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NORTH KOREA: A STUDY OF SELF-PRESERVATION AND REGIME-FIRST POLITICS

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**NORTH KOREA: A STUDY OF SELF-PRESERVATION AND REGIME-FIRST
POLITICS**

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ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the seemingly erratic and unrestrained North Korean domestic and foreign policy behaviour to elucidate the unique rationality and consistency underlying Pyongyang's actions. The paper argues that the conflation of regime security with national security frames all decisions taken by the regime, with the survival of the hereditary dictatorship taking precedence over every other consideration. Moreover, while superficially it may appear that this approach offers the highly centralized autocracy with an unparalleled freedom of action, this paper contends that its militaristic policies are in actual fact a reflection of regime weakness.

To do this, the paper will review the historical context that saw the creation of the North Korean state. It will then discuss the *Juche* ideology that serves to legitimize and even deify the Kims' rule, but in the end poses the greatest obstacle to the reforms so essential to the nation. The country's political economy, militant diplomacy and the repercussions that cumulative failures in each of these areas are having upon the broader geopolitical context will be covered to conclude how blind adherence to short-term regime preservation is ultimately undermining the monolithic ideology's three principles of self-defence, self-determination and self-sustenance. More importantly, this near-sighted approach prevents the polity from implementing the reforms so essential for the regime's legitimacy and the state's long-term survival.

INTRODUCTION

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), colloquially known as North Korea, is infamous for its ostensibly irrational and highly bellicose behaviour. True to the xenophobic heritage passed on to it by the Hermit Kingdom and thousands of years of great power intrigue on the Korean Peninsula, attempts to elucidate some form of strategic leitmotif guiding its actions are further complicated by the DPRK's status as "the most secretive state on earth."¹

Domestically, the exceptionally effective propaganda and internal security systems erected by the autocratic regime of the DPRK have seemingly given it total control over its population. The de facto hereditary monarchy's control is so complete that the average North Korean has endured such hardships as widespread famine and the lack of basic human rights without mobilizing against their government. Moreover, the DPRK's multi-layered security apparatus has earned it the reputation of being "the most repressive regime extant, scoring at the absolute bottom on all standard measures with respect to regime type, political and civil liberties, and human rights."² While attempts to monopolize information into and out of the country is characteristic of all Communist regimes, not even Stalinist Russia came as close as North Korea has in ensuring the conformance of information to government policy and objectives.³

¹ Edward A. Olsen, *Korea, The Divided Nation* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Security International, 2005), 2.

² Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "Political Attitudes Under Repression: Evidence from North Korean Refugees," *East-West Center Working Papers: Politics, Governance, and Security Series*, no. 21 (March 2010): 1.

³ Andrei Lankov, "The Official Propaganda of the DPRK: Ideas and Methods," in *North Korea: Yesterday and Today*, (Moscow: Vostochnaia Literatura, 1995), 3.

Internationally, the highly assertive DPRK consistently positions itself to retain the initiative and utilize any advantage it can leverage to act solely in accordance with its national interests, often with apparent success. Not only has it not relinquished an iota of its ideals to superpower or international pressure, but it has on numerous occasions simultaneously used extortion to secure international aid and ironically, pursue the normalization of relations with the United States (US). Throughout, the DPRK preaches and acts upon the cult-like political ideology of *Juche* and its three principles of independence and self-sufficiency in the economic, political and military realms in a unilateral fashion that gives the dictatorship the appearance of being entirely unconstrained and uninfluenced in its ability to act within and beyond its borders. This accomplishment is truly exceptional given how North Korea, as perhaps the "weakest of the six main actors in Northeast Asia . . . has also catapulted itself as a primary driver of Northeast Asian geopolitics".⁴

Far from acting erratically, this paper argues that the dictatorship has orchestrated a finely tuned scheme of manoeuvre that has assured it numerous tactical successes in controlling its population and isolating itself from international influence. However, this paper also demonstrates that from a strategic perspective, the DPRK's inability to disassociate state security from regime security ultimately constrains it from making the reforms so essential to the state's long-term survival and the realization of the sacred *Juche* principles of self-defence, self-determination and self-sustenance it purportedly upholds.

⁴ Samuel S. Kim, *The Two Koreas and the Great Powers*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), xiv.

To accomplish this task, chapter 1 will provide a summary of Korean history and the unique political and economic system that has evolved in the northern half of the peninsula. North Korea's contemporary political economy will also be covered, with emphasis placed upon how the extant political system limits meaningful economic reform. Chapter 2 will discuss the DPRK military and its central role in Pyongyang's foreign relations and the rational, yet short-term survivalist focus of the regime's behaviour. Chapter 3 will highlight the broader geopolitical context, the interplay of competing great power interests and how North Korea's actions have consistently favoured short-term regime survival tactics within this environment to the detriment of its international relations and its overtly expressed *Juche* principles. This paper will then conclude that the near-sighted survivalist policy approach along with the monolithic state ideology both serve strictly to perpetuate the regime but in the end also act as the primary impediments to meaningful reform.

Fundamentally, regime perpetuation is the veritable focus of the ruling elite, yet this all-consuming endeavour forces them into a reactionary posture that prevents them from taking the important domestic and international reforms required to allow the state to become self-sufficient. As a result and despite limited reforms, the DPRK is actually becoming increasingly dependent upon external assistance and subject to the very foreign influence from which it so ardently seeks to isolate itself. In summary, North Korea is a "prisoner of its own history and apparently has no way to exit itself from the cycle of decline and collapse."⁵

⁵ Paul French, *North Korea: The Paranoid Peninsula - A Modern History* (London: Zed Books Ltd., 2005), 3.

Concurrently, the drawn-out yet unavoidable collapse of the regime has become an ever greater international security concern owing to the high probability of civil war that would ensue, the likelihood such a conflict would draw in several major powers and the presence of weapons of mass destruction. These factors indubitably make the Korean Peninsula "the most dangerous flash point in Northeast Asia and perhaps in the world."⁶

⁶ Yong Sup Han, "South Korea's Military Capabilities and Strategy," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 215-230 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 215.

CHAPTER 1 - BACKGROUND

ANCIENT HISTORY AND THE HERMIT KINGDOM

History is of capital importance to the contemporary situation in North Korea and to the worldview of Koreans in general, one for the most part "formed around the principle of "repel the barbarians"."⁷ The favoured foundational legend amongst Koreans attributes the creation of the first Korean state to Tangun in 2333 B.C. The legend affirms that a female bear prayed to deity named Hwan-ung to become a woman. The deity and this woman had a son, Tangun, who was born on Mount Paektu, a mountain that today straddles the North Korean and Chinese border. Tangun founded the Korean state, a state he named Chosun (Land of the Morning Calm). The legend underscores the uniqueness of both Korean ethnicity and of their claim over Korean territory.⁸

Owing to its geographical placement, the Korean Peninsula has been buffeted by geopolitical forces, bringing with it a long history of foreign invasions and influence. From 56 B.C. to 18 B.C., three kingdoms named Koguryŏ, Shilla and Paekche arose on the peninsula. Of note, Koguryŏ extended north from the Korean Peninsula well into Manchuria and the current northeast Chinese provinces of Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang. Assisted by China, the southern Shilla kingdom ultimately prevailed over the other two kingdoms, defeating the northern Koguryŏ kingdom in A.D. 668 and for the first time creating a unified Korean nation-state.⁹

⁷ Robert A. Scalapino, "Korean Nationalism: Its History and Future," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 23-35 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 23.

⁸ Lankov, "The Official . . .", 11.

⁹ Olsen, 18.

The Koryŏ dynasty of the Shilla kingdom lasted from A.D. 918 until 1392 and is the source of the word "Korea" most Western languages would adopt as the name for the peninsula.¹⁰ In 1231, Koryŏ was forced into vassalage under the Mongols but was allowed to preserve its culture and a degree of independence.¹¹

Upon the waning of Mongol control over China, the Yi or Chosun dynasty was founded in Korea in 1392. Having observed how societal weakness had failed to preserve Korean independence, the Yi dynasty introduced a tailored neo-Confucianism from the Middle Kingdom that was "very hierarchical . . . and authoritarian in the ways that it inculcated group loyalty, deference towards seniors, and a fairly rigid societal order."¹² As a result of these efforts, by the eighteenth century Korea had become the most "Confucianized" society in East Asia.¹³

Regardless, repeated attacks from Japan in the 16th century greatly weakened the Yi dynasty. By the 17th century, Manchurian assaults finally proved too much for Yi Korea which was obliged to subordinate itself under a Manchurian controlled China.¹⁴

¹⁰ Ibid, 21.

¹¹ During this time, Koryŏ provided maritime cooperation to Mongolian attempts to invade Japan in 1274 and 1281; though the attacks failed, they earned the Koreans the enduring enmity of the Japanese for their supporting role. See Olsen, 23.

¹² Ibid, 24.

¹³ United States, United States Commission on International Religious Freedom, *Thank You Father Kim Il Sung: Eyewitness Accounts of Severe Violations of Freedom of Thought, Conscience, and Religion in North Korea* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, November, 2005), 15.

¹⁴ Olsen, 26.

JAPANESE ANNEXATION AND THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Struggling with 19th century Western imperialism and feeling like a shrimp amongst Chinese, Japanese and Russian whales, the Yi dynasty pursued a policy of isolationism. This xenophobic approach sprang naturally from the Korean genesis myth and was reinforced by its long history of fighting foreign influence, ultimately earning Yi Korea the moniker of the Hermit Kingdom.¹⁵ True to its policy, Korea resisted attempts to open as exemplified by the destruction of the heavily armed US merchant ship *General Sherman* when it ran aground on the Taedong River near Pyongyang in 1866.

Nonetheless, with the weakening of its protector, China, and faced with the East Asian colonization ambitions of Meiji Japan, Korea was soon forced into a succession of trade treaties and looking to Russia for support. However, the Russo-Japanese war of 1904-1905 concluded with Japan as the victor and the US brokered treaty made Korea a protectorate of Japan. By 29 August 1910, over five centuries of the Yi dynasty came to an end with the outright annexation of Korea by Japan.¹⁶

The northern portion of the Korean Peninsula was particularly attractive due to its significant mineral deposits, hydroelectric potential and the location of its ports.¹⁷ Unfortunately, while Japan invested heavily to develop the northern portion of the peninsula industrially, it concurrently attached little value to a Korean culture it deemed

¹⁵ Ibid, 34.

¹⁶ Ibid, 47.

¹⁷ Ibid, 106.

backward. The resulting oppression of the Korean people and repression of their culture caused many to flee to China and Russia.¹⁸

During the decades of Japanese occupation that would ensue, the Korean term *juche* meaning self-reliance or self-determination, was widely used by nationalist Korean leaders who longed for the day when the Korean people could exercise sovereignty on their own soil.¹⁹ Korean religious leaders were at the forefront of this nascent nationalist movement but public demonstrations were violently suppressed by Japanese colonials.²⁰ The humiliation and oppression would last 35 years until conclusion of the Second World War and the surrender of Japan on 15 August 1945.

THE KOREAN WAR AND THE ROOTS OF SELF-DETERMINATION

A US proposal to the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) concluded just days prior to the Japanese surrender arranged for the temporary administrative separation of the Korean Peninsula along the 38th parallel. Both sides immediately set about working on a suitable government for the entire peninsula, but with the competing ideologies of the nascent Cold War era already well entrenched, this proved impossible.

In 1947, the US proceeded through the United Nations Temporary Commission on Korea (UNTCOK) to hold pan-Korean elections. The USSR constrained UNTCOK to the south, resulting in the creation of the government of the Republic of Korea (ROK) on 31

¹⁸ Han S. Park, *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2002), 43.

¹⁹ Park, *North . . .*, 17.

²⁰ Korean religious leaders initiated the Korean Declaration of Independence on 1 March 1919. See United States, United States Commission . . . , 58.

May 1948 under its first president, Syngman Rhee, an English-speaking Korean educated in the US. Rhee was a septuagenarian and a long time resident of the US.

A short time afterwards, the USSR initiated a competing electoral process in the northern half of the peninsula that unsurprisingly resulted in the creation of the communist DPRK on 9 September 1948. At its head, the USSR drew upon the Russian-speaking Korean Kim Il-sung, a thirty-six year old Soviet Army-trained anti-Japanese guerrilla leader and communist revolutionary.²¹

With two Korean governments now sharing the peninsula, the stage was set for a protracted legitimacy rivalry that continues to this day. This campaign is fought between the ROK and DPRK for recognition by the Korean people, and the international community, as the only rightful government for the entire peninsula.

Kim soon made plans to unify the peninsula by force but was made to wait by Joseph Stalin for conditions to ripen. These circumstances occurred in rapid succession. To begin, US troops left Korea in June 1949 and two months later, the USSR tested its first nuclear weapon. October 1949 then saw the termination of the Chinese civil war, with Mao Zedong's communist People's Republic of China (PRC) victorious on the mainland. Finally, US resolve appeared to be further weakened by its Secretary of State's assertion in January 1950 that South Korea was outside the US defence perimeter.²²

²¹ Olsen, 110.

²² Scalapino, 27.

Kim, who had been petitioning Moscow for an invasion since early 1949, finally obtained Stalin's endorsement in April 1950 with the caveat that he obtain Mao's concurrence.²³

Of note, during the 1920s Mao and Kim had conducted guerrilla warfare together against the Japanese in Korea and developed close ties.²⁴ Moreover, Kim had provided food, supplies and troops to support Mao during the Chinese civil war.²⁵ Mao's consent was secured by mid-May and military action commenced on 25 June 1950.

While the Korean People's Army (KPA) initially made enormous progress, the UN-mandated and US-led intervention soon had the DPRK in full retreat and calling upon the PRC and USSR for assistance. Combat continued under Chinese command until signing of the armistice on 27 July 1953. The ROK and DPRK emerged with largely the same border prior to the onset of hostilities, except for the addition of a four kilometre wide demilitarized zone (DMZ).²⁶ While the Korean War cemented the US-ROK alliance, it similarly tightened Russo-DPRK and Sino-DPRK ties. For the DPRK, this dual-benefactor dynamic would become an important leverage point throughout the Cold War, providing it with an unparalleled degree of freedom of action within the communist bloc.

Although the war did not give Kim the geographic gains he sought, domestically it was pivotal for his consolidation of power within the communist Korean Workers' Party (KWP). The war served to justify many things:

Kim's communist party swiftly became rigidly hierarchical, tightly disciplined, and conscious of the need for its version of grass-roots in the form of mass membership. Unlike its Soviet and Chinese communist mentors, the KWP evolved into a party with many more rank-and-file

²³ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 239.

²⁴ International Crisis Group, "China and North Korea: Comrades Forever?" *Crisis Group Asia Report*, no. 112 (1 February 2006): 1.

²⁵ International, "China . . . ", 2.

²⁶ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 240.

members. But this should not be seen as representing the voice of the people to the elites of North Korean society. Its purpose actually was to give the elites, with Kim Il-sung at the absolute center of the political, economic, and strategic decision-making universe, the eyes and ears necessary to keep tabs on potential challengers, detect factional cliques that could be disruptive, and thereby serve as the means for conducting a series of purges.²⁷

The KWP formed on 10 October 1945 was comprised of several factions. The primary grouping was Kim's own partisan Kapsan faction and it rapidly affirmed itself over the others.²⁸ Hence, the Yan'an, domestic communist and Soviet-Korean factions were successively excluded from power and influence.²⁹

While Kim consolidated power within the KWP, he also set his sights on reducing opposition within the DPRK political system. From 1946 to 1950, the DPRK was a coalition government formed by the KWP, the Korean Democratic Party (KDP) and the Young Friends' Party (YFP).³⁰ In a fashion similar to the actions taken to consolidate

²⁷ Olsen, 113.

²⁸ The Kapsan faction consisted of Korean anti-Japanese guerrillas who operated under Kim in Manchuria. Their control over military and security forces prevented any other group from securing true power. See Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 112.

²⁹ The Yan'an faction was composed of Koreans who had labored for or fought as part of the Chinese Communist Party or its military. Although it also had strong anti-Japanese resistance roots, the Soviet Army disarmed it as it entered Korea in 1945 preventing it from wielding power. The domestic communist faction made the strategic error of basing itself out of Seoul and was further discredited by its inability to rally South Koreans to the North Korean cause during the Korean War. Meanwhile, the Soviet-Koreans, composed of descendent immigrants from the Soviet Union, never had the opportunity to develop an armed power-base. See Andrew Scobell, *Kim Jong Il and North Korea: The Leader and The System*, Strategic Studies Institute (March 2006), 19, Sung Chull Kim, *North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: From Consolidation to Systemic Dissonance* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 9.

