



# Will China be a Facilitator or a Bystander in North Korea's Denuclearization: Revisiting the DPRK-China Blood Alliance

BY  
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ISSUES & INSIGHTS

WORKING PAPER

VOL. 24, WP 1 | MARCH 2024



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# Executive Summary

*Jahee Kim*

While the DPRK-China relationship is a formal security alliance established by the DPRK-China Friendship Treaty signed in 1961, it differs from the usual asymmetric security alliance. Most of all, China's diplomatic strategy, dating back to Deng Xiaoping (邓小平) of avoiding direct confrontation with the United States and allowing itself time to build up its national strength (韬光养晦) to become a regional superpower has kept the North Korean nuclear issue from becoming a priority in Chinese foreign policy. In this vein, during the Cold War, China sought to stabilize the regional security environment more broadly through détente with the United States and improved diplomatic relations with South Korea to create a stable security environment in the region. In addition, China, which joined the NPT after its own successful nuclear tests, rejected North Korea's demand for the transfer of nuclear technology, claiming to defend the non-proliferation regime as a "responsible member" of the international community. As such, the Sino-North Korean asymmetric alliance is less likely than others to compel a response to each other's demands because the usual security-autonomy exchange formula has not been established. China's failure to provide security guarantees and North Korea's declining dependence on China have contributed to their diminishing value toward each other. The situation is further complicated by North Korea's concerns and wariness about Chinese interference in its internal affairs. The alliance treaty clearly outlines concerns about these two countries' interference in the internal affairs of the other. North Korea has been vigilant in preventing the expansion of pro-China groups among its elites. Most importantly, North Korea has also conducted numerous nuclear and missile tests to demonstrate its nuclear capabilities to the world. Dismantling the country's nuclear weapons is a challenging task, given North Korea's nuclear capabilities, which are widely accepted as a foregone conclusion. Unlike previous six-party talks, where all parties committed to the denuclearization of North Korea, Russia and China have expressed reservations about the application of tougher UN sanctions. As North Korea's nuclear program

advances, it is anticipated to take a pragmatic stance grounded in national security concerns, rather than a normative approach, and even if China tries to contain North Korea's nuclear program it will not be easy due to the fragile cohesion of the DPRK-China alliance. Thus, although China will undoubtedly be significant in forthcoming North Korean nuclear discussions, it is improbable that it will act as a normative arbitrator of anti-proliferation principles. As North Korea develops its nuclear capabilities, China's leverage is likely to diminish. Therefore, rather than negotiating a complete nuclear agreement, China will likely move toward negotiating step-by-step nuclear disarmament. South Korea should be aware of this possibility and actively encourage China to play a responsible role. The time to do so is now.

## Introduction

In October 2002, during a visit to Pyongyang by US Deputy Secretary of State James Kelly, North Korea's first vice foreign minister Kang Suk Ju admitted that North Korea was planning to develop a nuclear weapon using enriched uranium. As the international backlash against North Korea's disclosure of its nuclear program intensified, North Korea expelled IAEA inspectors, withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2003, and eventually conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, shocking the international community.

The North Korean nuclear issue, the subject of a series of on-again, off-again nuclear negotiations, has been in a quagmire since the failure of the Hanoi talks in 2019. Despite the imposition of mounting and increasingly severe sanctions, North Korea persists in its pursuit of nuclear weapons. It is currently estimated to possess enough nuclear material to produce between 20 and 60 nuclear weapons.<sup>1</sup> In 2022, North Korea publicly announced and demonstrated its status as a *de facto* nuclear state to the international community by announcing the Nuclear Policy Act. North Korea is moving toward second-strike capability by diversifying its nuclear warheads, fuel, and delivery vehicles, a threshold for US deterrence, and the threat perception of countries in the region, including the United States, is bound to increase.

Meanwhile, fatigue over the unresolved North Korean nuclear issue is widespread in the international community and there is growing insistence for China to assert its role as North Korea's sole ally and a member of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. China previously played a successful mediation role in the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear issue. But both China and Russia expressed unwillingness to tackle the issue and vetoed the extension of the scope of Security Council Resolution 2397 in May 2022. The resolution was originally adopted in 2017 in response to North Korea's missile provocations. One could contend that China has significant motivation to prevent a nuclearized North Korea, considering the potential ramifications it could lead to, such as the influx of

refugees in a contingency, and the potential escalation of a North Korea-South Korea conflict into nuclear war, which China may become trapped in.

