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“Will Kim Jong Un become a game changer?”

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## **Abstract**

The years 2017 and 2018 are considered watersheds in many ways. Just prior, in late 2016, North Korea claimed to have developed ICBM technology capable of delivering nuclear weapons to the US mainland. The tension reached its peak when the US president Donald Trump and Kim Jong Un exchanged explicit threat of nuclear war.

However, in 2018, the international community was pleasantly astonished when Kim Jong Un had inter-Korea talks after the PyeongChang Winter Olympics in February 2018. The excitement grew bigger after the Trump-Kim Summit on June 12, 2018. Although it is too early for the international community to hope for immediate denuclearization, the fact that the US and North Korea began negotiating, is positive.

However, it remains true that the international community has not studied North Korea and Kim Jong Un enough. As a result, the international community often misunderstands North Korea. This paper aims to improve such situation by closely looking at North Korea's domestic, economic, military, and foreign strategies. Most of all, the paper aims to analyze continuing and changing survival strategies under Kim Jong Un.

## **Abstrakt**

Die internationale Gemeinschaft war positiv ueberrascht als Kim Jong Un 2018 anlaesslich der Olympischen Winterspiele in Pyeongchang bilaterale Gespraechе mit Suedkorea begann. Die Freude wurde sogar noch groesser nach dem Gipfel mit Donald Trump 2018. Obwohl es zu frueh fuer die internationale Gemeinschaft ist auf sofortige nukleare Abruestung zu hoffen, ist der Beginn von Verhandlungen zwischen den US und Nordkorea positiv zu bewerten.

Da die internationale Gemeinschaft Norkorea Kim Jong Un noch nicht gut genug erforscht hat, wird der norkoreanische Fuehrer oft missverstanden. Diese akademische Arbeit zielt darauf ab, diesen Umstand durch genaues Untersuchen der inlaendischen, auslaendischen, wirtschaftlichen und militaerischen Strategien Nordkoreas. Hauptsächlich soll mit dieser Arbeit die anhaltenden und sich aendernden Ueberlebensstrategien von Kim Jong Un analysiert werden.

Key words: North Korea, Denuclearization, The Trump-Kim Summit, Kim Jong Un.

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Finally, my soon to be husband Martin Pretorius, this journey through four different continents would not have been possible without you. Thank you for your unconditional love and support.

Songyi Koo

*On my honor as a student of the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, I submit this work in good faith and pledge that I have neither given nor received unauthorized assistance on it.*

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# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Relevance

The North Korean nuclear crisis is not just an issue between the US and North Korea. It is indeed a threat to East Asian security and global security. The recent tension poses severe challenges to the current security system and increases speculation about possible nuclear war. The issue is not new. However, the speed of North Korea's nuclear development in 2016 and 2017 exceeded expectations. American intelligence agencies had estimated that North Korea would not be able to launch a nuclear attack against the continental US until 2020.

Various factors contributed to the miscalculation. First, information about North Korea is insufficient. The country keeps itself isolated from the rest of the world, successfully cutting off information. Second, too little interest and attention has been given to the domestic situation after the transition from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un. The international community does not have sufficient knowledge about North Korea's current domestic situation, perceptions, technology, and the level of importance it has put on nuclear weapons development. Third, the South Korean literature is not utilized at the global level. South Korea has extensive information on North Korea's domestic situation. It has certain advantages. It is the only country that can deploy agents to North Korea and also gets information from North Korean defectors. The shared cultural and historical background helps with understanding North Korea, too. Moreover, South Korea naturally has a strong motivation to focus on North Korea, to remove the security threat, and to achieve reunification one day.

In sum, assessing North Korea's current situation under the new leader is essential. Understanding the new supreme leader, Kim Jong Un, and his political goals and strategies are crucial. To achieve that, this paper will make use of extensive information provided by South Korean governmental agencies, research institutes, and financial institutions. This will help us to better understand, respond to, and predict North Korea's behavior.

## 1.2 Research Questions

**Main Question 1:** How can we describe the grand strategy of Kim Jong Un?

**Sub-Questions 1:** What are his primary political goals? What are the internal and external challenges he has faced since 2011? How has Kim Jong Un attempted to increase his defense capability? What are his plans for the economy? What is the informational strategy of the Kim regime? How can we analyze North Korea's diplomacy towards the US, South Korea, China, and Russia?

**Main Question 2:** What are the strengths and weaknesses of the current measures against the North Korean regime and how can they be improved?

**Sub-Questions 2:** What are the political aims of the US, South Korea, China, and Russia towards North Korean? What are the international institutions and measures that have been used to stop North Korea's nuclear development? What are the significant drawbacks of the current approach?

**Main Question 3:** What can be expected from the recent developments and the Trump-Kim summit?

**Sub-Questions 3:** What are the major misunderstandings and differences in opinion between North Korea and its counterparts? Why have previous attempts to stop North Korea's nuclear development failed, and what can be done better this time?

### **1.3 Methodology**

In this paper, history and international relations are two main areas chosen to explain North Korea's behavior. First, analysis of North Korea's contemporary history helps understand North Korea. Second, the research aims to find North Korea's major political goals by reviewing its domestic and foreign strategies. Combining two disciplines, the results of the research will be able to deepen our understanding of North Korea. This understanding will help us to better approach North Korea and develop solutions to a problem.

This paper is mainly based on qualitative analysis drawn from historic and international relations literature. In addition, it also extracts information from North Korean sources. These include the texts of the addresses, official statements, and government-released handbooks. The paper also makes extensive use of quantitative data from the South Korean ministry of Unification and Central Bank.

## 1.4 The Formation and Development of the North Korean Regime in Historical Perspective

On August 8, 1945, two days after the atomic bomb “Little Boy” was dropped on Hiroshima, Russia declared war on Japan. The Soviet Union and the US were already negotiating the post-World War II order in East Asia. At the Teheran Conference in November 1943 and again at the Yalta Conference in February 1945, President Roosevelt raised the idea of a trusteeship over Korea with Stalin, who did not disagree but advocated that the period of trusteeship be short.<sup>1</sup>

As soon as the declaration was made, the Red Army of the Soviet Union rapidly advanced into the Korean Peninsula while the US Army was still occupying Japan. The US was alarmed about the possibility of the Soviet Union's control over the entire Korean Peninsula and proposed the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as a line to divide the military occupation areas.<sup>2</sup> The proposal was accepted, and the Soviet Union and the US occupied the northern and southern parts of the Korean Peninsula, respectively. The division became official when General Order No. 1 for the surrender of Japan<sup>3</sup> was approved on August 17, 1945.

Despite the Korean people's strong protests, the alliance did not approve an independent, unified Korean government. Indeed, both the Soviet Union and the US started interim military governments, and they did not reach an agreement on who would be the principal trustee for the Korean Peninsula.<sup>4</sup> A Soviet-US Joint Commission met in 1946 and 1947 to work towards a unified administration, but it did not bear fruit. Increasing tensions between the communist and capitalist made it difficult for two parties to agree on a regime.

With the failure of the Joint Commission, the US brought the problem before the UN in September 1947. The Soviet Union opposed UN involvement and insisted that the UN was incapable of administering a fair election.<sup>5</sup> The US pushed for an UN-administered election in the Korean Peninsula, and the resolution was passed on November 1947. As the Soviet Union boycotted the election, the UN decided that South Korea would have a vote of its own, and the UN commission would take control. As a result of the election, the Republic of Korea was

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<sup>1</sup> Bruce Cumming, *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2005), 152.

<sup>2</sup> Steven Hugh Lee, *The Korean War* (London: Routledge, 2013), 144.

<sup>3</sup> R.K Sutherland, *General Order No.1* (Office of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers), 1945.

<sup>4</sup> Djun Kil Kim, *The History of Korea* (Westport: ABC-CLIO, 2014), 211.

<sup>5</sup> Josepha Sherman, *The Cold War* (New York: Twenty-First Century Books, 2004), 43.



established on August 15, 1948. With the help of Soviet forces in North Korea, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established in September 1948.

While the Soviet Union and the US were going through the negotiations, the division between the two zones was getting deeper. In May 1946, crossing the 38th parallel without a permit was not allowed.<sup>6</sup> Political elites moved based on their ideology. Communists moved from South Korea to North Korea, and capitalists moved from North Korea to South Korea.<sup>7</sup> There were campaigns to remove the citizens who did not share the same ideology as the occupation government. Naturally, the population transfer between North and South further polarized the Korean Peninsula.<sup>8</sup>

While the US supported anti-communist Syngman Rhee in South Korea, the Soviet Union started to implement the communist system in North Korea. It established a Soviet-backed political force, mainly through those Korean communists who had been trained in the Soviet Army. Kim Il Sung, the first supreme leader of North Korea, was one of them. He was part of the 88<sup>th</sup> brigade of the Red Army, a special unit of Korean anti-Japanese fighters.<sup>9</sup>

The Soviet Union created the North Korean Communist Party on October 13, 1945, in Pyongyang. The Korean Communist Party had been established on September 11, 1945. However, the Soviet Union established a separate party so that it could have Kim Il Sung, the leader that Stalin had in mind, take control of North Korea.<sup>10</sup> In the same month, the Soviet Union created the North Korean People's Committee and Administration Bureau, which was controlled by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. Although the North Korean People's Committee and Administration Bureau was the administrative organ in North Korea, its authority was limited by the Soviet Union. It had to submit the draft of its crucial strategic decisions and legislative changes to the Soviet Union for approval before it released them to the public.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Hyung Gu Lynn, *Bipolar Orders: The Two Koreas since 1989* (London: Zed Books, 2007), 119.

<sup>7</sup> Geoff Simons, *Korea: The Search for Sovereignty* (Berlin: Springer, 1995), 43.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>9</sup> Andrei Nikolaevich Lan'kov, *From Stalin to Kim Il Song: The Formation of North Korea, 1945-1960* (London: Hurst & Co. Publishers, 2002), 225.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 231.

<sup>11</sup> *Understanding North Korea: Totalitarian Dictatorship, Highly Centralized Economies, Grand Socialist Family* (Seoul: Ministry of Unification, 2015), 188.

The Soviet Union further developed the basis for the communist regime in North Korea. In February 1947, the North Korean People's Assembly was created. The organ drafted its constitutions and institutionalized the Korean People's Army. In February 1948, Kim Il Sung created the People's Army with the Soviet Union's support, which played an essential role in the domestic power struggle.<sup>12</sup>

The first election took place on August 25, 1948, and 212 senators were elected. The North Korean People's Committee also insisted that 360 senators be selected from South Korea. During the first Supreme People's Assembly, the constitution was passed and announced, and the government of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea was established, with Kim Il Sung as the prime minister on September 9, 1948.

Although Kim Il Sung managed to become prime minister, it took him at least a decade to establish the Kim-family dictatorship. In the late 1940s and the early 1950s, there were many factions with different visions competing against each other. Mansik Cho and Heonyoung Park, communists elites based in Korea, had widespread domestic support.<sup>13</sup> Kim Il Sung relatively easily removed them with the Soviet Union's support.

With this backdrop, the Korean War broke out on June 25, 1950. Kim Il Sung's ambition to forcefully achieve the unification led to the Korean War. According to the Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev, Kim Il Sung visited Moscow in late 1949 to get approval for his plan to conquer South Korea. Stalin was afraid that the US would come to South Korea's aid and it would escalate into a longer war.<sup>14</sup> On the other hand, some argue that it was Stalin, who planted the idea in Kim Il Sung's mind. They insist that Stalin purposefully encouraged Kim Il Sung to invade South Korea by providing information on the withdrawal of US troops.<sup>15</sup>

Kim Il Sung's plan to swiftly conquer South Korea met an unexpected UN intervention led by the US. On 27 June, two days after the outbreak of the war, the UN Security Council authorized armed intervention to stop North Korea's act of aggression. The UN troops, consisting of mainly the US and South Korea, managed to stop the North Korean forces at the "Pusan Perimeter" and

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<sup>12</sup> Stanley Sandler, *The Korean War: An Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 192.

