**Insane or Calculated? How the North Korean Military Model Can Explain the Behavior of the Kim Regime**

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On my honor as a University Student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment as defined by the Honor Guidelines for Thesis-Related Assignments

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**Fable of Tomorrow**

Dearest Ki,

I write to you this one last time in memory of the love we once held for each other. I still vividly remember the day when I met you. It was early in the war, less than three weeks after the United Nations launched their counteroffensive in North Korea. I still cannot specify exactly what it was that drew us together. Perhaps it was my ability to speak your language and engage with your community. Or maybe it was the fact that I grew rice at my home in California as you did in your village. Regardless, you brought purpose to my life for the two years I remained in your country. I am certainly grateful that the war ended when it did, but I was devastated that I had to leave you.

I know this letter will not find its way to you. I know that you are no longer there. Little remains of our once great, united nation. Yet, there is enough intact for me to see that nothing remains of your people. Tensions quickly escalated after the last six-party talk revealed that Kim Jong-un had finally succeeded in completing the work of his father and grandfather. After 75 years, North Korea finally had a nuclear warhead. Naturally, this accomplishment was quite frightening to the United States and South Korea. However, we allowed our fright to boil over. It is my belief that our subsequent threat to remove Kim and his regime from power led to that fateful and panicked display of power.

The warhead was supposed to detonate 30 miles offshore of Busan according to an emergency broadcast from the KCNA. But a broadcast could not reverse the damage of a terribly miscalculated trajectory. Retaliation by the United States and South Korea was soon met with responses from China and Russia. The rest of the world could only watch in horror. The Korean

peninsula is gone now, and the United States, China, and Russia cling to the few structures and institutions that remain intact. My deepest regret is that our leaders never tried to understand each other as you and I did. They professed that they had the same goals and dreams – denuclearization, peace, and a unified Korea. Maybe they even meant it. But there are two angles to every view, and our leaders could not grasp that. Now they are gone, and so are you. All I can do is reflect on what might have been, and never will be.

All My Love,

J.R.

**Introduction**

The previous story is clearly a fictional account, but it represents a tragic vision of the future that many people fear. This fear partially arises from the unpredictability and hidden motives of the North Korean regime. Indeed, it is not hard to find examples of confusing and threatening actions taken by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) against the United States. One such example is particularly poignant to members of the University of Virginia. On June 19, 2017, Otto Warmbier died from a severe brain injury shortly after returning home to the United States from North Korea. Warmbier, an American citizen and student at the University of Virginia, was convicted to fifteen years of hard labor in North Korea after he allegedly attempted to steal a propaganda poster from his hotel room in January 2016 (Sang-Hun & Gladstone, 2016). The Trump Administration was able to secure his release on humanitarian grounds after American officials learned that Warmbier needed urgent medical

attention in early June 2017 (Labott and Cohen, 2017). Warmbier's death shortly thereafter reminded the world of the brutality of the Kim regime, which routinely executes officials and sentences citizens to concentration camps. There is no question that the Kim regime is one of the most ruthless on earth, but there is not enough discussion as to why that is the case. Is Kim Jong-un truly insane, or is he a product of the social, political, and economic landscape of North Korea?

In order to forge a peaceful relationship between the United States, her allies, and North Korea, it is crucial that we attempt to understand the motivations and goals of the Kim regime. Diplomatic relations between the DPRK, United States, and American allies in East Asia have seen little improvement over the last 35 years. North Korea first suggested that it was willing to commit to denuclearization in 1985 with the ratification of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) ("Nuclear Negotiations," 2020). At 191 signatories, the treaty has been ratified by more countries than "any other arms limitation and disarmament agreement" ("Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons," 2020). North Korea went on to ratify denuclearization treaties with South Korea in 1992 (Joint Declaration), and the United States in 1994 (Geneva Agreed Framework of 1994) ("Nuclear Negotiations," 2020). However, North Korea never ceased development of its nuclear program, despite these agreements. The DPRK withdrew from the NPT in 2003 after "admitting to running a secret uranium enrichment program to power nuclear weapons," an action that violated all three aforementioned treaties ("Nuclear Negotiations," 2020). Since their withdrawal, the DPRK has continued to advance the nuclear program. They conducted their first nuclear missile test in 2006; revealed a newly constructed uranium enrichment plant in 2010; and performed their second and third nuclear tests in 2013 and 2016 ("Nuclear Negotiations," 2020).

