

# **The Boy Who Cried Wolf:**

## **North Korea's Nuclear Tests and Their Implications for Regional Stability\***

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## **Abstract**

The threat of nuclear war hung ominously over the world throughout much of the 20th century. Now, nearly two decades into the 21st century, we find ourselves in a situation where most countries have already denounced the potential use of nuclear weapons and have halted the rampant development of such arms. One country, however, has appeared eager to produce nuclear weapons as well as to actually use them. Since 2006, North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests. The most recent one, in September 2017, signaled that the country's military had gained the capability to send an intercontinental ballistic missile carrying a bomb 10 times stronger than the one dropped on Hiroshima not only to Seoul and Tokyo, but as far as Guam, Hawaii, Alaska, and possibly even the West Coast of the United States.

This research paper asks three key questions: Why did North Korea seek so desperately to develop a nuclear weapon? How has the world coped with North Korea becoming the ninth nuclear power? And what will North Korea do next? After policy and historical analysis, this paper argues that North Korea is not the boy who cried wolf and, rather, that there was never any wolf to begin with—that North Korea has never intended to launch a nuclear attack. The country sought nuclear arms to secure its sovereignty and, in 2017, it finally succeeded. From here, the regime and the country will step forward into another phase of economic development; the boy will one day become an adult.

Keywords: Nuclear Test, North Korea, Six-party Talks, US Foreign Policy, Northeast Asia, Korea Peninsula

In recent years, North Korea had conducted 22 missile tests and five nuclear tests in October 2006, May 2009, February 2013, January 2016, and September 2016. On September 3, 2017, North Korean state media claimed the country had successfully detonated a hydrogen bomb, marking its sixth nuclear test (Berlinger, 2017).

With its technological progress in both nuclear arms and the missiles necessary to deliver them, North Korea is estimated to be capable of projecting mass destruction with explosive power 10 times that of the Hiroshima bombing to as far as 2,200 miles from South Pyongan (outside Pyongyang). This extends the range of targets from those threatened by existing missiles, such as South Korea, Japan, and most of China, to targets including the American territory of Guam. Furthermore, North Korea claimed that its newest missile variants, the Pukguksong-8 and Pukguksong-14, make countries the world over viable targets, including most of the contiguous US, Europe, Russia, and India (BBC, 2017: Aug 10).

Scholars generally believe that North Korea cannot continue perpetually in its current form, and how the regime will end is an urgent issue in international security. Three urgent questions thus arise from security study circles across its East Asian neighbors as well as its archest enemy, the United States: Why did North Korea seek so desperately to develop a nuclear weapon? How has the world coped with North Korea becoming the ninth nuclear power? What will North Korea do next?

## **I. Literature Review: Why did North Korea seek so desperately to develop a nuclear weapon?**

Previous research has offered three main assessments of North Korea's intentions in developing nuclear arms. First, the country's regime, feeling grave insecurity regarding its future, has built up its nuclear program as a means of self-preservation. Second, it has sought to use the

nuclear threat as a bargaining chip in order to gain foreign aid to prop up its collapsing economy. Third, North Korea is not a “normal” country and its behavior cannot be understood or analyzed as those of a traditionally “rational” actor.

### **A. Self-Preservation**

Pyongyang withdrew from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons in 2003, citing American aggression. North Korea is typically alone in delivering bellicose rhetoric; however, comparing military capabilities reveals that the country should in fact be worried about its own security. Although possessing a relatively smaller military force in personnel and equipment, South Korea’s composite index of national capability (an index considering military expenditure, military personnel, population, urban population, iron and steel production, and energy consumption) is almost double that of North Korea (Singer et al., 1972).<sup>1</sup> Seoul spends 346 times more on its military than Pyongyang does (SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, 2017).<sup>2</sup> In addition to the South’s own military advantages, the presence of the United States Forces Korea (USFK) also poses a significant threat to the stability of the North Korean regime. Comprising more than 37,500 experienced soldiers with world-leading weaponry, the USFK includes the Eighth Army and Seventh Air Force as well as naval forces, Marines, Special Operations Command, and each element of the US nuclear triad (United States Force Korea, Areas and Installation, 2017).

On July 27, 1953, the United States, North Korea, and China signed the Korea Armistice Agreement, but no final settlement, such as a peace

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<sup>1</sup> The update Correlates of War dataset indicated that in 2007, ROK’s national capability is 0.023878 and PRK is 0.012925. <https://correlatesofwar.org/> Retrieval Date: 2017/12/01.