<sup>13</sup> James Jongsoo Lee, *The Partition of Korea After World War II: A Global History* (New York: Springer, 2006), 223.

<sup>14</sup> Nikita Khrushchev, *Memoirs of Nikita Khrushchev* (Pennsylvania: Penn State Press, 2004), Vol.1, 268.

<sup>15</sup> *The New Encyclopædia Britannica: Macropædia* (London, Encyclopædia Britannica, 1993), 860.

then secured the liberation of South Korea. The UN troops advanced rapidly to the Yalu River, the border between North Korea and China. In October 1950, the UN troops faced a surprise Chinese intervention, that forced the UN troops back below the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. After two years of stalemate, the armistice was signed on 27 July 1953. The cease-fire agreement permanently separated North and South Korea, and formed the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) around the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel.

After the Korean War, Kim Il Sung made further step away from the Soviet Union's sphere of influence. This provoked a resistance from the pro-Soviet factions. In August 1956, the pro-Soviet faction planned to remove Kim Il Sung from the party, accusing him of being a dictator.<sup>16</sup> However, the plan leaked beforehand, and he used this as an opportunity to remove his political competitors. Moreover, he established *Juche* or the self-reliance ideology, in the midst of the Sino-Soviet Union conflict in the 1960s; he argued that *Juche* is a creative application of Marxism-Leninism that suits well North Korea's conditions.<sup>17</sup>

In the 1960s, Kim Il Sung institutionalized a totalitarian dictatorship.<sup>18</sup> In 1967, Kim began to be praised as "Great Supreme Leader". In 1972, the revised Socialist Constitution was passed. The constitution stated that *Juche* ideology was the ideology of the Communist Party as much as Marxism.<sup>19</sup> It also abolished the cabinet government system installed by the Soviet Union, and it legalized the supreme leader's direct control over the administrative, legislative, and military branches of government.

Once this structure was stabilized, Kim Il Sung started to promote a blood succession system. In 1971, Kim Jong Il's future succession was discussed in the central party committee meeting. In 1973, Kim Jong Il was elected Secretary of Organization and Ideology, and this was followed by an additional promotion in 1974. In 1980, it was officially announced that Kim Jong Il would be the next leader to carry on the revolutionary tradition and development after the death of Kim Il

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<sup>16</sup> Jae-Cheon Lim, *Kim Jong-Il's Leadership of North Korea* (London: Routledge, 2008), 71.

<sup>17</sup> Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim, *North Korea: The Politics of Regime Survival: The Politics of Regime Survival* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 105.

<sup>18</sup> Niklas Swanström, Sofia Ledberg, and Alec Forss, *Conflict Prevention and Management in Northeast Asia: The Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait in Comparison* (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2010), 166.

<sup>19</sup> *North Korea Handbook* (Seoul: Yonhap News Agency, 2002), 70.

Sung. Kim Jong Il highlighted that he was the only person who could carry out the great leader Kim Il Sung's will.<sup>20</sup>

Thus, upon Kim Il Sung's death in 1994, Kim Jong Il took power without too much of a struggle. He had been considered the natural heir of his father since he had gathered enough elites around him before his father passed away.<sup>21</sup> However, Kim Jong Il faced drastic changes in the international political arena, and harsh natural disasters added more challenges. He tried to weather the crises by focusing on building military strength and nuclear weapons development. His *Songun*, "military first" strategy might have worked to sustain the regime, but the economic struggle and failing central distribution system led to serious human rights violations in North Korea.

Kim Jong Un had to go through a much harder succession process.<sup>22</sup> He was only appointed as an official heir in January 2009, and this went public in 2010 when he was appointed as Vice President of Military Commissions. He came to power in 2011. Unlike his father Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un did not have enough time to prove himself and build supporting groups within the North Korean political system before he took office.<sup>23</sup>

### **1.5 Summary of the Kim Jong Un Era: Continuities and Discontinuities**

Kim Jong Un, the third generation Supreme Leader of North Korea, was believed to be the de facto decision maker from the time his father started to suffer from serious health issues in 2008-2009.<sup>24</sup> Since then, the young leader has been portrayed by the media as a ruthless dictator based on the brutal and inhumane killing of his political enemies, including his uncle and half-brother. He is also seen as irrational due to his risky nuclear diplomacy.

However, after studying Kim Jong Un's policy planning and execution from 2008, one can understand the young leader is somewhat rational and well prepared. He has defined his own grand strategy of *Byungjin* (Parallel Development), which can be described as a "new strategic

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<sup>20</sup> Seok-Hyang Kim, *The Juche Ideology of North Korea: Socio-Political Roots of Ideological Change* (Athens: University of Georgia, 1993), 125.

<sup>21</sup> *Understanding North Korea*, 223.

<sup>22</sup> Andrew Tan, *Security and Conflict in East Asia* (London: Routledge, 2015), 49.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>24</sup> Justin McCurry, "North Korean Leader Kim Jong-Il 'Names Youngest Son as Successor.'" *The Guardian*. June 2, 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2009/jun/02/north-korea-kim-jong-il>.

line on carrying out economic construction and building nuclear-armed forces simultaneously.”<sup>25</sup> He also set military and diplomatic strategies and developed domestic and economic approaches to achieve his goal of regime survival.<sup>26</sup>

The *Byungjin* line is not new. In 2009, the Kim regime announced its intention to mobilize the country toward the goal of turning North Korea into a "Strong and Prosperous Country." It was characterized as "a political giant, a military giant, and an economic giant.”<sup>27</sup>

“Strong and Prosperous Country” was first mentioned by Kim Jong Il in 1998.<sup>28</sup> North Korea has always sought to become a strong and respected country that can secure the regime’s survival. However, Kim Jong Il failed to manage the economy in the 1990s and the distribution system broke down, which resulted in extreme famine.<sup>29</sup> The breakdown of the central distribution system caused waning loyalty towards the regime and the inevitable emergence of grassroots capitalism.

Kim Jong Un has exhibited better planning and execution ability than his father. Indeed, Kim Jong Un’s regime managed to have modest economic growth. The regime has promoted an economic reform package ("New Measures") since 2012. The reforms pragmatically accepted the elements of the market economy. In 2013, the regime allowed factories to have the power to decide their production quantities and hiring. It also adopted the family farming system, which is a smaller unit of cooperative farm, and it resulted in increased productivity. Furthermore, it has attempted to acquire foreign direct investment by establishing 20 free trade zones across the country.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> 김민서. “핵·경제 병진노선 수정할까...김정은의 선택은?” *세계일보*. April 19, 2018, <http://www.segye.com/newsView/2018041900`5151>

<sup>26</sup> HN Kim, *The Kim Jong-Un Regime's Survival Strategy and Prospects* (Washington, DC: ICKS, 2012), 18.

<sup>27</sup> BG Kim, *North Korea's 'Chollima Movement in 2009' and 'Strong and Prosperous Nation' Strategy* (서울: 통일정책연구원, 2009), 12.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 13.

<sup>29</sup> Smith, Hazel. *Hungry for Peace: International Security, Humanitarian Assistance, and Social Change in North Korea* (Washington, DC: US Institute of Peace Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>30</sup> Patricia M. Kim, “Making the Most of North Korea’s Mixed Motives,” *CFR*. May 10, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/making-most-north-koreas-mixed-motives>

As a result, from 2012 to 2016, but excluding 2015, North Korea's GDP increased despite the sanctions. Notably, in 2016 its economy grew nearly 4% according to The Bank of Korea.<sup>31</sup> The living standard of North Koreans is believed to be improved compared to 1990s or early 2000s according to *Yonhap News Daily*, one of the major South Korean newspapers.<sup>32</sup>

The food situation has been much more stable and famine is not imminent according to the UN World Food Programme (WFP). "Fortunately we are quite far away from the situation in the mid-1990s," said Claudia von Roehl, the UN WFP's representative in North Korea in 2012. Still, a significant portion of North Korean citizens continue to suffer from food insecurity and malnutrition, especially women and children under five.<sup>33</sup>

North Korea's military strategy under Kim Jong Un's rule is not exceedingly different from his father's. The nuclear programs are the essence of the defense strategy. The young leader celebrated the completion of the nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs, attributing the success to "the will of the great supreme leader Kim Jong Il and the great general Kim Il Sung" during his new year's address in January 2018.<sup>34</sup> Kim has shown confidence that now his nuclear forces are operational and ready to retaliate directly against US territories in the event of any first strike.

As a response to North Korea's nuclear development, the international community has strengthened economic sanctions and increased military pressure. From 2009 to 2016, the Obama administration's policy toward North Korea was "Strategic Patience," a policy of waiting out the North Koreans while gradually increasing the intensity of sanctions.<sup>35</sup>

However, the level of tensions on the Korean Peninsula dramatically increased in 2016. North Korea conducted several ballistic missile tests over Japan, and they claimed to have successfully

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<sup>31</sup> Isabel von Kessel, "North Korean Economy Growing Despite Sanctions," *Statista*, July 21, 2017, <https://www.statista.com/chart/10380/north-korean-economy-growing-despite-sanctions/>

<sup>32</sup> "Economic Experiments for Survival," *Yonhap News Daily*, September 27, 2016, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eMFGcmN34mw>

<sup>33</sup> "North Korea Famine Not Imminent but Flood Impact Not Yet Clear: UN," *The New York Times*, August 9, 2012, <https://www.wfp.org/content/north-korea-famine-not-imminent-flood-impact-not-yet-clear-un>

<sup>34</sup> "New Year's Address (Full Text Jan 01, 2018)," *Chosun Sinbo*, Jan 1, 2018, [http://chosonsinbo.com/2018/01/kcna\\_180101-2/](http://chosonsinbo.com/2018/01/kcna_180101-2/)

<sup>35</sup> Walter Russell Mead, "No More "Strategic Patience" on North Korea," *The American Interest*, Mar 17, 2018, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2017/03/17/no-more-strategic-patience-on-north-korea/>

launched hydrogen warheads in intercontinental ballistic missiles.<sup>36</sup> The international community, especially the US, responded furiously. In July 2016, the US and South Korea agreed to deploy a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system to South Korea,<sup>37</sup> an American anti-ballistic missile defense system designed to shoot down short, medium, and intermediate range ballistic missiles. The UN Security Council passed resolution 2321 in November 2016 to ban coal exports and raw materials. Furthermore, Resolution 2371 was passed in August 2017, and it banned all exports of coal, iron, and placed seafood and restrictions on the number of North Korean workers in the foreign countries. In September 2017, further sanctions were imposed to limit crude oil and natural gas imports and ban all joint ventures as well as to stop North Koreans from working abroad.<sup>38</sup>

These new sanctions will have a deadly effect on North Korea's economy because its traditional ally, China, which has been the primary trade partner and energy supplier, has supported the US-led measures by restricting energy supplies to North Korea.<sup>39</sup> Kim has highlighted the self-sufficient domestic economy as a way to weather the economic consequences. During his 2018 New Year's Address, the young leader repeatedly encouraged North Korean citizens to focus on increasing energy supplies from "thermal power generation and hydroelectricity" to replace imported gas and oil.<sup>40</sup> However, it is highly likely that the North Korean economy and its civilians will significantly suffer from the economic isolation.

