

International Studies Thesis

Sino-North Korean Relations:

China tackling the North Korean dilemma under a Realist framework

Name: Tirta Utama Umbas

Student no. s1250779

International Studies

Tutor: Professor S.R. Landsberger

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## Introduction

One of the largest alliances that define the rules of international relations within the North-East Asian region is that of China and North Korea. These two particular nation-states have qualities that force other actors, regional or international to indulge in their methods or demands. Therefore with China, as an increasingly emergent global super power and North Korea as state that consistently brings the threat of nuclear and regional instability it is important to define and identify if there are any significant developments within the relationship between China and North Korea. Recently China has begun to move into territory that is far removed from the status quo, committed to a move which may antagonise North Korea as its long-time ally. This leads to a new and uncertain predicament, leading to possibly a new era of the Sino-North Korean relationship and possibly regional rule.

On 5 April 2016, the *Independent* reported that China decided to support the U.S. in backing further severe sanctions against North Korea<sup>1</sup>. This is a newly unprecedented move that indicates the changing dimensions in China's and North Korea's relationship. It is further significant that this action runs counter to China's past reactions to the international community's calls for harsh international sanctions, which is to oppose them in hopes of preferable methods of persuasion<sup>2</sup>. Thus from China's unusual action a number of questions should be asked. Why did China finally approve of harsher sanctions? What caused it to finally move in this direction after opposing North Korean sanctions after so long? Thus it is

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<sup>1</sup> Sandhu, Serina. 2016. "China Announces Sanctions Against North Korea". *The Independent*.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/asia/china-announces-sanctions-against-north-korea-a6969256.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Eleanor, Albert "The China-North Korea Relationship" ed. Beina Xu, Council on Foreign Relations, February 8 2016. <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>

imperative to research the development of China's relationship with North Korea and how it pushed China into this unusual direction despite the long alliance between the two states."

The theoretical framework that is going to be used in analysing the relationship is International Relations Theory. To be more specific it will rely on the specific IR Theory of Realism. The decision on mainly using Realism stems from previously researching a number of different IR theories which include Constructivism, English School, and Liberalism. After analysing the numerous theories, Realism appears to be the most effective in applying itself to the situation and existence of China and North Korea's relationship. This is due to a number of particular qualities that Realism possesses over the other theories.

Realism is the pre-dominant theory of International Relations, which makes it deeply ingrained within the public consciousness<sup>3</sup>. The concept of Realism essentially places the priority of political life in power and security, meaning that the main aims of the state is to pursue power and achieve security<sup>4</sup>. It can be seen why the theory is widely adopted as it places International Relations within a zero-sum game context, states with the most power govern the rules and those with less power have their security under threat. This leads to the strong presumption that whatever actions states take there is a motive or interest at stake. The inherent simplicity and structural strength of the concept allows for the creation of a motive, as expressed by Kenneth Waltz (1928-2013) "states are unitary actors with a single motive – the wish to survive"<sup>5</sup>. Thus while Realism concerns itself with power politics, the concept of security indicates the survival of the state whatever the cost. Waltz again expressed this with "states at minimum, seek their own preservation, and at maximum, drive for universal domination"<sup>6</sup>. These ideas of power, survival and security greatly resonate with China and

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<sup>3</sup> Jack Donnelly, "Chapter 2: Realism" in *Theories of International Relations*, ed. Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2005), 29

<sup>4</sup> Donnelly "Chapter 2: Realism," 30

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 41

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid* 42

North Korea's relationship. Therefore Realism remains a relevant theory that can be applied to this changing relationship. .With the concern of power and security as core concept within the theory of Realism, it is fitting to apply it to the relationship of China and North Korea and serve as the main theoretical framework.

In retrospect, other theories are deemed not reliable enough due to a number of reasons and considerations. Constructivism is focused on the importance of the identity of states, where it motivates political actions and designates the relationships with other states<sup>7</sup>. While Constructivism is a theory that is applicable to China and North Korea's relationship it lacks the structural strength and clear motivational element that Realism possesses. In terms of defining an "ally" or "enemy", applying this theory will yield strong results where if it was mainly in terms of historical development it could be effective. However in terms of a narrow mutual relationship between two long term allied states, it is apparent that not many results can be obtained due to the present distinction of friend or foe. Also Liberalism was considered, a theory that is mainly held by democratic states and which emphasises democracy, political freedom and the underlying belief that peace is the status quo<sup>8</sup>. China and North Korea's respective governmental structure causes Liberalism to be largely inapplicable and thus not very effective as a theoretical framework. Lastly the English School indicates that sovereign states form an international society which does not answer to any higher power within an anarchical setting<sup>9</sup>. The English School is similar to Realism except for the argument that while the international political system is in a state of anarchy (due to the absence of a higher authority), it is not a ruthless zero-sum pursuit of power and is more civil than Realists claim<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Christian Reus-Smit "Chapter 8: Constructivism" in Theories of International Relations, ed. Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2005), 188