³⁰ The KDP's support base was primarily founded upon Protestants and the propertied class, but quickly lost its autonomy in 1946 when their leader was replaced by a Kim Il-sung partisan comrade. The YFP was the political arm of the indigenous Chondokyo religion and proved to be a greater challenge owing to their larger rural support base and experience. However, when Chondokyo believers attempted to stage a second March First movement in 1948 to demand permission for UNTCOK to enter North Korea, Kim's regime struck pre-emptively and harshly. The YFP subsequently became docile and by January 1950 was subordinated to the KWP. See Charles K. Armstrong, *The North Korean Revolution, 1945-1950* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2003), 107, 108 and 119.

power within the KWP, Kim's regime moved rapidly and violently to subordinate and ultimately eliminate these rival parties.³¹

The bloody purges against what were labelled counter-revolutionaries continued until 1958. They proved especially successful due to the ability of persecuted elements of society to flee to South Korea, however they also further accentuated the ideological divide between the two Koreas.³² Now with the KWP as the sole North Korean party and Kim firmly in control, he began shaping the regime as one ostensibly founded upon international socialism but in reality based on xenophobic nationalism.³³

SELF-DETERMINATION: FROM STALINISM TO KIMISM

Kim was first exposed to Marxism-Leninism in the 1930s during his time conducting anti-Japanese activities in Manchuria with Korean and Chinese communists and had joined the Chinese Communist Party in 1931.³⁴ At this moment, worldwide appeal for communism burgeoned with the rise of the USSR. Its cause was further aided by the worldwide economic depression that ravaged the globe from 1929 until the early 1940s, highlighting the failures of capitalism. Lastly, capitalism's association with imperialism and exploitation further enhanced communism's allure.

Mao's writings in the 1940s would lend important characteristics to what would ultimately become the underpinnings for *Juche* ideology and the Kimist system it

³¹ Ibid, 133.

³² Kim, *North . . .*, 4.

³³ Scalapino, 28.

³⁴ Armstrong, *The North . . .*, 28.

supports.³⁵ Maoist influence permeates the national Korean quasi-religion of *Juche*, a monolithic ideology that in the end serves to deify Kim Il-sung, his ancestors and most importantly from the perspective of the perpetuation of the Kim dynasty, his descendants. Mao would stress the importance of adapting the Soviet communist model to China instead of adopting it outright; this principle of adopting the form but filling it with native content would later become the main tenet of Kim's own philosophy.³⁶

Owing to Mao's guerrilla roots, his Marxist-Leninist slant was decidedly more militaristic with greater importance given to the masses. Accordingly, from Maoism Kim would adopt the mass line approach used with the KWP, the emphasis placed upon the ideological reformation of the population as expressed in the inculcation of *Juche*, and self-sufficiency as the means to economic development.³⁷ The accent on economic autarky clearly struck a chord with Koreans and their history of great power victimization. Kim would elaborate on this theme. Assisted by his eldest son, the self-anointed ideologue Kim Jong-il, they would synthesize the father's thoughts and infuse them with theological overtones under the 1982 publication *On the Juche Idea*.

Juche and the Kimist system also owe much to Stalinist influences in the DPRK's early formative years. Many of the key elements of the system that eventually arose can be directly attributed to distinctly Stalinist traits such as the:

establishment of a monolithic ideology, rehabilitation of state and nation, a Great Leader-centered party and state system, emphasis on personal

³⁵ Seong-Chang Cheong, "Stalinism and Kimilsungism: A Comparative Analysis of Ideology and Power," *Asian Perspective* vol. 24, no. 1 (2000): 155.

³⁶ Grace Lee, "The Political Philosophy of Juche," *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs* vol. 3, no. 1 (Spring 2003): 110.

³⁷ Cheong, 155.

power, use of an extreme cult of personality, suppression of oligarchy, [and] a political culture of terror.³⁸

During Kim's service with the Soviet Army from 1940 until the liberation of Korea, he was taught and experienced the fundamentals of Stalinist communism.³⁹ Stalin himself had gradually consolidated power over the Soviet Communist Party through massive purges in the mid-1930s in a fashion later emulated by Kim. Ominously, as Kim commenced his service with the Soviet Army, Stalin's personality cult was de rigueur and his rule enforced through wide scale systematic terror. Although such a cult runs directly counter to Marxist-Leninist dogma, this leadership approach facilitated the elimination of opposition and invested such power and freedom of action in the leader that it was also espoused by Mao. Hence as early as 1946, Kim's own cult began: amongst the many extravagant titles bestowed upon him that year were "the leader of all the Korean people," the "hero of the nation" and the now infamous "great leader".⁴⁰

Finally, through the 1930s Stalin restored the role of the nation in order to appeal to nationalist sentiment in the Soviet people and strengthen his rule.⁴¹ While Stalin defined "nation" as a community sharing a common tongue, culture, land and economic life, a xenophobic North Korea would add "shared bloodline" to the definition.⁴² Soon, anti-colonial nationalism became the primary theme in North Korean politics instead of

³⁸ Ibid, 157.

³⁹ Ibid, 135.

⁴⁰ Armstrong, *The North . . .*, 134.

⁴¹ Cheong, 141.

⁴² Ibid, 142.

Soviet-style socialism.⁴³ This nationalist penchant would ultimately become the major ingredient of the Kimist system.

In keeping with its Russian tutelage, the DPRK's first constitution was modelled after the Soviet Constitution.⁴⁴ However, through adoption of various elements from both Stalinism and Maoism, Kim gradually substituted the "dictatorship of the proletariat for the dictatorship of the party, and of the Leninist party dictatorship for the dictatorship of the leader."⁴⁵ Kim consolidated power within the KWP through Stalin-inspired purges, while simultaneously motivating a massive Maoist-informed KWP membership campaign that went well beyond anything attempted by Mao. As aforementioned, this extensive mobilization campaign provided Kim with the requisite domestic espionage apparatus to keep internal opposition from forming. In addition, the sheer size of the KWP membership alone numbering some three million to this day engenders an additional degree of support for the system because the many members depend upon the regime for their livelihood and social status.⁴⁶

While Stalin set the stage for the resurgence of nationalism within communism, Korean nationalism was further incited by the ill conceived Sino-Soviet interference in North Korean internal affairs in the 1950s. Amongst these was a Russian attempt to make the DPRK into a satellite state by pressuring it to join the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance.⁴⁷ Matters were made still worse in August 1956 by the intervention of the Soviet and Chinese leaders attempting to maintain some opposition forces within the

⁴³ Armstrong, *The North* . . . , 61.

⁴⁴ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 113.

⁴⁵ Cheong, 146.

⁴⁶ Scobell, *Kim* . . . , 22.

⁴⁷ Phillip H. Park, *The Dynamics of Change in North Korea: An Institutional Perspective* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers Inc., 2009), 248.

KWP to curb Kim's power.⁴⁸ The intervention backfired and instead served to accelerate Kim's deviation from Sino-Soviet ideological and economic models.⁴⁹ Kim capitalized on the collective Korean memory of Japanese imperialism and millennia of great power domination to further purge the KWP, while also exploiting the growing Sino-Soviet rift to give North Korea ever greater independence. Of note, while Kim did seek to maximize his regime's freedom of action, this did not mean that he also spurned Soviet and Chinese assistance.⁵⁰ To the contrary, he espoused a mini-max strategy of minimizing costs and foreign influence while maximizing the amount of aid his regime secured.⁵¹ Such aid served not only to bolster his own rule, but to further legitimize his credentials as the genuine ruler for all Koreans.

JUCHE: BUILDING ON XENOPHOBIA AND RACE-BASED NATIONALISM

The word *Juche*, while commonly translated to mean self-determination, may be better interpreted to mean that the "people are the subject of their own society as well as subjected to society."⁵² The autocratic regime reinforces this ideology using three distinct elements: triumphal survivalism, an ancestor cult, and wounded ultra-nationalism.⁵³ Owing to the central place *Juche* occupies within North Korean society

⁴⁸ Cheong, 155.

⁴⁹ International, "China . . .", 15.

⁵⁰ Scobell, *Kim . . .*, 18.

⁵¹ Young Whan Kihl, "Staying Power of the Socialist "Hermit Kingdom"," in *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival*, ed. by Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim, 3-30 (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe Inc, 2006): 12.

⁵² Sonia Ryang, "Biopolitics or the Logic of Sovereign Love," in *North Korea: Toward a Better Understanding*, ed. by Sonia Ryang, 57-83 (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 78.

⁵³ Scobell, *Kim . . .*, 25.

and the pivotal role it plays in decision making, it is essential to comprehend these composing elements to shed light upon actions taken by the state and its people.⁵⁴

The "triumphal survivalism" trait of *Juche* underscores how the Korean people have and will always prevail against all odds. With the majority of North Koreans living in a perpetual state of mobilization, state propaganda has sought to make the most of this characteristic by largely erasing the important and sizeable contributions of the USSR and China from official North Korean history.⁵⁵ The Korean War is also regularly featured in official media as if it had only just started, with North Korea portrayed as the victim who singlehandedly succeeded in fending off American aggression.⁵⁶ The population is relentlessly reminded how their country must stay vigilant in defending against American imperialism and Japanese hostile intent, while portraying the ROK as a belligerent puppet state manipulated by the US.

In this manner, a permanent siege mentality has been instilled that serves to both bond society together and solidify the Kim dynasty's unchallenged rule.⁵⁷ This element reinforces the importance of self-defence and self-reliance as essential features of *Juche*, and is closely related to the "wounded ultra-nationalist" component. It evokes the country's history, replete with invasions and oppression, and bombards citizens with a "never again" mantra. In combination, these two components both allow the regime to remind North Koreans that the DPRK is at war and justify the supposedly temporary sacrifices required of everyone for the sake of the nation: "no hardship is too much

⁵⁴ Lee, "The Political . . .", 112.

⁵⁵ Scobell, *Kim . . .*, 19.

⁵⁶ Charles K. Armstrong, "Socialism, Sovereignty, and the North Korean Exception," in *North Korea: Toward a Better Understanding*, ed. by Sonia Ryang, 41-55 (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2009), 45.

⁵⁷ Armstrong, "Socialism . . .", 45.

whether it be battling Japanese occupiers, American invaders, or prolonged economic deprivations."⁵⁸

The ancestor cult element arose in answer to the succession problems experienced by North Korea's two great benefactors, the USSR and China, as reflected by the de-Stalinization initiated by Nikita Khrushchev and the betrayal of Mao by his chosen successor, Lin Biao. Kim, having successfully established himself as the uncontested North Korean despot, sought a way to both further cement his position while also guaranteeing his family's dynasty. To do this, in 1955 he began elaborating *Juche* thought, a worldview premised on the notion that "*Koreans are too pure blooded, and therefore too virtuous, to survive in this evil world without a great parental leader.*"⁵⁹ This contrasts significantly from Marxism-Leninism in how authoritarianism is inherent to *Juche* and the indispensable role it confers upon an exceptionally brilliant leader to mobilize the working class.⁶⁰

By the 1970s, *Juche* had evolved from a simple slogan to an ingeniously woven indigenous doctrine fusing Maoism, Confucianism and the Korean dynastic tradition.⁶¹ *Juche* departed still further from its Marxist-Leninist roots by progressively excluding the possibility of a self-regulating, nation-less and lawless society.⁶² Accordingly, the writings of Marx, Engels and Lenin were forbidden from North Korean schools along

⁵⁸ Scobell, *Kim . . .*, 26.

⁵⁹ Brian Reynolds Myers, *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why it Matters* (New York: Melville House Publishing, 2010), ii.

⁶⁰ Lee, "The Political . . .", 111.

⁶¹ French, 31.

⁶² Cheong, 146.

with other subversive literature.⁶³ The ultimate goal of the regime gradually became to not only control what the population does, but more importantly what it thinks.⁶⁴

In its place, the co-option of Confucianism's filial tradition and Japanese-style Shinto emperor worship formed the ideal mechanism to support something akin to a Kim family Mandate of Heaven to justify dynasty-like succession of power.⁶⁵ In the end, the development of *Juche* reinforced the strength of Kim's command by holding him up not only as the anti-Japanese guerrilla leader who singlehandedly secured national emancipation and repelled the American imperialists during the Korean War, but now also as a great thinker.

As part of this ancestor cult and the need to build national identity around the Kim family, official state history was re-written to highlight the central role of the Kim family in Korean history. This includes such questionable historical assertions that the *General Sherman* was attacked under the leadership of Kim's great-grandfather, Kim Ung U.⁶⁶ Historical revisions further included Kim Il-sung's liberation of Korea from the Japanese although he and his guerrillas only entered the country one month after the Japanese surrender.⁶⁷ The North Korean calendar was renumbered to coincide with the birth of Kim Il-sung in 1912: on January 1st 2011, North Koreans celebrated the arrival of *Juche* 99. The true extent of this cult is understood by how the Korean language itself has been modified, with new words and special grammar forms invented and reserved exclusively

⁶³ Lankov, "The Official . . .", 9.

⁶⁴ Scobell, *Kim . . .*, 4.

⁶⁵ Cheong, 156.

⁶⁶ Kim, *The Two Koreas . . .*, 234.

⁶⁷ Armstrong, *The North . . .*, 39.

for Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il.⁶⁸ Additionally, the Kims' images are displayed prominently inside public buildings and private dwellings, and hundreds of Kim Il-sung statues and an estimated 35,000 monuments litter the countryside.⁶⁹

Within North Korea, *Juche* also plays a key role in supplanting religion. Having solidified control over the KWP and wholly cognizant of the important role religion played in the resistance to Japanese colonialism, Kim viewed religious groups as important political competitors.⁷⁰ Chondokyo and Protestant leaders started to protest Kim's policies immediately after the Second World War, however by the 1960s the DPRK succeeded in virtually eliminating all public practice of religion and substituted *Juche* in its place.⁷¹ *Juche* evolved to offer immortality while incessantly reinforcing the mantra of the leader as the head and the people as the body of the state.

On the topic of life after death, *Juche* theoreticians affirm that the mortal human can aspire to eternal life if he or she fully integrates into society.⁷² Essentially, all North Koreans are taught that they can attain immortality through enduring contributions to society and history that will see them immortalized as "national heroes, martyrs, artists, intellectuals, workers, and even peasants".⁷³ Indoctrination is lifelong: the first sentence parents must teach their children is "Thank you, Father Kim Il Sung".⁷⁴ Instruction of *Juche* is thoroughly embedded in the curriculum of the eleven years of compulsory schooling and continues afterwards: North Korean workplaces must devote one day per

⁶⁸ Lankov, "The Official . . .", 5.

⁶⁹ Ibid, 8.

⁷⁰ United States, United States Commission . . ., 2.

⁷¹ Ibid, 10.

⁷² Park, *North* . . ., 37.

⁷³ Ibid, 37.

⁷⁴ United States, United States Commission . . ., 1.

week towards mandatory *Juche* study sessions and self-criticism.⁷⁵ So intense is the indoctrination that conservative estimates indicate up to 30 percent of the North Korean population adhere unreservedly to this immortality aspect of *Juche*.⁷⁶

The power of *Juche* over North Korean society is impressive. In the case of both the collapse of the USSR and of its Eastern European satellites, "the one justification that the ruling elite used to secure their positions - the elevation of the position of the working class - was not achieved, as the economic system was unable to drive growth."⁷⁷

However, through draconian restrictions on the flow of information, the early and persistent inculcation of *Juche* and the Orwellian siege mentality it perpetuates, the Kim regime has thus far sidestepped this impending legitimacy crisis. The very conceptualization of the leader as the brain and society as his body evokes a natural relationship, one that cannot be dissolved.⁷⁸ Confucianism bolsters this "natural order" even further with its concept of filial piety, not to mention the strong Confucian association between poverty and dignity versus material abundance and depravity.⁷⁹ As a testament to its success, even North Korean defectors who flee their country at tremendous personal risk nevertheless find criticism or reappraisal of Kim's divinity unthinkable.⁸⁰

⁷⁵ Park, *North . . .*, 27.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 39.

⁷⁷ French, 5.

⁷⁸ Park, *North . . .*, 88.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, 166.

⁸⁰ Scobell, *Kim . . .*, vi.

SELF-SUSTENANCE: A COMMAND POLITICAL ECONOMY

Self-sustenance forms one of the three *Juche* "self" principles and speaks to the objective of economic autarky as a strategy to promote internal economic development while insulating the state from foreign influence. Given the DPRK's floundering economic situation and the instability it generates both within the state and the region, it is quite fitting that its sclerotic political economy, along with the ruling regime's ability to enact meaningful economic reform, be reviewed.

North Korea occupies about 55% of the Korean Peninsula, but with 22.7 million inhabitants it is home for only approximately 32% of the Korean population on the peninsula.⁸¹ Situated in the economically vibrant East Asian region, to the north it shares a 1416 kilometre border with the PRC and a 19 kilometre border with Russia.⁸² To the south, it shares a 238 kilometre border with the ROK. Most of the country's 25,000 kilometres of roads are unpaved tracks.⁸³ The DPRK is well endowed in hydroelectric potential, uranium, coal, iron, zinc, copper, gold, silver and the world's largest magnesium deposits.⁸⁴ What the country boasts of in minerals, it lacks in oil and arable land. Historically dependent upon the southern portion of the peninsula for food, a mere 22.4% of its mountainous countryside is suitable for agricultural purposes.⁸⁵ This fact is

⁸¹ Gale Cengage Learning. *Countries of the World and Their Leaders Yearbook 2011* (Farmington, MI: Gale, 2010), 1177.

