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## Political And Economic Dimensions Of The North Korean Nuclear Program

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### Abstract

After the collapse of the Soviet Union due to the economic crises that struck the Russian economy, North Korea benefited politically and militarily in how to deal with the United States where to benefit from the Soviet experience. Therefore, North Korea worked to develop its nuclear capabilities as a deterrent to any labor force trying to eliminate it. It relied on its nuclear program to confront US and its allies in Asia and the world. The North Korean nuclear program had political and economic dimensions making North Korea a robust opponent for US. This article attempted to read the most prominent and important of these dimensions and their repercussions on Korea itself. The nuclear program has generated many economic, political, and ideological problems for North Korea for reasons related to American pressure and its allies in exchange for North Korea relinquishing the nuclear program.

**Key Words :** North Korea, Sanctions, Nuclear program, Political dimensions, economic dimensions.

### Introduction

Indeed, North Korea pursued a strategy of deterrence against the United States and its allies based on its nuclear program. Therefore, it rushed to build its nuclear program to bargain with the major powers, especially the United States, to obtain what it planned. The important thing is that stripping North Korea of its nuclear capabilities is almost impossible for the Korean leadership because it is well aware that if it accepts that, it will be under pressure from the American administration to dictate its conditions whenever it wants. For it, this means submission to global capitalism, which stood against it and made efforts and sacrifices in order to build a nuclear program that would have real protection against any possible external interference in light of the current international situation. Despite the gains it achieved from this, it suffered in many areas, perhaps the most prominent of which is the economic aspect. Among the most prominent problems that North Korea has suffered from are the aggravation of debt, the lack of humanitarian aid, in addition to the shortage of hard currency and reliance on national industries that lack technology. Subsequently, the article will discuss developments in the North Korean nuclear program, in addition to the most prominent international

pressures it faced. The article will also examine the most important political and economic dimensions that emerged from North Korean nuclear trends.

### **1.The political dimensions of the nuclear program of North Korean**

In fact, nuclear program in North Korea began in the mid-1950s, as North Korea has uranium mines with a stock of approximately 40 million tons of high-quality. In the mid-sixties, North Korea established a nuclear energy research reactor in Pyongyang. In 1974, North Korea developed the nuclear reactor and began to focus on completing the program for using atomic energy for military purposes<sup>1</sup>. At the beginning 1980s, North Korea scientifically began conducting experiments in order to produce manufactured uranium. The US in 1985 declared which North Korea had built a nuclear reactor to production the enriched fuel. North Korea in the same year signed the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons<sup>2</sup>.

However, North Korea withdrew from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003. In 2006 it conducted the first successful nuclear experience, then its second nuclear experience in 2009 which includes launch of a long-range Taepodong missile <sup>3</sup>. In 2013, a third nuclear test was conducted, and in 2015 it announced that it had tested launching a missile from a submarine. In 2016, North Korea defied the Security Council resolutions and the international community and its severe sanctions when it announced its fifth new nuclear experiment. Despite the six-party talks to resolve the seriousness North Korean nuclear crisis, North Korea remains determined to develop its nuclear missile program in order to threaten American territory in any future war with it<sup>4</sup>.

North Korea believes that its possession of nuclear weapons will make it a regional power to be reckoned with. This may enable it to break the state of international isolation imposed on it by the United States, in addition to the ideological factor, which is another motivation for North Korea to resort to the nuclear option. North Korea still adheres to its Marxist-Leninist ideology, as its political system is characterized by single-party control, which has provided a kind of stability. Ideology and single-party control maintained the stability of the political system and helped the North Korean people adhere to communist beliefs and values, which in turn was reflected in their discipline and thus had a positive

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<sup>1</sup> Nikitin, Mary Beth Dunham. North Korea's nuclear weapons: Technical issues. Congressional Research Service, 2013. pp 34-36.

<sup>2</sup> Schneider, Mark. "The North Korean nuclear threat to the US." Comparative Strategy 33, no. 2 (2014): 107-121.

<sup>3</sup> Kristensen, Hans M., and Robert S. Norris. "North Korean nuclear capabilities, 2018." Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists 74, no. 1 (2018): 41-51.

<sup>4</sup> Habib, Benjamin. "North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and the maintenance of the Songun system." The Pacific Review 24, no. 1 (2011): 43-64.

impact on politics and the economy as well as foreign policy and the stability of its role in international politics<sup>5</sup>.