The failure of North Korea to uphold the terms of these treaties have led many to dismiss Kim Jong-un as a madman who cannot be negotiated with. However, these dismissals will not lead to peace with North Korea or improve the lives of their 25 million poverty-stricken citizens. The secrecy of the North Korean government makes it difficult to determine what occurs within the struggling country. However, the steady stream of missile tests and military demonstrations have made it apparent that the military is at the core of North Korean society. The intention of this thesis is to define the military model in the DPRK, and use that model as a means to explain the unique governmental structure and diplomatic behavior of the Kim regime.

## Literature Review

There is a lot of information in the literature surrounding the Military-Industrial Complex (MIC), which is the military model used by the US. The American MIC historically consisted of three major groups: The Department of Defense (DoD) and US Armed Services; Congressmen and women who represent districts that depend on military-related industries; and privately owned defense contractors (Weber, 2018). More recently, the MIC expanded to encompass American universities, which often engage in research with military applications. It is beneficial for all four of these groups to keep military spending high, a fact that accounts for the staggering size of the American MIC. The United States spent nearly 650 billion USD (United States Dollars) on the military in 2018, more than the next seven top spenders combined (Tian et al., 2019). This heavy spending allows the United States to remain the foremost military power in the world. In essence, the literature adequately describes how the history of the MIC and the relationship between its actors influence its structure and expenditure patterns. However, the literature does not contain a complete representation of the military model in North Korea.

A wholistic understanding of the military model in North Korea is needed to explain the behavior of the Kim regime. The existing literature principally discusses diplomatic relations between the DPRK and other nations, their nuclear program, and the power structure of the North Korean government and military. North Korea's foreign policy and the development of their nuclear program are of primary concern to South Korea, Japan, China, and the United States. Every militaristic action taken by North Korea is generally met by panic and protest in South Korea and Japan, "mild displeasure" from China, and demands for total denuclearization by the United States (Anderson, 2017). The literature often claims that these militaristic actions, especially the advancement of the nuclear program, are either responses to foreign and domestic pressures (military, political, or economic), or inherent to the nature of the North Korean government. Proponents of the former argument point to events such as the economic crisis and famine of the 1990s for support, while advocates of the latter theory point to the institution and proliferation of Juche – North Korea's nationalistic ideology of self-reliance and self-development – and military-first politics (MFP), also known as Songun (Klug, 2019; Kong, 2014; Anderson, 2017).

The literature has presented arguments to explain the behavior of the Kim regime in terms of their international relations, and foreign and domestic policy. However, there has been no direct attempt to determine the structure of North Korea's military model. In order to uncover the nature of this model, connections must be made between existing information in the literature. Further, this information must be supplemented with reports from non-western sources, which will provide an alternative perspective and help minimize the western bias that may exist in the literature. In summary, the military model in the DPRK can be determined by making connections between western literature and non-western sources, which are often not

considered by western literature. The Method section below outlines the research plan for data acquisition.

## STS Framework

The purpose of this research paper is to determine what model the DPRK has adopted with regards to the development of military technology. The STS framework that will be used to address the research question is the Social Construction of Technology (SCOT). SCOT is an actor-centric theory that was first posited by Trevor Pinch and Wiebe Bijker in 1987. According to Pinch and Bijker, the central claim of SCOT theory is that the "design of new technologies is an open process that can produce different outcomes depending on the social circumstances of development" (Klein & Kleinman, 2002). These social circumstances depend on deliberation and closure between the relevant social groups involved (Klein & Kleinman, 2002). In the context of this thesis, the relevant social groups are the current and historical actors within North Korea's military infrastructure.