<sup>2</sup> In 2016, South Korea spent 42.6 billion won and North Korea spent 1.23 billion in military. <https://correlatesofwar.org/> Retrieval Date: 2017/12/01.

treaty, has ever been achieved (BBC, 2017: Aug 10). This lends further reasons for the militarily weak side, North Korea, to be wary of a possible attack or invasion by the US–South Korean alliance. Wendy Sherman, US Under Secretary of state from 2011 to 2015, argued that the North Korean leadership had long believed that nuclear armament would ensure the regime's stability and enable it to unite the Korean Peninsula on its terms (Sherman and Revere, 2017). This perspective may appear more valid when the situation is viewed from Pyongyang's eyes, particularly as leader Kim Jong Un remains relatively new and still desperately needs to consolidate his power (Haggard et al., 2014). Thus, some argue, it is the insecurity of the leader, of the regime, and of the country and its people that has pushed North Korea to nuclear armament.

However, this first explanation of insecurity has a problem in North Korea's constant offensive words and actions. Indeed, it was North Korea, not any other country, that has been responsible for the past decades of tension in Northeast Asia. Defining North Korea's paranoid foreign policy as self-preservation is overly simplistic and does not fully elucidate the complexity underlying its bellicose attitude and behavior.

Examining the role of the China factor in North Korea's policy also reveals the flaws of the self-preservation argument. Research shows that China only acts to punish North Korea's belligerence if the US is seriously considering military intervention in the Peninsula. Following this logic, the best strategy for North Korea—if it were truly motivated by self-preservation—would be to keep a low profile in order to maintain Chinese friendship and appease the US. Therefore, North Korea's aggressive nuclear policy does not reveal a self-preservation-driven approach to the national interest.

## **B. Bargaining Chip**

The second argument is that North Korea has leveraged nuclear

armament to elicit financial aid to save its economy. The country's economy is on the edge of collapsing and state–society relations are extremely tense and violent. Considering this exceedingly weak economy (Table 1), North Korea resorting to extreme foreign policy making might have been inevitable.

**Table 1: Comparison of North Korea's Economy  
with Those of Northeast Asian States**

Country	2017 PPP in Billion USD	Number of times larger than North Korea
North K	17	
South K	1,800	105.88240
Russia	3,700	217.64710
China	19,400	1141.17600
Japan	4,800	282.35290
Taiwan	1,100	64.70588

Source: 2017 Index of Economic Freedom, the Heritage Foundation Accessed on:  
Nov. 26, 2017, <http://www.heritage.org/index/ranking>

Numerous studies have detailed the extreme poverty inside North Korea. Some argue accordingly that the country's nuclear and missile tests are aimed at generating urgently needed money to rescue its economy. On September 21, 2017, within weeks of the North's most recent nuclear test, South Korea approved an US\$8 million aid package for its neighbor. Seoul's strategy toward Pyongyang typically leans toward appeasement. Furthermore, shortly before that same nuclear test, the United Nations had approved US\$5.3 million in aid to North Korea (Logan, 2017). Experts estimated that North Korea's nuclear program had cost a total of US\$1 billion to US\$3 billion (Blumberg, 2017). This represents a substantial burden. Therefore, North Korea's ostensible intention for war could reasonably be suspected to be a means of soliciting foreign aid. In the long run, this may constitute a lucrative business. Scholars have noted just such a connection between North Korea's belligerent behavior and its receipt

of international aid. Ironically, the aid typically comes from the same countries that have pledged to retaliate against North Korea and that have led the push for sanction against it. Testifying to the US House of Representatives, Korea expert Sung-Yoon Lee said that from the Cold War until today, the Kim family had always used criminal activities to finance its regime. It began with Russia, followed by China, South Korea, Japan, and the United States. The ultimate purpose of its military buildup is to blackmail neighboring countries that might dare engage in a destructive war with the extremely impoverished country.

According to former South Korean President Lee Myung-bak's memoir, in exchange for sit-down talks in 2009, North Korea explicitly demanded 100,000 tons of corn, 400,000 tons of rice, 300,000 tons of chemical fertilizers, US\$100 million in aid for road construction, and—most blatantly—US\$10 billion in cash. North Korea solicited bribes five times during Lee's six-year tenure, sometimes lowering the asking price. In the end, because of the Lee administration's rejection of this solicitation, North Korea launched a military attack in 2010, sinking the South Korean military ship the *Cheonan*, killing 46 South Korean sailors (Fish, 2017).

Accordingly, North Korea has for years been performing the same trick of cashing in on its military threat for foreign aid, and the 2017 nuclear test was nothing new in the old blackmailing game.

Although North Korea has sufficient political and economic incentive to work toward nuclear armament, some have questioned why the country has been so determined to follow through all the way, particularly as the United States has the weaponry to destroy it in mere hours. US Secretary of Defense General James Mattis said the US had “many military options” regarding North Korea, which he added could face “total annihilation.” (Dewan et al., 2017). With a high possibility of severe defeat in the case of conflict, why has North Korea gambled big on completing its nuclear arms push?