The political dimension of the North Korean nuclear file lies in the fact that its possession of nuclear weapons allows it to play a greater regional role in the future and obtain gains that exceed what it has achieved so far. At present, it is seeking to ensure its political nuclear option from regional countries (as South Korea and Japan) and the US. It has used its military power to provoke its neighbors, South Korea and Japan, since it possessed nuclear weapons as a permanent means of deterrence, considering that they are allies of the United States in the region<sup>6</sup>.

In early June 1999, a naval clash occurred between the two Koreas in the Yellow Sea, which was called the Boat War, when two North Korean boats penetrated the territorial waters of South Korea more than once. South Korea considered this a provocation, which led it to sink a northern naval boat and damage many other boats. This also prompted North Korea to sink more than 10 southern ships, resulting in 7 casualties. North Korea's ideological factor constitutes an important motivation in resorting to nuclear armament because it gives it prestige and makes it a regionally influential military force. But the United States of America is not in its ideological interest to make a socialist-Marxist state hostile to the global capitalist system enjoy this image of international prestige and standing at a time when South Korea, its ally with the capitalist system, does not enjoy this prestige<sup>7</sup>.

North Korea faced a number of regional and international changes, the most important of which was the dissolution of the former Soviet Union and the subsequent Russian Federation and China establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992. In addition to the interruption of the aid that North Korea was receiving from these two countries. All of these circumstances had political and military repercussions on the political system in North Korea. These circumstances as a whole created an incentive and generated an incentive for North Korea to build its nuclear power as a tool to maintain a distinct international capability and standing<sup>8</sup>.

Therefore, North Korea rushed to build and expand its nuclear program to bargain with the major powers, especially the United States, to obtain what it planned. The important thing is that stripping North Korea of its nuclear

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<sup>5</sup> Tan, Morse. "The North Korean nuclear crisis: Past failures, present solutions." . Louis ULJ 50 (2005): 517.

<sup>6</sup> Kim, Sung Chull. North Korea Under Kim Jong Il: From Consolidation to Systemic Dissonance. State University of New York Press, 2012. Pp 67-69.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, pp 79-81.

<sup>8</sup> Cheon, Seongwhun. "Nuclear-armed North Korea and South Korea's strategic countermeasures." The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis 16, no. 2 (2004): pp 49-78.

capabilities is almost impossible for the Korean leadership because it is well aware that if it accepts that, it will be under pressure from the American administration to dictate its conditions whenever it wants<sup>9</sup>. For it, this means submission to global capitalism, which stood against it and made efforts and sacrifices in order to build a nuclear program that would have real protection against any possible external interference in light of the current international situation<sup>10</sup>.

In this regard, the Foreign Ministry of North Korea issued a statement saying: "North Korea would test a new nuclear test in the future under conditions where safety is fully guaranteed". The ministry explained in its statement that one of the most important justifications and motives for conducting a nuclear test is to confront foreign policy, which is characterized by escalation. The statement also mentioned which the US continual escalation of the threat of the surprised nuclear war and the horrific sanctions, and the pressure it is exerting, has caused a dangerous situation on the Korean Peninsula<sup>11</sup>.

The another political dimension of the nuclear file is that North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons has improved its negotiating position with Washington, given that its possession of these weapons is an effective deterrent tool to achieve decisive results. The North Korean decision-maker also seeks to improve a basically non-existent position in the Asian strategic theater and at the international level, in order to transform North Korea from a problem into a party with an acceptable and legitimate role in international and regional relations. Therefore, the goal of possessing nuclear weapons is linked to improving President Kim Jong Un position at home and increasing his ability to control his country by pleasing the military establishment<sup>12</sup>.

The other political dimension that emerged from North Korea's possession of nuclear and missile weapons is the inclusion of North Korea within the axis of evil<sup>13</sup>. The US administration has confirmed which regime in North Korea may provide support for parties hostile to the United States in order to blackmail it, and this ultimately constitutes a permanent threat to the national security of the United States and its allies, not only in Asia but in the entire world.

## **2. The economic dimensions of the North Korean nuclear program**

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid, pp 50-55.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, pp 61-65.

<sup>11</sup> Lee, Chung Min. "The Evolution of the North Korean Nuclear Crisis: Implications for Iran." The Institute Francis des Relations Internationales (IFRI) (2009): pp 20-38.