This paper examines China's role in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue, including: China's 1) willingness and 2) ability to solve the problem. It considers whether China can exert sufficient pressure and influence on North Korea and whether China has the necessary political will to denuclearize North Korea. To test this, I will analyze the cohesion of the DPRK-China alliance using alliance and proliferation theories, investigating whether the DPRK-China alliance is a typical asymmetric alliance of security-autonomy exchange. If not, what factors contribute to the absence of such an exchange? This paper also examines the differences in threat perceptions and political objectives between North Korea and China at the time of signing of the Sino-North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation, and Mutual Assistance. The features and limitations of the treaty are introduced to support the argument that this gap between North Korea's and China's perceptions has been a stumbling block in the North Korean nuclear negotiations.

## Is the DPRK-China Alliance a Typical Asymmetric Alliance?: Absence of Security-Autonomy Exchange

How did North Korea develop nuclear weapons despite opposition from the international community? It is widely believed that nuclear states generally refrain from proliferating their nuclear weapons and technologies to other countries, even to allies. This is because doing so can lead to a decrease in the patron's status and influence over their allies.<sup>2</sup> Furthermore, the development of nuclear weapons by an ally may lead to regional nuclear proliferation and instability, increasing the probability of entrapment in an undesirable conflict.

Nicholas Miller<sup>3</sup> argues that the US successfully restrained its allies with the threat of American sanctions toward Taiwan and South Korea in 1970s. And if the security guarantor has economic and technical influence over the ally, alliance coercion would be much more effective. Gene Gerzhoy<sup>4</sup> also

<sup>1</sup> Mary Beth D. Nikitin, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons and Missile Programs," *US Congressional Research Service (CRS) Report*, April 14, 2023, <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/IF10472.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew Kroenig, "Importing the Bomb: Sensitive Nuclear Assistance and Nuclear Proliferation," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, Vol. 53, No. 2, pp. 161-180.

<sup>3</sup> Nicholas L. Miller, "The Secret Success of Nonproliferation Sanctions," *International Organization*, Vol. 68, No.4, 2014, pp 913-944.

<sup>4</sup> Gene Gerzhoy, "Alliance Coercion and Nuclear Restraint: How the United States Thwarted West Germany's Nuclear Ambitions," *International Security*, Vol. 39, No.4, 2015, pp. 91-129.

contends that abandonment risk and fear prevent an ally's nuclear development.

Studies have also shown that alliance security commitments have a deterrent effect on nuclear proliferation. Lanozka<sup>5</sup> holds that alliances are a valuable instrument for deterring nuclear proliferation only if the patron offers robust security guarantees, and if the protégé encounters uncertainties such as conventional redeployment, the patron must offer a new bargain to increase the credibility of the security guarantee.

To sum up, academics widely consider alliances to have the potential to deter nuclear proliferation through alliance coercion or security assurance. Specific factors, including power balance between allies, alignment of national interests, and level of security dependencies, impact the outcome of proliferation. It cannot be assured that alliances alone will prevent proliferation completely. Based on previous studies and arguments mentioned above, this analysis will explore the applicability of the dynamics between alliances and non-proliferation to the alliance between DPRK and China.

### **Insufficient Security Guarantees from a Formal Treaty Alliance**

As argued in the literature, allies leverage their superior position to pressure other states to relinquish nuclear weapons or deter nuclear development through a variety of security assurances, such as extended deterrence and nuclear sharing. However, the extent of China's pressure and assurance toward North Korea remains uncertain.

Jaewon Lee<sup>6</sup> argues that the US succeeded in restraining ROK from developing its own nuclear weapons while China failed to do it. The US has the ability and willingness to provide a hard security commitment to ROK as well as economic and social assistance, described as soft commitment. However, China has been reluctant to get deeply involved in North Korea's internal affairs, in line with the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries. It has therefore contributed to the maintenance of North Korean society through

diplomatic, economic, and social exchanges and assistance.

Economic support alone may not provide sufficient leverage to halt North Korea's nuclear proliferation. In this regard, China's participation in UN sanctions over the continued development of North Korea's nuclear program and the disruption of Sino-North Korean trade due to the COVID-19 pandemic have further limited its leverage over North Korea.

