarmed the DPRK government, and caused concern throughout their administration due to the strained Sino-DPRK relations, but it did not stop their nuclear mission. Therefore, in 2009 North Korea conducted a second test. This test again prompted a swift and harsh response from the United Nations Security Council, and it subsequently implemented the UN Security Council Resolution 1874⁴⁷. This resolution was based around the same parameters as the 2006 resolution, but this time it was even more stringent with regards to trade and military imports. Again, China supported the UN's decision to implement these sanctions and voted in favor of the newest iteration of the resolution (this time with less internal deliberation).

These resolutions may have severely impacted North Korean international trade, but it didn't prevent the DPRK from again being persistent in achieving their goal of producing battle-ready nuclear weapons. Subsequently, on February 12th 2003, North Korea orchestrated their third nuclear test. This third, and most recent test, has provoked Beijing even further, and "experts say that China's patience with its ally may be wearing thin...and the tests could worsen relations and many have urged China's new leadership to consider taking a tougher stance with its neighbor⁴⁸. Beijing immediately reacted this past February's test, and "summoned the North Korean ambassador to its foreign ministry to protest Pyongyang's third nuclear test"⁴⁹.

⁴⁶ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

⁴⁷ <http://www.un.org/News/Press/docs/2009/sc9679.doc.htm>

⁴⁸ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

⁴⁹ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

These reactions and news reports highlight China's disapproval of North Korea's nuclear program. As a result, China has started to put in place measures in order to combat and control the DPRK's destructive actions. However, Council on Foreign Relations Senior Fellow, Adam Segal, believes that China completely stopping or withdrawing its support of the DPRK is unrealistic. He remarks, "The idea that the Chinese would turn their backs on the North Koreans is clearly wrong"⁵⁰. This theory of continued Chinese support for the North Koreans is due to the fact that "Pyongyang ensures a friendly nation on its northeastern border, and provides a buffer zone between China and democratic South Korea, which is home to around 29,000 U.S. troops and marines"⁵¹. Daniel Snider, the associate director for research at Stanford's Asia-Pacific Research Center, summarizes his view of the situation by suggesting that, "For the Chinese, stability and the avoidance of war are the top priorities. From that point of view, the North Koreans are a huge problem for them, because Pyongyang could trigger a war on its own"⁵².

In addition to war, if the Chinese halt their support of North Korea in terms of economic or food aid, then they risk the collapse of the DPRK regime which would lead to hordes of refugees fleeing across the Chinese border and into northeastern China. And, as the Council on Foreign Relations notes, while the Chinese are still technically bound by the 1961 Sino-North Korean treaty to support the DPRK in case of a war, "China now places more value on national interest, over alliances blinded by ideology,

⁵⁰ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

⁵¹ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

⁵² <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

but Chinese ambiguity deters others from taking military action against Pyongyang”⁵³. This proves how much Beijing’s decisions can effect the progression or demise of the North Korean regime. It also proves how China’s lack of a clear-cut direction, as it pertains to the DPRK, can severely constrain the actions and powers of the western-allied forces.

While it is clear that China maintains significant leverage and influence over the DPRK, and can successfully convince North Korea to come to the bargaining table, China cannot control the DPRK’s actions once they arrive *at* the table, unless they are willing to risk toppling the entire regime. Beijing’s dilemma remains a contentious debate, and most analysts will assert that China will avoid moves that could cause a sudden collapse of the regime⁵⁴. However, Andrew Scobell, an Asian military affairs expert, believes Beijing isn’t as predictable as most would assume. He writes, “No action by China should be ruled out where North Korea is concerned”. Scobell goes onto say that if China receives assurances that a unified Korea under Seoul would remain “favorably disposed” towards Beijing, then China would terminate its support and assistance of Pyongyang, and allow the DPRK to fail⁵⁵. These decisions that Beijing is currently grappling with all come down to whether or not North Korea will continue to develop and enhance their nuclear weapons program.

In order to fully understand the vastly different theories regarding China’s approach to the North Korea situation, one must merely review the two extreme sides of

⁵³ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

⁵⁴ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

⁵⁵ <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

the debate. This clash of ideologies is called the “Hawk and Dove Perspective”⁵⁶. These two perspectives were created as a result of a disagreement between two professors. The first professor is David Kang. Dr. Kang is a professor of both International Relations, and Management & Organization at the University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business. The other professor is Victor Cha. Dr. Cha is currently the director of the Asian Studies Department of Georgetown University. It is because of these two professors that we are able to grasp onto the two different strategies that can be used when approaching North Korean politics.

The “Hawk” perspective is the argument supported by Dr. Cha. Within this strategy, Dr. Cha asserts that North Korea’s threats are not only real and dangerous, but also imminent. Similarly, Dr. Cha also believes that the economic reform that the DPRK is allegedly striving towards is merely a tactic, and is not a genuine attempt at reformation. Additionally, scholars who believe in the hawk perspective acknowledge the fact that North Korea has continually tried to grab the attention of the world, and relishes in any opportunity to become feared by the international community as it makes the regime, and its people, feel powerful. As a result, North Korea is more than capable and willing to do something impulsive like launching a nuclear missile attack. Because of this view, Dr. Cha and his hawk perspective would advocate for an aggressive and immediate act of violence in order to ensure that North Korea is not granted the luxury of freedom and time that could result in an even more deadly situation⁵⁷.