<sup>12</sup> Braun, Chaim, Siegfried Hecker, Chris Lawrence, and Panos Papadiamantis. "North Korean Nuclear Facilities After the Agreed Framework." Center for International Security and Cooperation, Stanford University 27 (2016). pp 78-90.

<sup>13</sup> Plant, Thomas, and Ben Rhode. "China, North Korea and the spread of nuclear weapons." Survival 55, no. 2 (2013):p 61.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the occurrence of radical changes in the international system at the beginning of the nineties of the last century. This had a political and economic impact on North Korea, as the aid received from China and the Soviet Union declined, and its loss of the market of the former socialist republics, Russia also stopped supplying fuel to North Korea<sup>14</sup>. This deterioration in the North Korean economy was represented by a severe shortage of foreign currency, especially since it needs many countries to import technology to develop nuclear weapons. These circumstances prompted North Korea to think about benefiting from the returns from selling weapons and missiles to the Middle East to obtain hard currency, and the possession of nuclear weapons pushes other countries concerned to barter the Korean negotiations for economic aid<sup>15</sup>.

Hence, the economic dimension of the North Korean nuclear file came as it continued to promote its need for nuclear technology for the purposes of producing electricity and other peaceful purposes as a way to solve its economic dilemma. Thus, it has benefited from obtaining technology in order to develop its nuclear program, while selling advanced weapons in order to obtain hard currency<sup>16</sup>.

North Korea must compensate for its lack of benefit from globalization and openness to the outside world, as North Korea suffers from political and economic isolation, especially the period after the Cold War. Today, it operates an almost subsistence economy that is far from industrialized<sup>17</sup>. The best hope for most North Koreans is an underground market economy that fills the gaps in the state's command economy and public distribution system. Indeed, trade with China helps supply these market forces with goods and jobs across the border. There is no doubt that engaging North Korea economically will not solve the nuclear dilemma in the short term. The dream of complete and sustainable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula will not be achieved until North Korea actually begins to move in the direction of economic growth and integration<sup>18</sup>.

All previous and current American administrations promise Pyongyang economic aid, financial support, and state building in exchange for abandoning the nuclear program. Hence, the United States is intensifying its negotiations on the Korean nuclear program, supported by the provision of economic aid. Pyongyang believes that any agreement regarding its nuclear file is a deception by the US, Japan, and their allied countries. Its goal is to dismantle North Korea's nuclear

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<sup>14</sup> Nanto, Dick Kazuyuki, and Emma Chanlett-Avery. "North Korea: economic leverage and policy analysis." Congressional Information Service, Library of Congress, 2010. pp 56-59.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid, pp 78-81.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, pp 87-92.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, pp 93-96.

<sup>18</sup> Panda, Rajaram. "North Korea's Nuclear Policy: Domestic Determinants, Strategy and Future." *The Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 10, no. 2 (2011): pp 223-242.

program and end communist rule in the same way that was adopted in the dissolution of the Soviet Union<sup>19</sup>. The Soviet leadership was tempted by promises of America economic aid then economic, political and military structures gradually had been destroyed<sup>20</sup>.

Accordingly, one of the most important indicators that prompted North Korea to think about the illusion of these promises is the Japanese-American coordination to develop anti-Korean missiles, which prompted North Korea to research the extent of the impact of these missiles and the possibilities of responding to them, and from here North Korean strategic thinking began to change<sup>21</sup>.

The North Korean nuclear file has generated dimensions that have mainly affected the national internal situation. Its economy began to decline, because during that period the focus began on military industries, which were the main factor in the decline of the Korean economy. When the Russian Federation stopped its aid to supply North Korea with fuel which it was importing approximately (3.2) million tons in. After that, North Korea tried to achieve self-sufficiency, by relying on itself in grain production and achieving vast export surpluses, most of which went to socialist countries<sup>22</sup>. During the period from 1990 to 1997, the Korean agricultural system suffered a major deterioration, as 70% of grain crops were destroyed. At the same time, coal production also fell by 6.5%, petroleum production by 5.2%, and agricultural exports declined by 25%. The decline in energy production led to a decline in total production by 13.4%<sup>23</sup>.