The competing interests and goals of the current and historical actors influenced the structure of North Korea's military model. Closure occurred when the preferences of one relevant social group – or a combination of groups – were accepted by the others. In other words, the structure of the North Korean military model and all it entails – the actors that have authority, the technologies that are developed, and the supporting infrastructure – is largely a reflection of the preferences of the most influential social groups. However, while SCOT is a useful method for identifying how the relevant social groups within the DPRK created their military model, the theory does not place sufficient emphasis on the wider context in which these social groups

operate (Klein & Kleinman, 2002). I will address this analytical shortcoming of SCOT by discussing the international context in which the North Korean military model operates.

The DPRK maintains diplomatic relations with a number of nations despite the hostility and secrecy of the Kim regime. The North Korean military model cannot be understood without considering the interests and diplomatic concerns of these nations, and the power dynamics between them and North Korea. When considering these competing interests, it is important to consider that these nations may interpret situations differently than North Korea. For example, both the United States and North Korea have expressed their desire to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, but their visions for what denuclearization entails may be entirely opposed. This paper will consider such interpretative flexibility by considering both western and non-western sources as discussed in the following section. In summary, I will use SCOT to identify the relevant social groups and their preferences, and expand upon the framework by incorporating wider context. The interactions between these social groups and the wider international context shaped the military model that currently exists within North Korea.

**Method**

The aforementioned research question will be answered by considering the current and historical actors within the military model utilized by North Korea, and the wider international context in which that model was formed and now operates. The actors and wider context will be determined by analyzing both Western and non-Western sources. This dual analysis will be performed in order to minimize bias from Western sources. This bias results from the fact that many Western nations, including the United States, have poor or nonexistent diplomatic relations

with North Korea. On the other hand, some non-Western nations (i.e. China) have favorable relations with the DPRK. Consideration of both Western and non-Western perspectives will provide a more well-rounded understanding of the North Korean military model.

I will analyze journal articles found in the "Military & Government Collection" of the University of Virginia (UVA) Library in order to determine the actors in the North Korean military model and the international context in which it operates. The collection contains articles discussing Kim Jong-un's policies and military strategy; the nature and structure of North Korea's military market; and North Korea's key political leaders and defense infrastructure. The information gathered from this collection will be supplemented by articles from *Social Science Quarterly* and *Pacific Review*. These journal articles will provide insight into the North Korean military model from a Western perspective. I will also analyze North Korean media reports, which will provide information about the contemporary actors within North Korea's military model from the perspective of the Kim regime.

The international context will be explored further by analyzing North Korea's diplomatic relationships with the United States and China. Both American and Chinese media outlets will be considered to minimize bias. Foreign Affairs is an American magazine that principally discusses U.S. international relations. The reputable magazine contains several articles that attempt to understand the rationale of the Kim regime. China Daily is the largest Chinese newspaper published in English. This paper will present more favorable views of North Korea because it is owned by the Chinese government, which has good diplomatic relations with the DPRK. China's relationship with North Korea will be assessed further by analyzing articles from the *Journal of Contemporary China*. This journal provides a unique perspective because it is a North American journal with an editor-in-chief from Guangzhou, China.

**Data Analysis**

Journal articles from the “Military & Government Collection" at the UVA Library were analyzed to determine the actors in the North Korean military model. Analysis revealed that the Kim regime, communist party, and military are three key actors. However, they interact with each other in a fashion that is not typical of totalitarian regimes. In most communist states, the party exercises control from the highest office down to the local level (Woo, 2016). However, in North Korea, the party, cabinet, and military all “function as mere political servants to a single dictator and his ideology of Juche” (Woo, 2016). The Supreme Leader, currently Kim Jong-un, wields the most power in North Korea’s defense industry because he holds many titles within key political and military institutions (see Table I below). The most important institution that Kim heads is the National Defense Commission (NDC). The institution of military-first politics by Kim Jong-il created the NDC to “compartmentalize major political institutions – the cabinet, the military, and the party – and ensure that they maintain certain checks and balances” (Woo, 2016). The Supreme Leader sits at the head of the military model in North Korea, a position that he is likely to maintain so long as he maintains his “firm grip” over key military and political institutions through his various titles (Woo, 2016).