However, the question remains whether such economic hardship will lead to denuclearization. Although North Korean civilians will suffer from the economic isolation, their opinion is not reflected in the decision making process. The decision makers, the Kim family and the elites, might not think the economic downturn will necessarily lead to regime collapse. In the 1990s, North Korea went through devastating drought and famine, which resulted in the death of 10% of

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<sup>36</sup> Sang-Hun Choe, "North Korea Claims to Have Developed a Missile-Ready Hydrogen Bomb," *The New York Times*, Sep 2, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/02/world/asia/north-korea-hydrogen-bomb-missile.html>

<sup>37</sup> Adam Withnall, "US and South Korea agree 'early' deployment of THAAD missile defence system," *The Independent*, Jul 8, 2016, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/us-north-korea-south-missile-test-nuclear-thaad-defence-system-a7686756.html>

<sup>38</sup> Eleanor Albert, "What to Know About the Sanctions on North Korea," *CFR*, Jan 3, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/what-know-about-sanctions-north-korea>

<sup>39</sup> Eleanor Albert, "The China-North Korea Relationship," *CFR*, March 28, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-north-korea-relationship>

<sup>40</sup> "New Year's Address (Full-Text Jan 01, 2018)," *Chosun Sinbo*. January 1, 2018, [http://chosonsinbo.com/2018/01/kcna\\_180101-2/](http://chosonsinbo.com/2018/01/kcna_180101-2/)

the population due to a lack of food.<sup>41</sup> Kim's regime still managed to stay in power. Considering the fact that all the North Korean regime cares about is regime survival,<sup>42</sup> they would value the nuclear weapons much higher than the economic well-being of civilians. Thus when Russian president Vladimir Putin insisted that North Koreans would rather "eat grass" than give up their nuclear weapons program,<sup>43</sup> it is half-truth. The North Korean elites would rather let their citizens eat grass than give up their privileges that can be secured by the nuclear weapons.

Nevertheless, Kim has made somewhat positive moves towards international cooperation in 2018. During the first half of the year, he met Xi Jinping, the Chinese President, twice. He also met South Korean president, Moon Jae In, twice. The historic Trump-Kim summit took a place on June 12, 2018. Although the North Korean issue is highly volatile and difficult to predict what will happen, the international community is hopeful to see this seeming breakthrough.

If so, what factors made Kim actively seek international talks on denuclearization in 2018? Since Kim Jong Un took office in 2012, he has been bolder and more aggressive than his father. Although North Korea began testing nuclear weapons during Kim Jong Il's rule, the process of nuclear development was much slower. Kim Jong Il used to consult with China to a certain extent, and he used North Korea's nuclear testing as leverage for securing economic aid. However, Kim Jong Un increased the frequency of nuclear testing. He was decisive, and continued even when China stopped providing economic aid and energy supplies. He carried on while the US was making explicit military threats in 2017. Suddenly, Kim Jong Un wanted to discuss denuclearization and began suggesting talks. Why did he change so rapidly?

There are various factors contributing to the change of attitude of Kim Jong Un. Some argue that it is because of the changed US foreign policy. It is thanks to the "maximum pressure" strategy of the Trump administration. However, the position of the North Korean government is different. During the 2018 New Year's speech, Kim Jong Un claimed that North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities had reached their goal. Kim Jong Un insists that its ICBM technology and

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<sup>41</sup> Max Fisher, "The Cannibals of North Korea," *The Washington Post*, Feb 5, 2013, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/02/05/the-cannibals-of-north-korea/?utm\\_term=.79b51cbb4a4d](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2013/02/05/the-cannibals-of-north-korea/?utm_term=.79b51cbb4a4d)

<sup>42</sup> Gregory J. Moore, *North Korean Nuclear Operationality: Regional Security and Nonproliferation* (Baltimore: JHU Press, 2014), 165.

<sup>43</sup> Samuel Osborne, "Putin: North Koreans 'will eat grass but will not give up nuclear programme,'" *The Independent*, September 5, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/putin-north-korea-nuclear-programme-eat-grass-russia-president-test-missiles-icbm-a7930916.html>



nuclear warhead miniaturization technology program have been completed and claims to have at least second-strike capability. In other words, keeping in mind this can be also be a bluff, North Korea's attitude change in 2018 can be seen as an expression of confidence rather than fear.

President Trump's willingness to engage might have also played a role. While the president was sending hostile messages, he often ended his message with "I'm always willing to talk." The Obama administration either neglected North Korea's call for dialogue or demanded that North Korea must first fix its humanitarian issues before any talks or negotiations take a place. In addition, after nine years of a conservative administration in South Korea, the new government has shown a much warmer attitude towards North Korea. With all of these factors, the young leader of North Korea might feel that this is the golden time to negotiate.

## 2. Domestic Strategy

North Korea's domestic situation seems puzzling to outsiders. The West has established a strategy for North Korea based on the assumption that the North Korean system is not sustainable and that it will collapse on its own shortly.<sup>44</sup> Surprisingly, North Korea has sustained its political system for more than 70 years parallel to the significant changes in the international system. This seemingly unsustainable regime has survived the collapse of the Soviet Union, the extreme famine in the 1990s, and the international isolation and sanctions from the 2000s.

To understand how the North Korean regime survived, this chapter will analyze North Korean citizens' attitudes toward the regime and the rest of the world. Furthermore, it is critical to analyze how the regime regulates its citizens' perceptions about the regime and the rest of the world through the education system, the media, and the social organizations. Lastly, it discusses the signs of change in North Korean society to predict the possibility of changes under the Kim Jong Un regime.

### 2.1 The Social Structure and the Maintenance of the System

The North Korean regime is a dictatorship based on a unique ideology (*Juche* ideology or *Songun* ideology). The supreme leader controls the nation from a position above the people, organizations, and the Communist Party. The first generation leader, Kim Il Sung, is positioned as the founder of the party and the nation, and he is believed to have had superior ability and virtue above ordinary human beings.<sup>45</sup> This deification is infused and developed in the population by education and the media from birth, and the people who question this deification or the national system face brutal consequences. Thus, even if the citizens do not subscribe to the propaganda, most of them choose not to express their discontent.<sup>46</sup>

North Korean citizens can be classified into three groups. First, the core group are active supporters of Labor Party politics and account for about 35% of the population. They are typically from a revolutionary family, members of the Labor Party, and participants in the

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<sup>44</sup> Victor Cha, *Korean Unification in a New Era* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2014), 49.

<sup>45</sup> Jae-Cheon Lim, *Kim Jong-Il's Leadership of North Korea* (London: Routledge, 2008), 82.

<sup>46</sup> North Korean Writers in Exile, *Now We Can Speak: Violation of Freedom of Expression in North Korea: A Collection of Personal Accounts* (London: Pen International, 2017), 78.

Korean War and their families. Next, about 40% of the population is categorized as a moderate group, which favors the state and the Labor Party's politics, but they can change their attitude depending on the situation. Generally, the students who study abroad and the people who have close relatives in South Korea are categorized in this group. Lastly, there is an opposition group. They are actively against the Kim regime and the Labor Party. Typically, political prisoners and their family, religious groups, and supporters of Western democracy are put in this group.<sup>47</sup>

Regardless of their social class, all North Koreans belong to social organizations. North Koreans are taught about leaders and party policies through ideological institutions, lectures, and presentations at least once a week.<sup>48</sup> During the session, North Koreans are forced to regularly self-criticize themselves regarding their misdeeds or inappropriate ideas.

Furthermore, North Koreans are encouraged to monitor each other and report any inappropriate idea, action, or hint of such to the authorities.<sup>49</sup> Besides, residents are thoroughly monitored by public security agencies such as the National Security Agency and the People's Security Department. In addition to government surveillance agencies, censorship groups are responsible for monitoring and reporting on their neighbors and co-workers through a small-scale surveillance system consisting of North Korean residents.

## 2.2 The Education System

North Korean education aims to reproduce communists.<sup>50</sup> In other words, education is a tool for maintaining the regime. Thus, education is controlled by the central government, and free, obligatory education is provided for the entire population. In 2012, North Korea introduced 12 years of mandatory education for entire population.<sup>51</sup> However, after the economic crisis in the 1990s, while tuition is still free, students have to provide their own textbooks, stationery, and uniforms. In addition to this, building management and the cost of heating is also paid by the

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<sup>47</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해 2017* (서울: 삼우인쇄공사, 2016), 33.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>49</sup> 이동환, *A Critical Study on North Korea's "Human Rights in Our Own Style"* (청주: 한국교원대학교 교육대학원, 2012), 24.

<sup>50</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해 2017* (서울: 삼우인쇄공사, 2016), 42.

<sup>51</sup> DPRK's Education Committee, "*Education for All 2015 National Review Report: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea*" (paper presented at the World Education Forum, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 19-22 May 2015).

parents.<sup>52</sup> The North Korean interpretation of communism, revolutionary history, and economic philosophy are embedded within the curriculum.<sup>53</sup>

During the first five years of primary education, North Korean schools have classes on the three leaders for one hour each day. Apart from those subjects, North Korean students take a total of 13 classes, including Korean, mathematics, science, English, and information technology.<sup>54</sup>

North Korea's secondary system consists of six years, three years of middle school and another three years of high school. After 2012, changes were made to further develop science, computer skills, and foreign language learning courses in order to produce a stronger country. In the high school curriculum, the history of North Korea's communist revolution increases to a minimum of four hours per week, and party policy and introductory law classes are included.

North Korean higher education consists typically of five areas. Political ideology, foreign language, and health are mandatory for everyone, regardless of their majors. In addition to the mandatory parts, the curriculum differs based on the purpose and characteristics of the institutions.

Social service contributions by the students have been part of formal education since 1959. All North Korean citizens have to be part of political organizations. Once a child turns 6 years old, he or she becomes a member of the Children's Committee. Once the child turns 13, he or she enters the Youth Committee. Students in primary school are obligated to provide their labor for 2-4 weeks per year. This increases to 4-10 weeks once they are in secondary school.<sup>55</sup> Children 9 through 13 years of age are also subject to military drills and reserve duty for possible military action.<sup>56</sup>

North Korea's education system has evolved to meet its changing needs. Right after the end of the Second World War, they applied the Soviet system, which puts a high focus on transforming

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<sup>52</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해 2017* (서울: 삼우인쇄공사, 2016), 43.

<sup>53</sup> *White Paper on Human Rights in North Korea* (Seoul: Research Institute for National Unification, 2002)

<sup>54</sup> Ha-Kyung Angela Kim, "Inside North Korea's education system," *Foreign Policy News*, Feb 23, 2017, <http://foreignpolicynews.org/2017/02/23/inside-north-koreas-education-system/>

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Andrew C. Nahm, *North Korea, Her Past, Reality, and Impression* (Kalamazoo: Center for Korean Studies, Western Michigan University, 1978), 142.

the entire population into communists and improving literacy. According to North Korea's education committee, the literacy rate of the population above age five is almost 100%.<sup>57</sup>

After the Korean War, the North Korean regime started to focus on technological education. Technologically-educated human resources were desperately needed to rebuild the destroyed country, and were vital to developing heavy industry. Thus, institutions focusing on technological education were built.<sup>58</sup> In the 1970s, they began to teach *Juche* ideology, or self-reliance. In the 1980s, the North Korea regime increased its focus on foreign language education and specialized computer education.<sup>59</sup>

Recently, North Korean education has aimed to grow human resources that have healthy bodies. Two hours of physical education is mandatory for primary school children.<sup>60</sup> They also highlight that the real communists are loyal to the leaders (Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il), prioritize teamwork over private benefits, maintain positive attitude, and actively participate in national projects.

## 2.3 Media

North Korean media is used for educating the population and promoting the party's and the government's activities. In other words, it is officially a tool for the government to nudge the citizens.<sup>61</sup> Although freedom of speech is protected in the constitution, it adds that such rights are only protected when used to encourage the public to actively participate in the development of the socialist republic.<sup>62</sup> Journalists are considered educated elites in North Korea and referred as "warriors with the pencil."<sup>63</sup>

The same applies to newspapers and magazines. The North Korean regime sees printed newspapers as a significant means of communication and powerful propaganda material. The

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<sup>57</sup> DPRK's Education Committee, "Education for All 2015 National Review Report: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" (paper presented at the World Education Forum, Incheon, Republic of Korea, 19-22 May 2015).