### **C. Madman Strategy**

Third, some observers believe that North Korea is not a “normal” country and that its actions cannot be analyzed as those of a rational actor. Chairman of the US Senate Armed Services Committee John McCain called Kim Jong Un “crazy fat boy” while author Christopher Hitchens described North Korea as an “artificial entity entirely consecrated to the cult of hysterical worship of a hideous crime family.” (Hitchens, 2008). These comments reveal how many outside observers view the country. US Ambassador to South Korea and Assistant Secretary of State Chris Hill said North Korea was not a normal country and that the danger posed by it “lies in the essence of the North Korean state” (Hill, 2017).

North Korea’s bizarre handling of foreign affairs stems from the regime’s ideological grounding. The official state ideology of Juche, meaning “self-reliance” and comprising tenets such as “Kimilsungism,” is promoted through mass institutionalized brainwashing in the country’s media, schools, communities, work places, and military to such an extent that it is taken in like air every day by North Koreans, many of whom invariably fall in line in the supreme leader’s personality cult. Both the leaders who have formed the ideology and the people who have been fully immersed in it can be viewed as victims of excessive faith in the public’s uniqueness. It is on a nonstop path to total self-destruction; it is suicidal.

Pyongyang’s approach to foreign affairs is demonstrated by a series of particularly belligerent statements. In 1994, it threatened to turn South Korean capital Seoul into “a sea of fire.” (CNN, 2017: Sep 4). In 2002, it claimed it would launch war against the United States in order to “mercilessly wipe out the aggressors.” (BBC, 2017: Sep 15). In 2012, the North Korea Army stated that its artillery was aimed at seven South Korean media groups and that a “merciless sacred war” would start soon (The Guardian, 2017: March 2). Furthermore, North Korea has constantly directed extreme rhetoric at the leaders in Seoul, even calling for the



execution of South Korean Presidents Park Geun-hye and Lee Myung-bak. Pyongyang has continued to issue such threats after the September 2017 nuclear test, claiming that “Japan is no longer to exist near us” and pledging to “sink Japan.” Regarding the United States, it promised to “reduce the US mainland into ashes and darkness” and have the United States “beaten to death like a rabid dog.”

Beyond verbal threats, the North Korean regime has engaged in crimes inside and outside the country. These include Kim Jong Un having his exiled brother assassinated at Kuala Lumpur International Airport, and the country's decades of abductions of Japanese citizens. However, if we define North Korea as irrational and intrinsically unpredictable, generating a valid analysis for dealing with the nuclear crisis could be impossible. Perhaps this reflects the adoption of madman strategy by Pyongyang to cloud it from outsiders (Coll, 2017). Indeed, some scholars have argued that North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons is actually the most rational choice in the context of the country's security problem—that the regime's seemingly irrational behavior reflects a deep intention to maintain its supremacy (Cho, 2014). Accordingly, they suggest that North Korea's unusual strategy is the product of extreme international, political, and economic pressure (Lankov, 2008). If true, this would mean that normal reasoning could not be applied in assessing North Korea's decision making.

#### **D. Three Explanations in One**

As discussed, North Korea's aggressive foreign policy and testing of how far it can push international society could be interpreted as an effort of self-preservation, economic blackmail, or the madman strategy. Looking broadly at North Korea, we find a country that is barely sustaining its already faltering economy, that perceives all outsiders as enemies, and that acts irrationally due to political-economic insecurity. This paper proposes that North Korea is not capable of masterminding a grand project

to develop nuclear weapons in order to extort money and respect from international society. Rather, a multifactorial explanation combining all aforementioned arguments seems more reasonable, in which the initial intention of the country's nuclear program was to protect the Kim regime and where the subsequent process was consistently accompanied by overaggressive behavior, with the consequence of foreign aid and compromise from the outside. Through nuclear armament, North Korea has amplified its importance in Northeast Asian and global politics; however, it was not stable enough at the beginning of this nuclear push to stage the entire game to ensure this outcome. Therefore, it may be argued, although North Korea employed the bluffing game on and off for decades, neighboring countries still needed to be cautious in dealing with every related crisis.

The following section investigates how the world has responded to North Korea obtaining nuclear arms.

## **II. Policy Analysis: How has the world coped with North Korea becoming the ninth nuclear power?**

Neighboring countries and the United States have experienced a series of nuclear crises since 1994, when North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the Non-Proliferation Treaty. The following decades saw a vicious cycle of North Korean threatening to develop nuclear weapons, negotiations, a breakdown in the negotiations, and finally renegotiations. In retrospect, three approaches to taming North Korea's aggressive foreign policy can be identified: 1) offering foreign aid in exchange for North Korea freezing its nuclear weapons program; 2) confronting Pyongyang, mainly through economic sanctions, military exercises, and preparation for war; and 3) ignoring the threat and freezing relations while waiting for North Korea's collapse. In 2017, these approaches underwent new developments, as introduced next.