## Table I

*Kim Jong-un's leadership roles within North Korea's major political and military institutions*

| Political/Military Institution | Kim Jong-un's Title | Kim's Role |
|---|---|---|
| Korean Workers Party (KWP) | First Secretary of the Korean Worker's Party | "Exercises partisan control over the military" through committees within the Korean Workers Party |
| Central Military Commission (CMC) | Chair of the Central Military Commission | "Make collective decisions about security policies and military doctrines" (Woo, 2016) |
| Korean People's Army (KPA) | Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army | "Gives direct orders to the military hierarchy" (Woo, 2016) |
| National Defense Commission | Chair of the National Defense Commission | "Takes charge of making and implementing all major policies in politics, the economy, the military, and foreign affairs" (Woo, 2016) |

Analysis of articles from *Pacific Review* and *Social Science Quarterly* revealed that the nuclear program is a critical actor in the military model. The program legitimizes the regime, satisfies the military, and blackmails the international community into providing economic and political concessions (Habib, 2011; Wang et al., 2017). The nascent Kim regime maintains its power by unifying the people behind a hatred of American imperialism. The nuclear program serves as a nationalist symbol of anti-imperialism that the general population can rally behind:

> While Kim Jong-il, who had a firm grip on power, focused on the international audience before conducting nuclear tests, Kim Jong-un during his succession targeted the domestic audience prior to nuclear tests, probably in an attempt to consolidate his precarious power (Whang et al., 2017).

The regime's continuing development of the nuclear program also satisfies the military because it "reassures the Korean People's Army (KPA) that Kim and Party would provide it with priority access to the state's scarce resources" (Habib, 2011). Finally, the "nuclear capability gives the

regime the bargaining leverage it needs to plug holes in its economy with inputs of aid from the international community" (Habib, 2011). The program is used to blackmail other nations into providing what the domestic economy cannot produce on its own. Thus, the nuclear program is likely to remain a critical actor in the military model because it plays three crucial roles.

The nuclear program demonstrates the social constructionist notion that the interests of key actors define the form and function of new technologies. In order for the North Korean nuclear program to reach its current state, the Kim regime had to make several technical choices about nuclear facility design. Many of these choices are typical of developing nuclear programs, such as the miniaturization of nuclear warheads and the development of long-range missiles. In 2017, American intelligence stated its "belief that North Korea mastered miniaturizing nuclear devices on long-range missiles" (Daniels, 2017). In fact, South Korean intelligence reported in 2011 that Pyongyang had been attempting miniaturization (Daniels, 2017). Miniaturization is particularly concerning to the United States and its allies because it is a crucial step towards the creation of a functioning long-range missile. Miniaturization makes the nuclear warhead light enough and small enough to fit in a missile. In addition to miniaturization, the Kim regime made some calculated technical choices that demonstrate the interpretative flexibility associated with the term "nuclear weapon."

There is more than one way to create a nuclear weapon. The two most common methods are plutonium reprocessing and uranium enrichment. Plutonium reprocessing, or separation, is easier to achieve than uranium enrichment ("How do nuclear weapons work," 2018). However, plutonium separation requires the construction of "large distinctive nuclear reactors that are easily recognizable in satellite photos" ("Nuclear capability," 2014). In fact, satellite imagery revealed that North Korea was constructing a plutonium reprocessing plant at the Yongbyon

Nuclear Center in the late 1980s ("Nuclear capability," 2014). Subsequent international pressure forced North Korea to shut down the facility in 1994 as part of the Agreed Framework of 1994. In order for North Korea to secretly continue development of the nuclear program, the regime decided to pursue uranium enrichment. As mentioned previously, uranium enrichment is more challenging than plutonium reprocessing. However, the process does not require large reactors, and may be carried out in "dispersed or underground facilities" ("Nuclear capability," 2014). Thus, the Kim regime chose the more challenging method of developing nuclear weapons in order to hide the nuclear program from foreign intelligence. It was a calculated technical choice that demonstrated how the interests of the regime guided the evolution of a new technology.