The other perspective in this debate is known as the “Dove” perspective. The dove perspective is the strategy that is lobbied for by Dr. Kang. Dr. Kang understands

⁵⁶ http://prezi.com/1qj5m_1_xrha/nuclear-north-korea/

⁵⁷ http://prezi.com/1qj5m_1_xrha/nuclear-north-korea/

that North Korea is dangerous and should be reformed, but he doesn't insist on immediate action or a military strike. Rather, Dr. Kang and his peers believe in letting the North Korean regime run its course. They believe that the DPRK will either reform by itself as the administration liberalizes, or it will slowly deteriorate and wither away. This theory exists because Dr. Kang, and his like-minded scholars, surmise that North Korea is not only *not* an immediate threat, but also the DPRK isn't likely to launch a nuclear weapon or engage in terrorist activity. These violent acts only seem possible because North Korea has consistently used a tactic called "deterrence" for the past 50 years in order to evoke fear throughout the international community, and thus ensure that their country is not attacked⁵⁸. Additionally, even if North Korea would want to engage in a war with the US, China, or any other superpower, their large army wouldn't be able to sufficiently attack or defend themselves due to the fact that their army has been underfunded and under trained for the past 30 years due to fiscal constraints. Because of these assumptions, Dr. Kang and his dove perspective would promote a more passive approach to the DPRK, and would only support violent actions as a *reaction* rather than doing so immediately⁵⁹.

While these two theories are both plausible approaches to the DPRK and its' dangerous nuclear activity, they are not absolute in practice. Both Dr. Kang and Dr. Cha acknowledge this, and have revisited their arguments and augmented their theories. However, the premise of the Hawk vs. Dove perspective debate has remained relatively constant since the discussion was ignited. Because of this, I would suggest that if Kim Jung Un decides to adhere to the U.N. sanctions and pleas from the western world, and

⁵⁸ http://prezi.com/1qj5m_1_xrha/nuclear-north-korea/

⁵⁹ http://prezi.com/1qj5m_1_xrha/nuclear-north-korea/

begins to reign in its weapons program, Beijing should allow the two nations to return to its pre-established Sino-North Korean pact. However, if this nuclear development persists, Beijing will undoubtedly be forced back into this precarious position, wedged directly between the west, which guarantees globalization, political reform, and economic prosperity, and the North Korean regime, which has been China's most reliable ally since Kim Il Sung and Mao Zedong proliferated the same type of political ideology and collectively drove the imperialists out of East Asia.

Moving Forward

Since the Korean War, China and North Korea have been extremely close allies. At first, their shared political beliefs, coupled with their emphasis on self-reliance, brought the two countries together to drive out the imperialist forces of the United States, Japan and South Korea. This "victory", paired with the similarities and friendship that was shared between Mao Zedong and Kim Il Sung solidified the initial Sino-DPRK relationship. However, as time has past since these events of the mid 1900s, both countries have progressed very differently.

China has opened its borders in order to reform its economic landscape, and more recently, has begun to tackle political and human rights issues that will help strengthen its continental and global position. Meanwhile, North Korea has flirted with opening its economic borders, but due to its stubbornness with regards to reforming any other aspects within their country such as their political system, educational support, and basic human rights laws, North Korea has been unable to match the amount of foreign capital that

China has been able to attract. This economic failure, paired with the termination of Soviet assistance after the Cold War, has left North Korea isolated, poor, economically reliant on China, and forced to either concede to the pressures from the United Nations, or defend itself. North Korea has chosen to ignore the United Nations, and instead, has further sequestered themselves by developing a nuclear weapons program that has triggered fear and strict sanctions from the western world.

This last nuclear test has not only angered the United States, but it has pushed China into a position capable of dissolving the North Korean regime, or at least completely eliminating its nuclear program. The question remains, will China risk the possibility of North Korea collapsing, refugees fleeing from the DPRK into China, and the Korean peninsula being unified by a U.S.-allied South Korea, all due to China cutting off trade and support to North Korea. Or, will China continue to maintain its “lips to teeth” friendship between it and North Korea, continue to provide economic assistance, and ensure that there will always be a Chinese-controlled North Korea, even though this may lead to concerns over China’s credibility throughout the modern world.

This question is yet to be answered fully, but if China’s recent reactions to North Korea’s nuclear tests have been any indication of the trend China is currently on with regards to its relationship with North Korea, I predict China will slowly discontinue its assistance and support of North Korea, especially as China gradually reforms its government and financial system to align itself with the other modern superpowers. Additionally, if North Korea refuses to cease development of its nuclear weapons program, I suggest China ally itself with the west, and fight to end the DPRK regime.

This will prove to be a smart investment in China's future, and secure the trust and attention of the United States and the other developed superpowers for the years to come.

I believe that Kim Il Sung's proclamation that the "Korea-China friendship is an invincible one that no force can ever break. It will further flourish down through generations. It will last as long as the mountains and rivers to the two countries exist"⁶⁰ will inevitably prove false within the next few decades. Even though the mountains and rivers may not change, the force that will certainly drive the relationship into the ground will be China's divergence from the original *zili gengsheng* and *juche* political ideology, as well as North Korea's nuclear stubbornness.

⁶⁰ Samuel S. Kim, *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, p. 95

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