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Jacob Chobanian

Chapman University, choba100@mail.chapman.edu

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Jacob Chobanian

Professor Trokkos

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Foreign Policy Brief: North Korean Nuclear Weapons

Currently there is a potentially dangerous situation that has been developing in North Korea for over twenty plus years with the controversial topic of nuclear weaponry. Dating all the way back to 1993 when North Korea committed its' first of many offenses and raising red flags of eventually becoming a global threat when they refused to allow access to inspectors of The International Atomic Energy Agency to viewing two of their two nuclear waste storage sites (CNN). Eventually the regime caved in and kept their participation in the Non-Proliferation Treaty in order to avoid an attack and to continue their nuclear developments in secret. Following the agreement made by the United States in 1994 that stated that North Korea pledged to freeze and eventually dismantle it's old, graphite-moderated nuclear reactors in exchange for international aid to build two new light-water nuclear reactors (CNN) it was later exposed in 2002 by George W. Bush that North Korea had admitted to operating a nuclear weapon program all of those years in a direct violation of the treaty. With each offense and violation that they continue to commit, we only respond with mercy and forgiveness despite the fact that they continue to make more advancements nuclear wise, and are bold enough to show the world of their new developments. After North Korea withdrew from the NPT back in 2003, they have shown no signs of slowing down after they tested a multitude of varying weapons ranging from long range missiles, nuclear tests, miniaturized nuclear weapons, hydrogen bombs, and lastly the

most imposing being the development of intercontinental ballistic missiles (CNN). It is abundantly clear that North Korea has intentions of exercising its new arsenal at some point and more probable than not the United States is atop their list of potential targets. Even their National Defense Commission issued a statement that “the tests and launches will feed into an ‘upcoming all-out action’ targeting the United States, ‘the sworn enemy of the Korean people,’ (CNN). They show no indications of fear from the repercussions that they could face in the event of an intentional or even accidental launch of any weapon of any kind at the United States or any other target of their choice, which shows that the dictatorship should be approached with extreme caution as they do not fret in the face of death and destruction. Each and every day that passes, “North Korea is increasing its’ weapon grade materials and their capacity to make more by doubling the size of its Yongbyon uranium enrichment plant” (Tobey, Foreign Policy). Despite all of this evidence of expansions and creation of new weaponry, a majority of the United States “for years, has groaned at North Korea’s seemingly unfounded threats, despite the signs of growing nuclear momentum within the militarized country” (Young & Law, News.com.au). If we continue to sit back and play an uninvolved role in this developing matter, then the results could not only be catastrophic but fatal to millions of innocent civilians.

The repercussions from not dealing with this issue head on are endless, as not only is human life at stake, but the domino effect that will take place if we continue to allow North Korea to develop these weapons will have a global impact. Aside from the immediate effects of North Korea nearly doubling their uranium enrichment plant according to the International Atomic Energy Agency, the “Institute for Science and International Security both estimate that with this newly enlarged plant that they will become capable of producing enough material for four to six weapons in only eighteen months” (Tobey, 2017). If this is true, then that would translate to

North Korea's nuclear arsenal to approach roughly around the count of one hundred by the year 2024, which comes with a number of risks and fears. With this more sizable arsenal, then perhaps they could feel as if they all of a sudden now have a heavier hand of power resulting in a more aggressive posture on global issues as they would have nuclear credibility. Such a nation should never have the access to that sheer amount of nuclear capabilities for obvious reasons as well as the enormous responsibilities attached to watching over this grade of weaponry. The risk of an accidental or unauthorized launch only sky-rockets with each weapon created as they are not used to having this grand amount of responsibility. Along with the potential power that they could have over other nations, the temptation to sell these materials and technology can increase especially with North Korea's past of being "known for selling weapons to Libya and a plutonium production reactor to Syria" (Tobey, 2017). Lastly and potentially the most dangerous route that can be developed from North Korea in the near future is the more frequent testing of these weapons only allows for improvements and advancements in their technology. In other words, the continual military testing could eventually "lead to the creation and capability of smaller, lighter, and more powerful weapon designs and expand the range of its intercontinental ballistic missiles" (Tobey, 2017). The ability to fire missiles intercontinentally is one of the major factors that differentiates the United States from its enemies, and if that technology were to fall into the wrong hands then the fierce tension of conflict would eventually snap resulting in an all-out nuclear war in which there will be no winners. Moving away from the blunt damage that these developments could lead to, there are a number of actors both domestic and international who all have some form of interest in this situation through acts that must be kept intact in order to keep the peace. China is perhaps one of the bigger International powers that is wrapped into the North Korean issue, through the American "pivot" policy that

“strengthens US political, economic, and military participation in and commitment to Asia, both through a host of bilateral dialogues with China that cover a wide range of economic and strategic issues and through a variety of hedging measures designed to shape China's rise, limit the effects of assertive Chinese policies, and assure that China's rise will not result in regional instability” (Snyder, 2013). On the other side however, China is arguably North Korea’s greatest ally which places a tremendous amount of pressure on them as they are stuck in the middle of this ongoing conflict which could easily escalate to an all-out war. This being said, China continues to attempt to be the mediator between the two nations and deter them from entering an officially declared war but if it were to reach that point then China must keep its allegiance to North Korea as “China wants to reclaim its status as sort of the predominant power in east Asia, and in order to create that sort of perception they have to stand up for any ally in the region” (Price, 2017). With China openly declaring them siding with North Korea in the event of the escalating tension, it has to be taken into consideration how valuable China is to the United States in terms of the exports they produce annually and how drastically that would affect the economy if they were to stop their trading all together. On top of their economic contributions, they have also been known in the past in aiding the United States in stopping other foreign lands from obtaining nuclear weapons such as Iran and possibly saving millions of lives. It is safe to say that keeping China on our side is by far the most beneficial option both economically and strategically as they have proven time and time again that they are trustworthy and crucial to the survival of our country. In addition to China, another International actor that neighbors North Korea is in fact South Korea who have been identified as a major non-NATO ally to the United States. Being much closer to these weapons, they have much more to fear and have developed their own missiles in response to Kim Jong Un’s display of weaponry and open threats to the rest