Analysis of North Korea media reports revealed that military-run industries are also key actors in the military model. According to *Nodong Sinmun,* a North Korean newspaper, the government believes that a strong defense industry will lead to general economic growth: "Once we lay the foundations for a powerful self-sustaining national defense industry, we will be able to rejuvenate all economic fields" ("Military-first ideology," 2003). According to Mirko Tasic (2019), militaries are usually transformed in a linear, bottom-up fashion. Most nations bolster the defense industry by using resources (i.e. capital, human expertise, technologies) generated by other economic sectors. However, *Nodong Sinmun* suggests that North Korea instead aims for a top-down approach where a "self-sustaining defense sector…generates more resources and economic goods than [it] consumes" (Habib, 2011). In essence, the defense industry in the DPRK is intended to serve as a launchpad for the rest of North Korean economy.

Kim Jong-un confirmed the existence of this top-down approach in his 2019 plenary speech, which lists the nation's accomplishments from 2018, and outlines the regime's plans for 2019. For example, he states that the munitions industry provided "farm machinery, construction

equipment, cooperative products, and consumer goods…in response to [the communist party's] militant call for concentrating all efforts on economic construction" (Kim, 2019). Simply put, the munitions industry used its excess resources to boost the civilian economy. In many other cases, the military directly manages traditionally civilian industries, and contracts work out to the local civilian population (Kong, 2014). This arrangement is necessary because the regime has not funded the military or other government agencies since the economic crisis of the 1990s (Kong, 2014). In order to finance their own ventures, "[the military] came to dominate cash generators like mining, seafood, agriculture and medicines" (Kong, 2014). Thus, a symbiotic relationship exists between the military and traditionally civilian industries.

Further analysis of Kim's speech revealed that North Korean universities are also an actor in the defense industry. Nuclear physics departments were established in North Korean universities as early as 1956, suggesting that universities have long been an actor in the military model, specifically the nuclear program (Kong, 2014). However, Kim believes that their role could be expanded, and their curriculum more tailored to national defense. At one point in the speech, he says that "the state should promote talent training and sci-tech development purposefully and increase its investment in them" (Kim, 2019). He also notes that the socialist revolution is advanced through "efforts to make education modern and scientific," and by the improvement of the "teaching conditions and environment…at many universities, colleges, middle and primary schools across the country" (Kim, 2019). Given these statements, it is likely that the role of North Korean universities within their military model will only expand.

The international context in which the North Korean military model operates was explored through analysis of articles found in *Foreign Affairs*, peer-reviewed journals, and Chinese newspaper articles. The military model is most influenced by North Korea's relationship

with the United States and China. The relationship between the US and the DPRK is based on mistrust and misperception because "both states have bluffed in the past" (Jervis & Rapp-Hooper, 2018). For example, the United States has threatened to hold North Korea accountable for its missile and nuclear tests, but has only responded with "reactive" and "episodic" sanctions (Jervis & Rapp-Hooper, 2018). Conversely, "North Korea has a tendency to use incendiary rhetoric that does not result in action" (Jervis & Rapp-Hooper). This mutual skepticism has prevented the two nations from engaging in meaningful dialogue, and has assured Kim that he can continue to militarize and nuclearize without permanent consequences.

Newspaper articles from *China Daily* were analyzed to assess North Korea-US relations from a non-Western perspective. These articles claim that the US is largely responsible for the militarization of North Korea. Xinhua (2019) holds America responsible for the failure of the 2019 meetings between Trump and Kim to produce a deal: "The United States should abandon its tactic of maximum pressure [because] dialogue is always a better option than confrontation." In a separate article, Feng Zhu claims that "East Asia has been peaceful and stable since the 1980s thanks to the regional economies' deepening economic cooperation" (Zhu, 2020). Zhu states that the United States and North Korea failed to reach an agreement during the three 2019 summits because "the US refused to lift even part of its sanctions despite Pyongyang halting its nuclear program and focusing on economic development" (Zhu, 2020). The Chinese perspective is that North Korea is upholding their end of the bargain, while the United States is not. The DPRK shares this perspective, and "said it would shift its focus to military development to strengthen its national security" (Zhu, 2020). In essence, North Korea feels threatened by the American push for denuclearization, which has encouraged the Kim regime to militarize further.