<sup>58</sup> Ministry of Unification, *Understanding North Korea*, 289.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 295.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 302.

<sup>61</sup> Ha-Kyung Angela Kim, "Inside North Korea's education system," *Foreign Policy News*, Feb 23, 2017, <http://foreignpolicynews.org/2017/02/23/inside-north-koreas-education-system/>

<sup>62</sup> "DPRK Constitution," Korean Friendship Association, accessed June 18, 2018. <https://www.kfausa.org/chapter-v-fundamental-rights-and-duties-of-citizens/>, Chapter V Fundamental Rights and Duties of Citizens, Article 64.

<sup>63</sup> *21세기 정치학대사전* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan, 2002), 239.

government or party organizations publish all newspapers; there are no private news agencies legally operating. The major newspapers are operated by the party, the government, and the youth committee, respectively. The army also publishes its own newsletter. Each province's government has a regional newspapers.<sup>64</sup>

Broadcasting is not much different. It is used to promote party policies both internally and externally. Promoting Kim Jong Un takes up the most hours in the television schedule.<sup>65</sup> However, the share of sports program, movie, and drama has recently been increased. Although dramas mainly aim to boost socialist nationalism and loyalty towards the regime, they have started to also reflect social problems and concerns such as love affairs, daily life, etc.<sup>66</sup>

Radio has domestic channels and channels for audiences outside of North Korea; it has had a channel for South Koreans who share the communist ideology. The radio also has English, Chinese, Japanese, Russian, French, and even Arabic channels.

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<sup>64</sup>통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 57.

<sup>65</sup> Enrico D'Ambrogio, *North Korea's Propaganda Strategy* (Brussels: European Parliamentary Research Service, 2016), 3.

<sup>66</sup>통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 62.

### 3. Economic Strategy

Once the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, North Korea was no longer able to rely on the Soviet Union's economic aid. Economic reform seemed like a logical course for the North Korean regime. Furthermore, North Korea faced a hard time finding another export market for its natural resources. In addition, China's successful economic reforms, made without giving up on communist ideology, should have motivated North Korea to take a similar path.

Surprisingly, the North Korean regime chose not to follow the proven path. Macro-economic changes, low productivity, and natural disasters resulted in an economic crisis during the 1990s. Still, the regime chose to turn a blind eye to the grassroots capitalism that emerged during the crisis instead of pursuing economic reform.<sup>67</sup>

In 2002, the North Korean regime introduced an economic reform package. Although the package was not enough to bring real change, the package contained some market-economy elements.<sup>68</sup> One of the most important changes was legalizing the markets. However, such reform package was highly debated among North Korean political elites. The cabinet took the major role in launching economic reform. However, the Communist Party insisted that the North Korean economy should avoid market-economy elements.<sup>69</sup> Most of the market elements became illegal in 2005.<sup>70</sup>

This chapter aims to answer several critical questions about the North Korean economic strategy. Why does the North Korean regime refuse to go through the seemingly logical and proven Chinese style of economic reform? Moreover, what are the alternatives? And what is the impact of international sanctions on the North Korean economy?

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<sup>67</sup> Ministry of Unification, *Understanding North Korea*, 101.

<sup>68</sup> International Studies Review, *Institute for International Trade and Cooperation* (Seoul: Ewha Womans University, 2006), 23.

<sup>69</sup>한기범, *북한 정책결정과정의 조직행태와 관료정치: 경제개혁 확대 및 후퇴를 중심으로(2000~09)* (창원:경남대학교, 2010), 219.

<sup>70</sup> Keun Lee, Byung-Yeon Kim, and Insook Lee, "The Possibility of Economic Reform in North Korea," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* (2009): 143.

### 3.1 The Economic System

The North Korean economy is based on communal ownership. North Korea's constitution states that "resources and the products belong to society, the community, or the state."<sup>71</sup> North Korea considers the state-owned system to be superior to a community-owned system because under the state-owned system, resources are shared by the entire population instead of a smaller group of people (i.e., village, town, city, etc.).<sup>72</sup> The community-owned system is a transitory system before it evolves into the state-owned system.

The North Korean economy is mostly dependent on the central planning system and state ownership. All natural resources, trains, ports, transportation, major factories, industrial parks, and banks belong to the state in North Korea. Community-owned items include land, agricultural machines, ships, smaller factories, and workshops. Usually, the collective farm is the typical form of the community-owned system.

However, North Korea increased the role of community ownership and private ownership in 1998. The revised constitution allows individuals to own and inherit income that was legally acquired.<sup>73</sup> In the 1990s, the central planning system practically broke down and such change was inevitable. Illegal markets emerged everywhere in North Korea.<sup>74</sup>

These developments produced *Donju*, the merchant class in North Korea, who accumulated financial assets. That accumulated capital was invested into buying properties like a house or abandoned factories. Private property is not allowed by the North Korean authorities. However, North Koreans can get a permit to use the state-owned property and the document works as a deed.<sup>75</sup>

In sum, the North Korean economy is based on a strictly communist, state-owned system. The critical macroeconomic institutions are handled by the government, as well as industries that are

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<sup>71</sup> *North Korea Handbook* (Seoul: Yonhap News Agency, 2002), 106.

<sup>72</sup> Prableen Bajpai, "How the North Korean Economy Works," *Investopedia* (2013).

<https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/013015/how-north-korea-economy-works.asp>

<sup>73</sup> John Dale Grover, "North Korea Experiments With Freer Markets," *Forbes*. June 1, 2017,

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/realspin/2017/06/01/north-korea-experiments-with-freer-markets/#64c329a2f4ae>

<sup>74</sup> Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder, *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2013), 153.

<sup>75</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 106.



related to the military or energy. However, in reality market elements are emerging. Recently, community farms and factories were allowed to operate more independently. The leadership is aware that such development is inevitable, yet it is not ready to embark upon full-scale economic reform.<sup>76</sup>

### 3.2 The History of Economic Measures

In the 1960s, Kim Il Sung promoted industrialization. He proclaimed three essential principles: “Self-reliance”, “heavy industry led economic development”, and “economy-military parallel development.”<sup>77</sup> “Self-reliance” literally means “an economy that does not depend on external assistance, an economy that is developed based on its natural resources and its people.” The principle is still echoed by Kim Jong Un. However, this is rather ironic because North Korea has been dependent on external support throughout its history.

“Heavy industry led economic development” was distinguished from Mao’s focus on agricultural output in China. Kim Il Sung believed that an intense focus on heavy industry would lead to a stable economy that could sustain itself without external assistance.<sup>78</sup>

“*Byungjin*, parallel development”, highlighted the importance of military units in economic development. The regime wants its soldiers to not only serve in the army, but also to contribute to the economy. The North Korean army is considered one of the most important economic units.<sup>79</sup> Soldiers are expected to provide manpower for economic activities such as farming.

### 3.2 Economic Performance

North Korea used to release detailed and reliable economic indexes until 1965. However, the accuracy of the information, especially after the 1990s, is not trusted; indexes are modified based on political purposes.<sup>80</sup> Some argue that such information is negatively over-exaggerated, aiming to gain more economic aid from the international organizations and other countries. Thus, the

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<sup>76</sup> Young Whan Kihl and Hong Nack Kim, 256.

<sup>77</sup> Philip H Park and Hu-gŏn Pak, *Rebuilding North Korea’s Economy: Politics and Policy* (Changwon: Institute for Far Eastern Studies, Kyungnam University, 2016), 105.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>79</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 127.

<sup>80</sup> *North Korea - The World Factbook* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2018)

Bank of Korea (the South Korean national bank) has been providing the estimated indexes. While they are limited, they provide some outlook on the economy of North Korea.

North Korea's economy experienced a major shock in the 1990s. During the Cold War, despite its own economic struggle, the Soviet Union continued to economically support North Korea. The Soviet Union was the most significant trade partner of North Korea, and in the late 1980s, their bilateral trade made up 60% of North Korea's total trade volume.<sup>81</sup>

The Soviet Union helped North Korea to modernize its industrial plants, which produced about 25% of the country's gross output.<sup>82</sup> The Soviet Union also helped with North Korea's energy supply problem. It not only sent oil to North Korea, but also transferred basic nuclear knowledge for energy generation. Pyongyang paid for some of these goods and services by sending North Korean produced goods. However, most of the trade was on credit, and these debts were never paid.<sup>83</sup>

When the Soviet Union dissolved, North Korea's crude oil supply decreased by 80% in the 1990s compared to the late 1980s.<sup>84</sup> The reduced energy supply led to a shortage of electricity, and eventually, final goods output drastically decreased. North Korea's major industry contracted more than 15% in the 1990s on average.<sup>85</sup>

Kim Jong Il attempted to improve the situation. He implemented a state-led restructuring. Some factories and industrial parks, which were not operational anymore, were destroyed.<sup>86</sup> Resources were distributed based on priorities; the four major priority industries are electricity, coal, rail and transportation, and metal engineering. However, without foreign investment and energy supplies, the reform did not bear much fruit.<sup>87</sup> Kim Jong Il instead focused on a military-first policy and allocated scarce resources to military-related industries first.

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<sup>81</sup> A Lukan, *Russia-North Korea Economic Ties* (Philadelphia: Foreign Policy Research Institute, 2017), 56.

<sup>82</sup> Sergey S. Radchenko, *The Soviet Union and the North Korean Seizure of the USS Pueblo: Evidence from Russian Archives* (Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, 2017)

<sup>83</sup> Seung-Ho Joo, *North Korea's Foreign Policy under Kim Jong Il: New Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2016), 33.

<sup>84</sup> Robert L Worden, *North Korea: A Country Study* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), 68.

<sup>85</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 22.

<sup>86</sup> Young-Yoon Kim, Soo-young Choi, and Su-yŏng Ch'oe, *Understanding North Korea's Economic Reforms* (Seoul: Center for the North Korean Economy, Korea Institute for National Unification, 2005), 56.

<sup>87</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 24.

Even in the 2000s, the North Korean economy could not recover from the shock. The country does not have energy resources to boost its economic output. It is also not able to produce enough consumer goods for its citizens.

### 3.3 Foreign Trade

North Korea has been promoting the creation of a self-reliant economy from the very beginning and it tried to minimize external contact. Until the 1990s, it managed to source critical imports within the communist bloc. Even from the communist bloc, imports were minimal, and they were limited to resources that North Korea could not source domestically.

However, foreign trade within the former communist bloc decreased significantly in the 1990s. The Soviet Union no longer existed, and post-Soviet Union Russia was busy handling domestic issues and adopted a much warmer posture towards the West. China was opening up trade with the rest of the world, but North Korea stood still. The country became isolated in the changing international trade environment. Such isolation led to a shortage of imported raw materials and foreign currency reserves.

From the 2000s, trade slowly increased. However, there were two issues. First, North Korea's economic dependence on China drastically increased. Until the 1990s, the Soviet Union was the most significant trade partner and China was second. However, since 2014, more than 90% of North Korea's trade has been with China.<sup>88</sup> Such a high dependency gives China some leverage over North Korea.

Second, North Korea's import-export structure is unhealthy.<sup>89</sup> North Korea imports oil, gas, food, and various value-added products. North Korea's increasing number of imports reflects an increased demand for consumer products after its economy recovered from the severe shock of

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<sup>88</sup> Hsu Sara, "China Has Nothing To Gain From Sanctioning North Korea," *Forbes*, Aug 13, 2017, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/sarahsu/2017/08/13/china-has-nothing-to-gain-from-sanctioning-north-korea/#38d50aac6c97>

<sup>89</sup> 런밍, *A Study on Basic Economic Dependence of North Korea in the First Decade of the 2000s and Its Effects* (광주: 조선대학교 사회과학연구원, 2011), 34.

the 1990s.<sup>90</sup> However, North Korea exports low-cost raw materials such as coal and timber and low value-added products such as textiles.