⁸² Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2011.

⁸³ International Crisis Group, "North Korea under Tightening Sanctions," *Crisis Group Asia Report*, no. 101 (15 March 2010): 12.

⁸⁴ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea," *Country Profile 2008*: 11; available from http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=displayIssue&publication_id=600000660; Internet; accessed 24 August 2010.

⁸⁵ International, "North . . .", 9.

highlighted by the recurring food shortages experienced in North Korea throughout its history.

In the years immediately prior to the Korean War, Kim redistributed farm land to poor peasants as a way to boost productivity; his personal association with land reform also secured popular allegiance while state propaganda credited Kim's divine ability to control the weather for bumper crops and the containment of floods.⁸⁶ However, upon conclusion of the Korean War Kim collectivized agriculture and implemented a Public Distribution System (PDS) to dispense food at subsidized rates and further reduce the monetization of the economy.⁸⁷ These measures formed part of the larger Soviet-inspired Centrally Planned Economy (CPE) initiated in March 1946 and still in place today.⁸⁸ The emphasis upon industrialization initially proved to be a highly successful formula and by 1970, Kim's legitimacy soared as the DPRK's gross national product (GNP) per capita grew well ahead of the ROK's.⁸⁹ Much of the North's initial success was founded upon the Japanese colonialist industrial infrastructure base, while the South's initial difficulties stemmed from the initial loss of Japanese markets coupled with the physical isolation from the continent that effectively made it into an island state.⁹⁰

North Korean fortunes subsequently changed for the worse. Having given military preparedness equal status to economic development in 1962, economic growth abated in the 1970s and stagnated in the 1980s as the CPE became more bureaucratized and military-style mobilization campaigns failed to provide the requisite incentives to

⁸⁶ Armstrong, *The North* . . . , 150.

⁸⁷ International, "North . . .", 11.

⁸⁸ Scobell, *Kim* . . . , 35.

⁸⁹ Park, *North* . . . , 22.

⁹⁰ Olsen, 106.

increase productivity.⁹¹ Moreover, in keeping with Kim's unfulfilled mission of martial reunification, the 1970s would see increased emphasis upon an arms race that today consumes an estimated 25% of the country's GNP and mobilizes 20% of its people.⁹² In relative terms, this makes North Korean expenditures on defence the largest in the world.⁹³ From the 1970s onwards, Pyongyang would borrow some 14 billion dollars from the international community for this endeavour, only to unabashedly default in the 1980s.⁹⁴ Today, North Korea's debt with Japan amounts to approximately 600 million US dollars (USD), while its debt to Russia is estimated at ten billion USD.⁹⁵ Of the Russian debt, 70% is estimated to be for unpaid weapon systems.⁹⁶

The most inefficient of all Communist societies, the DPRK's CPE was progressively debilitated by the high costs of maintaining continuous ideological indoctrination of the entire population, a security apparatus on constant watch and a disproportionately large defence establishment.⁹⁷ Inefficiencies were further systematically incorporated within the economy as a result of Kim's promulgation of the Daean Management Method in 1961, a core element of the political economy that dilutes a plant manager's authority and

⁹¹ Bradley K. Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader: North Korea and the Kim Dynasty* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2004), 127.

⁹² Gale, 1180.

⁹³ Jonathan D. Pollack, "Korea's Looming Transformation," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 3-22 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 9.

⁹⁴ Hy-Sang Lee, *North Korea: A Strange Socialist Fortress* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2001), 3.

⁹⁵ Charles K. Armstrong, "Juche and North Korea's Global Aspirations," *North Korea International Documentation Project*, September 2009, 8. http://www.wilsoncenter.org/news/docs/NKDIP_wp1.pdf; Internet; accessed 21 April 2011 and *The Moscow Times*, "Cuba, N. Korea Owe \$37Bln," 1 December 2010; <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/business/article/cuba-n-korea-owe-37bln/425372.html>; Internet; accessed 12 March 2011.

⁹⁶ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 147.

⁹⁷ Andrei Lankov, "Can North Korea be Reformed?," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 39-57 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 40.

accountability by superimposing a KWP committee at each workplace with the power to overrule local managers.⁹⁸

To make matters worse, North Korea ceased attempting to balance the PRC against the USSR during the 1966 to 1976 period of the Chinese Cultural Revolution, a time when the PRC portrayed Kim as a "fat revisionist".⁹⁹ By the 1980s the DPRK was almost entirely dependent upon heavily subsidized trade from Moscow.¹⁰⁰ Annual North Korean trade deficits became the norm in 1985, with two-way trade with the USSR valued at 2.56 billion USD per year.¹⁰¹ As the USSR collapsed in 1991, the DPRK entered a period of precipitous economic decline with Russian trade dropping to less than 100 million USD per year.¹⁰²

By 1992, the severity of the situation could be discerned within the secretive state through government campaigns urging its population to only consume two meals per day.¹⁰³ In a highly uncharacteristic move, Pyongyang openly admitted that its economy was in "grave condition" in 1993; by 1999 the situation had only worsened.¹⁰⁴ When the Supreme People's Assembly (SPA) reviewed the 1999 budget, projected revenue and expenditures were lower than those reported for 1981.¹⁰⁵ 2006 trade was still

⁹⁸ Kim, *North . . .*, 146.

⁹⁹ International, "China . . .", 2.

¹⁰⁰ Nicholas Eberstadt, *The End of North Korea* (Washington, D.C.: The American Enterprise Institute Press, 1999), 8.

¹⁰¹ Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-In-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length*, Strategic Studies Institute (March 2004), 6.

¹⁰² Ibid, 6.

¹⁰³ Kim, *The Two Koreas . . .*, 315.

¹⁰⁴ Eberstadt, *The End . . .*, 8.

¹⁰⁵ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea," *Country Profile 2008*: 14.

substantially less than that of the 1980s, with the majority consisting of aid from its two new largest trading partners and benefactors, China and South Korea.¹⁰⁶

Lacking oil and fertilizer while buffeted by floods, the 1990s and early 2000s would usher in a series of severe famines unprecedented amongst Communist countries.¹⁰⁷

Their uniqueness derives from the fact that the worst food crises did not happen early in the DPRK's inception, nor did they initially happen as a result of a sudden contemporaneous economic policy change. Occurring instead during its fifth and sixth decades of existence, the recurring food shortages that persist to this day accentuate the systemic nature of the problem and of the complete failure of the DPRK's ill-conceived and isolationist self-sustenance development strategy.¹⁰⁸ In an effort to insulate Kim Jong-il from responsibility for these deteriorating economic conditions, in 1995 the state initiated *songun chongch'i*, or "military-first politics", justifying the military threat from the US as being so great that the Dear Leader had to dedicate himself entirely to this cause.¹⁰⁹

With the breakdown of the PDS in the mid-1990s and the onset of what would later be called the "Arduous March", up to 10% of the population may have died and over 300,000 refugees crossed into China.¹¹⁰ The closed nature of North Korea resulted in

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 20.

¹⁰⁷ Kim, *North . . .*, 20.

¹⁰⁸ Eberstadt, *The End . . .*, 9.

¹⁰⁹ Colin Marshall, "Immersion in Propaganda, Race-Based Nationalism and the Un-Figure-Outable Vortex of Juche Thought," *3 Quarks Daily*, 12 April 2010;

<http://www.3quarksdaily.com/3quarksdaily/2010/04/page/4/>; Internet; accessed 26 July 2010.

¹¹⁰ Business Monitor International, "Global Political Outlook," *North Korea Defence & Security Report 2010*: 40; available from [http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/results?vid=2&hid=105&sid=68298085-bb50-4830-9f58-2a25f56226b3%40sessionmgr12&bquery=\(JN+%22North+Korea+Defence+%26+Security+Report%22+AND+DT+20100901\)&bdata=JmRiPWJ0aCZ0eXBIPTEmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl](http://web.ebscohost.com/ehost/results?vid=2&hid=105&sid=68298085-bb50-4830-9f58-2a25f56226b3%40sessionmgr12&bquery=(JN+%22North+Korea+Defence+%26+Security+Report%22+AND+DT+20100901)&bdata=JmRiPWJ0aCZ0eXBIPTEmc2l0ZT1laG9zdC1saXZl); Internet; accessed 24 August 2010.

tepid international aid response to the famine with only some 67% of the annual food requirement provided.¹¹¹ As average North Koreans turned to survival tactics, farmers markets spontaneously arose across the country.¹¹² Reacting to the situation, the regime ushered in constitutional amendments in 1998 to legalize markets, allow the use of foreign currencies and create special economic zones (SEZ).¹¹³ Ever wary of outside influence upon the North Korean populace, however, the SEZs were situated in remote areas of the country, ultimately contributing significantly to the failure of the Rajin-Sonbong SEZ.¹¹⁴

Economic adjustments undertaken on 1 July 2002, known as the 7/1 measures, further acknowledged the spread of markets and the inability of the government to control the internal movement of its people by legalizing such activities.¹¹⁵ Price reforms saw the value of food adjusted to that of the black market, and wages were increased thereby temporarily re-monetizing the economy.¹¹⁶ Regardless, living conditions by 2005 were still no better than during the 1994-1999 famine.¹¹⁷ Moreover, reforms notwithstanding central planning remained so entrenched that the Heritage Foundation's 2008 Index of Economic Freedom ranked the North Korean economy last out of 157 countries.¹¹⁸

However, the introduction of markets reduced the population's dependence upon the government and the rupture of the social compact between the state and its citizens was

¹¹¹ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 352.

¹¹² International, "North . . .", 9.

¹¹³ Andrew Scobell, *North Korea's Strategic Intentions*, Strategic Studies Institute (July 2005), 21.

¹¹⁴ Jacquelyn K. Davis, Charles M. Perry, and James L. Schoff, *Nuclear Matters in North Korea: Building a Multilateral Response for Future Stability in Northeast Asia*, (Westwood, Massachusetts: Potomac Books, 2008), 92.

¹¹⁵ Kim, *North* . . . , 22.

¹¹⁶ Park, *The Dynamics* . . . , 30.

¹¹⁷ International, "China . . .", 20.

¹¹⁸ Davis, 84.

likely deemed to jeopardize political stability.¹¹⁹ Accordingly, to reassert control over a growing wealthy class becoming increasingly independent of the state, in early December 2009 the DPRK orchestrated an inept redenomination to reduce the monetization of the economy and restore the central role of the state.¹²⁰ The impact on the North Korean economy was disastrous as limited savings were wiped out, food and material goods were hoarded, inflation sky-rocketed and grave food shortages made their return.¹²¹ The regime blamed price increases on market activities and banned them. As starvation deaths mounted and the toll on the economy rose, the government finally reversed its market ban and once more allowed the use of foreign currencies.¹²²

Meanwhile, Pyongyang's economic state of affairs was exacerbated by a series of increasingly robust international sanctions regimes specifically aimed at the despotic state; although arms exports are the country's most significant source of foreign exchange, between 2006 and 2009 these became subject to seizure as contraband under the UN Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 1695, 1718 and 1874.¹²³ Tightening sanctions have compelled the DPRK to conduct illicit trade in weapons of mass destruction technology and ballistic missiles with such countries as Burma, Iran, Pakistan, Syria and Yemen.¹²⁴ Desperately in need of cash it has also engaged in

¹¹⁹ Pollack, 9.

¹²⁰ Mari Yoshioka-Izuyama, *et al*, "The Korean Peninsula – Strengthened Military-First Politics and "Grand Bargain" Proposal," in *East Asian Strategic Review 2010* (Tokyo: The Japan Times Ltd., 2010), 88.

¹²¹ *The New York Times*, "North Korea,"

<http://topics.nytimes.com/top/news/international/countriesandterritories/northkorea/index.html>; Internet; accessed 4 January 2011.

¹²² International, "North . . .", 10.

¹²³ International, "North . . .", 5.

¹²⁴ Business, 7.

organized crime, smuggling narcotics to Russia and Japan, used cars from Japan to China and manufacturing counterfeit cigarettes, prescription drugs and foreign currencies.¹²⁵

More recent events also stopped the flow of aid, cash and even goodwill from a principle supporter, the ROK. The Mount Kumgang and Kaesong City tourism projects were closed indefinitely after the KPA killed a South Korean tourist in July 2008.¹²⁶ Major South Korean conglomerates have avoided establishing themselves within DPRK SEZs owing to the uncertainty engendered by the regime. Of 672 South Korean firms that initiated business in the North in 2000, only 171 were still present one year later.¹²⁷ By 2009, this number had dropped again by over 40%.¹²⁸ Examples of arbitrary governance within the SEZs include sporadic border closures, draconian restrictions on the numbers of South Korean employees allowed within the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) and the illegal 136-day detention of a South Korean Hyundai engineer employed at the KIC in 2009.¹²⁹ North Korea has also made outrageous salary and rent increase demands, unilaterally declaring on 15 May 2009 that the KIC rules and contracts were null and void.¹³⁰

To make matters worse, the DPRK nuclear tests of 9 October 2006 and 25 May 2009, coupled with the sinking of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* in March 2010 resulted

¹²⁵ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea," *Country Profile 2008*: 21.

¹²⁶ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea," *Country Report November 2009*: 10; available from http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=displayIssue&publication_id=500000850; Internet; accessed 24 August 2010.

¹²⁷ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 326.

¹²⁸ Gale, 1197.

¹²⁹ Business, 45.

¹³⁰ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea," *Country Report August 2009*: 14; available from http://www.eiu.com/index.asp?layout=displayIssue&publication_id=500000850; Internet; accessed 24 August 2010.

in the cessation by the ROK of all cross-border trade with the DPRK in May 2010.¹³¹

While the dictatorship has traditionally enjoyed popularity amongst younger segments of

South Korean society for its reputation of standing up to major world powers, the

November 2010 artillery barrage of the South Korean Yeonpyeong Island significantly soured public and political attitudes in the South in regards to their northern cousins.¹³²

Cumulatively, the magnitude of this change is highlighted by how Seoul only just imposed economic sanctions upon the DPRK for the first time in 2010, this despite decades of repeated deadly attacks by North Korea upon the ROK and its leadership.¹³³

Even humanitarian assistance such as rice and fertilizer, briefly restored in October 2010 following severe flooding in North Korea, ceased entirely following the Yeonpyeong incident.¹³⁴

Having witnessed a significant curtailment of its legal exports as a result of unilateral and confrontational policy choices, Pyongyang has further discouraged foreign investment and isolated itself from international financial institutions by defaulting on loans.¹³⁵ For example, a 1997 North Korea submission to the Asian Development Bank in regards to possible membership was rejected by the shareholders.¹³⁶ When the International Monetary Fund and World Bank extended an invitation to the DPRK in 2000, the state

¹³¹ *The Chosunilbo*, "N.Korea Sells Products in South Under False Labels," 22 January 2011; http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/01/22/2011012200340.html; Internet; accessed 13 March 2011.

¹³² Mark MacKinnon, "South Korea's Patience with North Running Out," *The Globe and Mail*, 17 December 2010.

¹³³ International, "North . . .", 3.

¹³⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

¹³⁵ Martin, 155.

¹³⁶ Bradley O. Babson, "Visualizing a North Korean "Bold Switchover": International Financial Institutions and Economic Development in the DPRK," *Asia Policy*, no. 2 (July 2006): 18.

declined; by late 2002 any chance of entry had evaporated following the revelation of a covert North Korean nuclear program.¹³⁷

In summary, despite of, or more accurately because of half-hearted attempts at economic restructuring, the DPRK is unable to secure the financing it so desperately requires to ensure the most basic nutritional needs of its population.¹³⁸ Constrained by the deification of Kim Il-sung and his infallible legacy, prospects for true reform dimmed when Pyongyang observed the absorption of East Germany by its alter ego and the disintegration of the USSR following its opening to reform.¹³⁹ The Dear Leader continues to warn against trade with advanced market economies owing to the risk of unleashing "powerful, unpredictable, and subversive forces".¹⁴⁰ Contemporary popular uprisings in Northern Africa and the Middle East similarly reinforce the lesson of how once initiated, reforms can unexpectedly spiral out of control. They highlight how more open authoritarian systems are more vulnerable than closed and highly controlling systems.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, through its actions the dictatorship has demonstrated that it is more afraid of change than of the status quo.¹⁴²

Clearly, any moves to make the North Korean political economy more similar to the ROK's model would place the very legitimacy of the DPRK at risk.¹⁴³ The North Korean governance system can only survive so long as it remains unique; the CPE founded by the

¹³⁷ Babson, 18.

¹³⁸ International, "North . . .", 4.

¹³⁹ Olsen, 138.

¹⁴⁰ Nicholas Eberstadt, "Why Hasn't the DPRK Collapsed?" in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 143-170 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 158.

¹⁴¹ Randall Newnham, "North Korea, Libya, and Iran: Economic Sanctions and Nuclear Proliferation," *Korea Economic Institute Academic Paper Series* 5, no. 7 (September 2010): 2.