How has military cooperation between North Korea and China developed? After the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule in 1945, military cooperation between North Korea and China began in November 1945. North Korean political forces provided weapons, strategic materials, and rear bases to support the Chinese revolution. At the same time, the Chinese Communist Party ordered Korean cadres and soldiers from the northeast to enter North Korea to support the "Korean revolution." In addition, the North Korean political forces and the CCP established close military cooperation during the founding of the Republic of Korea and the Chinese Civil War.<sup>7</sup> Thus, the process of the founding of North Korea and China was not only carried out internally but also in the context of military cooperation between North Korea and China. Later, during the Korean War, the Chinese People's Liberation Army was sent to support North Korea, and after the armistice was signed in 1953, Chinese troops were gradually withdrawn from the Korean peninsula between 1954 and 1958. There has been no significant military cooperation between the two countries since the 1960s, and US intelligence officials even evaluated that China's primary political objective is to prevent the collapse of North Korea, making it unlikely that Beijing will honor its military assistance commitments to the DPRK.<sup>8</sup> North Korea signed an aviation cooperation agreement with Russia to jointly operate search and rescue missions since 2015.<sup>9</sup> However, there are no joint exercises with China to enhance peacetime deterrence. In response to the strengthening ties between South Korea, the United States, and Japan, the possibility of North Korea-China-Russia ties has emerged in recent years. The Russian ambassador to North Korea has suggested joint military exercises between North

<sup>5</sup> Alexander Lanozka, *Atomic Assurance: The Alliance Politics of Nuclear Proliferation*, New York: Cornell University Press, 2018.

<sup>6</sup> Jaewon Lee, "Alliance Security Commitments and Nuclear Proliferation: Case studies of the ROK-US Alliance and the DPRK-China Alliance," *Journal of International Area Studies*, vol. 32, no.2, pp. 2023, pp 117-140.

<sup>7</sup> 김선호, "해방 이후 북·중 군사협력관계의 형성과 '혁명'의 경계 - 북한의 중국내전 지원과 군대창설을 중심으로," 『군사』 no.102, pp. 115 - 150.

<sup>8</sup> National Security Archive, "China: Potential response to Korean Contingencies," *DIA Special Report*, Jan. 31, 1994. [China: Potential Response to Korean Contingencies, DIA Special Report, Jan. 31, 1994 \(Secret\) | National Security Archive \(gwu.edu\)](https://www.gwu.edu/~nsaia/NSAEBD/NSAEBD001/1990s/19940131china.htm).

<sup>9</sup> Voice of America, "Russia, North Korea sign aviation cooperation agreement," Sept. 5, 2015, <https://www.voakorea.com/a/2948172.html>



Korea, China, and Russia.<sup>10</sup> However, experts caution that the situations and dynamics of the three countries are different, which may lead to friction and disagreements.<sup>11</sup> As North Korea-China relations have focused on strengthening economic linkages, the bonds of military cooperation have gradually loosened. It can be concluded that the alliance's efforts to prevent nuclear proliferation through security assurances have lost momentum.

However, one could argue against this view. Recent media and intelligence reports suggest that North Korea is using stolen cryptocurrencies to develop nuclear weapons.<sup>12</sup> This has become the only way to obtain foreign currency for a country where tighter sanctions have prevented it from sending workers abroad and exporting goods. To withdraw these virtual currencies, they have to go through a mixing service or a bank, which is not easy due to UN sanctions. As a result, North Korea is using Chinese banks to cash them out, and there are many who believe that China is indirectly supporting North Korea. In this way, China is creating an indirect military support effect by providing North Korea's economic conduit.

### **DPRK's Concern Regarding China's Exertion of Political Influence**

Avery Goldstein<sup>13</sup> argues that states developed nuclear weapons not only to enhance military security, but also to protect their political autonomy from neighboring powers as well as from the alliance. James D. Morrow<sup>14</sup> also contended that nations have two options for strengthening its security: building arms or forming alliances. Both options are costly since building arms requires enormous economic cost. In an asymmetric security alliance, security guarantees are mostly exchanged for political autonomy. The weaker state must abandon its interests that conflict with those of the ally.

If so, weaker countries have to then choose between the two options, and simple economic logic is not enough to weigh the costs of building up arms

against the costs of ensuring security through alliances. It is vital to consider the domestic political costs of each option. The advantages of political propaganda in terms of enhancing unity among its citizens and stabilizing the regime must also be considered. The balance of power within the party, government, and military, as well as the relationship with leadership, can impact a state's decisions regarding nuclear development. Considering these factors, weaker non-nuclear states might opt to develop their own nuclear capabilities instead of seeking alliance.