Chinese newspaper articles suggest that China has good diplomatic relations with North Korea. The influence that China has on North Korea's military model was explored by analyzing an article from the *Journal of Contemporary China*. According to Lee (2013), China wants to prevent North Korean nuclear crises for three reasons. First, North Korea is a buffer zone that shields China from attack by Japan or the United States. Second, China wants to maintain the regional status quo, and would not want to choose sides in a conflict between the US and DPRK. Finally, if North Korea went nuclear, other regional powers may follow suit and threaten Chinese security. This last point is of chief concern to the Chinese government, which gives "China a strong interest in stopping the North Korean nuclear plan and maintaining denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula" (Lee, 2013). In essence, the nuclear program actor is influenced not just by actors within North Korea, but also by North Korea's most powerful regional neighbor.

The Chinese influence on the North Korean military model has only increased in the last two decades as China embraced its role as a world power. During the first North Korean nuclear crisis in 1993-1994, China "engaged in passive and 'behind-the-scenes' diplomacy," and merely facilitated negotiations between the DPRK and US (Lee, 2013). However, China underwent a major shift in identity that made them realize that they had unique responsibilities as a major world power. This shift was triggered by the East Asian Financial Crisis in 1997-1998; the 'peace and development' debate in 1999; and the stable transition of power to younger, more pragmatic leaders within the Chinese Communist Party in 2002 (Lee, 2013). Since this shift, China has taken a much more "proactive" role in maintaining North Korean nuclear crises (Lee, 2013). China is chiefly responsible for maintaining the six-party talks and ensuring that the major participants remain involved. Thus, while China has always tried to limit North Korean

militarization, their increased proactivity in recent years has further pressured North Korea to demilitarize.

## Discussion

The North Korean military model is a hierarchical structure that has been shaped by both domestic actors and international context. Analysis of Western and non-Western journal articles and media reports according to the SCOT framework revealed that there are six key actors in the North Korean military model. Table II below identifies these actors; when they became relevant actors within the military model in North Korea; and their role within that model. The data analysis also expanded upon SCOT by considering the role that the wider international context played in shaping North Korea's military model.

## Table II

*Major actors within the hierarchical military model of the DPRK*

| Actor | Date of Emergence as an Actor | Role within the Military Model | Relative Position within military model hierarchy |
|---|---|---|---|
| Single Dictator (Supreme Leader) | Kim Il-sung, 1948<br>Kim Jong-il, 1991<br>Kim Jong-un, 2011 | Holds the highest leadership role in every major military and political institution within the DPRK. Holds final decision-making authority within each of these institutions. | Unchallenged and preeminent authority within the hierarchy. |
| Nuclear Program | 1952 | Provides national security; unifies the military and civilians under the Kim regime; wins political and economic concessions from foreign powers. | Second most important and influential actor within the hierarchy. Other actors act in service of the program even though it does not wield decision-making authority on its own. |
| Korean Workers Party | 1949 | Creates political, economic, military, and foreign policy under the supervision of the single dictator. Oversees the Korean People's Army and shares the authority to make military policy decisions with them. | Third most important and influential actor within the hierarchy. Subservient to the Kim regime and nuclear program. |
| Korean People's Army | N/A | Provides national security. Operates the industrial sector and traditionally civilian industries such as agriculture and mining. | Fourth most important and influential actor within the hierarchy. Subservient to the Kim regime, nuclear program, and KWP. |
| Industrial Sector | N/A | Provide raw materials needed for the defense industry and nuclear program. | Bottom of the hierarchy; subservient to other major actors. |
| Universities and Professional Schools | 1956 | Conduct research and provide scientific/technical expertise for the benefit of the defense industry and nuclear program | Bottom of the hierarchy; subservient to other major actors. |

The American MIC is a separate-but-equal structure in which legislators, the US Armed Forces, and privately-owned defense contractors cooperate to create new military technologies. Each of these actors operate independently of each other and have their own motivations. Contrarily, the military model in North Korea is a hierarchical structure in which all major actors

are subservient to the authority of the Supreme Leader. This single dictator, currently Kim Jong-un, controls the communist party and military through his titles within the KPA and committees in the Korean Worker's Party (KWP). The KWP is responsible for legislating and enforcing political, economic, foreign, and military policy. The KPA provides national security and makes military decisions under the supervision of KWP committees. The KPA funds its expenditures through foreign aid and by operating traditionally civilian industries. The industrial sector and universities provide the raw materials and technical expertise needed to support the defense industry.