<sup>8</sup> Scott Burchill "Chapter 3: Liberalism" in Theories of International Relations, ed. Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2005), 55

<sup>9</sup> Andrew Linklater "Chapter 4: The English School" in Theories of International Relations, ed. Scott Burchill and Andrew Linklater (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2005), 84

<sup>10</sup> Linklater "Chapter 4: The English School" 85

While China is presently an emerging global super power aiming to increase its role in global governance, North Korea through its belligerent actions such as missile tests defies this particular ground of the English School IR Theory. Therefore under the basis of the arguments above Realism was chosen as the main IR Theory and theoretical framework for this research.

It is worth noting that the theories above are mostly of western origin. An interesting perspective would be if it is possible to have IR theory with under national characteristics, such as a Chinese perspective. The author Hun Joon Kim explores a number of analyses regarding the possibility of whether it is possible to have IR theory with Chinese characteristics. The author outlines how on using national or particularistic approach to IR theory it must be acknowledged by as a theory, the creators must acknowledge it as connected to IR theory and it must use a systematic attempt to generalize IR subject matter<sup>11</sup>. The author proceeds to underline a number of observations regarding the possibility and arrives at the conclusions that it must: A. Have discussion on the existence of alternatives with national characteristics and is indeed effective (e.g. English School), B. Difficulty in obtaining serious empirical study which is further hindered by numerous different analyses and opinions and C. The Chinese attempting to look for another alternative to IR is not a unique phenomenon and it is in the larger attempt to move away from Western roots<sup>12</sup>. The author then discusses a number of Chinese Schools of thought in terms of Chinese alternatives such as an IR theory ingrained with specific Chinese characteristics including Chinese history, tradition, political thoughts, culture, literature, problems, or puzzles<sup>13</sup>.

In chapter 1, I will analyse and discuss the historical development within the Sino-North Korean. Identifying the creation and nature of this relationship will bring the necessary context

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<sup>11</sup> Hun Joon Kim, "Will IR Theory with Chinese Characteristics be a Powerful Alternative?" *The Chinese Journal of International Politics* (January 2016), 61

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* 64

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid* 71

and weight of this alliance. In this section I have chosen three key topics which I believe is significant in shaping the past and present direction of the Sino-North Korean relation. By applying Realism to China and North Korea's relationship it will allow us new perspective in regards to how the development of this relationship has progressed and how it by extension effects the current iteration of the relationship of China and North Korea.

In chapter 2, the main focus will be on the security implications in regards to China and North Korea's relationship. North Korea's behaviour has consistently brought concern within the region and security crises. Outlining the effects and security implications of North Korea's behaviour and its effect on China and North Korea's relationship allows for reveal of the motivations and policies that are committed by China and North Korea. It is in this section where realism plays a large role in indicating the extent of the security threats that North Korea's actions brings forth and ultimately whether or not this justifies China's recent action as the paradigm shift to China's recent actions.

In Chapter 3, I will conduct a case study of North Korea's missile tests since the beginning of 2013 and its continued belligerence within the region. Through this case study, I will reveal the reasoning and the intended cause and effect of conducting these tests. Realism will put into context North Korea's reasons for nuclear testing at this particular moment in time. It is also important to note that during the course of this research new developments continued to be set in motion, as evidenced by China's very recent backing of harsher sanctions against North Korea. Therefore newly developing events since the announcement of China's support of the sanctions will not be addressed in order to provide a clear research perspective.

## **Chapter 1: Historical Development**

A key proponent to the Sino-North Korean relationship is its historical development. It is a prime influence affecting China's policy and behaviour on North Korea. The history between the two nations has continued to shape current modern outlooks and policies between China, North Korea and the rest of the world. Due to the duration of Sino-North Korean relations, I decided to choose three main topics that I believe are crucial in understanding the past and present developments of Sino-North Korean relations. I chose the following three topics worthy of analysis: The Korean War, The Kim Dynasty, and the six party talks. By analysing these instances in the context of the Sino-North Korean relationship, I hope to provide a suitable accompanying analysis and historical background that will shed light on the origins and complexity of Sino-North Korean relations. Accompanying this analysis is the application of Realism. Using Realism a number of nuanced analyses can be discerned that may help identify the intricacies of how the relationship between these two nations has developed. This aims to provide respective motivations in terms of behaviour within the context of Sino-North Korean relations.