## **A. Negotiation and Aid**

North Korea's September 2017 nuclear test shocked and greatly dismayed its neighbors as well as the US, nearly completing ending the possibility of further negotiation. Even the most dovish country in the game, South Korea (because it stands to be damaged the most of all neighbors in the event of war with the North) said through President Moon Jae-in that "we have the power to destroy North Korea and make it unable to recover" and that all policies of engagement would stop for the moment (Wintour, 2017). US President Donald Trump, speaking at the United Nations, threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea (Borger, 2017). He also sounded a pessimistic tone regarding negotiations with North Korea, calling them a "waste of time" and criticizing the South's engagement policy as well as his own secretary of state's strategy as the wrong approach (Sevastopulo, 2017).

However, one month later, related countries began to ease their tough stances in an attempt to reduce the tension with North Korea. In general, no country gave up on the possibility of sit-down talks with Pyongyang. Influential US publication *Foreign Policy* called for the US to talk with North Korea right after the nuclear test (Wolfsthal, 2017). Japan and South Korea promised to follow the US stance in dealing with North Korea. In late September, despite frequent exchanges of hostile rhetoric between Trump and Kim, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson stated that Washington had at least three channels open to Pyongyang and that "we do talk to them directly." (Sanger, 2017). In the other hand, China, North Korea's only ally before and after the crisis, continued providing vital aid and trading opportunities across the Yalu river despite criticism from abroad and domestically (Reilly, 2014). North Korea has for decades been China's most important strategic partner in Northeast Asia—a relationship China has acknowledged and cherished (Szalontai and Choi, 2013).

During the 1990s, the United States, Japan, and South Korea worked

together to use aid, light-water nuclear reactor construction, heavy fuel oil supplies, and security guarantees in exchange for North Korea halting its nuclear weapons program. However, North Korea was discovered in 1997 to have secretly been conducting uranium enrichment. In 2003, North Korean supporters Russia and China joined the negotiating table and formed the six-party talks (Bajoria and Xu, 2017). According to polling, the American public supports only negotiation as the course of action on North Korea (Kim et al., 2008). Although the negotiation process between 2003 and 2017 had plenty of frustration, as former Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell stated, many believed that it remained the most valid and efficient means of dealing with Pyongyang (Campbell, 2017).

In the negotiating game of North Korea versus international society, two countries carried more weight than the others in their ability to influence Pyongyang. The first was China, the most vital supplier of energy and trade for North Korea. Beijing “strongly opposed” Pyongyang’s September 2017 nuclear test (Needham, 2017) and was already seeking six-party talks early in 2017 (Reuters, 2017: Feb 17). The second was Russia, a long-term strategic partner of North Korea. Moscow worked with Beijing to call for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, implying that both the US–South Korea alliance and North Korea should stop all military confrontation and go back to the table. Russia intentions in this context are clearly colored by its strategic goal in East Asia, namely to be sufficiently strong to act as a counterweight to the US–Japan alliance. A nuclear North Korea would be a new bargaining chip for Russia (Buszynski, 2009).

Overall, a more dovish tack including negotiation, the exchange of interests, and compromise has been the mainstream approach of governments in dealing with a nuclear North Korea.

## **B. Confrontation and Sanctions**

As noted, negotiations with North Korea have spanned decades and failed to deliver a satisfying result. The process has started and stopped frequently, with North Korea arguably appearing to use the negotiations to hide its determination to possess nuclear weapons. Therefore, a more forceful approach that topples the North Korean regime and thus terminates the greatest source of insecurity in Northeast Asia is always on the table. First, as Trump told the United Nations, the United States could use its arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles to bring total annihilation to North Korea. This scenario seems highly unlikely because it is against the modern just war tradition, the rules of which the United States has built and maintained for decades.

Second, the United States could launch a preemptive attack to destroy all of North Korea's nuclear missile facilities and complete the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Such action would need to be implemented rapidly and deployed precisely as a strategic move rather than one aimed at causing mass human casualties in North Korea. According to retired US Army General Mark Hertling, a decisive surgical operation to remove North Korea's nuclear facility would not be simple. It would need to involve B-2 and B-52 bombers to bring the necessary explosives, F-22 stealth fighters to guard the bombers, additional warships and submarines equipped with Tomahawk missiles to take down North Korean air defenses, and ground troops to take control of the facilities after the strikes. Such an operation would take months to prepare and its consequences would be uncertain. In addition, even if it were successful, the collapse of North Korea could cause greater trouble, with the resulting crises, such as refugee, nuclear contamination, and humanitarian problems, lasting for years (Delury et al., 2014).