North Korea has always been cautious of Chinese involvement in its internal affairs, to the extent of including mutual respect for sovereignty in the two countries' alliance treaty. Following the 1956 Sectarian Incident, North Korea removed domestic pro-Chinese officials, and the fact that there has not been a single pro-Chinese ambassador to China since then shows how concerned North Korea is. The editorial on the front page of the June 26, 2014, *Rodong Sinmun* says that the power of great ideas is inexhaustible and that neither the imperialists' strong-arm tactics nor the pressure of the great powers has been able to subdue the people of North Korea, under the leadership of the great leaders Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il. The imperialist here refers to the United States, but the great power ultimately refers to China.<sup>15</sup>

Several scholars say that North Korea concealed its development of nuclear weapons by disguising it as a peaceful use of nuclear energy, such as electricity generation. The main reasons for this were fear of retaliation from the United States, South Korea, and Japan, and to avoid a possible backlash from China and the Soviet Union.<sup>16</sup> Eventually North Korea chose to develop a nuclear program in secret, eventually revealed by IAEA inspections in 1992-1993.

### **China's Lack of Political Interest in North Korean Nonproliferation**

<sup>10</sup> *Financial Times*, "Russia propose joint naval drills with North Korea and China," Sept. 5, 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/807b232b-1652-4574-8368-ad7ced8d66d4>

<sup>11</sup> Voice of America, "Experts: 'Hard to see "China's constructive role" in DPRK-Russia military cooperation,'" Nov. 10, <https://www.voakorea.com/a/7349340.html>.

<sup>12</sup> *The Wall Street Journal*, "How North Korea's Hacker Army Stole \$3 Billion in Crypto, Funding Nuclear Program," June 11, 2023, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/how-north-koreas-hacker-army-stole-3-billion-in-crypto-funding-nuclear-program-d6fe8782>.

<sup>13</sup> Avery Goldstein, *Deterrence and Security in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: China, Britain, France and the Enduring Legacy of the Nuclear Revolution*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2000.

<sup>14</sup> James D. Morrow, "Arms versus Allies: trade-offs in the search for security" *International Organization*, Vol. 47, Issue 2, 1993, pp. 207-233.

<sup>15</sup> 서경경, "북중관계의 새로운 변화와 동맹의 딜레마," 『성균차이나브리프』 제 3 권 1 호, pp. 39-45.

<sup>16</sup> 유호열, "북핵문제와 북한의 대응," 『국제평화』 제 4 권 1 호, 2007, p. 47.

Instead of striving to establish a secure regional setting by reinforcing North Korea's security, China has sought to create a peaceful regional environment by improving Sino-US and Sino-South Korean relations more broadly. The US-China détente in 1970s and China-ROK normalization of relationship signals to North Korea that the DPRK-China blood alliance no longer shares a common enemy and threat perception.

Moreover, the United States is a rival of both China and North Korea, but the United States' threat perception is quite different toward the two countries. Despite their growing technological, economic, and security rivalry, the US and China do not see each other as "enemies" in their respective strategic documents, but rather as competitors or potential threats. During the Sino-Soviet conflict in the late 1950s and early 1960s over the interpretation of orthodox Marxism, the two countries' different views of the United States also had a profound impact on the conflict between the two countries.<sup>17</sup> China took a practical approach toward the US during the period. North Korea, on the other hand, has long characterized and denounced the United States and South Korea as enemies since the Korean War.<sup>18</sup> The two countries' discrepancies in threat levels and policy priorities reduce leverage over allies.

In the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping led China to focus on economic development through implementing the policy under the spirit of Dokuang Yangkai (韜光養晦) which advocates for quiet waiting and skill-building without revealing oneself. Since 1953, China has waged so-called "economic warfare" both internally and externally, with five-year economic plans and the creation and publication of the Science and Technology Roadmap to 2050.

In the context of escalating US-China technological and economic competition, China's preference is likely to maintain the status quo as North Korea's significance in Chinese policy has diminished.