### **Korean War**

Due to its impact and surviving legacy, I believe that the Korean War is a major turning point within the Sino-North Korean relationship. After the fall of the Qing Dynasty (1644-1912), the Communist Party of China (1921) arose as one of the contenders for power. Kim Il-Sung (1912-1994) the future leader of North Korea joined the anti-Japanese movement in Manchuria and eventually joined the Chinese Communist forces as well in the 1940s<sup>14</sup>. This involvement from Kim proved essential as after the Chinese Communist Revolution in 1949, Kim could request crucial aid and favours during his eventual invasion of the South in the

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<sup>14</sup>Jian, Chen "Limits of the 'Lips and Teeth' Alliance: An Historical Review Chinese-North Korean Relations" in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korea Relations* (September 2003) 4



Korean Peninsula<sup>15</sup>. The Korean War, waged in 1950 until 1953 by North Korea (supported by China and the Soviet Union) and South Korea (supported by the United States) it was a political and ideological battle that reflected much of the Cold war<sup>16</sup>. Stalin and the Soviet Union supported its Communist allies the North Koreans due to the pre-conceived notion that it would be an easy victory, as the North Korean forces was battle hardened and equipment wise better prepared<sup>17</sup>. According to Ohn Chang-II through assistance with the Soviet Union the North Korean forces:

*“Were fully armed with heavy weapons and equipment supplied by the Soviet Union, well trained by the prudent guidance of Soviet military education and training advisers, greatly reinforced with the Korean soldiers and combat leadership, well-matured in the Chinese Civil War (1927-1949) period, and given a coordinated fighting plan prepared by the Soviet military war-planning advisers.”*<sup>18</sup>

The assistance by both the Soviet Union and China’s support brought great confidence towards the North Korean forces. It can be argued however that the main reason for Kim Il-Sung and the North Korean leadership to have enough forces and weapons that constituted the main North Korean offensive was based on a series of negotiations with the Chinese which can be deemed as receiving a “greenlight” for conducting the invasion<sup>19</sup>. China made an active effort in order to educate their people in the struggle of their North Korean allies. An example of this

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<sup>15</sup>Jian, Chen “Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ Alliance: An Historical Review Chinese-North Korean Relations” 4

<sup>16</sup>Chang-II, Ohn. 2010. "The Causes Of The Korean War, 1950-1953". *International Journal Of Korean Studies* XIV (2). page 19

<sup>17</sup>Chang-II, Ohn. 2010. "The Causes Of The Korean War, 1950-1953" Ibid 20

<sup>18</sup>Chang-II, Ohn. Ibid 20

<sup>19</sup>Jian, Chen “Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ Alliance: An Historical Review Chinese-North Korean Relations” Ibid 5

is the RAAK Campaign (Resisting America, Assisting Korea)<sup>20</sup>. This campaign was successful enough to influence the Chinese mentality upon North Korea and the U.S. up to six decades<sup>21</sup>. This campaign of large scale propaganda upon China's entry to the war brought mixed reception due to a combination of confusion, ignorance over Korea's proximity, and general passivity over the conflict<sup>22</sup>. China's impact and assistance to North Korea is significant as their assistance made up 260,000 troops to the North Korean War effort<sup>23</sup>. The war however ended with no decisive victor and an armistice was signed between North Korea and South Korea. This conflict was important due to its effects on the geography and solidified the relationship between China and North Korea. The aftermath of the War essentially split the Korean Peninsula into North and South and remains until the present.

Thus it is evident why the Korean War is an important key historical event in the development of the Sino-North Korean relationship. It laid the foundation to modern Sino-North Korean relationship and the Korean War remains a celebrated affair that unites the two nations. However, how does the Korean War reflect itself through realism? Using realism we can identify key actions that contribute to the initiation and conclusion of this war. North Korea's reason for invasion is derived from Kim Il Sung's desire to unite the Korean Peninsula. Thus we can identify reunification being the motivation and main interest of North Korea as the initiator of this war. Gathering allies that support North Korea's cause not only increases chances of victory but also survival in engaging the enemy. The same can be said for China and the Soviet Union, while ideology played a large part in providing assistance to the North

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<sup>20</sup> Hailong Sun, "The Chinese Portrayal of the Korean Peninsula in the Resisting America and Assisting Korea Literature of the 1950s" *Sungkyun Journal of East Asian Studies* Vol.15 No.2, 239-262 (October 2015) 239

<sup>21</sup> Hailong Sun, "The Chinese Portrayal of the Korean Peninsula in the Resisting America and Assisting Korea Literature of the 1950s" *Ibid* 241

<sup>22</sup> Hailong Sun, *Ibid* 242

<sup>23</sup> Crocker, Harry M. 2002. "Chinese Intervention In The Korean War". Bachelor, Regent's College. 30

Koreans there were other reasons for assisting North Korea. For China it was the threat of the United States that continue to supply the Kuomintang (KMT) and the possibility of an American intervention that caused China great concern<sup>24</sup>. Naturally defending the United States defending South Korea was the same as defending “American interests” and likewise China considered American intervention into the war as “constituted armed aggression against the territory of China”<sup>25</sup>.