Another worsening problem that North Korea was suffering from was the collapse of communist Marxism itself and the decline in the role of the ideological variable in international relations in the period that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union<sup>24</sup>. What has become a topic of discussion on the international scene is the effectiveness of economic power, the conditions for competition and economic growth, and the supremacy of the philosophy of the market economy<sup>25</sup>. The purpose of this is to secure an international environment free of pressures and challenges. On the basis of this, the volume of trade between South Korea and China has increased five times as much as the volume of trade between China and North Korea. In addition to China's approval of the United States (an ally of South Korea) to issue a Security Council resolution condemning North Korea's practices

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid, pp 225.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid, p 227.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid, p 243.

<sup>22</sup> Kong, Tat Yan. "The political obstacles to economic reform in North Korea: The ultra cautious strategy in comparative perspective." *The Pacific Review* 27, no. 1 (2014): pp 73-82.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p 88.

<sup>24</sup> Wertz, Daniel. "The US, North Korea, and nuclear diplomacy." Washington: National Committee on North Korea (2018). pp 45-48.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid, p 50.

after the submarine accident in 1996, demanding that it resume dialogue with South Korea<sup>26</sup>.

As a result, North Korea's debts amounted to more than 10\$ billion and equaled more than 50% of the gross national product. North Korea's economy also declined in the 1990s, as the North Korean economy's production rate declined in 1997 to 50% compared to 1990. The decline is still continuing despite the silence of the North Korean media regarding this. On the other hand, North Korea suffers from a food shortage, and the number of people who died due to famine between the years 1995-1998 was estimated at 270,000 thousand people, most of whom were children and the elderly. In July 2002, Kim Yong Nam, Chairman of the Supreme Council of North Korea, visited Vietnam to discuss the problem of food aid that North Korea needs<sup>27</sup>. At the request of the United Nations in 2003, 100\$ million was raised to purchase quantities of food to satisfy 7.9 million North Koreans who were at risk of starvation. On September, 2003, the World Food Program announced that it needed (194,876) tons of food, and Catherine Britney, Executive Director of the World Food Program, announced in a statement that it would increase the amount of aid in the food program to (876,933) tons of food, at a total cost of (3.58) million dollar. One of the internal problems that the Korean people were suffering from was the Korean government, which was not distributing food to the population equally<sup>28</sup>. In addition, the Korean government closed humanitarian organizations, which generated an international decline in providing support and economic aid to North Korea.

Aforementioned, it can be said that the economic problem in North Korea stems from a number of reasons, the most important of which is North Korea's focus on one sector, which is the heavy industry sector, and making the rest of the economic sectors, including the agricultural sector, servants of this sector<sup>29</sup>. North Korea followed a policy of self-reliance and cooperation with other socialist countries, which made it suffer from a lack of foreign capital and manufactured most of the production equipment, which created a gap between global and local standards. This is due to the backwardness of Korean technology and the backwardness of industry capabilities. North Korea also suffers from weak infrastructure components (means of communication, ports, roads, and wages), which are closely linked to industrial production. Ultimately, economic policies

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, pp 53-56.

<sup>27</sup> Lukin, Artyom, and Liudmila Zakharova. "Russia-North Korea economic ties: is there more than meets the eye?." *Orbis* 62, no. 2 (2018):pp 244-250.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, pp 255-261.

<sup>29</sup> Nanto, Dick Kazuyuki, and Emma Chanlett-Avery. "North Korea: economic leverage and policy analysis." Congressional Information Service, Library of Congress, 2010. pp 34-38.

were adopted based on collective ownership and the planned economy, which led to the weakness of the incentive system<sup>30</sup>.

## Conclusion

The North Korean nuclear program is not born today, but rather its roots extend back to a historical era that began in the 1950s and continued to develop to establish an advanced nuclear program with high capabilities that would stand up to the most prominent global powers, led by US and supporting allies. Although North Korea's nuclear program has achieved some positive goals, it has led to disastrous consequences, causing many internal and external problems for North Korea at the national, regional and global levels. However, the North Korean decision-maker knew how to deal with these political and economic obstacles, depending on the national interior, where industry and agriculture, and on allies hostile to the United States, such as China and Russia.

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<sup>30</sup> Chen, Cheng, Kyungmin Ko, and Ji-Yong Lee. "North Korea's Internet strategy and its political implications." *The Pacific Review* 23, no. 5 (2010): pp 649-670.



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