### Significance and Limitation of Sino-DPRK Mutual Assistance Treaty

As they fought the Korean War together, North Korea and China became de facto security allies, and

signed the North Korea-China Friendship Treaty on July 11, 1961, to document their security alliance. It is reasonable to view the North Korea-China relationship as a security alliance based on the North Korea-China Friendship Treaty because the Treaty includes security cooperation and remains in force today. Article 2 of the treaty includes security cooperation, stating that if one of the parties is subjected to armed aggression by any country or a coalition of countries and is placed in a state of war, the other party will do everything in its power to provide military and other assistance without delay:

The Contracting Parties undertake jointly to adopt all measures to prevent aggression against either of the Contracting Parties by any state. In the event of one of the Contracting Parties being subjected to the armed attack by any state or several states jointly and thus being involved in a state of war, the other Contracting Party shall immediately render military and other assistance by all means at its disposal.

The treaty's centerpiece, Article 2, which provides for "automatic intervention" in the event of a dispute between them, is regarded as a strong guarantee of security between the two countries. However, the treaty has its limitations. In contrast to the North Korea-Soviet Union treaty of friendship and cooperation signed in the same period in 1961, the North Korea-China alliance treaty does not designate a hypothetical "common enemy." An alliance is a means of countering the threat of an enemy, and a common enemy is a prerequisite for its formation. Scholars suggest that alliances formed during wartime exhibit more characteristics of a coalition than those formed during peacetime.<sup>19</sup> The North Korea-China alliance was formed during the Korean War and Cold War, and is considered a wartime alliance. Unlike peacetime alliances, it lacks the ability to deter aggression, preclude conflict, and exercise restraint. Scholars argue that alliances formed during the wartime are more "coalition-like" than peacetime alliances. The North Korea-China Alliance is also a wartime alliance formed against the backdrop of the Korean War and Cold War ideological rivalry, and it lacks the deterrence of aggression, preclusion, and restraint of peacetime

<sup>17</sup> 한상준, "1960년대 초반 북중관계 밀착 연구," 『중국근현대사연구』 제 94 집, 2022.6, pp. 95-120, <https://doi.org/10.29323/mchina.2022.6.94.95>.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen M. Walt, *the Origins of Alliance*, Cornell University Press, 1990.

<sup>19</sup> Glenn H. Snyder, "Alliance Theory: A Neorealist first cut," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 44, Issue 2, 1990, pp.103-123.

alliances.

Article 7 of the treaty also prevents a country from abrogating the treaty by stipulating that it will remain in force unless there is a bilateral agreement to amend or abrogate it.

The present Treaty is subject to ratification and shall come into force on the day of exchange of instruments of ratification, which will take place in Pyongyang. The present Treaty will remain in force until the Contracting Parties agree on its amendment or termination. Done in duplicate in Peking on the eleventh day of July, nineteen sixty-one, in the Chinese and Korean languages, both texts being equally authentic.

The DPRK-China Friendship Treaty originated from the Sino-Soviet conflict, although it was presented as a response to a perceived threat from capitalist states like the United States, South Korea and Japan. At the time, China was grappling with the Sino-Soviet conflict and the China-India border dispute, leading them to propose a friendship treaty to North Korea and Vietnam as a means to stabilize the border dispute. North Korea, having received security support from both China and the Soviet Union, was concerned about losing this support due to the Sino-Soviet conflict. Therefore, it entered into a treaty with China that also covered security assistance.<sup>20</sup>

However, it is difficult to regard the DPRK-China relationship as a typical asymmetric alliance between a patron and protégé. It diverges from such alliances in which a powerful state and a less powerful state exchange autonomy and security assistance. In line with the détente between the US and China, North and South Korea also attempted to engage in dialogue for the first time since the Korean War, issuing a joint statement on July 4, 1972 to create an atmosphere of reconciliation. Given the changed security landscape in the region, North Korea prioritized enhancing its military capabilities and announced the “Jaju-rosun,” which means to take charge of their own security. During the 1970s détente period, North Korea aimed to ensure its independence from China and has not relied on Chinese security aid ever since.