### **The Kim Dynasty**

The role of the Kim family in governing North Korea and managing its relationship with China remains a crucial aspect within the historical development within Sino-North Korean relations. The Kim Dynasty is significant as the three generations of the Kim family has held the main leadership position of the governing party and the country. During the early period of the 1950s, while Kim Il-Sung was the main leader there was largely other members within the leadership which did not agree with his methods. The tension within the North Korean leadership caused the 1956 Crisis. The crisis involved North Korea’s top leadership and their strong disagreements regarding Kim Il-Sung’s personality cult, political purges and economic policies. In the aftermath they fled to China and requested Chinese and Soviet mediation<sup>26</sup>. Kim Il-Sung initially submitted to concessions due to China and the Soviet Union’s direct involvement but overturned them a few months later and established himself as the single most powerful leader in North Korea’s political leadership<sup>27</sup>. This proved significant as this allowed for North Korea’s ability to resist particular influences in decision making from China and the Soviet Union, placing itself in a more equal position in comparison to North

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<sup>24</sup> Yufan, Hao. Zhihai, Zhai. 1990. "China's Decision To Enter The Korean War: History Revisited". *The China Quarterly* 121: 94. 100

<sup>25</sup> Yufan, Hao. Zhihai, Zhai. 1990. "China's Decision To Enter The Korean War: History Revisited". 101

<sup>26</sup>Jian, Chen “Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ Alliance: An Historical Review Chinese-North Korean Relations” 6

<sup>27</sup>Jian, Chen “Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ Alliance: An Historical Review Chinese-North Korean Relations” in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korea Relations* (September 2003) 6

Korea's larger Communist "brothers"<sup>28</sup>. Furthermore in 1955 Kim Il-Sung introduced the Juche Ideology in which a Korean revolution must be achieved through a Korean way and must obtain complete self-reliance<sup>29</sup>. This was further strengthened in July 1961 when China and North Korea signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance establishing equality between the two "blood brothers"<sup>30</sup>.

Kim Il-Sung resorted to purges as a way to consolidate his power, including purging leaders from rival factions and intellectuals that have the possibility for dissent<sup>31</sup>. After purging rival factions since Kim Il-Sung obtained the seat of Chairman is has never changed hands ever since only renaming it to Secretary-General of the Central Committee<sup>32</sup>. Kim Il-Sung for example disliked the idea of destalinization and strongly believed the existence of a personality cult as crucial for being a leader<sup>33</sup>. However since the 1970s, Kim Il-Sung finally designated his son Kim Jong-Il as his successor<sup>34</sup>. Kim Jong-Il began to regularly appear on the Political stage and was being mould by Kim Il-Sung as his successor, this included obtaining domestic acceptance as the fledgling new leader to eventually traveling abroad to promote North Korea's new up and coming leader<sup>35</sup>. However despite the long term image building and similar personality cult being ingrained similar to Kim Il-Sung, there was bound to be resistance and there were government reorganization aim to promote Kim Jong-Il's supporters<sup>36</sup>. Hereditary

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<sup>28</sup>Jian, Chen "Limits of the 'Lips and Teeth' Alliance: An Historical Review Chinese-North Korean Relations" Ibid 6

<sup>29</sup>Jian, Chen "Limits of the 'Lips and Teeth' Alliance: An Historical Review Chinese-North Korean Relations" Ibid 5

<sup>30</sup> Jian, Chen Ibid 7

<sup>31</sup> Kim, Woojoo. 2012. "Kim Il Sung And The DPRK- USSR- PRC Triangle: The Creation Of An Asian Dynasty In A Communist State". Msc, University of Washington. 40

<sup>32</sup> Kim, Woojoo. 2012. "Kim Il Sung And The DPRK- USSR- PRC Triangle: The Creation Of An Asian Dynasty In A Communist State" 30

<sup>33</sup> Kim, Woojoo. Ibid 38

<sup>34</sup> Oh, Kong Dan. 1988. "*Leadership Change In North Korean Politics*". Santa Monica, CA: Rand. 6

<sup>35</sup> Oh, Kong Dan. 1988. "*Leadership Change In North Korean Politics*". Ibid 17

<sup>36</sup> Oh, Kong Dan. Ibid 44

succession between Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il can be seen as systematic and took a long a period of time for it to be implemented.

The Kim Dynasty, I believe initially acted as a strong benefit due to the relationship Kim Il-Sung had with the Chinese. While maintained within the succession of Kim Jong-Il, direct relationships with Chinese officials only continued to devolve particularly with the latest succession of Kim Jong Un. As such Sino-North Korean relationship effectively experiences three different eras corresponding with each specific leader. As such new security concerns may develop due to the instability of North Korea's hereditary succession.