### **3.4 Macro Economic Changes**

#### **3.4.1 Development of Grassroots Capitalism and the Growing Merchant Class**

North Korea's planned economy started to show visible defects from the mid-1980s. Low productivity resulted in low output. The private market was allowed by the government on a limited basis. However, as the central system began to malfunction in the 1990s, the markets became permanent.<sup>91</sup>

The North Korean government, although it was not entirely comfortable with the emergence of the market, did not completely stop the market activities. The regime allowed factories to use their facilities to produce for the private market, as long as they met their given target. Community farms also allocated 30% of their land to produce crops for sale.<sup>92</sup> It suggests that the North Korean leadership was aware of the issues with the broken planned economy and the central distribution system, and the leadership involuntarily tolerated these market elements in the 1990s.

In 2002, the Kim Jong Il regime partly institutionalized the market. This reform package included the introduction of a legal market for consumer goods, food, and a raw material exchange market. It even allowed partial autonomy of factories and farms and allowed incentives. Such measures aimed to adopt the positive functions of the market economy, while eventually normalizing the planned economy. Although the reform itself resulted in limited outcomes, legalizing market activities and collecting taxes made a positive impact on the North Korean economy.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> Byung-Yeon Kim, *Unveiling the North Korean Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 21.

<sup>91</sup> James Pearson, "North Korea's Black Market Becoming the New Normal," *Reuters*. October 29, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/US-northkorea-change-insight/north-koreas-black-market-becoming-the-new-normal-idUSKCN0SN00320151029>.

<sup>92</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 28.

<sup>93</sup> José Luis León-Manríquez, *Similar Policies, Different Outcomes: Two Decades of Economic Reforms in North Korea and Cuba* (Washington, DC: Korea Economic Institute of America, 2011), 12.

*Donju*, the people with capital assets, emerged while market activities were increasing. *Donju* own considerable capital assets, mainly in USD and Chinese Yuan, and work as private lenders. This group of people earn interest by lending money to the people who need cash to participate in the market. Since there are no institutionalized commercial banking service, they quickly made profits.<sup>94</sup> Later, *Donju* started to invest in significant projects themselves. For example, the Kim Jong Un's ambitious projects of building luxurious apartment complexes in Pyongyang were partly funded by *Donju*.<sup>95</sup>

Such unexpected growth of the private sector alarmed the North Korean regime, so the regime began to close off the market in late 2005. In 2006, the regime announced currency reform and attempted to collect the free-flowing capital in the state system. However, the currency reform resulted in a negative impact on the economy. According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), the currency reform was “disastrous.”<sup>96</sup> North Korean citizens could only change limited amount of their cash into new currencies. As a result, the prices of foods and essential goods soared and normal citizens' small savings diminished. The currency reform was suspended within two months and Pak Nam-gi, head of the ruling North Korean Workers' Party's planning finance division, was blamed for the failure and killed in 2010.<sup>97</sup>

Even the central planning system was dependent on the markets, and the existence of the central planning system and the private market system became inseparable; there was no way back to the complete planned economy.

### **3.4.2 Establishment of Specialized Economic Zones**

Since the 1990s, the North Korean regime had searched for an alternative economic strategy for survival. Sourcing its energy supply was the single most crucial problem for North Korea after 1991. However, North Korea was not ready to completely open itself to trade. The regime carefully opened up *Najin-Seonbong*, the port city located in the northeast of North Korea, as a

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<sup>94</sup> Byung-Yeon Kim, *Unveiling the North Korean Economy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 156.

<sup>95</sup> Sooho LIM, Yoojeong CHOI, and Seokki HONG, *A Reassessment and Prospect of Economic Reform in North Korea: Focus on the Connection with Military-First Economic Policy* (Seoul: Korea Institute for Economic Policy, 2015), 15.

<sup>96</sup> Tania Branigan, “North Korean Finance Chief Executed for Botched Currency Reform,” *The Guardian*, March 18, 2010, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2010/mar/18/north-korean-executed-currency-reform>.

<sup>97</sup> Catherine Cavanaugh, *The North Korean Economy: Between Crisis and Catastrophe* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 78.

specialized economic zone that is governed under the foreign direct investment law. The result was not impressive due to the lack of interest from foreign investors.<sup>98</sup>

This changed when trade between North Korea and China improved. Kim Jong Il visited China twice in 2010, and he managed to acquire investment from the Chinese. Kim Jong Il invested the funds into developing the port as a hub for trade and investment. As a result, the special economic zone became home for 120 North Korean enterprises and 150 foreign companies. The total investment amount was \$410 million (USD) up to May 2013. Most of foreign companies are Chinese, yet some firms are from Russia, the US, and Italy.<sup>99</sup>

In the 2000s, North Korea opened up four specialized economic zones. *Shinuiju* was intended to be the most independent specialized zone; being organized similarly to the Chinese model, it is meant to have independent legislative and administrative rights. *Kaesong* and *Geumgansan* were developed based on 100% South Korean capital investment.<sup>100</sup> However, as the political situation became difficult, the operation of the last two economic zones has repeatedly stopped and started, and currently, South Korean investment has ceased.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> A. Abrahamian, *THE ABCs OF NORTH KOREA'S SEZs* (Washington, DC: US-Korea Institute at SAIS Johns Hopkins, 2014), 17.

<sup>99</sup> 통일교육원 교육개발과, *북한이해* 2017, 33.

<sup>100</sup> 이유진, *북한의 경제특구 및 경제개발구 개발 현황과 전망* (서울: 북한연구학회, 2016), 15.

<sup>101</sup> 통일한국 편집부, *남북·글로벌뉴스: 개성공단 전면중단 1년... 여론은?* (서울: 평화문제연구소, 2017)

## 4. Military Strategy

North Korea's military force aims to protect the regime and eventually liberate the entire Korean Peninsula. The revised constitution of North Korea states that the People's Army of the Democratic Republic of Korea exists to protect the leadership of the party and the people from external aggression.<sup>102</sup> Hence, having a strong military is considered vital for regime survival. Naturally, the regime has invested sizable resources to increase its military capability. More importantly, maintaining a firm grip over the army has been important for the regime. The importance of military capability became even greater when the eastern European countries began to leave the communist bloc in the late 1980s.

*Songun* (military first) reflects the importance of the military in North Korean politics. The North Korean regime prioritized the military over civilians during the Great Famine in the 1990s. During the economic crisis, limited funds and foods were allocated to the army first.<sup>103</sup> Nuclear weapons development was considered most important, too.

In 2013, Kim Jong Un announced *Byungjin* (parallel development). The new line aims to simultaneously develop strategic weapons and the economy. Kim Jong Un argues that at this stage, nuclear development is much more cost efficient than conventional weapon development.<sup>104</sup> Thus, more resources can be allocated for economic development and eventually for North Korean citizens.

### 4.1 Military Capabilities

According to the latest national defense report of South Korea, North Korea's military has a total of 1.28 million personnel: army (1.1 million), navy (60,000), and air force (110,000). This is twice as many as the South Korean military. According to estimates, 70% of troops are deployed

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<sup>102</sup> "DPRK Constitution," Korean Friendship Association, accessed June 18, 2018, <https://www.kfausa.org/chapter-iv-national-defense/>, Chapter IV National Defense, Article 59.

<sup>103</sup> Ken E Gause, *North Korean Civil-Military Trends: Military-First Politics to a Point* (Carlisle Barracks: Strategic Studies Institute, 2014), 44.

<sup>104</sup> Terence Roehrig, *From Deterrence to Engagement: The U.S. Defense Commitment to South Korea* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2006), 231.

between the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel and Pyongyang. It is strategically positioned to support a possible war in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>105</sup>

All North Korean males are subject to mandatory military service. At the age of 14, all men must register and go through two medical tests. After they graduate from secondary school, they start their military service. Until 1994, only men over 150cm were allowed in the military. However, due to extreme famine, the average height went down dramatically in the 1990s. The required height in the military became 148cm in 1994, and it is known to be less recently.<sup>106</sup> Men who come from inappropriate backgrounds are excluded from the service. These backgrounds include the family of political prisoners and close relatives of defectors who fled North Korea.

North Korean soldiers are obligated to serve in the army for three and half years. However, they stay in the army for five to eight years.<sup>107</sup> The ones with specialized skills are forced to serve longer. Female soldiers are up to 30% of the entire army. Ordinarily, female soldiers are positioned in the transportation, medical, and communication departments.

The central government partly provides food for the army. However, a sizable portion has to be sourced by the army by itself. Most of the army units have their own farms to grow crops and raise cattle. After the economic crisis, grass-roots capitalism emerged within the army, too. Many units actively participate in illegal economic activities.<sup>108</sup>

The military system has positive and negative enforcement methods. If soldiers leave the army with negative records, they face considerable disadvantages in getting a good job afterwards. Also, they might face difficulties getting promoted in their jobs. If they leave the army with positive records, specific benefits such as party membership and food vouchers are awarded.

## **4.2 Nuclear Weapons, Ballistic Missiles, and Chemical Weapons**

Two points are most important in analyzing North Korea's nuclear capabilities. First, how many nuclear bombs does North Korea have? Second, has North Korea produced small and stable warheads suitable for ICBMs?

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<sup>105</sup> *Defense White Paper* (Seoul: Ministry of Defense, 2016), 22.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 22.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, 24-25.

<sup>108</sup> C Freeman, *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 183.



Analyses of North Korea's nuclear capabilities vary. On August 8, 2017, the US Defense Intelligence Agency reported that North Korea had up to 60 nuclear warheads and that North Korea had produced miniaturized warheads that can be loaded in an ICBM. However, on August 7, 2017, Siegfried S. Hecker, a North Korean expert who has visited North Korea's nuclear facilities many times, suggested a different estimate. He indicated that North Korea's stockpile of plutonium and enriched uranium was sufficient to produce up to 25 nuclear bombs. He also assessed that North Korea had produced warheads suitable for medium-range missiles, but it has not yet produced one for an ICBM.<sup>109</sup>

North Korea began ballistic missile development in the late 1970s. It managed to produce SCUD-Bs and SCUD-Cs from the mid-1980s. Then it further advanced its missile technology and produced the mid-range ballistic missiles in 2007; this includes missiles that can damage Japanese territory. Since then, North Korea carried out few additional long-range missile tests. North Korea argues that they successfully finished their long-range missile development, a missile with a 10,000km range, in December 2012, and 12,000km in February 2016. In November 2017, North Korea successfully tested its Hwasong-15 ICBM, which rose to an altitude of 4,475 kilometers and flew about 1,000 kilometers. Although opinions vary among experts, it is believed that it could reach the US mainland.<sup>110</sup>

North Korea has been developing chemical weapons since the 1960s. It has many R&D labs and production sites across the country. Its chemical weapons stock is expected to be between 2,500~5,000 tons, including blistering and neurological agents, and tear gas.<sup>111</sup> They also possess biological weapons that are related to cholera and anthrax.

#### **4.3 Defense Treaties**

North Korea's defense had relied on the Soviet Union and China during the Cold War. Indeed, China came to North Korea's aid during the Korean War. However, the Soviet Union, supplied

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<sup>109</sup> Eleanor Albert, "What's the Status of North Korea's Nuclear Program?" *CFR*, June 6, 2018, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/north-koreas-military-capabilities>.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>111</sup> Cindy Vestergaard, *What are North Korea's Chemical Weapon Capabilities* (Sydney: Lowy Institute, 2017), 77.

the aircraft and arms and did not deploy ground troops.<sup>112</sup> In 1961, Kim Il Sung visited both the Soviet Union and China and concluded treaties of mutual friendship and cooperation with both.