## China's Technical Assistance: From Constraint to Passive Bystander

In the 1950s and 1960s, the United States and the Soviet Union competitively distributed nuclear technology to friendly countries as a political favor in the name of peaceful use of nuclear energy. North Korea was one of the recipients of nuclear technology from the Soviet Union and, as a founding member of the United Institute for Nuclear Research (UINR), in Dubna, Russia, was given the opportunity to acquire nuclear technology. Based on those technologies, North Korea has built nuclear physics research centers and received a small experimental nuclear reactor from the Soviet Union in 1965. North Korea was a founding member of the UINR, but its contribution to the construction and maintenance of the laboratory was 0.05%, the lowest of any participating country, along with Albania and Mongolia. North Korea did not even possess the basic infrastructure to build a nuclear facility, and it would have been very costly to host one. Therefore, from the Soviet perspective, there was no reason for North Korea to be considered a priority for nuclear technology assistance.

Under Eisenhower, the United States repeatedly mentioned the possibility of using tactical nuclear weapons and in 1958 these were deployed in South Korea, creating a steady stream of nuclear threats to North Korea. North Korea realized that it would need more than Soviet assistance to develop its own nuclear program. On October 16, 1964, China successfully conducted a nuclear test at the Lop Nor site in Xinjiang. On the same day, Khrushchev, who had strongly opposed providing North Korea with nuclear weapons, was removed as General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. North Korea, greatly encouraged by the success of China's nuclear test, congratulated the Chinese Academy of Sciences, which conducted the test, and hailed it as a brilliant manifestation of the Chinese people's revolutionary will and spirit of self-renewal.<sup>21</sup> Kim Il Sung then sent a delegation to Beijing to ask for assistance with North Korea's nuclear program. He reportedly wrote to Mao Zedong, arguing that China and North Korea were blood brothers and should share the technology to produce nuclear weapons.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>20</sup> 이상숙, “북중우호조약 60 년과 그 현재적 함의,” 『Global GK 논평』 2021.7., [http://www.eai.or.kr/m/research\\_view.asp?intSeq=20676&code=64&menu=program](http://www.eai.or.kr/m/research_view.asp?intSeq=20676&code=64&menu=program).

<sup>21</sup> 『노동신문』, 1964.10.21.

<sup>22</sup> 김보미, “북한 핵프로그램의 시작과 성장,” 『통일정책연구』 제 28 권, 1 호, 2019, pp 197.

But Mao Zedong firmly rejected this idea, and the Chinese Foreign Ministry made it clear that a small country like North Korea did not need nuclear weapons. During the 1970's, North Korea proceeded with its own nuclear program, which included uranium production and fuel rod fabrication with the support and aid from Soviet and Chinese technicians. But the Soviets and Chinese became suspicious of North Korean intentions and eventually withdrew their technical advisors.<sup>23</sup>

After the successful nuclear test, China focused on the importance of nuclear non-proliferation. During the 1970s, despite the improvement of inter-Korean relations and a détente between the US and China, North Korea maintained its goal of achieving unification by force. Conversations about deploying Chinese tactical nuclear weapons in North Korea as a countermeasure to US tactical nuclear deployments were held but ultimately did not come to fruition.<sup>24</sup> Like the Soviet Union, China's pursuit of détente with the United States during the Cold War prevented it from actively supporting its ally, North Korea, against security threats. Additionally, North Korea's isolationism, aggression, and limited international presence have resulted in it being of relatively low policy importance.

However, what we should note is that North Korea's nuclear capability is now near completion. While it is not yet guaranteed to have ICBM with re-entry technology capable of targeting the United States, a nuclear attack on the whole of the Korean Peninsula is now a plausible scenario. Lanozka argues that dismantling existing nuclear armaments is far more difficult than deterring a state with nuclear potential, and history has shown this to be true. South Africa is the lone nation to have relinquished its nuclear capability without any quid pro quo.

This implies that the alliance's stance may vary, depending on North Korea's status and capabilities as a nuclear power. For example, when President de Gaulle decided to create France's own nuclear arsenal and leave NATO in the 1950s, the United States responded negatively and actively attempted to reverse the decision through diplomatic and policy efforts. Once France gained the ability to deliver a limited number of nuclear weapons via surface-to-

surface missiles to Moscow during the early 1970s, the US changed its stance toward French nuclear forces promptly. The US discreetly facilitated French Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBMs) early deployment.

During the Six-Party Talks, all five participating nations shared the common belief that North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons should be discouraged, despite their differing interests and the varying degrees of threat posed by North Korea. The adoption of UN Security Council resolutions to impose sanctions on North Korea in the aftermath of its missile launch in July 2006 and its nuclear test in October of the same year is further evidence of this shared view.<sup>25</sup> North Korea's efforts to reconfigure the Six-Party Talks into a bilateral negotiating framework with the US were based on its perception that the Six-Party Talks, including China and Russia, were not favorable to North Korea. This contrasts with the current opposition of China and Russia to the imposition of further sanctions through the UN Security Council resolution.