### **The Six-Party Talks**

The Six-party talks is a series of high level political negotiations between six countries in regards to denuclearising North Korea. The participants in this series of negotiations involves the United States, Russia, Japan, China, South Korea and North Korea. North Korea's nuclear programme have been a great source of concern to the international community due to their lack of transparency and pulling out from Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), indicating that North Korea have intentions of pursuing the creation of nuclear weapons<sup>37</sup>. Due to the complex scope of this topic I will focus on the role of China in orchestrating this high level talks and negotiations.

China's proactive role of mediating and the creation of the Six-party talks however is did not happen instantly. The U.S. and North Korea had an initial nuclear "stand-off" in 1993-1994 relating to North Korea's nuclear programme, China's response was to leave the matter between three actors to resolve the matter<sup>38</sup>. This changed however with the second standoff

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<sup>37</sup> Leurdijk, Dick. 2008. "The Six-Party Talks, The UN And North Korea'S Nuclear Programme". In *Ending The North Korean Nuclear Crisis: Six Parties, Six Perspectives*, 1st ed. The Hague: Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael'. 9

<sup>38</sup> Kim, Samuel S. 2005. "China And The Six-Party Talks: The New Turn To Mediation Diplomacy". *International Journal Of Korean Studies* IX (2): 117-139. 118

between North Korea and the U.S. in 2002 after North Korea's confession to the existence of a highly enriched uranium program, China changed its previous stance and instead took a very proactive role in facilitating and mediating the talks<sup>39</sup>. China's proactive diplomacy included to direct phone calls at the highest level of leadership between China, the U.S. and North Korea and deployed personal envoys to Pyongyang, Washington and Moscow<sup>40</sup>. Eventually the first round of the Six-Party talks was held in Beijing in 2003, where the main agendas include:

“(1) that there is the need for a peaceful solution to the nuclear standoff through dialogue; (2) that there is the need for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula and that the D P R K's security concerns and other concerns should be considered and resolved; (3) that the parties should decide “on an overall plan for solving the nuclear issue in stages and through synchronous or parallel implementation in a just and reasonable manner”; and, (4) that all parties should avoid actions or words that might escalate tensions.”<sup>41</sup>

China also took great measures in getting North Korea's consent in returning to the second round of talks including providing North Korea economic aid and energy assistance totalling \$50 million<sup>42</sup>. However in 2009 North Korea exited the talks and resumed their nuclear programme<sup>43</sup>. This has led to China attempting to relaunch the Six-Party talks, however many of the countries including the U.S. are uninterested unless North Korea keeps its initial promise of dismantling their nuclear arsenal<sup>44</sup>. Despite what appears to be friendly Chinese mediation in regards to North Korea, China possesses interests seeks particular outcomes in regards to its proactive approach and mediation of the Six-Party talks. The odds of regional

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<sup>39</sup> Kim, Samuel S. 2005. "China And The Six-Party Talks: The New Turn To Mediation Diplomacy" 118

<sup>40</sup> Kim, Samuel S. Ibid 119

<sup>41</sup> Kim, Samuel S. Ibid 119

<sup>42</sup> Cody, Edward. Faiola, Anthony "N. Korea's Kim Reportedly in China for Talks," Washington Post , April 20, 2004, p. 13; and Ralph A. Cossa, "CVID, WMD, and Elections Galore," Comparative Connections, vol. 6, no. 1 (April 2004), 1

<sup>43</sup> Bajoria, Jayshree. Xu, Beina. 2013. "The Six Party Talks On North Korea's Nuclear Program". *Council On Foreign Relations*. <http://www.cfr.org/proliferation/six-party-talks-north-koreas-nuclear-program/p13593>.

<sup>44</sup> Bajoria, Jayshree. Xu, Beina. 2013. "The Six Party Talks On North Korea's Nuclear Program".

instability caused by the rows of North Korea and U.S. has been growing to levels which concern China's sense of security. Therefore by taking a strong proactive approach in leading the Six-Party talks not only elevates China's international prestige, but calms the rows between North Korea and the United States.

## **Chapter 2: Security Implications**

Security is a very important element in determining the survival of a state and a core concept within Realism. Therefore by analysing the security implications of the Sino-North Korean we can discern the complex relationship between China's and North Korea's perceptions in regards to security. The three main security implications I have listed is maintaining the status quo, Kim Jong Un and nuclear capability. The status quo is a term used by many scholars in describing China's approach towards North Korea and why it is a preferable approach. As such, I believe this particular approach is worth analysing in the context of the Sino-North Korea relationship. Finally, the effect of Kim Jong Un as the most recent North Korean leader affecting the decision making and new concerns over his rule. Accompanying these topics of discussion is the application of the realism in regards to the decision making and reasoning over these security implications.