¹⁴² Scobell, *North . . .*, 9.

¹⁴³ International, "North . . .", 8.

flawless Kim Il-sung cannot be made into a pragmatic one without losing the legitimacy war, and simply becoming a poorer version of the South would be catastrophic.¹⁴⁴ In

short, the command economy:

enshrined within . . . Juche, cannot successfully undertake any rust-to-riches transformation without jettisoning its core economic theory. It cannot reject this economic theory without admitting the failure of Juche and the regime created by Kim Il-sung and Kim Jong-il. As the personality cult around the Kims is built on their infallibility, any truly radical restructuring of the economy to deal with the current spiral of decline would destroy the ruling elite's legitimacy and strip them of the Mandate of Heaven.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Park, *North* . . . , 149.

¹⁴⁵ French, 5.

CHAPTER 2 - SELF-DEFENCE: DPRK MILITARY MIGHT

CONVENTIONAL POWER - WANING MILITARY DETERRENCE

From the ROK's inception, Kim Il-sung portrayed it as morally bankrupt, corrupt and illegitimate while the Great Leader was portrayed as the only leader for the entire Korean race. Accordingly, he established Korean unification as the DPRK's paramount goal, a sacred mission that could only be undertaken entirely on Pyongyang's terms owing to the South's fatal moral failings. To this end, in 1950 Kim relied on military might in his abortive attempt to unify the peninsula. Intransigent, he would subsequently focus on destabilizing successive South Korean governments in every possible manner.¹⁴⁶

Concurrently, Kim continued to build the country's armed forces to ensure that when conditions, such as a crisis in the ROK or an important weakening of the US-ROK alliance presented themselves next, he could "liberate" the southern portion of the peninsula.¹⁴⁷

Just as Kim used his command of the KPA to consolidate power in the early years of his rule, Kim Jong-il would fortify his hereditary power transition in 1995 by tying the KPA closely to him under the *songun* policy and elevating it into the supreme ruling organ of state.¹⁴⁸ The centrality of the military within North Korea cannot be underscored: it is the "largest employer, purchaser and consumer. It embodies the power of the regime and is also the only international leverage available to the country."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Eberstadt, *The End . . .*, 5.

¹⁴⁷ *Ibid*, 6.

¹⁴⁸ Scalapino, 28.

¹⁴⁹ *Business*, 47.

The North Korean military has over 1.2M active military members, 4.7M reservists and 3.5M paramilitary reservists. Of these, the KPA makes up the bulk of the conventional deterrent forces with an active strength of 956,000 soldiers. Within this number, approximately 100,000 are special operations forces (SOF) making it one of the world's largest special forces.¹⁵⁰ The Navy and the Air Force are significantly less important components, numbering an estimated 47,000 and 111,000 respectively. An additional 189,000 active paramilitary forces serve the Ministry of Public Security.¹⁵¹

Quantitatively, North Korean armed forces rank fourth in the world.¹⁵² It also boasts twice the number of troops, tanks, artillery and armoured personnel carriers than does the ROK.¹⁵³ Moreover, years of *Juche* ideology have meant that the DPRK can produce most of the parts required to keep its low technology military hardware operational.¹⁵⁴ What it lays claim to in quantity, however, it cannot boast of in regards to quality. Even though KPA soldiers are privileged members of North Korean society, they are malnourished as underscored by low average weights of only 50 kgs.¹⁵⁵ The North Korean navy is antiquated, its air force obsolete and the bulk of the army's hardware is 1960s vintage.¹⁵⁶ The faltering economy has harshly impacted the serviceability of its outdated weapons systems, resulting in a world ranking of 20th in terms of military

¹⁵⁰ Gale, 1180.

¹⁵¹ Business, 47.

¹⁵² The International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance, 2010*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 411.

¹⁵³ Gale, 1180.

¹⁵⁴ United States, Defense Intelligence Agency, "North Korea: The Foundations of Military Strength - Update 1995," http://www.fas.org/irp/dia/product/knfms95/1510-101_toc.html; Internet; accessed 26 March 2011.

¹⁵⁵ Gavan McCormack, *Target North Korea: Pushing North Korea to the Brink of Nuclear Catastrophe* (New York: Nation Books, 2004), 108.

¹⁵⁶ Gale, 1180.

strength.¹⁵⁷ Although military spending has remained at the crippling level of one quarter of the GNP, in real terms defence expenditures have fallen dramatically.

More importantly, these expenditures have been eclipsed by South Korea's rising and very sustainable defence budget.¹⁵⁸ Repeatedly tested by North Korean acts of aggression, the increasingly affluent ROK has consistently modernized its military, earning it the much higher ranking of 12th in terms of military strength despite their comparatively smaller size.¹⁵⁹ The most recent round of South Korean military modernization was initiated in 2005 under the banner "Defense Reform 2020". The ROK operates the latest in western military hardware, and significantly, a host of indigenously developed and produced high technology weapon systems. The ROK Navy is a leading Asian naval force that sails a complement of highly advanced native ships and submarines armed with cutting edge self-developed torpedoes and cruise missiles.¹⁶⁰ The ROK Air Force is equipped with the latest variants of F-15 and F-16 fighters, while the country produces its own supersonic advanced trainers which it plans to use as an offset for the purchase of the F-35 stealth fighter.¹⁶¹ The ROK Army has a combined active and reserve strength of 3.7M, with a main battle tank based upon the third-generation M1 Abrams. As with the other services, it is also being actively modernized with domestically designed and fabricated main battle tanks. More significantly, it is tripling the number of multiple rocket launcher (MRL) systems and self-propelled howitzers

¹⁵⁷ Business, 47.

¹⁵⁸ Gale, 1193.

¹⁵⁹ GlobalFirepower.com, "Strength in Numbers," <http://www.globalfirepower.com/>; Internet; accessed 18 March 2011.

¹⁶⁰ Lindsey Ford and Nirav Patel, "The Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance: Global Perspectives," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21, no. 4 (December 2009): 406.

¹⁶¹ Victor Fic, "Swapping T-50s for Stealth Fighters," *Asian Defence Journal*, May 2011, 44.

intended to neutralize KPA artillery within striking distance of Seoul.¹⁶² These systems will be complemented with the acquisition of the latest GPS-guided anti-artillery missiles and mobile artillery-locating radar announced immediately following the Yeonpyeong attack.¹⁶³

With North Korean doctrine emphasizing rapidity of action to minimize time for US mobilization and maximize the damage to South Korea, it has prepositioned over 70% of its forces within 100 kilometres of the DMZ. Ironically, while the ROK's stellar economic rise has allowed it to increasingly balance against the North's forces, it has also become increasingly vulnerable due to its dense population and concentration of economic power. This concentration has boosted the deterrence value of the DPRK's conventional capabilities so long as it remains sufficiently strong to inflict massive casualties and damage upon South Korea. Add to this the second and third order repercussions significant military action against the ROK would have upon an interconnected global economy in which it plays a progressively more important role, and the DPRK's conventional deterrent value is strengthened further.¹⁶⁴

Notwithstanding, for the North Korean leadership this represents a shift from "deterrence by denial" to "deterrence by punishment" that has most certainly been a profoundly destabilizing one for an increasingly isolated regime that finds itself with few if any military allies. Deterrence by denial, or the KPA's ability to strike counterforce targets, was possible until the late 1980s when US and ROK assessments precluded punitive

¹⁶² GlobalSecurity.org, "Republic of Korea Military Guide," <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/rok/index.html>; Internet; accessed 12 April 2011.

¹⁶³ Jung Sung-ki, "S. Korea Steps Up Arms Plans: Attack Puts Missiles, Radars Atop Military's Shopping List," *Defense News*, 29 November 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Olsen, 151.

military actions against Pyongyang due to the elevated risk and cost of war against massive conventional KPA forces. Basically, the US and ROK were denied from considering substantial retaliation or pre-emptive attacks. But by the 1990s the revolution in military affairs and corresponding modernization of US and ROK forces brought about the reappraisal that North Korea could now be defeated at minimal risk. Conscious of this, the 1990s saw Pyongyang forward deploy many more artillery platforms and MRLs along the DMZ to dissuade its opponents with the KPA's ability to severely punish Seoul.¹⁶⁵ Fundamentally, the regime was basically now restrained to countervalue targets only through the threat of massive punishment.

One way a state can bolster its conventional deterrence is through the establishment of military alliances. South Korea recognized this by entering into an alliance with the US immediately upon the conclusion of the Korean War, with the US committing over 690,000 soldiers and 2,000 aircraft should the North attempt a repeat of its invasion in 1950.¹⁶⁶ However, as it looked to shift the military advantage still further in its favour, the ROK also looked to also weaken the DPRK's alliances and isolate Pyongyang. Seoul's *Nordpolitik* initiative of 1983 was the answer. It sought to normalize relations with the USSR, PRC and Eastern Bloc countries as a way to encourage its economy while concurrently bolstering its own legitimacy.¹⁶⁷ The approach first paid off with Moscow in 1990 and two years later with Beijing as each formally recognized Seoul

¹⁶⁵ Narushige Michishita, "North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaign Strategies: Continuity versus Change," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 59-78 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 63.

¹⁶⁶ Business, 6.

¹⁶⁷ Victor Cha, "Power, Money, and Ideas: Japan, China, and the "Korean Shift"," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 267-285 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 274.

despite Pyongyang's objections. This success was attained without sacrificing the US-ROK alliance, thereby further aggravating North Korea's isolation.

In contrast, North Korea currently has no true military allies.¹⁶⁸ The lack of allies became evident when the bilateral treaty for mutual defences and assistance between Pyongyang and Moscow enacted in 1961 was terminated unilaterally by Russia in September of 1995.¹⁶⁹ Mao once used the Chinese proverb "when the lips are gone, the teeth grow cold" to describe the relationship between China and North Korea.¹⁷⁰ However, the Chinese shift from ideological to economic priorities meant that by 2009 the ROK figured amongst its four top trading partners.¹⁷¹ Consequently, despite the existence of a 1961 Sino-DPRK Treaty, the PRC has made it perfectly clear that military assistance might be proffered only if North Korea is attacked, subject to determination by Beijing according to the specific circumstances.¹⁷² In summary, Pyongyang can most certainly not rely upon Russia for help, and the most it can secure from China is a conditional "perhaps".¹⁷³

Pyongyang has therefore found itself gradually losing ground from a conventional deterrence perspective through its inability to keep pace with the military capabilities of its potential adversaries. Significantly, the rapid annihilation of Iraqi forces in the Persian Gulf War most definitely caused North Korea to profoundly reassess the deterrent value

¹⁶⁸ Scalapino, 35.

¹⁶⁹ Young, 12.

¹⁷⁰ Scobell, *China* . . . , 18.

¹⁷¹ Central Intelligence Agency, "The World Factbook," <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html>; Internet; accessed 20 February 2011.

¹⁷² Zhang Liangui, "Coping with a Nuclear North Korea," *China Security* (Autumn 2006): 16.

¹⁷³ Sverre Lodgaard, *Nuclear Disarmament and Non-Proliferation: Towards a Nuclear-Free-World?* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 155.

of the comparably sized and equipped KPA.¹⁷⁴ Since 1991, the fact that the ROK and the US have continued to modernize their forces while the KPA's conventional forces have for the most part remained unchanged has most certainly not gone unnoticed in Pyongyang. In the absence of reliable military allies to offset the growing conventional imbalance and true to its self-reliant philosophy, the DPRK has therefore turned to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to restore its military deterrent strength.

WEAPONS OF MASS DESTRUCTION - RESTORING THE BALANCE

The region of the globe in which North Korea finds itself offers the highest concentration of both military and economic capabilities in the world, making it one of the first multi-polar regions to arise since the collapse of the Soviet empire. It possesses:

the world's three largest nuclear weapons states (the United States, Russia, and China) . . . , three threshold nuclear weapons states (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan), the world's largest economies on a purchasing power parity basis (the United States, China, and Japan), and Asia's three largest economies (Japan, China, and South Korea).¹⁷⁵

Surrounded by great world powers, increasingly secluded and faced with overwhelming military and economic odds in its obdurate pursuit of the monolithic *Juche* ideology, a review of the role of WMDs both as an extension of the North Korean arsenal and as an important element in its international diplomacy is appropriate.

One cannot underestimate the impression the power of the nuclear weapon must have made upon Kim when its use in the Second World War brought the seemingly invincible

¹⁷⁴ Martin, 439.

¹⁷⁵ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 10.

Japanese to surrender.¹⁷⁶ In the late 1950s, Kim subsequently observed the introduction of tactical nuclear weapons by the US into South Korea, a move clearly intended to deter future North Korean truculence.¹⁷⁷ With nuclear weapons initially out of his grasp, Kim reciprocated by focusing upon chemical and biological weapons (CBWs), issuing in 1961 a "Declaration of Chemicalisation".¹⁷⁸ Today, the DPRK's CBW stockpiles are estimated to be the third-largest in the world, behind only the US and Russia.¹⁷⁹ North Korea's CBW inventory is thought to be deliverable by almost all of its weapon systems, with artillery well in range of a primary objective, Seoul.¹⁸⁰

Although Pyongyang acceded to the Biological Weapons Convention in 1987, the lack of any inspection mechanisms lead to assessments that it has an active program and a weapons arsenal that includes anthrax, smallpox and cholera.¹⁸¹ Possibly as a corollary of the verification regime imbedded within the Chemical Weapons Convention, North Korea is one of only five non-participating countries.¹⁸² A formal statement issued by Pyongyang on 13 January 1993 asserted that it did not possess a chemical weapons programme, however North Korean chemical stockpiles are estimated to be in the range of 2500 to 5,000 tonnes.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁶ Park, *North . . .*, 139.

¹⁷⁷ Martin, 113.

¹⁷⁸ John Chipman, *North Korea's Weapons Programmes: A Net Assessment* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 51.

¹⁷⁹ Cha, "Power . . .", 279.

¹⁸⁰ United States, Department of Defense, *North Korea Country Handbook*, (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1997), 41.

¹⁸¹ Michael Kort, *Weapons of Mass Destruction* (New York: Facts on File, 2010), 108.

¹⁸² United Nations, Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, "Non-Member States," <http://www.opcw.org/about-opcw/non-member-states/>; Internet; accessed 25 March 2011.

¹⁸³ Chipman, 49.

North Korea's nuclear programme began with Soviet assistance in the mid-1960s.¹⁸⁴ Encouraged by the USSR to ratify the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985, the DPRK methodically resisted opening its nuclear facilities to legally mandated International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspections throughout its involvement with the treaty.¹⁸⁵ In an attempt to increase sorely needed international assistance and compensate for a crumbling economy, Pyongyang finally allowed greater IAEA access in the early 1990s.¹⁸⁶ However, as these limited IAEA inspections disclosed in 1993 the evidence of falsified records regarding nuclear fuel reprocessing, North Korea changed tactics and instead threatened withdrawal from the NPT to extort international aid.

Exceptionally successful from the DPRK's perspective, the 1994 Agreed Framework provided for two light-water reactors (LWR) valued at over five billion USD, annual supplies of 150 million USD in fuel oil until their construction and the easing of US sanctions. However, the half-hearted implementation of the agreement on the part of Washington increased tensions as Pyongyang expressed its impatience with the 1998 launch of a three-stage Taepodong 1 missile over Japanese territory.¹⁸⁷ In 2002, with the LWRs still incomplete and the political and economic normalization foreseen in the Agreed Framework unrealized, the US announced that the DPRK had admitted to an ongoing nuclear weapons program.¹⁸⁸ With the ensuing cessation of compensation under the Agreed Framework, North Korea withdrew from the NPT in 2003, declared its

¹⁸⁴ Lodgaard, 154.

¹⁸⁵ Andrew O'Neil, "Learning to Live with Uncertainty: The Strategic Implications of North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Capability," *Contemporary Security Policy* 26, no. 2 (August 2005): 6.

¹⁸⁶ William T. Pendley, "The Korea-U.S. Alliance," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 333-359 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 335.

¹⁸⁷ Kim, *North* . . . , 204.

¹⁸⁸ Colonel David J. Bishop, "Dismantling North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programs," (Carlisle Barracks, PA: US Army War College, 2005), 1.

possession of nuclear weapons in 2005 and tested two nuclear devices in 2006 and 2009.¹⁸⁹

Officially, the DPRK asserts it requires nuclear weapons due to the "military, political and economic insecurity caused by the hostile policy of the United States."¹⁹⁰ The following expands upon these military, political and economic factors to argue that upon closer analysis, each actually revolves around regime survival.

Militarily, an increasingly isolated establishment seeks to guard against attempts at regime change by external elements. The shift by the USSR to a two-Korea policy in 1990 portended the termination of the Soviet-DPRK alliance and led to the North Korean warning that this would "force Pyongyang to take certain actions to build certain types of weapons by our own means."¹⁹¹ Unable to rely unconditionally upon the PRC, facing an opponent with technologically superior weapons proven in the Persian Gulf War, having come very close to being the subject of a pre-emptive US strike in 1994 and included as one of three "axis of evil" states by the US who under President W. Bush adopted a doctrine of pre-emption in 2002, nuclear weapons were imperative.¹⁹² Nuclear weapons are a "great equaliser" for technologically inferior states, something increasingly important for North Korea as the balance of military power shifts ever more in favour of the US-ROK alliance.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁹ Kort, 28.

¹⁹⁰ Lodgaard, 164.

¹⁹¹ Valery I. Danisov, "Viewpoint: The U.S.-DPRK Deal - a Russian Perspective," *Nonproliferation Review* 3, no. 3 (Spring-Summer 1996): 75.

¹⁹² Bishop, 5.

¹⁹³ Lodgaard, 1.

Examples of how US-led coalitions dealt with non-nuclear Iraq in 1999 and 2003, Serbia in 1999, Afghanistan in 2001 and Libya in 2011 versus North Korea sends a strong message and incentive to retain nuclear weapons: "adversaries without nuclear arms risk being attacked; those who have them, do not."¹⁹⁴ To avoid being pre-emptively targeted, the regime must therefore guard against a breakdown in its conventional deterrence by complementing with nuclear deterrence. Through the possession of nuclear weapons, the possible costs of an invasion are elevated to a level where the possible benefits to the attacker are eclipsed.¹⁹⁵ In the end, nuclear weapons send the unequivocal message that the regime will not die alone, a form of insurance policy of last resort.¹⁹⁶

Politically, nuclear weapons serve the regime in its dealings with both a domestic as well as an international audience. Domestically, they allow Pyongyang to make its population believe that it continues to enjoy military superiority over an illegitimate southern rival, in so doing avoiding the truth that poor policy choices directly attributable to adherence to the sacred state ideology have resulted in the state's subordination to the ROK by every measure.¹⁹⁷ Nuclear weapons are used to promote stability by serving as a propaganda tool: nationalist pride is fomented in becoming a member of the very exclusive nuclear clique, a symbol of their technological prowess that justifies the tremendous sacrifices the vast majority of the North Korean population have made to develop them.¹⁹⁸ Pride ensues from the fact that their possession on the international stage is rare and brings with

¹⁹⁴ Ibid, 181.

¹⁹⁵ O'Neil, 10.

¹⁹⁶ Seung Joo Baek, "North Korea's Military Buildup and Strategic Outlook," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 199-214 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 213.

¹⁹⁷ Seung, 213.

¹⁹⁸ Zhang, 4.

it heightened status, thereby infusing greater prestige and legitimacy upon the government and shoring up its survival.¹⁹⁹

Significantly, having informed its population that it possesses nuclear weapons, disarmament becomes anathematic owing to *Juche*. Kim Jong-il's own *songun* policy further reinforces the fact that self-defence is preeminent amongst *Juche*'s three "self" principles; the Dear Leader can ill afford the perception amongst the masses that he is compromising upon the revered national philosophy, that the people's sacrifices were for nought or worse, that he is selling out on the immortal Great Leader's sacrosanct mission of racial reunification. In the end, the "nuclear program helps to stabilize society, eliminate feelings of failure and enhance the legitimacy of the system."²⁰⁰

Internationally, the development of nuclear weapons by a former participant to the NPT may initially appear to prove how strict adherence to *Juche* has allowed the DPRK to choose amongst proactive and provocative foreign policy options that most countries could never entertain. However, the decision by the nepotistic state to acquire nuclear weapons is quickly discerned as nothing more than the highly reactive and limited policy spectrum of a regime focused upon the short-term tactical pursuit of survival through a form of militant mendicancy. The early 1990s saw Pyongyang increasingly isolated from the international community and its own economic situation deteriorate spectacularly, leaving the regime with no other alternative but to hasten its nuclear options.²⁰¹

¹⁹⁹ Lodgaard, 182.

²⁰⁰ Zhang, 4.

²⁰¹ O'Neil, 14.

In the absence of alternative legitimate revenue sources, the Kim dynasty has no choice but to resort to military power and diplomatic brinkmanship to extort the assistance from the international community required for its continued existence.²⁰² Military power is the only basis for the secluded and impoverished government's ability to muster diplomatic power, and nuclear weapons epitomize the greatest destructive power known to humanity, forestalling what would otherwise be a weakening and increasingly irrelevant dictatorship.²⁰³

As a result of its nuclear weapons, the risks inherent with regime collapse mushroom spectacularly. These risks include their use as a final desperate act of a failed state or their sale to terrorist organizations intent on destroying the current world order. Either way, the DPRK's nuclear arsenal provides the international community additional incentive to keep the regime stable by acquiescing to its demands for aid.

Lastly, economically Pyongyang likely views nuclear weapons as a means to reduce its defence burden, intensify crises to demand greater compensation and generate revenue through sales. Most definitely, the investment in a small number of WMDs provides a convenient means to decrease the crushing defence burden while simultaneously maintaining a semblance of superiority over South Korea.²⁰⁴ Although Seoul's 2008 defence budget represented a mere 2.5% of its gross domestic product (GDP), the steadily growing South Korean economy means the defence budget stands at approximately 34 billion USD.²⁰⁵ In comparison, the ROK's defence budget alone equals North Korea's

²⁰² Nicholas Eberstadt and Richard J. Ellings, "What If? Economic Implications of a Fundamental Shift in North Korean Security Policy," *Asia Policy*, no. 2 (July 2006): 3.

²⁰³ Lodgaard, 182.

²⁰⁴ Seung, 213.

²⁰⁵ Gale, 1193.

entire GDP and is set to overtake it entirely.²⁰⁶ It is consequently inconceivable that Pyongyang could continue to effectively use brinkmanship in its dealings with South Korea or the international community by conventional means alone.

North Korea was also quick to understand how nuclear weapons could allow it to radically inflate crises, and importantly raise the economic inducements demanded to defuse these crises accordingly.²⁰⁷ The aforementioned 1993 nuclear crisis that culminated in the extremely generous 1994 Agreed Framework provides an excellent example. The provocations subsequently taken by the DPRK from 2003 to 2009, including two nuclear tests, can be understood in part as an attempt by the autocracy to repeat the success enjoyed following the employment of similar tactics in 1993.²⁰⁸

The DPRK's possession of WMDs even provides it with an additional measure of international assistance by playing on its "power of the weak": the PRC and the ROK are in essence obligated to provide aid simply to preserve stability and prevent the much greater risk of collapse.²⁰⁹ Paradoxically, a much more powerful China is forced into the role of the reluctant patron, despite attempts since the 1990s to move from "friendship prices" to market-based transactions with Pyongyang.²¹⁰ In the end, the risk that instability could result in the physical devastation of East Asia, massive refugee movements from North Korea into the northeast Chinese provinces and the deleterious economic ramifications such events would have upon China's economic rise are simply too great. The DPRK is keenly aware that the aid provided by the PRC is in its own self-

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 1177.

²⁰⁷ Lodgaard, 155.

²⁰⁸ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1016.

²⁰⁹ Bishop, 2.

²¹⁰ Scott Snyder, *China's Rise and the Two Koreas: Politics, Economics, Security* (Boulder, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2009), 114.

interest and as a result the leverage Beijing wields over Pyongyang is greatly diminished despite the fact it provides North Korea with up to 90% of its fuel and over 40% of its food.²¹¹ South Korea is in much the similar situation, with the added concern of the tremendous financial burden a sudden reunification post-collapse would have upon its economy. Estimates based upon the German reunification experience indicate it could cost the ROK upwards of 3.5 trillion USD.²¹²

Finally, the North Korean regime perceives the nuclear and missile technology it has developed as a commodity that can be exported in return for currency it so desperately requires. Despite several UN sanctions against DPRK conventional weapons exports and long-standing international WMD non-proliferation treaties, economic conditions are so dire that the regime continues to attempt to transfer technology and military hardware to other states, and possibly even more worryingly, non-state entities prepared to ignore international restrictions.²¹³ For example, in June 2009 the North Korean cargo ship *Kang Nam I* was suspected of carrying WMD-related material to Burma but ultimately returned to North Korean waters before it could be intercepted by the US Navy.²¹⁴

In summary, militarily the DPRK seeks to increase its military might with WMDs to guard against Iraqi-like attempts at regime change while also compensating for its growing conventional military weakness vis-à-vis the ROK. Politically, the regime's legitimacy is enhanced internally by the successful development of nuclear weapons, while externally they provide the ultimate leverage with an international community that

²¹¹ Phillip C. Saunders, "Korea as Viewed from China," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 233-251 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 236.

²¹² Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 316.

²¹³ International, "North . . . ", 5.

²¹⁴ Yoshioka-Izuyama, 75.

increasingly sees regime change as too risky a proposition. Lastly, economically nuclear weapons provide both a way to reduce defence expenditures while also attracting badly needed income and assistance. Taken together, these reasons make it unfathomable that North Korea could ever seriously consider their abandonment.

INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY: MILITANT MENDICANCY

Pyongyang has repeatedly and skilfully utilized diplomatic brinkmanship in its international affairs to what at the outset may appear to be tremendous success. The autocratic government has further enhanced the leverage that its military might provides by intentionally choosing not to act in accordance with generally agreed upon international rules of conduct.²¹⁵ Facilitated by the opaqueness of North Korean decision taking, the unpredictability created multiplies the effectiveness of Pyongyang's threats and demands.²¹⁶ However, a review of past DPRK military-diplomatic campaigns exposes a recurring rationality that although highly distinctive to this regime, nonetheless demonstrates direction by a calculating and rational actor.²¹⁷

Given the centrality of diplomatic brinkmanship within North Korean diplomacy, this section will review a number of actions taken over the decades by the dictatorship to reveal the underlying logic. Since the totalitarian government derives its legitimacy from *Juche* and the attainment of the three principles at the core of the state ideology, the following will illustrate how the sum of these tactical coercive diplomatic successes in

²¹⁵ Olsen, 122.

²¹⁶ Narushige Michishita, "Coercing to Reconcile: North Korea's Response to US 'Hegemony'," *The Journals of Strategic Studies* 29, no. 6 (December 2006): 1029.

²¹⁷ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1029.

actual fact have had negative mid to long-term repercussions upon prospects for regime endurance.

Kim Il-sung's brand of diplomatic unilateralism first caught international attention in 1950 with his instigation of the Korean War. While this failed endeavour helped him consolidate power internally, his impatience to unite the peninsula perversely forced the US to commit to the 1953 ROK-US Mutual Defense Treaty still in place to this day.²¹⁸ Thus, Kim scuttled any chance that the population of a young and initially highly unstable ROK may have been irresistibly drawn to the North's initial economic successes and extremely popular socialist land reforms with little or no resistance.²¹⁹ It also tarnished North Korea's international reputation, a stigma that continues to haunt it to this day owing to the continuity offered by the transition from father to son.²²⁰

With US forces now firmly entrenched in the south, Kim saw Khrushchev place emphasis upon peaceful economic competition over military rivalry with capitalist countries.²²¹ Forced to adapt his aspirations for unification, he developed a two pronged approach. Kim would on one hand attempt to foment a nationalist revolution in South Korea, thereby keeping the country unstable and highly susceptible to take over when conditions were ripe.²²² Recognizing that one of these conditions had to be the withdrawal of US

²¹⁸ Embassy of the Republic of Korea in the USA, "Korea-US Relations: Military Alliance," http://www.koreaembassyusa.org/bilateral/military/eng_military4.asp; Internet; accessed 9 April 2011.

²¹⁹ Armstrong, *The North* . . . , 81.

²²⁰ Olsen, 120.

²²¹ Martin, 123.

²²² *Ibid*, 98.

forces, his second line of operation endeavoured to weaken the US-ROK alliance in every possible fashion.²²³

In its attempts to subvert the ROK, North Korea vigorously sought to destabilize a very fragile South Korea through both propaganda and more active acts of subversion which included targeting of the ROK's leadership. For example, using its ideological high-ground shortly after General Park Chung-hee's South Korean coup d'état in 1961, the North called upon students to strike, conduct sabotage and reject obligatory military service as a way to reject the authoritarian "imperialist" ROK government.²²⁴ By 1969, North Korea established an underground United Revolutionary Party with the purpose of overthrowing the South Korean regime.²²⁵ More directly, the DPRK targeted the ROK government through recurring assassination attempts upon the South Korean president in 1968, 1970, 1974 and 1983.²²⁶ Concurrently, KPA SOF would repeatedly infiltrate South Korea via land and sea while also digging upwards of 17 infiltration tunnels under the DMZ, four of which were discovered between 1974 and 1990.²²⁷

With the US embroiled in the Vietnam War through the 1960s and early 1970s and the DPRK still outperforming the ROK economically, Kim felt emboldened to actively target US forces in an attempt to weaken Washington's resolve. This timeframe saw numerous small-scale border skirmishes along the DMZ, with over 550 separate incidents being recorded in 1967 alone. From 1967 to 1969, some 38 American soldiers were killed and 144 wounded from border clashes and the downing of a US EC-121 naval reconnaissance

²²³ Scobell, *North . . .*, 7.

²²⁴ Martin, 126.

²²⁵ Hanna Fischer, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *North Korean Provocative Actions, 1950 – 2007* (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 20 April 2007), 5.

²²⁶ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1017.

²²⁷ Fischer, 11.

plane.²²⁸ The intensification of such incidents in the late 1960s also coincided with the realization in Pyongyang that Seoul's economy was gaining and time was no longer on its side.²²⁹

One objective of the attacks was similar to Al Qaeda's present-day goals in targeting the US: the attacks discredited American power, conveyed the North's might and established the supremacy of its ideology.²³⁰ But just as importantly, the DPRK sought to undermine the US-ROK alliance by creating crises to draw the US into dialogue while marginalizing South Korea to undermine its legitimacy.²³¹ Through these confrontations, North Korea demonstrated it needed to be taken seriously, while simultaneously feeding perceptions of unpredictability and nurturing ROK concerns that a war-weary US may abandon the alliance entirely.²³² The provocations from the North also resulted in unilateral South Korean reprisals, a source of further strain to the US-ROK alliance.

North Korea would also repeatedly utilize the stratagem of detaining US citizens, then use negotiations for their release to open dialogue with the US.²³³ Examples include the capture in 1968 of the USS *Pueblo* followed by Pyongyang's insistence that negotiations for the crew's release exclude South Korea. Such demands reduced the ROK's legitimacy in the eyes of the Korean people while simultaneously elevating Seoul's concerns that Washington might compromise upon the alliance in exchange for the return of the

²²⁸ Martin, 127.

²²⁹ Ibid, 133.

²³⁰ Gaetano Joe Ilardi, "The 9/11 Attacks - A Study of Al Qaeda's Use of Intelligence and Counterintelligence," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* vol 32, no. 3 (March 2009): 181.

²³¹ Snyder, 118.

²³² Olsen, 122.

²³³ Yoshioka-Izuyama, 75.

Pueblo's crew.²³⁴ Other instances include the more recent detention of the US airman Bobby Hall in 1994, captured after crossing the DMZ in a helicopter. This incident led to Pyongyang's proposal to replace the Military Armistice Commission with a bilateral military liaison office, a move intended to exclude participation by the ROK.²³⁵

Internationally, North Korea succeeded in 1975 to have the UN General Assembly pass a resolution supporting the removal of all foreign forces from the Korean Peninsula, a move specifically aimed at US forces.²³⁶ However, kinetic targeting of US forces ceased by 1981 as the DPRK gradually lost its economic and military advantage over the South and found itself increasingly in search of ways to normalize with the US to supplement its deteriorating economy.²³⁷ As regime preservation increasingly became the DPRK's primary focus and the ROK's transition from military to democratic rule strengthened Seoul's stability, Pyongyang also ceased targeting the South Korean leadership in 1983. In its place, North Korea began emphasizing diplomatic versus military gains and the number of fatalities resultant from overt KPA action dropped: from 507 deaths in the 1960s, the number fell to 94 in the 1970s, 17 in the 1980s (not including North Korean sponsored terrorist attacks) and still lower in the 1990s as the North faced its Arduous March.²³⁸

The first decade of the 21st century would see the continuation of the policy of limiting targeting to the ROK. However the rise to over 50 South Koreans killed by the DPRK during this timeframe may be interpreted in the context of preparations for a leadership

²³⁴ Martin, 131.

²³⁵ Snyder, 118.

²³⁶ Armstrong, "*Juche* . . .", 19.

²³⁷ Michishita, "North . . .", 61.