The third possibility is forcing North Korea to scrap its nuclear program through tighter economic sanctions. It is widely believed that

effective sanctions would require solid cooperation by the United States, Japan, South Korea, China, and Russia (Haggard and Noland, 2010).

Japan has for decades been a main target of North Korea's threats (W. Hughes, 2009). Furthermore, because of the aforementioned abduction of Japanese citizens, the country has typically responded to North Korea with hostility. Japan has long been generous in providing aid to less-developed Asian countries with the exception of North Korea (Söderberg, 2006). Following the September 2017 nuclear test, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe called for solidarity among members of international society in order to tighten sanctions, particularly to prevent North Korea obtaining the people, technologies, goods, and funds necessary to further develop its missile and nuclear arsenal (Abe, 2017). Previous economic sanctions against North Korea had lasted for years. In 2006, a UN Security Council Resolution imposed the first sanctions including on the supply of heavy weaponry, missile technology and material, and luxury goods. In 2016, Resolution 2270 extended the sanctions to bar North Korea from importing aviation fuel and exporting minerals. In 2017, Resolution 2371 barred North Korea from exporting iron and coal. New UN sanctions later that year included oil imports, textile exports, and overseas laborer contracts as well as measures to suppress smuggling efforts and stop joint ventures. Combined with separate sanctions from the US and EU, the latest move by UN resulted in the freezing of 90% of North Korea's imports and exports. Its last hope of China, which controlled 85% of both imports to and exports from North Korea, appeared to follow suit with the international community, declaring a ban on imports of iron ore, iron, lead, coal, and seafood from the country. This was a severe blow to its collapsing economy (Reuters, 2017: Nov 23).

This second means of containing North Korea is ongoing. In December 2017, the United States and South Korea conducted a massive military exercise involving 230 planes and 12,000 soldiers, including six F-22 Raptor stealth fighters, the US Marine Corps, and Navy troops. The

showdown between North Korea and the United States reflects the Biblical parable of David and Goliath. David, in this case North Korea, is adept at exploiting the weakness of Goliath, the United States. To avoid the same fate as Goliath, the United States must prepare for battle more shrewdly and be ready to act (L. Huntley, 2007).

### **C. Freezing and Ignorance**

If the second approach were to yield a result, namely military conflict or a complete economic collapse, a failed North Korean state would quickly generate the largest refugee wave in modern history, triggering a humanitarian disaster and economic tsunami that would also severely affect South Korea and China (Ryal, 2017). Military action against North Korea would cause the greatest danger. First, the country has already proved that it is capable of putting nuclear warheads on missiles and, as nonproliferation expert Jeffrey Lewis stated, "If you attack them after they have the nuclear weapons, it's not a preventive war. It's just a plain old nuclear war." A conventional nuclear war will bring irreversible change to the world. Even if nuclear war were off the table, conventional warfare still poses devastating consequences. Seoul is inside the firing range of North Korean artillery, which includes 12,000 pieces of tube artillery and 2,300 pieces of rocket artillery over 107 millimeters. With this firing capability, even without missiles, North Korea could completely destroy Seoul and its 10 million inhabitants within days. One estimate found that up to tens of thousands of military forces and civilians in Seoul could be killed within the first hours of an artillery attack. During the conventional war that would follow, the death toll in South Korea could exceed 20,000 per day. Subsequently, as US and South Korean forces with their superior weaponry and logistical support descend on the North, Pyongyang may have no choice but to deploy its nuclear weapons toward the South; the estimated casualties in Seoul would reach 4 million if a single nuclear weapon were to be detonated on the city (Meixler, 2017).

Because of the unavoidable cost of life, very few serious national security analysts advocate for war on the Korean Peninsula. However, negotiations seeking a peaceful solution with North Korea lack trust on either side. The Clinton administration signed the Agreed Framework with North Korea in 1994, with Pyongyang agreeing to freeze its nuclear program in exchange for the delivery of fuel oil and two advanced light-water reactors. The agreement was problematic initially because the true intention of the United States was to delay the advancement of North Korea's nuclear program but not to deal with the issue of Korean reunification, which is key to Pyongyang's insecurity. The United States never built the reactors, delayed the delivery of fuel oil, and continued to conduct military exercises with South Korea. Finally, in 2002, the Bush administration scrapped the agreement and labeled North Korea a rogue state that the United States may have to target with a military attack, potentially with nuclear arms. However, through much of the Bush administration, as it was troubled by the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the US strategy in the Korean Peninsula was ambiguous. The subsequent administration of Barack Obama was passive in this foreign policy area; during his eight years in office, North Korea made key progress toward nuclear capabilities (Hamblin, 2017).

From the 1990s until recently, the United States largely ignored North Korea, hoping that the Kim family regime would collapse without outside interference. Thus, US policy on North Korea was characterized during most of that time by postponed negotiations, ignoring of the threat, and freezes on direct contact.