### **Maintaining the Status Quo**

A key phrase that is constantly repeated in terms of security from China and its approach to North Korea has been the committing to protecting the "status quo". This can be seen from China's efforts in the six party talks and their role in mediating the series of negotiations. That being said what exactly is the status quo? And what exactly are China's fears should this be interrupted? China's challenge in tackling the North Korean dilemma lies in North Korea's importance in China national security strategy<sup>45</sup>. What this implies is that North Korea's existence and stability provides a number of benefits that assists China's national security strategy. China's rising influence within the international sphere puts them into direct competition with the United States, however it is due to this that North Korea's presence proves a valuable asset. North Korea's existence for example is a great source of distraction towards

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<sup>45</sup>Feng, Zhu. Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Nathan, "China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Objectives from a Changing China" ed. Carla P. Freeman (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2015) 37



the United States, such as being an active buffer zone to South Korea who contains thousands of U.S. troops<sup>46</sup>. Thus by providing aid to North Korea it is the same as maintaining the security foil that assists China's national security<sup>47</sup>. However maintaining the status quo does not necessarily mean that China does not wish for any significant change from within North Korea. North Korea's behaviour in engaging in brinkmanship and threats only serves to complicate the state of affairs. China desires outcomes that are beneficial to its security and economic standing, maintaining the status quo is preferable than negative outcomes such as regime collapse or war.

As discussed in the previous chapter Sino-North Korean relations has been going on for a very long period of time. The Korean peninsula has long been a part of China's sphere of influence since its dynastic era and due to China's role in the Korean War 1950-1953, China (to a degree) asserts a strong influence towards the region<sup>48</sup>. Thus it is to North Korea's displeasure that China's direction in engaging on friendlier terms with South Korea. For the first time ever China has visit to Seoul before visiting Pyongyang and jointly announced that the denuclearisation of North Korea was a joint goal between the two countries<sup>49</sup>. This leads to the indication that China's idea of security in maintaining the status quo while not necessarily abandoning North Korea, it shows a strong contrast in the interests and the desired outcomes between China and North Korea.

Within China the opinions and research regarding North Korea is highly controlled and Beijing have managed the discourse to avoid souring the relationship between with Pyongyang.

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<sup>46</sup> Dingli, Shen. 2006. "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China". *World Security Institute*. 20

<sup>47</sup> Dingli, Shen. Ibid 20

<sup>48</sup> Feng, Zhu. Beauchamp-Mustafaga, Nathan, "China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Objectives from a Changing China" ed. Carla P. Freeman. 42

<sup>49</sup> BBC. "China And South Korea Oppose North Korea Nuclear Tests - BBC News". 2014. *BBC News*. <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-28139972>.

However there is no doubt that consistent North Korean actions that defy China's expectations has vented strong frustration, indicated by China's vocal netizens<sup>50</sup>. China has managed much of its relationship with Beijing through exchanges of senior military officials and party-to-party ties, which further expanded to a more "normal" diplomatic channels that also aimed to return North Korea back to the six party talks<sup>51</sup>. Furthermore modern Chinese scholars seem to be split into two factions where one faction seeks to reassess the Chinese and North Korean relationship labelled as "revisionist or strategists" and the other seeks to preserve and if possible further strengthen the relationship labelled as "traditionalists"<sup>52</sup>.

### **Kim Jong-Un**

One the most concerning and unpredictable factors that bring a number of security concerns is the new young North Korean leader Kim-Jong Un. Mentioned previously in chapter 1 is the importance of the Kim dynasty in directing North Korean affairs. There is a number of reasons where I believe Kim Jong Un brings uncertainty in regards to being North Korea's latest leader. First, his age at the time of taking power is estimated between twenty eight and thirty. Not only is this an extremely young age for any ruler to take power, I believe it speaks volumes to the numerous challenges of taking over the North Korean regime. Second, Kim Jong Un needed to consolidate his power over the regime, despite being named Kim Jong-II's successor there was bound to be element within the regime which did not agree with the succession and third unlike Kim Jong-II under his father before him he did not have ample time to get used to be his father's successor. There is much evidence suggesting that unlike his

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<sup>50</sup> Carla P. Freeman, "China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Objectives from a Changing China" ed. Carla P. Freeman (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2015) 2

<sup>51</sup> Ibid 3

<sup>52</sup> Ibid 5

predecessors Kim Jong Un lacks the same control over key institutions such as the North Korean military, in the same way his predecessors had<sup>53</sup>.