The Sino-North Korea treaty states that each will provide military aid if the ally is attacked. The treaty is automatically renewed unless the two parties agree to suspend or cancel it. Although recently China has been showing less willingness to intervene,<sup>113</sup> the treaty is still in force.

The original Soviet Union-North Korea treaty is no longer valid. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, Russia formally requested to end to the treaty.<sup>114</sup> Thus, the treaty lost ended in 1996. Even though North Korea and Russia agreed on the new treaty in 2000, the new treaty does not guarantee automatic military assistance. Instead, the parties are to communicate with each other immediately in case of war.<sup>115</sup>

Naturally, China has been the most important strategic partner of North Korea. In 2000, both countries celebrated a 50-year anniversary of the Chinese participating in the Korean War. In 2003, North Korea and China exchanged envoys to discuss the nuclear development of North Korea, followed by the summit meeting in 2006. Until then, China was believed to have a certain amount of control over the North Korean regime. Indeed, North Korea used to inform China about upcoming tests in advance.<sup>116</sup>

#### 4.4 War Plans

North Korea's war plan is not too different from the one it used during the Korean War. The Korean Peninsula is small, and Seoul, the capital of South Korea, is merely a two hours car drive from the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. North Korea would first launch a missile attack on the major cities of South Korea and US military bases. Simultaneously, its troops would aim to cross the border and take Seoul as soon as possible.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Lester H Brune and Robin Higham, *The Korean War: Handbook of the Literature and Research* (Westport: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1996), 72.

<sup>113</sup> Lowell Dittmer and Maochun Yu, *Routledge Handbook of Chinese Security* (London: Routledge, 2015), 53.

<sup>114</sup> Stephen Blank and Alvin Z. Rubinstein, *Imperial Decline: Russia's Changing Role in Asia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 44.

<sup>115</sup> *North Korea Handbook* (Seoul: Yonhap News Agency, 2002), 67.

<sup>116</sup> C Freeman, *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 122.

<sup>117</sup> 김강녕, *남북한 군사력 비교평가와 한국의 안보과제* (광주: 조선대학교 군사발전연구, 2016), 32.

Once a war breaks out, North Korea would attempt to provoke an internal dispute in South Korea, too. For decades, the North Korean regime has worked on an information strategy in South Korea. It maintains close communication with the anti-South Korean government communists in South Korea. The most important role for those communists is to start a riot inside of South Korea if a war breaks out.<sup>118</sup> However, there are not many communists left in South Korea. Thus, it is highly unlikely that North Korea would get meaningful effect from its informational strategy.

However, one must not overlook the potential risk of North Korea's use of WMDs. North Korea is a nuclear state, and its chemical weapons are ranked fourth in the world.<sup>119</sup> Although it is clear that North Korea would not be able to win a war, it has enough capability to destroy the entire Korean Peninsula and damage Japan, as well as possibly damage the US mainland.

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<sup>118</sup> 강철환. *북한정치체제의 특징* (서울: 북한연구소, 2013), 11.

<sup>119</sup> 이윤걸. *북한 생화학무기의 위험성* (서울: 북한연구소, 2014), 8.

## 5. Diplomatic Strategy

### 5.1 1948-1960s: Communist Comrades

North Korean's diplomatic strategy aims to win the competition with South Korea and be recognized as the single legitimate regime on the Korean Peninsula. Especially after the end of Korean War in 1953, North Korea has devoted significant diplomatic efforts to achieve its primary goal.

However, in the 1960s, North Korea faced growing conflict between its two most important allies, the Soviet Union and China. North Korea finalized bilateral agreements on cooperation and friendship with both the Soviet Union and China in 1961. North Korea expressed their neutrality<sup>120</sup> when the conflict escalated in 1962. North Korea even went further and explicitly criticized the Soviet Union's policy as imperialistic.<sup>121</sup> This made the Soviet Union reduce its economic and technical aid towards North Korea.<sup>122</sup>

### 5.2 1970-1990: Neutrality and Practicality

From the 1970s, North Korea began to realize that the international environment had changed. Mainland China gained UN membership in 1971, which was followed by the former US president Nixon's visit to China in 1972. The economic growth of South Korea was threatening to North Korea. North Korea began to realize that it might be helpful to import machinery from Western countries to improve productivity and maintain its autarchic system in the long run.<sup>123</sup> This meant more effort on developing the relationship with capitalists, namely the US and Japan.

During that time, North and South Korea considered diplomatic recognition as competition.<sup>124</sup> South Korea built its relationships within the capitalist bloc and was backed by the US, North Korea's major diplomatic partners were within the communist bloc, and naturally the Soviet

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<sup>120</sup> *The Sino-Soviet Struggle in the World Communist Movement Since Khrushchev's Fall (Part 1)* (Washington, DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 1967), 14.

<sup>121</sup> Michael J Seth, *North Korea* (London: Macmillan International Higher Education, 2018), 55.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

<sup>123</sup> Antony Best et al., *International History of the Twentieth Century and Beyond* (London: Routledge, 2014), 173.

<sup>124</sup> Samuel S Kim, *The International Relations of Northeast Asia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2003), 47.

Union supported North Korea in the international arena. In addition to its activities within the communist bloc, North Korea expanded its bond with the non-aligned countries.

Furthermore, the membership of international organizations was considered meaningful to proclaim the legitimacy of the regime. For example, there was no consensus on which regime would have membership in the UN until 1991; the US vetoed every time the Soviet Union recommended North Korea's admission, and the Soviet Union vetoed South Korea's admission. The issue was finally resolved when two countries gained membership at the same time in 1991.

### **5.3 Post-1991: Strategies for Survival**

After 1991, North Korea became isolated. The Soviet Union was dissolved and post-Soviet Union Russia did not show much interest in the Korean Peninsula.<sup>125</sup> China successfully opened up its economy and improved its relationship with the US and the rest of the Western countries.

North Korea began to realize that it needs to directly communicate with the US to secure the regime's survival. Hence, North Korea managed to have bilateral talks with the US regarding its possible nuclear weapons development in 1994. North Korea did not express its nuclear ambition for about ten years, then it announced in 2004 that it had successfully developed nuclear weapons. Since 2004, it has been using the 'escalation and de-escalation' tactic to secure regime survival and to gain economic assistance from the rest of the world,<sup>126</sup> mainly the US, South Korea, and the UN.

### **5.4 Foreign Relationships**

#### **5.4.1 Relations with South Korea**

After the division, both North Korea and South Korea refused to accept each other as legitimate. Both regimes claimed they were the only legitimate regime for the entire Korean Peninsula. Both countries recognized each other as enemies for 65 years in the absence of a full-fledged peace treaty and did not erase the possibility of forceful unification.

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<sup>125</sup> Antony Best et al., 68.

<sup>126</sup> Larry A Niksch, *North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Development and Diplomacy* (Darby: DIANE Publishing, 2010), 185.

In the 1980s, when the gap of economic development between the two regimes grew bigger, North Korea began accusing South Korea of being a puppet state of the US, North Korea charged that South Korea has been preventing the two states from building peace by getting the help of external forces.

In 2018, the relationship between South Korea and North Korea eased dramatically. During his 2018 New Year's speech, Kim Jong Un announced his intention to send a North Korean sports team to the PyeongChang Winter Olympics. The gesture was warmly welcomed, and it soon led to political talks between North Korea and South Korea. As a result, North Korea and South Korea have taken positive moves forwards. Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae In had their first meeting at the end of April. At the summit, the two Korean leaders agreed to finally end the Korean War. Furthermore, the two started disarmament negotiations and then invited Trump to have a meeting. They also released a joint statement on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Soon after the summit, Kim Jong Un announced that he had suspended all future nuclear and missile testing and that he would shut down the testing site.<sup>127</sup>

Although full-scale denuclearization will depend on future talks, the improvement of North-South relations has had a positive impact. South Korea has been coordinating the talks between Trump and Kim Jong Un. When Trump temporarily stopped the possibility of a summit, Kim Jong Un and Moon Jae In informally met and discussed the issue and the summit was back on after a few days.

#### **5.4.2 Relations with the US**

US-North Korea relations have been strained since 1950. The war ended in 1953 when the US and North Korea signed a cease-fire agreement, yet the US-South Korean alliance and North Korea never managed to sign a peace treaty to permanently end the war. Indeed, for North Korea, the US was the main force that prevented it from conquering the entire Korean Peninsula.

Moreover, the US-led UN troops had pushed the North almost to the North Korean border with China.<sup>128</sup> Even after the war, US troops and missile bases remained in South Korea. Thus, North

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<sup>127</sup> Soyoung Kim and Cynthia Kim, "North Korea Says Will Stop Nuclear Tests, Scrap Test Site," *Reuters*, April 21, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-missiles/north-korea-says-it-will-stop-nuclear-tests-abolish-test-site-kcna-idUSKBN1HR37J>.

<sup>128</sup> 장훈각, *President Rhee Syngman and ROK-US alliance* (서울: 연세대학교 사회과학연구소, 2011), 22.

Korea has regarded the US as its main enemy and the chief threat to its regime survival.<sup>129</sup> At the same time, the regime is aware that the US is its main counterpart. Kim Jong Il wanted to deal with the US directly, disregarding South Korea and Japan as puppet states.<sup>130</sup>

During the first four years of the Kim Jong Un regime, this attitude toward the US did not change much. On August 31, 2012, in the memorandum of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Kim Jong Un declared that North Korea has “two ways” to choose between.<sup>131</sup> The first is the way of peace. He insisted that North Korea is always willing to take the road to peace.<sup>132</sup> However, there is a precondition. The US first has to normalize its relations with North Korea and accept the legitimacy of the North Korean regime. Unless regime survival is guaranteed, the regime cannot abandon its nuclear weapons. The second way is to develop nuclear weapons. Kim Jong Un stated that he would react “nuclear weapons to nuclear weapons and missiles to missiles.”<sup>133</sup> North Korea has been claiming that it has to take the second way, since its proposal for peace is rejected by the US.<sup>134</sup> Nevertheless, the regime has not ignored the importance of improving relations with the US. Despite Kim Jong Il's sudden death in December 2011, the regime continued the US-North Korea dialogue in Beijing at the end of February 2012.

#### 5.4.3 Relations with China

Even though North Korea and China are no longer “comrades sealed in blood,” the two are still technically allies.<sup>135</sup> Although Beijing has stated several times that it will not come to North Korea's aid if “Kim Jong Il gets himself into hot water” with his nuclear development,<sup>136</sup> Beijing has not officially terminated the treaty that guarantees automatic military aid in case of war.

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<sup>129</sup> Edward Friedman and Sung Chull Kim, *Regional Co-Operation and Its Enemies in Northeast Asia: The Impact of Domestic Forces* (London: Routledge, 2007), 204.

<sup>130</sup> Glen Segell, *Axis of Evil and Rogue States: The Bush Administration, 2000-2004* (London: Glen Segell Publishers, 2005), 22.

<sup>131</sup> 두 가지 길 (평양: 외무성 비망록, 조선중앙통신, 2012.)

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> 서재정, *북의 3차 핵시험과 한반도 비핵화 평화체제의 전망* (서울: 창작과 비평, 2013), 19.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

<sup>135</sup> Andrew Scobell, *China and North Korea: From Comrades-in-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length* (Darby: DIANE Publishing, 2004), 193.

<sup>136</sup> C Freeman, *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 88.

North Korea is still a strategic partner for China since China would like to maintain the communist regime, or at least a regime that is not under the dominant US influence. A collapse of North Korea does not serve China's regional interests. Thus, even if the nuclear issue has created an unprecedented sense of distance between the two countries, China is still opposed to military intervention. Moreover, China has been a pipeline for North Korea's energy demands.