This US strategy now seems to be being adopted by China, where the debate about how to deal with North Korea has diverged into two schools of argument. The traditional leftist argument is skeptical of US intentions and resents the idea of American troops stationed in front of the Chinese border. It also sees ties between China and North Korea as unbreakable, with this somewhat emotional argument stemming from their historical,



geographical, and political-economic closeness. On the other hand, more hawkish forces view North Korea as already being a latent enemy, with its grand ambition posing a threat to China's security. While the debates continue, top Chinese leaders have toned down both their support of and opposition to North Korea. Indeed, since becoming leader in 2011, Kim Jong Un has never visited Beijing. This is notable because China and North Korea were close allies for much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century after having fought a war shoulder by shoulder against the West. After the September 2017 nuclear test, Chinese officials said they were unwilling to meet with North Korean leaders. In return, Kim refused to meet an envoy sent by Chinese leader Xi Jinping. These strained relations reflect a Chinese policy similar to the US strategy of "ignoring" the threat.

In July 2017, China began to strengthen its border defenses to prepare for a possible US invasion of North Korea. China also began preparing for a possible influx of North Korean refugees and for radioactive contamination. China deployed approximately 150,000 troops around the border; meanwhile, Russia sent tanks and troops over its 11-mile border with North Korea.

For its part, the United States has deployed four layers of defense to counter an attack from North Korea. The first layer comprises Patriot missiles that, with the upgraded SM-3 system, could shoot down short-range missiles (McCarthy, 2017). The second layer is the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system set up in South Korea which is intended to shoot down medium-range missiles launched from North Korea. The third layer is the Aegis land and sea system, which is stationed on Navy ships in the Pacific and targeted at short- and intermediate-range missiles. The fourth layer is interceptors located in Alaska and California (Mac Askill, 2017). To prepare for a counterstrike, the United States is also considering the reintroduction of nuclear weapons to Japan and South Korea (Friedman, 2017).

If military action were to take place, stabilizing a collapsing North Korea would require approximately 260,000-400,000 military personnel (W. Bennett and Lind, 2011). Whether freezing relations choice and awaiting North Korea's collapse or war breaking out, neighboring countries as well as the US should prepare for the worst-case scenarios.

The following section conducts a historical analysis to assess what North Korea's next moves may be.

### **III. Historical Lesson: What will North Korea do next?**

Now that North Korea has achieved its objective of developing not only nuclear weapons but also intercontinental missiles to deliver them to other continents, what will the country's next move be? Will it continue with the madman strategy? To further understand North Korea's behavioral pattern, we must examine the experiences of other nuclear weapon-quipped countries. Why and how did they seek nuclear arms? How did they deal with the related pressure from international society? What did they do after obtaining them?

The material used in the analysis below comes from three dataset resources: the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), UN Office for Disarmament Affairs (UNODA), and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).<sup>3</sup>

The United States launched the Manhattan Project in the early 1940s and conducted the first nuclear test in 1945. The initial intention behind

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<sup>3</sup> SIPRI (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute) <https://www.sipri.org/> UNODA (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs) <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/npt/> IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency) <https://www.iaea.org/> Retrieval Date:

developing the weapon was to compete with its WWII rival, Germany. In the same year, to avoid the large number of casualties that a ground invasion of Japan would incur, the United States dropped two atomic bombs—one in Hiroshima and another in Nagasaki—causing more than 240,000 deaths. The US subsequently continued to maintain the world's largest nuclear arsenal (until being surpassed by the Soviet Union in the 1970s) and most advanced delivery system. During the Cold War, the United States maintained a nuclear strike plan for the Soviet Union. In addition, during the Korean War, Vietnam War, and Taiwan Strait Crisis, the United States deployed nuclear weapons on the front line and was prepared to use them.

### **A. Soviet Union**

The Soviet Union successfully tested its first nuclear weapon in 1949 as part of efforts to match the military might of its new archrival, the United States. Its arsenal of warheads grew rapidly in the following years, peaking at 45,000. That the United States and the Soviet Union both possessed complete second-strike capability was a crucial reason the Cold War remained “cold” throughout the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The proxy conflicts, including the Korean War, Cuban Missile Crisis, Vietnam War, and Soviet–Afghan War, were limited to the regional level also because of the rigid balance of the two sides' nuclear capabilities—the so-called “nuclear peace” proposed by political scientist Kenneth Waltz (Waltz, 2018).

### **B. United Kingdom**

The United Kingdom became the third nuclear power in 1952, motivated by a desire to possess its own deterrence to the Soviet threat; the United States had not wanted to share its nuclear technology with the British. The country had also wanted to retain its superpower status and viewed joining the nuclear club as a key step toward that goal. In 2016,

even under significant financial difficulties, the British government approved the 31-billion-pound renewal of the country's triad nuclear weapon system in a landslide vote across party lines of 472–117 (BBC, 2016: Jul 19).