²³⁸ Fischer, 19, Michishita, "North . . .", 61 and Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1017

transition from Kim Jong-il to his son, Kim Jong-un, necessitating a reaffirmation of the dynasty's legitimacy and credibility with its population while concurrently attempting to strengthen its leverage with the international community through seemingly random acts of aggression.²³⁹ Throughout, these actions have not been haphazard and instead reflect the competing goals of rapprochement with the US and need for international aid versus the maintenance of regime legitimacy and survival.²⁴⁰

Though many of the aforementioned incidents provided short-term legitimacy and assistance to Pyongyang, the mid to long-term ramifications have almost without exception proven counterproductive and detrimental to the state. For example, although North Korean threats to withdraw from the NPT resulted in the 1994 Agreed Framework, implementation by the US government was hampered by domestic politics right up until 2003 when the Agreed Framework was terminated; the cumulative impact of DPRK provocations rendered it easy prey for the free press, lobby groups and the US Congress. These provocations included the infiltration of some 3,693 armed agents into the ROK between 1954 to 1992, KPA submarine incursions in 1996 and 1998, the 1998 Taepodong 1 missile test and the 2002 admission of the abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁴¹ In the end, the sum of North Korean actions severely constrains the ability of open and democratic governments to assist, let alone develop long-term and meaningful relationships with Pyongyang.²⁴²

²³⁹ Sebastien Falletti, "US N Korea Policy Causing Tension With China," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 47, no. 35 (September 1, 2010): 4.

²⁴⁰ Park, *North . . .*, 102.

²⁴¹ Fischer, 4.

²⁴² Lodgaard, 159.

In addition, ever since the withdrawal of US forces from the ROK in 1949 and their reintroduction shortly thereafter due to the DPRK invasion, Washington has repeatedly contemplated the reduction or removal of forces from the ROK. President Carter made troop withdrawal an element of his election campaign in 1977, but the discovery of a third tunnel being actively dug under the DMZ and intelligence showing the KPA was significantly larger than previously estimated resulted in the cancellation of this initiative.²⁴³ Shortly after the dissolution of the USSR in 1991, the US again looked to reduce force commitments on the Korean peninsula. However the DPRK's threats to withdraw from the NPT in 1993 and the ensuing US consideration of a pre-emptive attack factored heavily in the reversal of this decision in 1995.²⁴⁴

Many other antagonistic North Korean actions provided temporary attention to Pyongyang's demands but proved to be strategically counterproductive with South Korea, Japan and most significantly, China. The DPRK's frequent and recurring attacks upon the ROK have resulted in the continuous improvement of South Korean forces, with each clash gradually seeing the KPA take more casualties than it has been able to inflict. More significantly still, while polls of the South Korean population make obvious the unpopularity of US forces in the ROK, the KPA attacks offer the South Korean government justification to not only retain American presence but increase cooperation.²⁴⁵

For example, in 2005 the ROK started to envision itself as a "balancer in Northeast Asia", a vision that would have seen it attempt to become closer to the PRC and DPRK while

²⁴³ Martin, 139.

²⁴⁴ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 255.

²⁴⁵ Ibid, 272.

distancing itself from its traditional allies of the US and Japan.²⁴⁶ As a reflection of this vision, South Korea was opposed to the US Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) inaugurated in 2003.²⁴⁷ However, the 2006 nuclear test pushed the ROK to consider participation in the PSI.²⁴⁸ The election of South Korean President Lee Myung-bak in 2007 served as "a virtual referendum on the strategy of engagement [with North Korea] that had been pursued under the Kim Dae-jung and Roh Myung-bak administrations, and brought a new, more conditional approach to bear."²⁴⁹ Following the second nuclear test in 2009, South Korean apprehensions regarding North Korean intentions finally led to full participation in the PSI.²⁵⁰ In essence, cumulative provocative DPRK actions gradually moved the ROK's position closer to that of its US and Japanese allies and abandon its erstwhile equidistant objective.

Moreover, the North Korean artillery barrage against the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong, coming only eight months after the sinking of the ROKS *Cheonan* in March 2010, dramatically hardened the South Korean tone: the ROK's defence minister asked parliament to consider the possibility of having the US redeploy its tactical nuclear weapons, absent since 1991, to the peninsula.²⁵¹ Such musings if enacted would strategically prove highly detrimental to North Korea's security posture. Additionally and

²⁴⁶ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1032.

²⁴⁷ The PSI is a multinational effort to interdict WMDs, "their delivery systems, and related materials to and from states and non-state actors of proliferation concern." A total of 98 countries have agreed to stop ships on the high seas suspected of posing a proliferation threat despite the UN Law of the Sea guarantee of freedom of the seas. Although not explicitly targeting North Korea, its creation in May 2003 followed the DPRK's January 2003 withdrawal from the NPT. See United States, US Department of State, "Proliferation Security Initiative," <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/c10390.htm>; Internet; accessed 3 June 2011.

²⁴⁸ Snyder, 172.

²⁴⁹ Stephan Haggard and Marcus Noland, "North Korea in 2008: Twilight of the God?" *Asian Survey* 49, no. 1 (January/February 2009): 98.

²⁵⁰ Choe Sang-hun, "North Korea Threatens Military Strikes on South," *The New York Times*, 27 May 2009.

²⁵¹ Henry Sokolski, "Getting Serious about North Korea's Nukes," *National Review Online*; available from <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/print/253792>; Internet; accessed 29 November 2010.

as aforementioned, the DPRK's actions also ultimately drove South Korea to impose economic sanctions and an aid embargo for the first time in 2010, a highly destabilizing move owing to the DPRK's precarious economic situation and the importance of trade and aid from the ROK, its second largest trading partner by this time.

North Korean diplomatic brinkmanship has also been transformative upon Japanese policy, but again in a fashion counter to the DPRK's long-term economic interests. With the collapse of the USSR, Japan became North Korea's second largest trading partner and even briefly its largest partner. As the North Korean famine worsened the importance of normalizing with Japan, then the world's second largest economy, became a priority second only to normalization with the US. As such, in 1991 Pyongyang came very close to securing both normalization and generous reparations for damage inflicted during the colonial occupation period from Tokyo. However, negotiations halted as Japan raised the precondition that North Korea sign the IAEA safeguards agreement and admit inspectors, something unacceptable to a regime focused upon acquiring nuclear weapons for regime survival over the welfare of its population.²⁵²

While Japanese humanitarian food aid valued at over 1.45 billion USD continued to flow until 1998, this also was suspended following the Taepodong 1 missile test. Importantly, the missile test reinvigorated discussion within Japan regarding the shedding of its constitutionally imposed limitations preventing it from developing the military means of a "normal country".²⁵³ Intended by Pyongyang to express dissatisfaction regarding Agreed Framework progress, the missile test resulted in enhanced military cooperation

²⁵² Martin, 441.

²⁵³ Olsen, 148.

between the US, South Korea and Japan, while concurrently strengthening those within the Diet calling for a larger defence budget.²⁵⁴ By 1999, Japan was participating in the US Ballistic Missile Defence program as it attempted to reduce the threat posed by North Korea.

In September 2002, diplomatic normalization with Tokyo again seemed possible as Japanese Prime Minister Koizumi held a historic meeting with Kim Jong-il. For the DPRK, the importance of normalization now figured even more prominently: added to continuing economic woes it now faced the renewed spectre of regime change raised by Bush in his January 2002 "axis of evil" declaration.²⁵⁵ Looking to weaken US-Japanese relations and secure substantial financial assistance, Kim offered Koizumi an unprecedented admission and apology for the abduction of Japanese citizens in the 1970s and 1980s.²⁵⁶ However, Pyongyang failed to anticipate the intensity of the Japanese population's reaction to this confession. In the end, the abduction issue, compounded by North Korea's October 2002 disclosure of a highly enriched uranium (HEU) program and the subsequent moves taken to withdraw from the NPT in January 2003, foiled any chance at normalization.²⁵⁷ Instead of fostering increased trade, Japan enacted a series of sanctions that saw economic transactions with what was then the world's second largest

²⁵⁴ Marcus Noland, "The Economic Implications of a North Korean Nuclear Test," *Asia Policy*, no. 2 (July 2006): 38.

²⁵⁵ Hong Nack Kim, "The Koizumi Government and the Politics of Normalizing Japanese-North Korean Relations," *East-West Center Working Papers: Politics, Governance, and Security Series*, no. 14 (February 2006): 7.

²⁵⁶ Victor Cha, *Japan-Korea Relations: Engagement from Strength*, Report Prepared for the Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, DC, 1 July 2004), 3.

²⁵⁷ McCormack, 7.

economy drop fourfold by the end of 2003.²⁵⁸ Where cash remittances by Korean permanent residents in Japan once provided the DPRK with one of its most significant sources of foreign reserves, even these transfers were legislated against in 2004 in reprisal to the abduction issue.²⁵⁹ By 2008, Japan had severed most of its ties to North Korea and no longer figured amongst the DPRK's top ten trading partners.²⁶⁰

Pyongyang's relations with Beijing have also suffered as a result of North Korean actions. Attempts by the DPRK to have the PRC boycott the 1988 Seoul Olympics failed as a result of DPRK-sponsored terrorist attacks against ROK politicians in Rangoon in 1983 and of a South Korean airliner in 1987. Beijing's desire to distance itself from Pyongyang's rogue behaviour later coincided with the PRC's need to reduce its own isolation from the international community following the 1989 Tiananmen crackdown. These factors contributed significantly to China's acceptance of the ROK's application for UN membership in 1991, something it had routinely vetoed in the past, and ultimately facilitated normalization of Sino-ROK relations in 1992.²⁶¹

Highly detrimental to Kim's long-term goal of denying South Korean international legitimacy, the cumulative economic and diplomatic losses of the 1990s and early 2000s led to increased risk-taking on behalf of a regime desperate for expedient recovery.²⁶² The 1994 nuclear standoff resulted in the PRC changing its stance from "opposing

²⁵⁸ Phillip Wonhyuk Lim, "North Korea's Economic Futures: Internal and External Dimensions," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 171-195 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 187.

²⁵⁹ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 210.

²⁶⁰ Newnham, 3.

²⁶¹ Snyder, 29.

²⁶² Kim, *North Korea* . . . , 205.

economic sanctions" to "not favouring economic sanctions".²⁶³ This transition in Chinese posture continued to be increasingly evident as the DPRK withdrew from the NPT in 2003 and openly pursued its nuclear program. Tactically, the Taepodong 2 and Nodong missile tests along with the DPRK's first nuclear test in 2006 succeeded in bringing the Bush administration back to Six-Party Talks despite prior affirmations the US would never negotiate.²⁶⁴ However, each test also brought China and the US closer together; whereas Beijing had traditionally blocked UNSC resolutions against the DPRK, both UNSCR 1718 and 1874 were passed unanimously, in effect "multilateralizing" Washington's PSI.²⁶⁵

In summary, the regime's emphasis upon secrecy and opaqueness reinforces the inscrutable nature of its actions despite the maintenance of a consistent strategy.²⁶⁶ However, a review of past North Korea antagonistic behaviour reveals a unique rationality that has been adapted over time as the KPA declined in terms of conventional military deterrence value. Torn between the economic need for normalization with the US and Japan while attempting to maintain regime legitimacy within the context of *Juche*, Pyongyang has attempted to secure both but has consistently placed regime survival at the forefront. As a result, the Kim dynasty has had numerous short-term legitimacy successes but has utterly failed in its longer-term objectives of destabilizing the South, weakening of the US-ROK alliance and normalizing with Japan and the US. Instead, its actions have served to gradually strengthen the ROK militarily and diplomatically, brought Seoul and Tokyo to cooperate on security despite Japan's colonial

²⁶³ International, "China . . .", 5.

²⁶⁴ Lodgaard, 158.

²⁶⁵ International, "North . . .", 13.

²⁶⁶ O'Neil, 8.

legacy, caused a rapprochement of Sino-American positions and severed valuable economic assistance from both South Korea and Japan.²⁶⁷

²⁶⁷ Olsen, 144.

CHAPTER 3 - GEOPOLITICS, REGIME SURVIVAL AND THE THREE SELFS

REGIME SURVIVAL IN NORTHEAST ASIA

An old Korean saying warns that "a shrimp gets crushed to death in the fight between whales."²⁶⁸ Korea has identified with the shrimp throughout its history, surrounded in Northeast Asia (NEA) as it is by the overlapping spheres of influence exerted by China, Japan, Russia and more recently the US. Wishing to maximize the regime's chance of survival and its autonomy, the DPRK quickly understood that the higher the great power rivalry around it, the greater the leverage it could muster.²⁶⁹ In the more than six decades that have transpired since the division of the peninsula, the autocratic regime has been particularly attuned to this fact, first capitalizing upon the Sino-Russian rivalry to maximize its freedom of action and the material benefits derived from these powers. More recently, this same approach has been utilized to influence Six-Party Talks in its favour through the manipulation of competing great power strategic and geopolitical interests.

North Korea is a pivotal state where any noteworthy systemic change, good or bad, will at a minimum result in important geopolitical ramifications regionally, and most likely globally. This is due to the way future development on the Korean Peninsula will recalibrate the relationships between the world's three largest economies, China, Japan, and the US, and ultimately decide the balance of power in East Asia.²⁷⁰ Complicating matters, each of these countries view the DPRK differently in subtle but important ways:

²⁶⁸ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 1.

²⁶⁹ Ibid, 15.

²⁷⁰ Business, 22.

China sees a domestic security risk, Japan perceives a national security threat and for the US, it is a nuclear proliferation threat.

As the plight of average North Koreans deteriorated in the early 1990s, Pyongyang's foreign policy concern became its relationships with the great powers around it: Russia, China, Japan and the US.²⁷¹ What follows will underline how the DPRK's stubborn adherence to the *Juche* principle of self-determination in pursuit of short-term regime survival objectives has derailed and even backfired in its attempts to cultivate these relationships. Taken cumulatively, Pyongyang's actions not only detract from realization of its three "self" principles but more importantly jeopardize long-term survival of the regime.

RUSSIA: FROM PRINCIPLE SPONSOR TO TERTIARY ACTOR

The DPRK was created by the USSR following the Second World War and it rapidly became a Soviet economic dependency.²⁷² Accordingly, Moscow retained the most influence over Pyongyang up until 1991. However, after having been North Korea's most important patron, Russia's influence began to wane in the late 1980s as it moved to market prices and hard currency trade with Communist Bloc countries. The Kremlin's sway was reduced further as ideology became irrelevant and it engaged in pro-Western policy as evidenced by the reversal of its long-standing veto against a separate UN

²⁷¹ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1016.

²⁷² Armstrong, *The North . . .*, 154.

membership application by Seoul in 1991.²⁷³ Finally, its influence all but evaporated in 1991 as the USSR disintegrated and economic support to the DPRK ceased, contributing considerably to North Korea's plunge into famine.²⁷⁴ Where North Korea had previously looked to minimize Russian influence and maximize assistance by balancing with China, it found itself having to extort the US to balance against the PRC and make up for the lack of aid.²⁷⁵

With the Russian decline came a comprehensive withdrawal from the NEA region as reflected by an important reduction in military presence and an exodus of the ethnic Russian population from Russia's Far East. Concurrently, an influx of Chinese into this area further weakened Russia's linkages to the DPRK to the PRC's advantage.²⁷⁶

Notwithstanding, Pyongyang is still heavily dependent upon Moscow due to Russian technology and spare parts used extensively in its factories and military hardware.

Economically, the strength of Pyongyang's reaction to Moscow's 1990 decision to normalize with Seoul "relieved the Soviet Union of its obligations to provide ongoing economic support . . . [and] made it possible for Moscow to insist on a market basis for economic transactions going forward".²⁷⁷ As discussed previously, this sudden transition had dramatic ramifications upon North Korea. Russia's insistence upon market prices and hard currency instead of barter has kept trade to under a tenth of the pre-1991 2.56 billion USD exchange figures. In contrast, only one year following Russo-ROK

²⁷³ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 106.

²⁷⁴ Marcus Noland, "Korea's Economic Dynamics," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 123-141 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 124.

²⁷⁵ Snyder, 31.

²⁷⁶ Business, 31.

²⁷⁷ Snyder, 33.

normalization in 1990, trade between Moscow and Seoul rose 107% and stood at over six billion USD by 2004.²⁷⁸

Furthermore, Pyongyang's readiness to link disparate political and economic issues has engendered uncertainty that has discouraged Russian commercial investments. For example, when the Kremlin announced in 1995 its intention to withdraw from the Russo-DPRK treaty of 1961, North Korea retaliated by declaring it would refuse to pay its ten billion USD debt.²⁷⁹ In addition, while a proposed 4,000 kilometre natural gas pipeline from Irkutsk to the lucrative South Korean market could have provided the DPRK with much needed energy and revenue, the risk of arbitrary pipeline closures resulted in the re-routing through China and across the East Sea to the ROK.²⁸⁰ The lack of predictable governance has also contributed to the DPRK's inability to attract significant foreign investment to the Rajin-Sonbong SEZ established along the Russian and Chinese borders.²⁸¹

Yet another example of the primacy of regime survival over economic interests can be found in the first North Korean nuclear crisis of 1993. Moscow had promised to provide four LWRs in return for Pyongyang joining the NPT in 1985.²⁸² Nearly complete and valued at four billion USD, Russia suspended construction of the LWRs when IAEA inspections concluded North Korea had falsified records in contravention of the NPT.²⁸³ In essence, the DPRK's actions demonstrated that it valued the pursuit of a covert nuclear weapons program to bolster the regime militarily over the possible loss of the LWRs

²⁷⁸ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 138.