However, China's discontent with North Korea has been growing.<sup>137</sup> Without a doubt, North Korea's nuclear program widens the gap between the two allies. However, the gap is not only generated by the nuclear issue. It reflects the changing status of China in the international system. China is no longer a closed communist country. As an economic giant that has been integrated into the world system pretty successfully, it can no longer prioritize old ideological conflicts. Of course, China still does not want North Korea to suddenly collapse, which will most likely be followed by a South Korea-led unification. However, China does not want its own interests to be infringed by North Korea.

After the Kim Jong Un regime was launched, the conflict deepened.<sup>138</sup> When young Kim Jong Un was installed as leader, the expectations for Chinese style reform were high. However, these expectations were dashed when Kim's uncle, Jang Sung Taek, the second highest ranking politician and a proponent for economic cooperation between China and North Korea,<sup>139</sup> was executed by Kim Jong Un in December 2013. The second charge against Jang Sung Taek stated that he had been selling the country's resources too cheaply to a foreign country, which must have been China.<sup>140</sup> The two states' relations only seemed to improve in 2018, when Xi Jinping of China finally invited Kim Jong Un for a meeting in Beijing.

#### **5.4.4 Relations with Russia**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union happened on December 26, 1991. Although the Yeltsin administration agreed on the establishment of an Inter-governmental Commission for Trade, Economic, and Scientific-Technical Cooperation in 1996, the Soviet Union did not place much importance on the Korean Peninsula during the 1990s. Only in 2000 was the Treaty on

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<sup>137</sup> C Freeman, *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 93.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>139</sup> Andrew Tan, *Handbook of US-China Relations* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2016), 143.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 143.



Friendship, Good-Neighborly Relations and Cooperation signed after the first summit meeting between post-Soviet Union Russia and North Korea.

The major concern for North Korea was a security guarantee. The security guarantee promised by the Soviet Union was ambiguous. Russian president, Yeltsin, even told the South Korean foreign minister that the 1961 Treaty of Friendship with North Korea, which committed Russia to an automatic response in the case of an attack upon the North Korea, existed in “name only.”<sup>141</sup>

Despite this, Russia was involved in North Korea’s nuclear development in the 1990s. It is true that the Soviet Union helped North Korea to obtain basic nuclear knowledge. In 1959, the Soviet Union and North Korea signed a nuclear cooperation agreement as a response to the deployment of American nuclear missiles in South Korea, and the Soviet Union trained North Korean scientists and engineers, giving them the basic knowledge to initiate a nuclear program.<sup>142</sup>

However, there is insufficient proof that the Soviet Union transferred critical technical assistance for nuclear weapons development to North Korea, at least intentionally. Rather, the Soviet Union wanted both China and North Korea to be without nuclear weapons. This was one of the main reasons for the Sino-Soviet conflict.<sup>143</sup>

Russia realized that it has lost its influence over North Korea when the first North Korean nuclear crisis broke out. In June 1993, it was the US that sat with North Korea to talk bilaterally about the nuclear program. Russia tried to take part by suggesting eight-party talks in March 1994 and succeeded in being part of the six-party talks, yet its participation was minimal.<sup>144</sup> Some Russian scholars blame Yeltsin’s administration for losing its privileged position on the Korean Peninsula because of an inability to demonstrate leverage over North Korea due to “democratic romanticism”, and allowing the Americans to take full leadership.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> Leszek Buszynski, *Russia and North Korea: Dilemmas and Interests* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009), 67.

<sup>142</sup> Derek Bolton, *North Korea's Nuclear Program* (Washington DC: American Security Project, 2012), 8.

<sup>143</sup> Arthur H Mitchell, *Understanding the Korean War: The Participants, the Tactics, and the Course of Conflict* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2013), 167.

<sup>144</sup> Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience: Moscow, Beijing, and the New Geopolitics* (Baltimore: Brookings Institution Press, 2009).

<sup>145</sup> Alexander Vorontsov, *Current Russia-North Korea Relations: Challenges and Achievements* (Baltimore: Brookings Institution, 2007).

In 1999, Vladimir Putin took office. He saw the need for recovering influence over North Korea. During his term, Russia managed to sign a new treaty with North Korea where the automatic-response obligation was replaced by a mutual-consultation clause in Article 2 of the new treaty.<sup>146</sup> Putin also visited North Korea in 2000, a friendly gesture that was well received by North Koreans.

However, there are fundamental reasons that stop Russia from actively improving its relationship with North Korea. First, Russia has different strategic interests in the Korean Peninsula. While it enjoys having North Korea as a “buffer zone”, and it does not feel a direct threat from North Korea’s nuclear weapons, it shares common interests with the US and China for nuclear non-proliferation. Thus, Russia is not willing to actively support North Korea regarding advancing its program.

Second, Russia has much more complicated diplomatic relationships with the stakeholders. While its rivalry with the US is reviving, the intensity is clearly lower than during the Cold War. Now, Russia has diplomatic ties with South Korea. Most importantly, its relationship with China is less like a rivalry; rather, they have learned to accommodate each other in the region.

Third, post-Soviet Union Russia cannot afford to give economic aid that was formerly provided to North Korea. Soviet and North Korean trade was largely on credit and it was valued at 3.2 billion rubles according to the 1990 exchange rate (about 8.8 billion USD in 2007).<sup>147</sup> North Korea was declared in default on its foreign debt between 1989-1990.<sup>148</sup> With a struggling economy, Russia is not currently in the position to exchange economic pain for uncertain strategic gains.

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<sup>146</sup> Selig S Harrison, *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 22.

<sup>147</sup> Ian Jeffries, *North Korea: A Guide to Economic and Political Developments* (London: Routledge, 2013), 162.

<sup>148</sup> Andrei Lankov, *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 48.

## 6. Review and Recommendations: The International Community's North Korea Policy

### 6.1 Policy Review

#### 6.1.1 Strategic Patience

When US President Barak Obama took office in the 2009, the call for retrenchment in the US was growing. The previous administration had invested too many resources in the Middle East. It was still suffering from a financial crisis. Experts started to argue that the US was incapable of maintaining its global supremacy, not to mention that there is little reason to do so.<sup>149</sup> Providing a security umbrella for its allies all over the world demanded astronomical costs and possible entanglement in unnecessary conflicts. Hillary Clinton, the former US Secretary of State, reflected this in her foreign policy. President Obama delegated foreign policy to Hillary Clinton to concentrate on domestic politics during his first term. She determined China's emergence was the most pressing issue for US diplomacy.<sup>150</sup>

Although Obama began to implement his own foreign policy, he did not completely go against Hillary's legacy. On May 24, 2014, Obama announced the "Obama Doctrine" during his address at West Point. While Obama made it clear that he was willing to launch military action in the of a direct security threat to US citizens, he still stressed the importance of diplomatic means. He also emphasized the importance of international law and multilateral action.<sup>151</sup>

The Obama administration's North Korea policy was based on so-called "Strategic Patience." The basic concept is to continue economic pressures such as UN Security Council sanctions and wait for the demise of North Korea.<sup>152</sup> On May 26, 2010, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Korea and argued for "Strategic Patience" when she met the South Korean President Lee

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<sup>149</sup> Michelle Bentley and Jack Holland, *The Obama Doctrine: A Legacy of Continuity in US Foreign Policy?* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 13.

<sup>150</sup> Mark Landler, *Alter Egos: Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, and the Twilight Struggle Over American Power* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2016), 97.

<sup>151</sup> Robert G Kaufman, *Dangerous Doctrine: How Obama's Grand Strategy Weakened America* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2016), 31.

<sup>152</sup> "Obama's 'strategic Patience' on North Korea Is Turning into Strategic Neglect," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed June 19, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/02/14/obamas-strategic-patience-on-north-korea-is-turning-into-strategic-neglect/>.

Myung Bak. Therefore, when North Korea conducted several nuclear tests, numerous rounds of sanctions were imposed. The sanctions were considered ineffective, and China was blamed for increasing its trade volume with North Korea.<sup>153</sup> Many experts evaluated this policy as a total failure. Some even stated “Strategic Patience” allowed North Korea to develop its nuclear weapons.<sup>154</sup>

### 6.1.2 Maximum Pressure and Engagement

US President Donald Trump took office in January 2017. Trump criticized Obama’s “Strategic Patience” policy saying that it failed to prevent North Korea’s nuclear and missile development.<sup>155</sup> Trump himself made it clear that he was willing to take an active approach towards North Korea. The US increased pressure on North Korea with the help of China, North Korea’s traditional ally and the biggest trading partner. Trump said, if necessary, military attack against North Korea was on the table.<sup>156</sup>

In 2017, tensions on the Korean Peninsula started to increase. North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test in September as well as seven missile tests. Apart from the usual sanctions, the US responded with increased military threats against North Korea. The US and South Korea held a joint exercise that included the carrier *Carl Vinson*, on May 3, 2017. In addition, THAAD stationed in South Korea had reached its initial operating capability (IOC) on May 1, 2017.<sup>157</sup>

On August 8, 2017, President Donald Trump warned that North Korean nuclear threats would "be met with fire, fury and frankly power, the likes of which the world has never seen before."<sup>158</sup> On September 19, President Trump addressed the UN General Assembly saying that "if it is

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<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Ian E Rinehart and Mary Beth D Nikitin, *North Korea: U.S. Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation* (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2016), 32.

<sup>155</sup> Leif-Eric Easley, “FROM STRATEGIC PATIENCE TO STRATEGIC UNCERTAINTY: Trump, North Korea, and South Korea’s New President,” *World Affairs* 180, no. 2 (June 1, 2017): 7–31, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0043820017721361>.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>157</sup> Phil Stewart and Idrees Ali, “THAAD Missile Defense System Initially Capable in South Korea: Sources,” *Reuters*. May 1, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/US-northkorea-US-thaad/thaad-missile-defense-system-initially-capable-in-south-korea-sources-idUSKBN17X23Q>.

<sup>158</sup> Emily Shugerman, “Trump says North Korea will be met with 'fire and fury like the world has never seen' if it escalates nuclear threat,” *The Independent*, August 8, 2017, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/donald-trump-north-korea-fire-and-fury-like-the-world-has-never-seen-nuclear-threat-a7883386.html>

forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea. Rocket Man [Kim Jong-un] is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime. The US is ready, willing and able, but hopefully this will not be necessary."<sup>159</sup>

Thus, in 2017, President Trump had focused on “maximum pressure.” However, in 2018, he started to put a greater emphasis on “engagement” with North Korea. Indeed, recent developments have made observers’ brains spin. On March 7, 2018, Chung Eui-yong, the South Korean presidential national security director, conveyed an invitation for talks from Kim Jong Un to Trump. On March 9, Trump accepted Kim Jong Un’s invitation to meet and discuss the fate of North Korea’s nuclear arsenal. Then Trump sent his trusted foreign affairs advisor, Mike Pompeo, then the CIA chief, to North Korea before the summit. On April 21, Trump tweeted "This is very good news for North Korea and the World" and "Looking forward to our meeting!" when North Korea suspended future nuclear testing and shut down a major testing site.<sup>160</sup> Even when the summit temporarily was off the table, Trump still sent a letter of cancellation directly to Kim Jong Un and left room with the final remark, “call me or message me if you change your mind.”<sup>161</sup>

The positive side is that Trump at least tries to have direct interaction with Kim Jong Un. There have been no US presidents before Trump who engaged with North Korea on such a level, no matter whether the reaction was positive or negative. Trump has been giving immediate responses to North Korea. When there were nuclear or missile tests, Trump gave negative feedback. When North Korea attempted to talk directly to Trump, he accepted the offer. Such an attitude relieved Pyongyang’s frustration. North Korea had been trying to have direct talks with the US, however, such efforts had been ignored.<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>159</sup> Ruth Ann Monti, *Donald Trump in 100 Facts* (Gloucestershire: Amberley Publishing Limited, 2018), 78.