of the world. With the election of new South Korean President Moon Jae-In however, the possibility of defusing this entire situation has become much more realistic as he is trying to return to the “sunshine policy” in which he means that they will “lead the diplomatic efforts involving multiple parties, which will lead to the complete abandonment of the North Korean nuclear program, and bring the relationship between South and North to peace, economic cooperation and mutual prosperity” (CNN). Moon was involved in the original sunshine policy has enough experience on how to deal with this issue and will remain a valuable asset to deescalating this ongoing tension with North Korea. Much like China, South Korea is another major contributor of trade and manufacturing for the United States and is key to our economic stability and must be continued to be protected by US forces in order to maintain that relationship. On the domestic scale, there are a few groups involved in North Korea’s weapon developments such as the Korean Workers Development Elite, the National Defense Commission, the Ministry of the People’s Armed Forces and the Korean People’s Army, the ‘nuclear coalition’, the munitions industry, and a group of reformers and civilian enterprises” (Pinkston, 2003). Starting with the KWP, they are most likely going to side with their regimes decisions to continue the development and testing of these deadly weapons as it will ensure protection of external forces, create a number of jobs in order to build these missiles, and a high level of foreign exchange earnings. Along with them, the NDC and the Korean People’s army will most likely favor the expansion of missile capabilities as it encourages exports which in turn generates more revenue and funding for other government programs. All of these actors being considered, there is an extremely difficult and pressing matter of getting this issue resolved in order to prevent a nuclear world war, and it seems to be that the international actors and our allies will be of the biggest help in making this possible. I have taken the liberty of providing

you with a series of potential routes that you could take in the attempt of resolving this issue with North Korea and have weighed the pros and cons of each option in order to make the most effective decision.

With a number of lives and the preservation of human life being on the line, every option must be taken into consideration and evaluated to the highest degree in order to resolve this situation in a thorough way. The first option would be to take the offensive move and launch a pre-emptive strike on North Korea in the hopes that not only would their weapons be destroyed, but their wills to strike as well. If a powerful enough air assault is launched the probabilities that they would be unable to respond are rather high, however one has to take into consideration the possibility that they would be able to make some sort of response possible. There are three types of attacks that could be taken including a strike that would halt the deployment of their missiles, another air strike that would have the end goal of destroying their entire arsenal and military bases to make retaliation virtually impossible, and lastly a declaration of war on American terms. The issue with attempting to halt their missiles with a strike is that it would most likely agitate the enemy into pursuing more effective testing in order to send a missile towards American soil resulting in a potential severe loss of life. While completely destroying their arsenal seems to be a valid option, it is rather difficult as “North Korea’s program is indigenous rather than imported from abroad, the country has the know-how to replace destroyed facilities, making set-backs only temporary” (Fisher, 2017). This would mean that the chances of there being remaining missiles after the attack would be rather high and could give the government the idea that an invasion could be coming which may result in retaliation through missile strikes. Lastly, the option of declaring war is perhaps the worst option as thousands to potentially millions of lives would be lost almost guaranteed given the grade and severity of these weapons, along with North

Korea's stance of showing no fear in the face of a possible nuclear war with the United States making them even more dangerous. If conflict is trying to be avoided altogether, then it is probably in the country's best interest to take a more passive route in dealing with the North Korean regime. One way of accomplishing this could be through peaceful means of negotiations between Kim Jong Un and President Trump himself in which hopefully a resolution could be reached with no human lives lost. South Korea could also be involved in this negotiation process as the newly elected President Moon has openly sided with the United States and believes "what the United States wants is strong pressure on North Korea with cooperation from China to bring North Korea to the negotiation table to get them to scrap their nuclear programme" (Foster, 2017). The delegation would most likely have to occur on North Korea's territory do their extreme paranoia of letting outsiders into their country usually stripping them of all technology to prevent any type of information leak. With this being said however, some exceptions would have to be made if this meeting were to occur as the President cannot blindly walk into a situation with a potential enemy in a foreign land without some form of security closely watching them at all times. In the event that the time for negotiation has passed and is completely off of the table, then the other peaceful option would be to simply keep the naval perimeter that is currently around North Korea stationed there and take on the more defensive roll in order to preserve American lives. This would mean that we would need to be prepared for an incoming attack at any time and plan on neutralizing the threat while it is still in the air before it reaches the United States. I personally believe that this would be the best selection out of the options listed as if North Korea were to launch a preemptive attack on the United States, then we would be completely justified in responding with an all-out attack in the hopes of wiping out the entire North Korean government. They have been given a plethora of warnings and

opportunities to stop their weapon developments, so if it were to escalate to the point that they strike first then we will respond in the exact way we should with them having no one to blame but themselves. Along with the strategic pros of this plan, this route would most likely receive the most public outpour of support from the American People as they would feel that we must strike back simply as a form of self-defense. Not only would the North Korean regime be almost completely destroyed, but the President would gain the trust of the American population as this would be his first major act of his term and one that would be known as a defining moment in American history. All of the information facts to this date have been laid out in extreme detail in order to provide the most assistance in this extremely important decision of which action to take. This being said, I am more than confident in the President's abilities of leading this country and guiding us in the right direction starting with this nuclear North Korean dilemma.

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