### **Dimensions regarding security**

As the previous section detailed much regarding China's history with Korea, China's approach to North Korea in terms of security relies upon a combination of historical ties, ideological solidarity and economic motives (including fear of collapse)<sup>54</sup>. The Korean War 1950-1953 was a war that ended in armistice was signed by three countries the U.S., China and North Korea. This directly influences present Chinese contemporary with regards to the Korean peninsula as well as which action or policies to take action with<sup>55</sup>. Furthermore, China's and North Korea's Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation essentially brings China into the defence of North Korea should it be dragged into any sort of conflict. Therefore North Korea's security can be perceived as China's security as well. Furthermore security implication for China in dealing with North Korea are split into two categories both indirect and direct, which translates to positive and negative implications as well<sup>56</sup>. Positive implications direct and indirect, include having a security buffer and bargaining leverage, while negative aspects consist of unintended war, refugees issues, nuclear blackmail, U.S. rebalancing legitimacy, and damaged credibility<sup>57</sup>.

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<sup>53</sup> Bechtol Jr., Bruce E. 2013. "The North Korean Military Under Kim Jong-Un Evolved Or Still Following A Kim Jong-Il Script?". *International Journal Of Korean Studies* XVII (2).

<sup>54</sup> Feng, Zhu. Beauchamp-Mustafaga. Nathan, "China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Objectives from a Changing China" ed. Carla P. Freeman (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2015) 37

<sup>55</sup> Feng, Zhu. Beauchamp-Mustafaga. Nathan, "North Korea's Security Implication for China" ed. Carla P. Freeman (New York: PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2015) 42

<sup>56</sup> Feng, Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Objectives from a Changing China" ed. Carla P. Freeman 43

<sup>57</sup> Ibid 43

### **Chapter 3: Case Study: 2013 North Korean Nuclear Test**

To further illustrate the security concerns originating from North Korea's behaviour, I have decided to conduct a case study on North Korea's 2013 Nuclear Test. This Nuclear test continued to elevate security concerns from international and regional actors, with China being one of the most reactive actors. Within this section I discuss the background, Chinese reaction and reasoning in regards to the initiation of this nuclear test. Through this case study, I believe it may show the changes in regards to Sino-North Korean relations and how it influences the direction and decision making of China. Furthermore by applying realism into this case study, I believe I can obtain some insights in regards to North Korea's current motivations.

#### **Background**

On 12 February 2013, North Korea confirmed to have conducted an underground nuclear test<sup>58</sup>. It was detected due to the seismic readings of a 5.1 magnitude earthquake from inside North Korea<sup>59</sup>. This was North Korea's third nuclear test, where chronologically the first nuclear test was conducted on 9 October 2006 and the second on 25 May 2009<sup>60</sup>. There are a number of reasons and claims in regards to the initiation of this nuclear test ranging from fresh U.N. sanctions attributed to North Korea's successful satellite launch in the December of 2012 to South Korea's transition of power from President Lee-Myung Bak to Park Geun Hye<sup>61,62</sup>.

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<sup>58</sup>Sanger, David E. and Sang-Hun, Choe. 2013. "North Korea Is Suspected Of Conducting 3Rd Nuclear Test". *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test.html>.

<sup>59</sup> Atherton, Kelsey D. 2013. "How Did We Know North Korea Tested A Nuke?". *Popular Science*. <http://www.popsci.com/technology/article/2013-02/ear-nuclear-underground>.

<sup>60</sup> Zhao, L.- F., X.- B. Xie, W.- M. Wang, and Z.- X. Yao. 2014. "The 12 February 2013 North Korean Underground Nuclear Test". *Seismological Research Letters* 85 (1): 130-134. doi:10.1785/0220130103.

<sup>61</sup> McCurry, Justin and Branigan, Tania. 2013. "North Korea Stages Nuclear Test In Defiance Of Bans". *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/12/north-korea-nuclear-test-earthquake>.

<sup>62</sup> Sanger, David E. and Sang-Hun, Choe. 2013. "North Korea Is Suspected Of Conducting 3Rd Nuclear Test". *New York Times*.

This issue of conducting nuclear tests is also amplified by the most recent of North Korean leaders Kim Jong Un, who has made pre-emptive nuclear threats<sup>63</sup>.

### **Reasons over the nuclear test**

Within the background I put forth a number of claims that may contribute to North Korea's decision in initiating this nuclear test. Namely U.N. sanctions and South Korea's transition of power. However, I believe that North Korea must at least have a solid strategy in launching a nuclear test and under a realist perspective must have solid motivations to do so. According to a report by the Guardian the North Korean official news agency KCNA claims that the test was due to perceive "U.S. hostility that "violently" undermines the regime's right to peacefully launch satellites"<sup>64</sup>. North Korea's lack of transparency strongly hinders the process in getting direct answers in regards to the motivations of conducting this nuclear test. However as this is not the first time North Korea has committed a nuclear test, I believe through looking at past nuclear tests, bold rhetoric and state dealings we can discern North Korea's nuclear strategy and what they hope to achieve.