<sup>160</sup> Donald Trump, Twitter post, April 20, 2018, 3:50 p.m., <https://twitter.com/realdonaldtrump/status/987463564305797126>

<sup>161</sup> David E Sanger, “Trump’s Letter to Kim Canceling North Korea Summit Meeting, Annotated,” *The New York Times*, May 25, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/24/world/asia/read-trumps-letter-to-kim-jong-un.html>.

<sup>162</sup> Sato Yoichiro and Tan Seng See, *United States Engagement in the Asia Pacific: Perspectives from Asia - Student Edition* (Amherst: Cambria Press, 2015), 56.

## 6.2 Reviews on the Policy Goals and Methods

### 6.2.1 The Impossible Goal of Immediate Denuclearization

Denuclearization of North Korea has been the single most important, and non-negotiable policy goal for the US, South Korea, and Japan.<sup>163</sup> Ideally, successful denuclearization would indeed solve the nuclear standoff, although the Korean Peninsula hasn't been free from a threat of conventional military confrontation since 1950, before North Korea developed its nuclear weapons.

Yet, immediate denuclearization is not realistic. Success stories from Brazil and Argentina, or temporary suspension of the Iranian nuclear program, are not comparable; those countries had not manufactured operational nuclear weapons and they were only at an early preparatory stage. Libya's disarmament case is more relevant. In fact, the Libyan model is very different from the procedural approach of the Trump regime. First, Libya's disarmament is a change that has been well-prepared through informal and formal talks for a long time. Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi proposed talking to the US in 1998, but he agreed to eliminate his weapons of mass destruction including nuclear weapons development program, only in 2003.<sup>164</sup> Discussions on specific denuclearization issues have continued for at least a decade, while US administrations have changed twice and the governing parties also have changed. It is also true that the other party's intention has been verified, and the terms and conditions were realistic. In that sense, the lessons of the Libya model can be helpful if there is a concern that too rapid changes might backfire.

However, Kim learnt a different lesson from the Libyan case. Once the Libyan leader gave up his WMDs, including his nuclear weapons development program, the international community promised better diplomatic relations and lifted economic sanctions. Yet, within a decade, Gadhafi was killed and his regime overthrown during a civil war backed by NATO.<sup>165</sup> There is

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<sup>163</sup> Anna Fifield, "North Korea is a nuclear state. But can the US accept that?," *The Washington Post*, December 9, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia\\_pacific/north-korea-is-a-nuclear-state-but-can-the-US-accept-that/2017/12/09/6fd76d7c-da79-11e7-8e5f-ccc94e22b133\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.e1acbc8c76fc](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia_pacific/north-korea-is-a-nuclear-state-but-can-the-US-accept-that/2017/12/09/6fd76d7c-da79-11e7-8e5f-ccc94e22b133_story.html?utm_term=.e1acbc8c76fc)

<sup>164</sup> Paul R. Pillar, "It's Time to Explain the 'Libya Model,'" *The National Interest*, May 25, 2018, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/paul-pillar/its-time-explain-the-libya-model-25984>.

<sup>165</sup> Stacey Yuen, "How the miserable death of Moammar Gadhafi factors into Kim Jong Un's nuclear ambitions," *CNBC*, July 30, 2017,

no guarantee that this would not be repeated for Kim Jong Un once he abandoned his nuclear weapons. Thus, the North Korean case might need even longer to build trust. In addition, this explains why North Korea is seeking not only economic benefits and betterment of diplomatic relations but also concrete a security guarantee prior to giving up its nuclear weapons.

Understanding the North Korean regime's insecurity and that nuclear weapons are its vital tool, it is not possible for the US to hope that the current regime would give up its nuclear weapons at this stage.

Hence, arms control and deterrence are the last options left on the table. Fortunately, North Korea has expressed that it is interested in an arms control agreement<sup>166</sup> and many experts agree that this could be genuine. A deterrence strategy could work, too. Considering that the US has learned to live with a nuclear Russia and nuclear China, the same procedures could prevent further escalation and the horror of a nuclear war.<sup>167</sup>

### **6.2.2 Problems with the Comprehensive Sanctions**

Sanctions have had minimal effects on curbing North Korea's nuclear development.<sup>168</sup> Since 2016, the UN has been imposing its harshest sanctions yet on North Korea. Starting with an arms embargo, it expanded to a ban on oil and gas imports and restricting North Koreans working abroad or starting joint ventures with foreigners. As addressed in earlier chapters, these new imposed sanctions will have a deadly effect on the North Korean economy and the innocent civilians; it is unclear whether such economic hardship will lead to immediate denuclearization. Furthermore, in the long run there is one additional negative consequence: the possible collapse of the middle class. A growing middle class, increasing engagement with the outside world, and a market economy are crucial for nudging North Korea into a long-run economic reform process. However, current sanctions, comprehensive on all civilians, bans on joint corporations and

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<https://www.cnn.com/2017/07/30/how-the-miserable-death-of-moammar-gadhafi-factors-into-kim-jong-uns-nuclear-ambitions.html>

<sup>166</sup> Sanghun Choe, "North Korea Offers US Deal to Halt Nuclear Test," *The New York Times*, Jan 10, 2015, <https://www.nytimes.com/2015/01/11/world/asia/north-korea-offers-US-deal-to-halt-nuclear-test-.html>

<sup>167</sup> Sagan Scott D, "The Korean Missile Crisis: Why Deterrence Is Still the Best Option," *Foreign Affairs*, Nov 1, 2017,

<https://www.google.at/search?q=why+deterrence+is+still+the+best+option&oq=why+deterrence+is+&aqs=chrome.1.69i57j0l5.5970j0j4&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

<sup>168</sup> "U.N. Report: Sanctions Aren't Stopping North Korea's Nuclear Program," *Foreign Policy* (blog), accessed June 19, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/07/u-n-report-sanctions-arent-stopping-north-koreas-nuclear-program/>

working abroad, are taking away the opportunity for North Koreans to engage with the rest of the world and express their political opinions against the regime.

### **6.2.3 Problems with the Military Intervention**

The risk of military confrontation in the Korean Peninsula is dramatic. It will lead to the deaths of millions of Koreans, perhaps hundreds of thousands of Japanese citizens and hundreds of thousands of US service members and civilians living in East Asia.<sup>169</sup> Furthermore, North Korea claims to possess the ability to launch a second strike to the US mainland. Although some experts believe North Korea still needs some time to have an operational ICBM system that can damage the US mainland,<sup>170</sup> it is simply too dangerous to risk a war against nuclear North Korea.

### **6.2.4 A Peace Treaty**

One of the main sources of North Korea's insecurity comes from the fact that it has never officially concluded the war with the US. They have repeatedly asked to sign a peace treaty as a prerequisite before giving up their nuclear weapons.<sup>171</sup> The US and South Korea have been insisting on the exact opposite sequence. The US will provide a security guarantee only if North Korea agrees on "complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization." Naturally, the gap is never getting any smaller. North Korea has a solid historical reason to not give up on its nuclear weapons first. The US is not interested in wasting its winning card. Although it has to be dealt with caution, the signing of a peace treaty will be essential to achieving denuclearization.

## **6.3 Recommendation: What Comes after the Trump-Kim Summit**

The Trump-Kim Jong Un summit on June 12 is believed to be one of the most significant talks in decades. The result was not necessarily satisfying for those who expected immediate denuclearization. Some argue that the summit did not produce any concrete result. They criticize the fact that the statement merely reaffirms North Korea's willingness to "work toward"

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<sup>169</sup> Ted Lieu, "President Trump's Threats Against North Korea Put the World in Danger," *Time*, January 4, 2018, <http://time.com/5085997/north-korea-donald-trump-war/>

<sup>170</sup> William J. Broad et al., "This Missile Could Reach California. But Can North Korea use It with a Nuclear Weapon?," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/22/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-weapons.html>

<sup>171</sup> "U.S. Rejected North Korea Peace Talks Offer before Last Nuclear...," *Reuters*, February 22, 2016, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-nuclear/u-s-rejected-north-korea-peace-talks-offer-before-last-nuclear-test-state-department-idUSKCN0VU0XE>.



denuclearization. Moreover, critics say US President Trump is giving away too much without getting enough from his counterpart. For instance, the US president committed to stopping the US-South Korea joint military drill during the denuclearization negotiations. He is also blamed for legitimizing a leader with bad humanitarian record.<sup>172</sup>

However, the summit was still meaningful despite what the critics say. First, it is unrealistic to expect North Korea's denuclearization after one meeting. It took more than a decade to get Libya to give up its WMDs after it began negotiating with the international community.<sup>173</sup> The summit was a head start, and now it is two countries' high level officials' job to meet and negotiate about the terms and conditions carefully. Second, the US president made conditional offers. He made it clear that the military drills would be suspended while the negotiations are ongoing and when North Korea is indeed working toward denuclearization.<sup>174</sup> If North Korea does not live up to its commitment, this promise can be void. Lastly, isolating North Korea or refusing to talk to the regime will not improve North Korea's human right situation.<sup>175</sup> We need to consider whether Obama's "Value Diplomacy" did anything to make those civilians' lives better.

Then what can be done to lead to concrete results after the summit? To answer this question, it is important to look at the most acute differences of opinion between North Korea and the United States. First, there should be consensus on the purpose of the talks. Of course, the goal of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula has already been set, but it is unlikely that the two sides have the same ideas about it.

First, the two parties need to agree on the sequence of events. The US and South Korea continue to adhere to the principle that there will be no military operations by the US and South Korea if North Korea abandons its nuclear weapons. North Korea, however, argues that it must first have peace treaty to take steps toward denuclearization.

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<sup>172</sup> Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Don't Dismiss the Trump-Kim Summit so Quickly," *Brookings* (blog), June 16, 2018, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2018/06/16/dont-dismiss-the-trump-kim-summit-so-quickly/>.

<sup>173</sup> Paul R. Pillar, "It's Time to Explain the 'Libya Model,'" *The National Interest*, May 25, 2018, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/paul-pillar/its-time-explain-the-libya-model-25984>.

<sup>174</sup> "The Trump-Kim Summit Statement: Read the Full Text," *The New York Times*, June 13, 2018, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/06/12/world/asia/trump-kim-summit-statement.html>.

<sup>175</sup> Doug Bandow, "To Improve Human Rights In North Korea, Engage The Kim Regime And Reduce Its Insecurity," *Huffington Post* (blog), December 14, 2017, [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/to-improve-human-rights-in-north-korea-engage-the\\_us\\_5a328168e4b06a512dd69e03](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/to-improve-human-rights-in-north-korea-engage-the_us_5a328168e4b06a512dd69e03).

Second, the two parties need to agree on the deal. What will North Korea get from taking steps towards giving up on its most effective defense measures? The US and South Korea are offering to lift sanctions and increase economic assistance as a reward for North Korea's denuclearization. However, North Korea is not just looking for economic aid. Kim Jong Un wants a security guarantee and possibly a guarantee for the regime survival. North Korea has consistently demanded normalization of its relations with the US. The US and South Korea have shown little response to North Korea's demand. Once again, economic development is an important factor for North Korea, but this is also for the sake of regime stability. If there is no guarantee of regime survival, there is a high possibility that denuclearization will not be achieved.

Finally, the talks should be regarded as a starting point for solving the North Korean problem, not the end point. The North Korean problem is actually a difficult problem that has been going on over 65 years. Since 1953, the mistrust and misunderstanding accumulated on both sides has become very deep. This will be a long game, and the international community should be prepared to be patience and engaging to solve the problem.

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