### **C. France**

With similar reasons as the United Kingdom, France developed and tested its own nuclear weapon in 1960. The French government still maintains a nuclear arsenal.

### **D. China**

At the beginning of the Cold War, China faced the prospect of a US invasion from the Taiwan Strait and Korean Peninsula while also monitoring for Soviet advances from the north. To deter both the United States and the Soviets, China successfully tested its first nuclear weapon in 1964. In the following years, China began to normalize its relations with the United States and openly split with the Soviet Union. China was the first country to claim “no first use” of a nuclear weapon.

### **E. Israel**

Israel is believed to have possessed nuclear weapons since the 1960s. In order to avoid a nuclear arms race in the Middle East, it has exercised a strategy of ambiguity in admitting whether it possesses nuclear capabilities. Israel has promised not to be the first country to use nuclear weapons in the region. In recent years, Iran has sought to develop its own nuclear capabilities, aiming to deter a possible Israeli attack.

### **F. India**

India successfully tested its first nuclear weapon in 1974. India

insisted that it was developing the arms for peaceful purposes and derided the Non-Proliferation Treaty as a new form of colonialism. Along with China, India has declared a “no first use” policy.

## **G. Pakistan**

The then-head of Pakistan's nuclear program once said: “We'll eat grass but build the bomb.” (Lodhi, 2017). Facing its long-term enemy India, Pakistan became a nuclear power in 1998. In 2017, while the world worried about North Korea's latest nuclear test, Pakistan's defense minister stated in a TV interview that his country was ready to use a nuclear weapon against India (Keck, 2017).

Based on these brief histories and the cross analysis in Table 2, this research proposes three main implications of countries achieving nuclear armament.

First, developing nuclear weaponry is highly expensive and time-consuming. Countries decided to devote large resources to create and maintain nuclear weapons because they were facing an existential military threat from an enemy country. The United States was trying to beat Germany to the bomb; the Soviet Union was seeking to balance US domination; the UK and France were defending themselves from the Soviet Union's penetration into Europe; China was looking to survive the US–Soviet dual; India aimed to counterbalance China; and Pakistan wanted to deter India. Post-WWII, after obtaining nuclear weapons, none of these countries have used them on their supposed enemies.

Second, the nature of nuclear weapons buildups can thus be considered defensive. Once these countries became nuclear powers, their search for a bedrock of national security ended immediately. There were no moves to use a nuclear weapon offensively, with the threat of doing so only causing more insecurity and the projection of mass destruction bringing only

disaster. This is why China and India both declared “no first use” policies. The original purpose of nuclear armament is self-preservation.

**Table 2: Cross Analysis of States with Nuclear Weapons**

County*	Motivation for Armament	Method of Armament	Post-Armament Developments
United States, 1945 (Trinity)	To defeat Nazi Germany in WWII	Manhattan Project; Einstein; Oppenheimer led Western scientists	Dropped two nuclear bombs on Japan <u>No use since</u>
Soviet Union, 1949 (First Lightning)	Deterrence for the United States	Spying intelligence from the US; Soviet and German scientists.	Achieved a balance of power with the United States <u>Never used</u>
United Kingdom, 1952 (Hurricane)	Deterrence for the Soviet Union	Support from the United States	Maintains a small stockpile <u>Never used</u>
France, 1960 (Blue Jerboa)	Deterrence for the Soviet Union	Support from the United States	Maintains a small stockpile <u>Never used</u>
China, 1964 (596)	Deterrence for the United States and Soviet Union	Chinese scientists; the Soviet Union provided no support; the United States planned to bomb the facility but did not	Maintains a small stockpile; declared a “no first use” policy <u>Never used</u>
Israel, 1966 (Never Again)	Deterrence for larger, hostile neighbors	Support from Western countries	Maintains ambiguity regarding its stockpile; declared a “no first use” policy <u>Never used; not signed the NPT**</u>
India, 1974 (Smiling Buddha)	Deterrence for China	Indian scientists	Maintains a small stockpile; declared a “no first use” policy <u>Never used; not signed the NPT</u>
Pakistan, 1998 (Chagai-I)	Deterrence for India	Support from China	Maintains a small stockpile; signed the Lahore Declaration*** <u>Never used; has not signed the NPT</u>
North Korea, 2017 (Hwasong)	Deterrence for the United States	North Korean scientists; achieved despite widespread sanctions	Called for new talks with the United States <u>Never used; has not signed the NPT</u>

Compiled by the author

\* County, First Successful Nuclear Test, Name.

\*\* NPT: Non-Proliferation Treaty.