²⁷⁹ Ibid, 147.

²⁸⁰ Ibid, 152.

²⁸¹ Ibid, 153.

²⁸² Chipman, 5.

²⁸³ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 130.

should this program be exposed. The importance of the power such reactors would have provided North Korea is evidenced by how LWRs would later form part of Pyongyang's demands in the Agreed Framework negotiations.

The force of Pyongyang's reaction to Russo-ROK normalization also had negative military repercussions for North Korea. With Moscow now able to insist upon hard currency and market prices and longing to recover some of the debt owed to it by Pyongyang, repeated DPRK requests to purchase modern military weapon systems using credit or barter have been denied.²⁸⁴ It also facilitated the Kremlin's 1995 withdrawal from the bilateral mutual defence treaty, resulting in a heightened sense of insecurity in Pyongyang as underscored by the launch of *songun* politics that same year.

Politically, Russia under President Vladimir Putin sought to restore its relevance and influence in NEA as demonstrated by the signing of a 2000 "Treaty of Friendship" between Moscow and Pyongyang. This treaty, while not including an automatic military intervention formula, does open the possibility for unspecified Russian intercession under a "mutual contact" clause.²⁸⁵ However, the DPRK's use of coercive diplomacy continues to strain attempts at rehabilitating their relationship: the Kremlin issued public admonishments over both North Korea's 1993 threats to withdraw from the NPT and the 1998 Taepodong missile test that transited through the Russian economic exclusive zone.²⁸⁶ Evidently, Moscow and Pyongyang both value relations with Washington over each other, resulting in confrontational North Korean diplomatic acts intended to compel

²⁸⁴ Ibid, 133.

²⁸⁵ Ibid, 127.

²⁸⁶ Ibid, 131.

the US to negotiate but that have had the unintended consequence of forcing Russia to vote in favour of international sanctions under UNSCR 1695, 1718 and 1874.²⁸⁷

Overall, Russo-DPRK relations have repeatedly been hindered by Pyongyang. North Korea's initial strategy of near total economic reliance upon the USSR as a way to keep its system closed and shore up the regime contradicted its own self-sustenance principle and long-term viability. Subsequent displays of outrage at Russia as a demonstration of self-determination and regime legitimacy were counterproductive, facilitating Moscow's termination of the military alliance and contributing to its support of international sanctions against North Korea. Moreover, these displays facilitated Russia's move to market prices while concurrently dissuading possible aid and investment through the uncertainty generated by the DPRK's own actions.

CHINA: THE RELUCTANT PATRON

As discussed previously, China has a long history of influence over the Korean Peninsula. While its regional hegemony was severely curtailed towards the end of the 19th century and first half of the 20th century, its participation in the Korean War at the expense of military preparations for Taiwan would signal both its resurgence as an active player on the peninsula and underscore the perceived strategic importance of this peninsula for China. The subsequent decades long division of the Korean Peninsula by the same Cold-

²⁸⁷ Ibid, 154.

War-era geopolitical frictions that have kept Taiwan out of the PRC's grasp would further cement the bonds between Beijing and Pyongyang.²⁸⁸

However, since its opening in the late 1970s, Beijing has focussed upon ensuring its peaceful rise back into a position of prominence both regionally and globally.²⁸⁹ This aspiration is contingent upon its integration within the global economy; China's dependence upon the US, Japanese and EU markets is monumental and any political dispute that deleteriously impacts trade relations could derail its ambitions.²⁹⁰ To facilitate its emergence, China seeks to maintain stability within the international environment and particularly on its periphery, to allow it to concentrate upon internal economic, social and political challenges its rapid ascension are generating. Just as significantly, it seeks to reduce US influence around it as it reasserts its historical regional leadership role while concurrently seeking to minimize any perceptions of it as a threat to the current leader of today's world order.²⁹¹

As a result, China's interests are increasingly tied to regional and world stability.²⁹²

Where it once shared ideological affinities with the DPRK and sought to use North Korea as a buffer against encirclement by the US and Japan, increasingly Pyongyang has become a distraction and drain upon China's aspirations as a responsible stakeholder within the present global governance system. In sum, from Beijing's perspective,

²⁸⁸ Olsen, 140.

²⁸⁹ Valérie Niquet, "China's Future Role in World Affairs: An Enigma?" *Politique étrangère*, no. 5 (2008): 51.

²⁹⁰ Noland, "The Economic . . .", 35.

²⁹¹ Lodgaard, 29.

²⁹² Niquet, 64.

Pyongyang's tenacious pursuit of its quasi-religious ideology has transformed North Korea from a strategic asset to a fossilized strategic liability.²⁹³

The DPRK's first strategic misstep with the PRC was Kim Il-sung's succession plan. While Mao and Deng Xiaoping had shared a common war experience and communist ideological starting point with Kim, both were also unsupportive of his intent to name his son as his successor. Their rejection certainly served to influence Kim Jong-il's own attitude towards China that has been described as unfriendly at best.²⁹⁴ While this difference was minimized during Kim Il-sung's reign owing to his personal relationships, his death in 1994 occurring shortly after the loss of Russian assistance and the start of the Arduous March meant that a Pyongyang led by Kim Jong-il was even further alienated from Beijing just as it became economically dependent upon it.²⁹⁵

Concerned by the possibility for instability along its border with North Korea, in 1991 China broke with its past by supporting cross recognition of Seoul and Pyongyang and encouraging the DPRK to join the UN simultaneously with the ROK. This change reflected Beijing's desire to see improved US-DPRK relations, however Pyongyang instead felt betrayed, abandoned and insecure, contributing directly to the first nuclear crisis of 1993.²⁹⁶

North Korea's behaviour would subsequently repeatedly prove to be counter to China's economic interests as well as embarrassing to Beijing's international stature.²⁹⁷ For example, in 1996 the PRC offered only a tenth of the grain requested by the DPRK.

²⁹³ Snyder, 132.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 118.

²⁹⁵ Ibid, 2.

²⁹⁶ Ibid, 36.

²⁹⁷ Eberstadt, "What If? . . .", 9.

Offended, Pyongyang threatened to open relations with Taiwan until it was appeased by a larger offering from Beijing. In another incident, visiting Chinese agriculture experts in the spring of 1997 recommended the implementation of Chinese style reforms. In response, the DPRK called Deng a traitor to socialism. Insulted, Beijing threatened to cease food aid provided to Pyongyang, but this caused North Korea to open talks with Taiwan regarding direct air links between their two capitals. The PRC finally backed down in order to have Pyongyang halt dialogue with Taipei.²⁹⁸

Fundamentally, China is not interested in a reunited Korea for economic, geographic and national security reasons.²⁹⁹ Economically, although reunification costs would initially weigh profoundly upon the Korean economy, a reunified Korea could conceivably be in a position over the longer term to surpass the Japanese economy and compete with China's vision of itself as the regional hegemon.³⁰⁰ Conversely, the current dire economic situation and political isolation of the DPRK facilitates the advantageous purchase of long-term mining rights by Chinese corporations. Such transactions have been so prevalent that they have raised concerns in South Korea regarding the possibility of North Korea gradually becoming a fourth Chinese province.³⁰¹

Geographically, China is concerned over possible territorial claims that might be made by a unified Korea. The Chinese northeast has historically been a source of popular uprisings that have created political instability, and in 2004 Seoul made it clear that it considered invalid the Sino-Japanese Gando Convention of 1909 that gave Korean

²⁹⁸ Scobell, *China . . .*, 5.

²⁹⁹ Timothy Savage, "Big Brother is Watching: China's Intentions in the DPRK," *China Security* 4, no. 4 (Autumn 2008): 55.

³⁰⁰ Lankov, "Can North Korea . . .", 40.

³⁰¹ Davis, 41.

territory to China.³⁰² On a grander scale, nationalist South Koreans have periodically laid claim to even larger portions of Manchuria on the basis of the ancient Koguryō kingdom, one of Korea's three founding kingdoms.³⁰³ Despite South Korea's physical separation from China, Chinese Koreans in the Yanbian autonomous region of Jilin province have increasingly come under its influence: 75% of ROK foreign direct investment in China goes to the provinces closest to Korea and these transactions are accompanied by the swift spread of South Korean popular cultural influences. This explains Beijing's attempts to discourage South Korean investment in Yanbian throughout the 1990s.³⁰⁴ These attempts proved unsuccessful, with the ROK figuring as the third largest investor in China by 2002.³⁰⁵ With significant levels of socioeconomic pressure already prevalent within the PRC, it can ill afford another source of instability in the form of ethnonationalism, as little as it can afford the instability that would ensue along its borders and across NEA should the DPRK collapse.³⁰⁶

From a national security perspective, China understands that unification would likely result in the North being subsumed by the South, thereby completing the PRC's encirclement as the US-ROK alliance ensured Washington's continued hegemony in NEA. Owing to the fragility of the nepotistic regime, Beijing has had to restrain the amount of pressure it applies. However as North Korea has moved to arm itself with nuclear weapons, China has found itself in the uncomfortable position of either accepting the possibility of seeing Japan, South Korea or even Taiwan arm themselves with nuclear

³⁰² Snyder, 96 and Savage, 55.

³⁰³ Snyder, 95.

³⁰⁴ Snyder, 53 and 97.

³⁰⁵ Cha, "Power . . .", 271.

³⁰⁶ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1028.

weapons, or see American military presence further cemented in NEA.³⁰⁷ Of note, both South Korea and Taiwan have had nuclear weapons programmes and both Japan and the ROK joined the NPT with the stipulation that there would be only five nuclear weapons states.³⁰⁸

Accordingly, following the DPRK's first nuclear test in 2006 Beijing had no choice but to substantially increase pressure upon Pyongyang.³⁰⁹ Subsequently, China has more readily publicly condemned North Korea, approved stronger than anticipated UNSCRs, and limited cooperation to only those areas essential to North Korean stability.³¹⁰

Ergo, China prefers the extant slow and stable situation over an unknown and potentially disastrous change.³¹¹ As a result, it has assumed the role of guarantor to North Korea: desirous of a normal trade relationship with North Korea, it continues to subsidize the decrepit state for fear of political instability or economic collapse.³¹² The arbitrary nature of North Korean governance may continue to impede economic development, but Chinese companies remain due to Beijing's policy objective of supporting DPRK stability; worryingly, far from promoting North Korean self-sustenance, these same corporations are profiting from North Korea's economic desperation and isolation to exploit its non-renewable resources.³¹³

However, as North Korea continues to embarrass China through its ever more provocative deeds, Beijing has increasingly had to disregard its self-imposed five

³⁰⁷ Zhang, 12.

³⁰⁸ Lodgaard, 176 and 109.

³⁰⁹ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1037.

³¹⁰ Snyder, 174.

³¹¹ Davis, 128.

³¹² Michishita, "Coercing. . .", 1030 and Snyder, 112.

³¹³ Davis, 43 and Snyder, 127.

principles to peaceful coexistence and join with the international community in pressuring Pyongyang. In the end, the weariness now being expressed in China underscores North Korea's strategic policy failure vis-à-vis the maintenance of its relationship with its most important trading partner and only benefactor still ready to underwrite Pyongyang's continued survival. This fatigue has in turn undermined military alliances in support of the DPRK's self-defence principle, and the ensuing global economic isolation and corresponding dependence upon Beijing are dramatically curtailing its ability to ensure its much vaunted principle of self-determination.

US: PRESERVING EAST ASIAN INFLUENCE

As one of the two states responsible for the initial division of the Korean Peninsula, the US began its involvement as part of an anticommunist containment philosophy that would become the Cold War. With the crumbling of its primary adversary, the US has shifted its attention to the PRC and how its emergence as the world's second largest economy might supplant Washington's influence in East Asia and particularly in Japan, South Korea and Taiwan. It is in this light that the ongoing conflict with the largely isolated and irrelevant DPRK takes on more substantial geopolitical overtones.³¹⁴

The pursuit of aggressive policies by North Korea have both forced and allowed the US to commit far more to the ROK than it would have otherwise: by serving to enhance South Korean and Japanese security concerns, Pyongyang's provocations have repeatedly

³¹⁴ Pendley, 334.

served to justify an unpopular US military presence and cooperation with the ROK and Japan.³¹⁵

In fact, the US finds itself torn between genuine nuclear proliferation concerns in relation to North Korea versus how the despised dictatorship conveniently serves to enhance American influence in East Asia; the national security threat Pyongyang creates in Seoul and Tokyo forms the basis for their ongoing dependency upon Washington.³¹⁶

Accordingly, in the 1990s North Korea became the US's single largest aid recipient, receiving over one billion USD in food and energy assistance.³¹⁷ US aid provided during this timeframe exceeded North Korea's entire export revenue and played a significant role in the survival of the state.³¹⁸ Essentially, by playing into Washington's need for an internationally accepted rogue actor within the NEA, the autocracy's short-term stability benefited through the food and energy assistance provided. Conversely, by allowing the dictatorship to continue to muddle along, the aid proffered actually discouraged more significant reform so vital to making North Korea become self-reliant. In essence, Pyongyang's success in extorting aid has deferred system collapse without averting it; it artificially supports the regime by treating the symptoms but leaves the systemic causes untouched.³¹⁹

Fundamentally, it is not in Washington's interest to see Pyongyang normalize relations with its neighbours and it has acted in ways to prevent this. For example, when Tokyo unilaterally initiated a normalization attempt with Pyongyang in 1991, the US intervened

³¹⁵ Olsen, 120.

³¹⁶ Lim, 186.

³¹⁷ Pendley, 337 and Noland, "Korea's . . .", 125..

³¹⁸ Eberstadt, "Why . . .", 155.

³¹⁹ Ibid, 160.

by providing intelligence indicating that North Korea could produce nuclear weapons within four years. These revelations directly contributed to the ensuing Japanese IAEA safeguards precondition for normalization, the consequent refusal by the DPRK and in the end, the re-alignment of Japanese and US foreign policy.³²⁰

Paradoxically, the DPRK's nuclear weapons programme has worked counter to Pyongyang's own long standing priority to drive a wedge between South Korea and its US ally; if peace were to take hold in NEA, one justification used by Seoul as well as by Tokyo to justify US military presence would disappear.³²¹ However, the totalitarian regime is unable to take the requisite concessions to foster normalization with its neighbours; only under the siege conditions instigated by the ever vilified American and Japanese can the Kim dynasty legitimize its rule, mobilize support and crush opposition.³²² As a result, through its actions the regime makes it clear that short-term system stability takes precedence over long-term national security.

As North Korea entered the Arduous March of the early 1990s, US experts widely predicted its demise within three years.³²³ However, supported as it was by international assistance, not only did the regime survive but its enigmatic nature and resultant unpredictability soon led Washington to conclude that as an opponent, Pyongyang was harder to deter than Moscow had ever been during the Cold War.³²⁴ After threatening withdrawal from the NPT in 1993 only to be compensated by the provisions of the Agreed Framework, the US proposed Four-Party Talks as a new way to exert influence

³²⁰ Martin, 441.

³²¹ McCormack, 145.

³²² Ibid, 186.

³²³ Kim, *The Two Koreas . . .*, 247.

³²⁴ Kort, 161.

over the DPRK vis-à-vis the nuclear proliferation threat it posed. Initiated in 1997 and comprised of China, North Korea, South Korea and the US, they were derailed in 1998 by DPRK provocations consisting of a number of submarine incursions into ROK waters, the construction of an alleged underground nuclear facility at Kumchang-ri and the Taepodong 1 missile test.³²⁵

Such demonstrations of indomitable behaviour, although briefly bolstering deterrence and strengthening DPRK demands for additional financial concessions, provided the US with one more reason to justify its withdrawal from the 1972 Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 2002.³²⁶ This turn of events is highly destabilizing for North Korea's long-term security owing to its dependency upon deterrence by punishment: the deterrence value of its missiles is eroded by the US global missile defence initiative that saw ABM development cooperation commence with Japan immediately following the 1998 missile test.³²⁷ This arrangement was further formalized and strengthened in 2004 by the signing of a bilateral memorandum of understanding between the US and Japan increasing ballistic missile defence cooperation.³²⁸

Soon after the DPRK's withdrawal from the NPT, the US proposed Six-Party Talks in 2003 involving China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, Russia and the US.

Throughout, Pyongyang called for security guarantees against Washington's hostility in return for abandonment of its nuclear weapons programme. However, these calls were clearly hollow because even if a US military "threat is not manifest it will always be

³²⁵ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 248.

³²⁶ Kort, 52.

³²⁷ Lodgaard, 37.

³²⁸ British Broadcasting Corporation, "Japan, US Sign Defence Pact," *BBC News*, 17 December 2004; <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/4104301.stm>; Internet; accessed 17 June 2011.

latent for the future is unpredictable."³²⁹ This fact is emphasized by the US pledge in 1994 not to use nuclear weapons against non-nuclear weapons states, followed by a reversal in 2001.³³⁰ As a result, North Korea has in actual fact used the talks to exhort assistance and forestall against possible regime change initiatives.