The nuclear program is a unique actor within the military model because it is largely operated by the other actors. However, its influence within the hierarchy is only surpassed by the Supreme Leader. A key goal of the military model is growth of the nuclear program because it plays the critical roles described previously. Thus, while the program possesses no decision-making authority, the actions of every other actor, including the Supreme Leader, are directed in service of it. A hierarchical military model was instituted with the sole purpose of keeping the Kim regime in power. A complex web of checks and balances between the KWP and KPA ensures that neither gains enough power to threaten Kim's absolute authority. The regime further ensures the loyalty of the military by allowing them to operate and profit from domestic industries; and by granting the KPA the majority of funds from foreign aid. The nuclear program keeps the regime in power by bolstering national pride, winning concessions from other nations, and ensuring the military that the regime will provide for their needs.

The decision to institute and maintain a hierarchical military model was influenced by international context in addition to the aforementioned actors. The relationship between the United States and North Korea is based on misperception and a mutual misunderstanding. The

US views North Korea's nuclear program and aggressive militarization as threats to national security and to America's East Asian allies. On the other hand, North Korea perceives American demands for denuclearization as threats to national security, the regime, and the economy. The Kim regime responds to these threats by tightening its grip over the country, allocating more resources to the military, and advancing the nuclear program. Thus, American demands for denuclearization have only proliferated North Korea's hierarchical military model.

The military model in North Korea is also influenced by China. However, unlike the US, China has motivations to keep the Kim regime in power. For example, North Korea is a buffer state that discourages attacks from Japan and the United States. Further, collapse of the regime would generate a massive influx of refugees into China's northern provinces. These refugees would overwhelm Chinese relief, especially when Chinese resources are strained by the outbreak of the COVID-19 coronavirus. China's desire for stability has strengthened the hierarchical military model by helping the Kim regime stays in power. However, China does not want North Korea to become a nuclear state because that would provoke the United States and encourage other regional powers to pursue nuclear weapons. The Kim regime must respect Chinese national security interests or risk isolating themselves from their largest provider of foreign aid. In essence, China limits the pace at which North Korea militarizes.

## Conclusion

North Korea has a hierarchical military model that is shaped by six relevant groups: the single dictator, nuclear program, communist party, military, industrial sector, and universities. The single dictator maintains absolute authority over the other actors through his military and

political titles, and checks and balances between the other actors. North Korea's uneasy relationship with the United States motivates the Kim regime to further consolidate its power through continued militarization, while their favorable relationship with China ensures that Kim retains his power and position at the head of the military hierarchy. In summary, the data analysis revealed that the Kim regime instituted a military model with a hierarchical structure in order to maintain total control over North Korea. The identification of the military model structure helps to explain the puzzling behavior of the Kim regime.

The Kim regime has ignored international law and committed countless human rights violations over the past 75 years. The regime's behavior is morally reprehensible, but it can be explained in terms of the military model. Identification of the model's hierarchical structure reveals that the principal goal of the Kim regime is to maintain its power. The intersection of political and military institutions within North Korea, the continued development of the nuclear program, and heavy military spending are carefully crafted policy decisions that keep Kim in power. Competition and forced cooperation between the communist party and military prevent either from becoming more powerful than the dictator. The nuclear program is a nationalist symbol that bolsters support for the Kim regime, and serves as an international bargaining chip. Finally, allocating the majority of domestic resources and foreign aid to the KPA ensures that the military remains loyal to Kim.

It is critical for the United States and its allies to understand that North Korea's military-centric society is designed to preserve the power of the Kim regime. Demands for the DPRK to demilitarize and denuclearize, while crucial to national security, are only perceived by Kim as a threat to his power. The hierarchical structure of the North Korean military model reveals how committed the regime is to maintaining its power. All future negotiations, concessions, and

threats to North Korea must be made in light of this reality if they are to be effective. If our future foreign policy decisions are informed by Kim's desire to retain his power, then it may be possible to have a meaningful discussion with North Korea. If we make the attempt to understand this driving motivation of the Kim regime, maybe, after 75 years of fruitless negotiations, they will finally listen.

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