\*\*\* Lahore Declaration is a bilateral agreement between India and Pakistan improving the regional security.

Third, rival countries possessing nuclear weapons creates a balance of power and brings relative peace to their relationship through the prospect of mutually assured destruction. The United States and Soviet Union restrained themselves from using nuclear arms for over 40 years. The United Kingdom, France, and other European countries reached a state of relative peace after a millennium of near-constant conflict. Pakistan and India worked together on the Lahore Declaration to secure peace in South Asia.

In sum, newly nuclear weapon-equipped countries are not part of the NPT but over time have started abiding by international norms, and so will North Korea.

After decades of effort, North Korea has finally reached the stage where it owns nuclear weapons and has the capability to deliver them globally. Accordingly, the country will stop its hitherto relentless search for a master key to national security. Now, North Korea need not be so afraid of a US invasion or of Chinese intervention in its domestic politics. It does not need to use a nuclear weapon in an attack; by merely reaching the status of nuclear power, North Korea has already established a new balance of power in Northeastern Asia.

#### **IV. Observation and Suggestion**

Based on the analysis above, this paper concludes by offering six observations and predictions regarding North Korea's future nuclear strategy, foreign policy, and political transformation.

First, North Korea's regime is determined to protect itself by possessing nuclear triad capability. Negotiations are mere means to this end. Second, South Korea is paralyzed by its ineffective domestic politics and is unable to develop a strategy toward the North that is independent from that of the US. Third, Japan is using the external threat posed by

North Korea in order to campaign for the revision of its pacifist constitution (i.e., rearmament), thereby further destabilizing regional security and relations. Fourth, China has found itself in the unusual position of defending its loyal buffer state while also witnessing a fourth neighbor (after Russia, India, and Pakistan) join the nuclear club. Fifth, the United States has admitted that North Korea's nuclear armament is unstoppable. Therefore, to maintain regional stability in East Asia, Washington is relying on the new balance of power of, essentially, Pyongyang versus the rest of the world. However, a united front in this regard is not a straightforward proposition, as many countries in East Asia have their own bilateral tensions (e.g., rows between China and Japan, South Korea and Japan, China and Taiwan, and Russia and Japan). Sixth, Russia has distanced itself from North Korea but still benefits by advancing its strategic importance in the Far East.

Tracing back the history of other nuclear states suggests that North Korea will become a more confident country going forward. Regional stability will be restored over time as countries grow used to living with a nuclear North Korea and start adopting new strategies for dealing with its regime. China has made effort to bring the market economy to North Korea for years and achieved promising progress (Reilly, 2014). The timing now is ripe for North Korea to more confidently experiment with progressive economic policies. A gradual opening-up and economic reform can be expected for North Korea in the near future.

On January 1, 2018, Kim Jong Un—for the first time—put on a Western-style suit for an address on state media, saying that he had a “nuclear button” on his desk and that he was sending a team to the Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, which was then a few months away. The following month, North Korea proposed an inter-Korea meeting—the first of its kind in 10 years (Stiles, 2018). This and the two Koreas' subsequent joint Olympic appearance are the latest signs of the normalization of the North.



The Boy Who Cried Wolf:

North Korea's Nuclear Tests and Their Implications for Regional Stability

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North Korea is not the boy who cried wolf. In fact, there was never any wolf—Pyongyang never intended to launch a nuclear attack. North Korea sought to develop nuclear weapons to secure its sovereignty, and, in 2017, it finally succeeded. The regime and the country will now step forward into a new phase of economic development; the boy will become an adult.

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# 狼來了

## 北韓核試爆以及其對區域安全的影響

賴文儀\*

### 摘 要

國際政治在二十世紀後半壟罩於美蘇核子戰爭的威脅之下。冷戰結束之後，二十一世紀到來，當大部分國家公開否定使用核子武器的可能性以及停止擴大發展相關項目之際，北韓卻急切的發展核子武器並且重複的表達使用核子武器的意願。從 2006 到 2017，北韓已經執行了六次核子武器試爆。最新的數據顯示，平壤可以投射其十倍於廣島原爆的洲際導彈於首爾、東京、關島、夏威夷，甚至抵達美國本土的西岸地區。本研究試圖回答，為何北韓急切於發展核武？世界各國如何處理第九擁核國，北韓？北韓接下來會如何處理與各國關係？經過政策與歷史分析之後，本文申論，北韓並非欺騙哭喊狼來了的男孩，北韓並沒有計畫要使用核武。正如歷史上擁有核武的國家都是出於自我防衛，北韓多年來的核計畫也是為了自身的國家安全。2017 年北韓成功發展出核武，下一步北韓將逐漸正常化，男孩會逐漸成長為大人。

關鍵詞：北韓、核試爆、核武、朝鮮半島、六邊會談

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