On April 15, 2012, North Korea held a parade at Kim Il Sung Square, showcasing a KN-08 intercontinental ballistic missile. It was suspected that the transporter-erector-launchers (TELs) used to carry the missile were manufactured by a Chinese company. The Chinese government promptly refuted the accusations; however, the matter was ultimately resolved upon finding that the Transporter Erector Launchers (TELs) had been illicitly transported with disguised end-user identities.<sup>26</sup> This event sparked inquiries into China's endorsement of North Korea's nuclear advancement and the violation of imposed sanctions.

In addition to its development of nuclear technology, North Korea is also acquiring nuclear-related skills through a variety of means, including research conducted by North Korean scholars overseas. These scholars are obtaining skills in nuclear physics, either directly or indirectly, by studying and researching related technologies at universities and institutions abroad. Of the countries receiving North Korean scholars, China has hosted the largest number. They even engage on research collaboration with Chinese researchers resulting co-authored publication and

<sup>23</sup> Philip Baxter, Justin Hastings, Philseo Kim, Man-sung Yim, "Assessing Intangible technology transfer in North Korea's nuclear international collaboration networks," *Strategic Trade Review*, Vol.9, Issue 10, 2023, p 62.

<sup>24</sup> 김보미, "북한 핵프로그램의 시작과 성장, 『통일정책연구』 제 28 권, 1 호, 2019, p 203.

<sup>25</sup> 후나바시 요이치, "6 자회담, 각국의 이해갈등과 다자주의," 『평화포럼 21』, 2004.

<sup>26</sup> Jeffrey Lewis, "That Ain't My Truck: Where North Korea Assembled Its Chinese Transporter-Erector-Launchers," 38 North, February 3, 2014.

technological know-how was likely transferred and it provide the effects of mitigating sanctions.<sup>27</sup>

It is evident that Russia and China previously had an unfavorable view of North Korea's nuclear advancements and supply of related technologies during the Cold War. However, their stance became less rigid as North Korea's nuclear program progressed. The nuclear powers' policies or positions concerning the nuclear weapons capabilities of their allies and friends have been heavily reliant on calculative, rather than normative, considerations at certain points and at certain levels of allied nuclear capabilities, making it difficult to find consistency.

## **Conclusion**

There is much debate about whether nuclear states have failed to prevent their allies from developing nuclear weapons, or whether they have not done enough.

Previous research suggests that nuclear states will oppose acquisition of nuclear weapons by their allies because of their status as a nuclear power and their diminished influence over their allies. It aims to prevent nuclear proliferation in line with the principle of upholding non-proliferation norms. This is important as their proliferation may trigger a nuclear proliferation domino effect in the region. Despite the reasons and motivations for stopping an ally's nuclear proliferation, nuclear powers have still transferred nuclear technology to allies, flouted nonproliferation norms, and implicitly accepted allies' nuclear weapons.

It has been observed that in the absence of positive security assurances (hard assurances) to allies, such as the provision of a nuclear umbrella, or where allies have already developed a certain level of nuclear capability to build their own defense, the likelihood of a nuclear state being able to coerce or entice allies becomes very limited.

In particular, the alliance treaty's automatic intervention clause is limited to wartime. The treaty also stipulates mutual respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, reflecting North Korea's fear of Chinese political influence. North Korea's nuclear development is expected to consolidate the country's political and military independence. In other words, the window of opportunity for China to influence the negotiations on denuclearization is closing as North Korea's nuclear program continues to develop.

On top of that, if an ally's proliferation is not among the nuclear power's top policy priorities, or if the ally's collapse would lead to a diminution of the nuclear power's sphere of influence, the nuclear power is more inclined to be tolerant. In essence, the political impact of an ally's nuclear developments on its nuclear power will determine the nuclear state's behavior, and we can thus infer China's future behavior.

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<sup>27</sup> Philip Baxter, Justin Hastings, Philseo Kim, Man-sung Yim, "Assessing Intangible technology transfer in North Korea's nuclear international

collaboration networks," *Strategic Trade Review*, Vol.9, Issue 10, 2023, pp.51-78.



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