According to Dr Shane Smith, North Korea's nuclear capability is strongly underestimated due to three reasons. First North Korea's nuclear efforts are seriously underestimated due to its perception as a backward and incompetent state<sup>65</sup>. Secondly, the unknown motivation or doctrine of North Korean Nuclear engagement cause nuclear scholars to ignore it<sup>66</sup>. Finally, the third reason was that the pre-assumption that "non-military goals drives its nuclear decision

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<sup>63</sup> Smith, Shane. 2015. *North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy*. North Korea's Nuclear Futures Series. Washington DC: US-Korea Institute at SAIS. Page. 7

<sup>64</sup> McCurry, Justin. Branigan, Tania. 2013. "North Korea Stages Nuclear Test In Defiance Of Bans". *The Guardian*. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/feb/12/north-korea-nuclear-test-earthquake>.

<sup>65</sup> Sanger, David E. and Sang-Hun, Choe. 2013. "North Korea Is Suspected Of Conducting 3Rd Nuclear Test". *New York Times*. <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test.html>.

<sup>66</sup> Smith, Shane. 2015. *North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy*. North Korea's Nuclear Futures Series. Washington DC: US-Korea Institute at SAIS. Page 7

making”, indicating that North Korea’s nuclear tests are not guided by rationality<sup>67</sup>. Under a realist perspective states seeks survival and security through any means it is capable of. Thus as a result of initiating this nuclear test, I believe North Korea seeks desired results or concessions. There are many dimensions over the perceived concessions that North Korea desires over this nuclear test.

### **Chinese Reaction**

The immediate Chinese response was condemnation and “resolutely opposed” North Korea’s nuclear test<sup>68</sup>. It is safe to say due to being North Korea’s most steadfast ally, China reaction over North Korea’s belligerence are constantly watched by the international community. This not only brings for unnecessary negative reactions from many countries regarding this. It is safe to say that North Korea’s behaviour has shifted in a direction that humiliates China. This is due to China’s repeated calls to re-commence the Six-Party talks and in this case North Korea’s only validates the feelings of other countries in regards to the. I believe North Korea actions while not necessarily antagonises China is going forth in a direction that causes China’s support towards them to only diminish and not be positive.

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<sup>67</sup> Smith, Shane. 2015. *North Korea’S Evolving Nuclear Strategy*. Page 8

<sup>68</sup> Mullen, Jethro. 2013. "Tough U.N. Action Vowed After North Korean Nuclear Test". *CNN*. <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/02/11/world/asia/north-korea-seismic-disturbance/>.

## **Conclusion**

Using Realism as the main theoretical framework a number of patterns and perspectives can be identified with regards to China's relationship with North Korea and its development since its conception. By focusing upon historical development, case studies and security implications, Realism has allowed for a strong analysis that explains and may continue to motivate the behaviour and policies of China and North Korea towards each other. These particular areas illustrate the different dimensions which I believe are essential to China's policy making and what contributes to China's new stance towards North Korea.

In chapter 1, I discussed how the Korean War, Kim Dynasty and six party talks contribute greatly to the development and direction of the Sino-North Korean relationship. The Korean War remains one of the most important events within the Sino-North Korean relationship. Being one of the first major conflicts of the cold war, the results of the conflict remains relevant due to splitting the Korean peninsula into North and South. The assistance that China provided North Korea is looked upon fondly, and is remains relevant in North Korea's particular behaviour towards China. China's perception towards North Korea was strongly influenced since this period of time due to China's own efforts in creating propaganda for its own citizens to support the war. This conflict also contributed to the formal creation of an alliance to between China and North Korea. The reasons for and interests for conducting the war can be attributed to a number of reasons. For North Korea it was to unite the Korean peninsula under their rule which caused them to ask for assistance in invading the South. Furthermore, China and North Korea signed a military agreement that causes them to be allies. Secondly the Kim Dynasty is important to understand the direction and development of North Korea across the years. Beginning with Kim Il-Sung we can see how dedicated he is to the concept of reunification and his brutal methods in maintain and gaining power. Thirdly in discussing the Six-party talks I discussed the proactive role of China in engaging with other

major powers in regards to issue of North Korea's denuclearisation. The Six-party talks is significant as it reflects the China's increased role and international standing to be able to facilitate and mediate the Six-Party talks with other countries

In chapter 2, I discussed the issue of security implication within the Sino-North Korean relationship. In this section discussed three main issues which are the maintaining the status quo and Kim Jong Un. I believe these three points personify the security implication within the Sino-North Korean relationship and by extension addresses much of the realist concerns related to survival and power. In chapter 3, I conducted a Case study on North Korea's 2013 nuclear test. The aim of this case study was an attempt to understand the reasons on effects of North Korea's nuclear test. This being North Korea's first nuclear test under the new leader Kim Jong Un brings uncertainty and concern over future tests.



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