A notable event during the talks that brings to light the DPRK's manipulative approach consists of US allegations of money laundering in 2005 that resulted in the freezing of North Korean assets in the Banco Delta Asia of Macao.³³¹ Pyongyang reciprocated with its first nuclear test and the Taepodong 2 and Nodong missile tests in 2006, actions that succeeded in having DPRK funds unfrozen and in bringing the US back to the bargaining table despite the Bush administration's prior assertions it would never negotiate.³³²

Subsequently, in 2007 the Six-Party Talks agreed to the provision of energy assistance to North Korea in return for the disablement of the Yongbyon plutonium facilities.³³³ But a year later, when the aid became linked to a disablement verification protocol, North Korea reacted by the launch of another Taepodong 2 in February 2009 in contravention of UNSCR 1718.³³⁴

Of note, the Taepodong 2 launches albeit unsuccessful, signalled the regime's intent to develop the means to threaten US soil directly.³³⁵ Taken in combination with Pyongyang's many other bellicose deeds such as the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents of 2010, these events ultimately swayed Seoul into accepting Washington's overtures to

³²⁹ Lodgaard, 43.

³³⁰ McCormack, 182.

³³¹ Snyder, 172.

³³² Lodgaard, 158.

³³³ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea," *Country Profile 2008*: 13.

³³⁴ Lodgaard, 160.

³³⁵ Sebastien Falletti, Duncan Lennox and Ted Parsons, "Pyongyang Shows Off Hardware and New Heir," *Jane's Defence Weekly* 47, no. 42 (October 20, 2010), 7 and Kort, 111.

enter into a bilateral ABM development pact with the US in 2011.³³⁶ Accordingly, North Korean actions have resulted in heightened ABM defence cooperation between the US, Japan and South Korea and as a side effect, have still further isolated Pyongyang from a Beijing increasingly irritated by the tightening of these same ties.³³⁷

In summary, North Korea has made bandwagoning with the US its primary foreign policy objective. However, given that its political ideology is dependent upon US hostility to justify itself, and owing to the state's inability to wield any form of power other than military power, it has had to resort to the use of military coercion in order to compel the US to normalize relations with it.³³⁸ Unsuccessful, North Korea has participated in both four and six-party talks but throughout has demonstrated that it is uninterested in pursuing these to their true conclusions due to the regime's conflation of its own immediate survival needs with state security. Meanwhile, Pyongyang's actions have inadvertently contributed to Washington's objectives by providing the requisite pretext for its continuing presence in East Asia, encouraging closer ties with Tokyo and Seoul and further constraining Beijing's regional influence.³³⁹

JAPAN: GROWING MILITANCY

Owing to the centuries of animosity perpetuated daily by the North Korean media, Japan has the most to fear from the DPRK. While Pyongyang's apprehensions over

³³⁶ Victor Fic, "South Korea, US Sign Missile Development Pact," *Asian Defence Journal*, May 2011, 44.

³³⁷ Byung-Kook Kim, "The Politics of National Identity: The Rebirth of Ideology and Drifting Foreign Policy in South Korea," in *Korea: The East Asian Pivot*, ed. by Jonathan D. Pollack, 79-120 (Newport, Rhode Island: Naval War College Press, 2004), 93.

³³⁸ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1016.

³³⁹ O'Neil, 1.

Washington's intentions have served to justify its nuclear weapons programme, this same programme has simultaneously greatly elevated fears in Tokyo over the true motives of the regime.³⁴⁰ Faced with the most important national security threat since 1945, Japan understands that in the event of an open military conflict on the Korean Peninsula, it will indubitably be the main target of North Korean nuclear weapons regardless of Tokyo's involvement.³⁴¹

Right wing elements within Japan have therefore been positioned to gain the most from the situation. Already the most unyielding of the Six-Party members in its approach towards Pyongyang, the North Korean threat has invigorated those within Tokyo who seek to revise Japan's pacifist constitution to make the state more militant.³⁴² Faced with an inscrutable adversary, Tokyo has had no choice but to reinforce its military defences, heighten surveillance capabilities such as with the launch of reconnaissance satellites over North Korea in 2003 and 2004 and embrace theatre missile defence.³⁴³ More worryingly still for the DPRK and regional nuclear proliferation risks in general, a 2005 US Senate report envisaged the possibility of encouraging Japan to acquire nuclear weapons.³⁴⁴ The acquisition of nuclear weapons by North Korea has therefore set the stage for a Japanese review of its three non-nuclear principles, with the concern being that "the probability of nuclear weapons being used increases exponentially as more countries acquire them as part of their national arsenals."³⁴⁵

³⁴⁰ Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, "Uncertainty," in *Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed. by Paul D. Williams, 133-150 (New York: Routledge, 2008), 144.

³⁴¹ Zhang, 11.

³⁴² Zhang, 9 and McCormack, 8.

³⁴³ Kim, *The Two Koreas . . .*, 202 and Zhang, 11.

³⁴⁴ Zhang, 10.

³⁴⁵ O'Neil, 7 and McCormack, 147.

Ironically, Pyongyang's ardent pursuit of *songun* and nuclear weapons in support of self-defence may also be increasing the likelihood of pre-emptive military strikes against it. The reason is that the retaliatory capabilities of a country with fewer than 30 nuclear weapons is questionable since some weapons "may be destroyed by an attacker, others may be intercepted, and yet others may not function as planned."³⁴⁶ Although Japan's constitution restrains the military options available to it, under the growing nuclear threat from the DPRK, the Diet's interpretation of these limitations have progressively loosened. Accordingly, in 1999 Tokyo asserted its right to pre-emptive strike; this was repeated in 2003 with Japan affirming it was prepared to act unilaterally against North Korea.³⁴⁷

Despite concerns within South Korea over Japanese militarization, North Korean brinkmanship tactics have prevailed in bringing Seoul and Tokyo to embark upon a number of confidence building measures (CBM). From joint Japanese and ROK military exercises initiated in 1998 following the first DPRK missile test, to joint peacekeeping forces in East Timor and coordinated naval search and rescue exercises conducted during the second DPRK missile test, these CBMs have gone a long way to advance ROK-Japan relations.³⁴⁸

In contrast, although North Korea sees the normalization of relations with Japan as essential, its ability to advance on this front has been blocked by its dynastic politics. Pyongyang's dependency upon militant diplomacy to escalate crises and extort material gains from the international community exacerbates its own isolation.³⁴⁹ Pyongyang's

³⁴⁶ Lodgaard, 217.

³⁴⁷ Olsen, 127 and McCormack, 147.

³⁴⁸ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 201-202.

³⁴⁹ Lodgaard, 37 and Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 196.

inept handling of highly sensitive issues has even further contributed to the deterioration of relations with Tokyo. From the early 1990s when Japan briefly became North Korea's top trading partner, the Japanese-initiated normalization attempts in 1991, 2000 and 2002 were scuttled in large part by Pyongyang's intransigence which gradually saw Tokyo raise economic sanctions. In 2004, Koizumi again attempted to reconcile with Kim Jong-il, offering food, medical assistance and the elimination of economic sanctions in return for the five children of Japanese abductees, the remains and death certificates of those who had died in North Korea and a missile test moratorium. Although Pyongyang did allow the five children to join their parents, scientific analysis concluded that neither the death certificates nor the remains were authentic.³⁵⁰ A very sensitive issue within Japan, such deception led to the banning of most North Korean vessels from Japanese ports and the virtual elimination the DPRK's access to Japanese markets and assistance.³⁵¹

Consequently, as with the other three major regional players, North Korea has systematically achieved the opposite of what it set out to accomplish with Japan. Constrained by a monolithic ideology and unprepared to make any concessions that could detract from the regime's short-term stability and security, Pyongyang's actions have repeatedly brought Japan closer to South Korea and the US while concurrently eliminating Japan as its most important trading partner and source of foreign funds.

³⁵⁰ Kim, *The Two Koreas* . . . , 179 and 185.

³⁵¹ Ibid, 209.

CONCLUSION

The DPRK purportedly derives its legitimacy from the realization of Kim Il-sung's three sacrosanct principles of self-defence, self-sustenance and self-determination. From a self-determination perspective, having suppressed organized religion in the northern part of the peninsula and replaced it with *Juche*, change to the system is now not simply a matter of Kim Jong-il changing his mind and issuing orders. Instead, he must carefully weigh the impact of any potential system dissonance upon the almost 23 million ardent followers of the quasi-religious state ideology.

Just as worryingly, having fomented a fundamentalist-like fervour in ordinary North Koreans in regards to this monolithic ideology, its followers now perceive the Korean people's struggle as a matter of good versus evil instead of simply in terms of one governance system over another. Framing issues in such a context dramatically increases the risk of total war; average North Koreans, many of whom are members of the WMD-armed KPA, may perceive death as the only rational course in the event of the toppling of the Dear Leader or the perceived betrayal of the Great Leader's revered legacy.³⁵²

Juche represses critical thinking and as a result, politics and the economy are closed and cannot deal with unexpected or highly complex situations. The *Juche* society is unable to accept criticism or novelty, leading to inflexibility, corruption and incompetence within the state's bureaucracy.³⁵³ The glorification and survival of the Kim dynasty has become

³⁵² Brent Ellis, "Countering Complexity: An Analytical Framework to Guide Counter-Terrorism Policy-Making," *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 6, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2003): 6.

³⁵³ McCormack, 74.

primary with all else, including economic sense, being subordinate; "no price is too high for the ruling elite if regime legitimacy is at stake."³⁵⁴

Behind the facade of self-sustenance, North Korea has always depended upon external assistance for its existence.³⁵⁵ Ominously, today there is no reason for the DPRK to exist except for the fact that it is Kimist; Poland and Hungary existed apart from communism and as a reflection of this were much more lenient than hard-line East Germany.³⁵⁶

Nevertheless, East Germans overthrew their communist regime even though they possessed the highest communist bloc living standards simply because of the existence of West Germany with yet higher standards.³⁵⁷ Ergo, North Korea cannot gradually reform to a market system and simply become a poorer version of South Korea without also being subsumed by the South.³⁵⁸ Moreover, owing to the central role that isolation of the population serves in preserving the system, any possible opening of the economy is even further constrained.³⁵⁹

Although a command political economy was very effective in the state's early years, the growing complexity within the system ultimately made central planning wasteful and unresponsive.³⁶⁰ This is exemplified by how in 1980 the DPRK boasted Asia's largest electrical network. Yet ten years later, the country produced less than half of the required electrical demand and its once proud network was outdated and dilapidated.³⁶¹ Today, North Korea has all the features of an underdeveloped country: heavy reliance upon

³⁵⁴ McCormack, 88 and Park, *North . . .*, 102.

³⁵⁵ Noland, "Korea's . . .", 124.

³⁵⁶ Martin, 825.

³⁵⁷ Lankov, "Can North Korea . . .", 53.

³⁵⁸ Martin, 825.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid*, 125.

³⁶⁰ *Ibid*, 776.

³⁶¹ The Economist Intelligence Unit, "North Korea," *Country Profile 2008*: 13.

primary industries, an undersized domestic market, low workforce skill levels and immature economic institutions and regulatory framework.³⁶² This transformation cannot be attributed to factors outside of the regime's control: in the over sixty years of the DPRK-ROK legitimacy struggle, the South has transformed itself into an economic heavyweight whilst the North is broke, secluded and nearly universally despised.³⁶³

Through its 2009 currency reforms and attempted reversal of previous, albeit limited economic improvements, the regime has made it clear that it is unwilling "to embrace reform and openness that could increase productivity and allocate resources more efficiently."³⁶⁴ Meanwhile, a 2010 survey conducted by the DPRK with UN assistance found that between one third to 45 percent of the population suffered from stunting and malnourishment.³⁶⁵ Measured against the most basic economic performance criterion of providing its population with the bare essentials for survival, North Korea's political economy is a massive failure.³⁶⁶ In fact, the Sunshine and Grand Bargain policies adopted by the ROK reflect their perception of having triumphed in the legitimacy struggle while simultaneously concluding that the DPRK's collapse now represents a greater threat than any military invasion ever could.³⁶⁷

Starting with the 2005 annual DPRK New Year's Message, the leaders of the hermit kingdom have promised a strong and prosperous nation by 15 April 2012 (*Juche* 100) in

³⁶² Park, *The Dynamics* . . . , 263.

³⁶³ McCormack, 121.

³⁶⁴ International, "North . . .", 8.

³⁶⁵ Amnesty International, *Amnesty International Report 2011: The State of the World's Human Rights* (London: Peter Benenson House, 2011), 197.

³⁶⁶ Eberstadt, *The End* . . . , 8.

³⁶⁷ Michishita, "Coercing . . .", 1027.

honour of the Great Leader's 100th birthday.³⁶⁸ However, in 2011 North Korea's food situation is expected to deteriorate once again due to a cold winter, the spread of foot-and-mouth disease and increasing international food prices.³⁶⁹ These facts are corroborated by DPRK requests in early 2011 for international food aid.³⁷⁰ While the leadership will likely point to the development of nuclear weapons as proof of having fulfilled the first part of the promise, failure to fulfill the economic portion may explain the *Cheonan* and Yeonpyeong incidents as diversionary crises manufactured to substantiate its inability to deliver prosperity.

Having utterly failed to provide its population with the most basic essentials for life, the continued hostility with the US and Japan are essential to legitimize the absolute authority of the Dear Leader.³⁷¹ As such, from a self-defence perspective Pyongyang has had to adhere to coercive diplomatic tactics reinforced with unpredictability and augmented by the threat of nuclear weapons. Significantly, having made itself irrelevant to the contemporary interconnected world, it is now unable to moderate in its militant diplomacy since this would undermine its only leverage.³⁷² Yearning for the economic benefits that normalization with the US and Japan could provide, North Korea has

³⁶⁸ Jon Rabirotff, Ashley Rowland, and Yoo Kyong Chang, "Experts: North Korea Unlikely to Use Quake as Opportunity for Aggression," *Stars and Stripes*, 16 March 2011.

<http://www.stripes.com/news/pacific/earthquake-disaster-in-japan/experts-north-korea-not-likely-to-use-quake-as-opportunity-for-aggression-1.137918?localLinksEnabled=false>; Internet; accessed 16 March 2011.

³⁶⁹ Agence-France Press, "North Korea Faces Worsening Food Shortages: Expert," *Asia One News*, 11 March 2011. <http://www.asiaone.com/News/Latest%2BNews/Asia/Story/A1Story20110311-267533.html>; Internet; accessed 16 March 2011 and Yonhap News, "N. Korea's Parliamentary Speaker Asks Britain to Send Food Aid: Report," *The Korea Herald*, 2 April 2011. <http://www.koreaherald.com/national/Detail.jsp?newsMLId=20110402000025>; Internet; accessed 2 April 2011.

³⁷⁰ Chico Harlan, "Starving N. Korea Beggars for Food, but U.S. Has Concerns About Resuming Aid," *The Washington Post*, 22 February 2011. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2011/02/19/AR2011021901953.html>; Internet; accessed 23 February 2011.

³⁷¹ McCormack, 13.

³⁷² Scobell, *North . . .*, 6.

methodically soured relations with every one of its benefactors due to its inability to take the requisite steps due to the *Juche* imposed principles and most importantly, the need to preserve the regime above all else.

Despite the adoption of *songun* or military-first politics, the investment of a debilitating percentage of its GDP towards self-defence and the precedence given to the military for food distribution, its military is largely outdated and its soldiers malnourished.³⁷³ The regime's conventional forces have been reduced to merely providing deterrence by punishment. Pyongyang has pursued nuclear weapons to re-establish its deterrent strength, however in so doing it has brought its opponents ever closer together while distancing its few remaining supporters.

As a result, it can be said that the:

North Korean project has totally failed to accomplish the missions for which it was ostensibly constructed - missions, indeed, on which the DPRK's authority and legitimacy, in large measure have always been predicated. Those missions were, first and foremost, the unification of the entire Korean peninsula under an "independent, socialist" regime, and, second, the implementation of a program of sustained socialist growth that would permit the state to amass steady power and allow the populace to enjoy a modicum of prosperity. The North Korean system, as we well know, has not achieved either of those objectives. More than that: from our current vantage point, it is apparent that the North Korean project, as currently constituted, is *systemically incapable* of accomplishing the objectives that justify its existence.³⁷⁴

Constrained by the liabilities of the North Korean political mythology and fixated upon regime survival, the overwhelming financial burden of sustaining the ideological indoctrination of its population combined with crushing investments in a large military

³⁷³ Kim, *North . . .*, 21 and Martin, 515..

³⁷⁴ Eberstadt, *The End . . .*, 4.

apparatus have exacerbated the DPRK's predicament.³⁷⁵ The long-term North Korean mission to unify the peninsula under socialism has been replaced by an immediate and desperate battle for everyday survival; trapped within a fossilized system unable to open or change, the future of the North Korean project is decidedly bleak.³⁷⁶

³⁷⁵ Scobell, *Kim . . .*, 38.

³⁷⁶ Eberstadt, *The End . . .*, 7.

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