

# CHINA'S PROTECTIVE POLICY TOWARDS NORTH KOREA

Name

Course Name/Number

Professor's Name

Submission Date



# Abstract

China has been enjoying a mutual and unique relationship with North Korea since the time of the Cold War era. China's policies towards North Korea have been determined by its prime interests in the Korean Peninsula. According to the analysts, this helps China ensure its peaceful and stable position and secure the border with North Korea. In attaining these interests, China has managed to change the situation on the peninsula and its relationship with both Koreas. China provides the policy which is based on the need to maintain the status quo while seeking to avoid any kind of war.

If to take into consideration the perspective of China's security, North Korea is vital as it appears to be a military buffer state for China. North Korea is also strategically placed for the economic growth of China. It shares its border with China, and it is also adjacent to one of Chinese key industrial areas, Manchuria. It should be mentioned that China has established a number of mineral industries in North Korea. As a result, China has been supporting North Korea against the pressure from the international community. China is currently acting as a major power that can influence North Korea.

The international policy of China, the myth of blood ties between the two countries, and the strategic geographical position of North Korea are some of the reasons why China continues supporting North Korea. Being a North Korea's close friend and seemingly the only ally, China did not criticize the North Koreans openly in the past. However, it has had different views with North Korea on a number of issues. For instance, in 2010, North Korea defied the agreement between the two countries and carried out its nuclear test program.

This research attempts to explore the policy of China towards North Korea. It will focus on the Chinese realism policy and the notion of brotherhood between these two countries, among other variables. It also seeks to project if China should continue to defend North Korea.

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Lee (2012)<sup>1</sup>, the relationship between China and North Korea can be traced back to the times of the Cold War era when China joined up with the Soviet Union to support North Korea. China has been offering continuous assistance to North Korea since those times. However, the cordial relationship between China and North Korea began to grow cold from mid-2000s, when contrary to the hopes of China and the global society, North Korea started to conduct nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009. Lee (2012) noted that despite the challenges posed by the policy of North Korea, China has continued to support it. However, this has not been without external challenges, as there has been a strong argument given by the United States and other regional countries that it is China, which has both the economic and political leverages necessary to influence North Korea. However, China has remained very reluctant to take advantage of its position.

This was explicitly demonstrated in 2010 when Beijing refused to accept the fact that it was North Korea which was responsible for the sinking of the naval ship that belonged to the South Korean Navy. Additionally, China never criticized North Korea for attacking South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island and developing its uranium enrichment program. China refused the United Nations to debate over any of these issues (Orrick, 2011). In addition, Lee (2012) has highlighted the kind of support that China is giving to North Korea, as represented by a number of press reports. All these reports state that if China stopped giving the support and protection to North Korea today, the country might not be able to survive on its own. However, Lee (2012) notes that, in such a case, the end result would be very detrimental to the security and economic interests of China. According to Lee (2012), China has been in dilemma between the need to continue its relation-

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<sup>1</sup> Lee, J. After the U.S-China Summit: *The Onus on the Two Koreans*. Online.  
[http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/0124\\_korea\\_lee.aspx](http://www.brookings.edu/papers/2011/0124_korea_lee.aspx) (February 9, 2012)



ship with North Korea and the demand of the international community to act as a global power because it does have such capacity.

Kick (2010)<sup>2</sup> argues that China's 2010 protection of North Korea's aggressive policy may be related to the on-going dynasty leadership succession that China has tacitly recognized. Noland (2000)<sup>3</sup> suggests that China may have chosen to follow the non-intervention principle. This implies that China will not interfere with the internal matters of another independent sovereign nation. Looking from another angle, China's leadership might have been afraid that a failure to accommodate the side effects of the dictatorial power transfer in North Korea could negatively affect its own transition of leadership, which should take place in 2012. Therefore, with all liabilities related to North Korea, China has continued to embrace it as its ally (Harrison, 2003).

According to Noland (2000), the friendly relations between peoples of North Korea and China play a crucial role in 'defending the common cause of socialism and independence,' and 'advancing the revolution and construction' in both countries. There is absolutely no doubt that the 'blood' ties between the Chinese and the North Koreans had been forged during the anti-Japanese war in the 1930s and 1940s, and these ties were subsequently strengthened by the Korean War and the Cold War rivalry. However, Lee (2012) argues that even though China has been forming policies which the United States considers to be in favour of North Korea, they are never meant to protect North Korea. The policies are the mere strategies introduced by China to avoid the possibility of any kind of the regional tension.

Currently, China is dormant in its status quo approach towards North Korea, and the rest of the world maintains that it has both political

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<sup>2</sup> Kirk, D., The sinking of the Cheonan. *Global Media Journal-Canadian Edition*, 3(2010): 99-104.

<sup>3</sup> Noland, M., *Avoiding the Apocalypse: the future of the two Koreas* (Washington, DC: Institution for International Economics, 2000).

and economic potential to influence North Korea. It will be interesting to find out what forces are behind this unique China's policy towards North Korea. Finding out the answers to these issues will contribute to one's understanding as to China's strategic and defensive policies towards North Korea.

This dissertation will not only help me delve deep into my passion for Chinese politics, but also for solving complexities. Having a Chinese background myself, I regard this research as extremely personal and thus would like share the facts that I have found out through this process with my ex-colleagues. I am confident that this particular topic will help me become a good expert in this field and to continue specializing in this area.

## **2.0 THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA POLICY TOWARDS NORTH KOREA**

### **2.1 The Korean War and the Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and the Co-operation Friendship Treaty**

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#### **2.1.1 The Korean War**

##### **EVENTS LEADING TO THE WAR**

The Russo-Japanese War of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century led to the Yalta Conference of 1945, which authorized both the Soviet and the American troops to take control of Korea after the end of the war. This led to the division of the country at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel. According to Hickey (2012), these events were the force behind the continued confrontation between the North and the South. He noted that the various parties were dissatisfied with the agreement that Korea, which had been a Japanese colony from 1910, should be divided between the Soviet Union and the United States. Hickey (2012) notes that the Soviet

Union supported the establishment of the Stalinist regime in North Korea. It was the Soviet Union that helped create the North Korean People's Army, trained and supplied them with modern arms. On the other hand, American actions in South Korea created a chaotic political situation by establishing its own administration, which used force in ruling people of the South. It was probably the greatest mistake that the United States and the Soviet Union made concerning South and North Korea.

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## 5.0 CONCLUSION

It is clear that China has been portraying a protective policy towards North Korea. The commitment of these nations to protect and promote the interests of one another is well stimulated in the binding Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and the Second Co-operation Friendship treaties. They seem to have played a key role, especially in the case of China which, irrespective of the condemnable actions by North Korea, has stood firm in its support for the country. However, its future effectiveness will depend on the achievements by its critics in luring the leaders to believe in the claim that the provisions in this treaty were not based on any set of the logical ideology. The foreign policy of China has also been that of maintaining the status quo, while avoiding the possibility of any conflict.

This is well demonstrated by the two case studies of the Cheonan Sinking Saga and the Yeonpyeong Island Bombing. It should be mentioned that, irrespective of the fierce criticism across the world, China has remained true to its position. China's commitment to North Korea is also demonstrated through its central role in the Six-Party Talks. However, with the latest behaviours of North Korea, especially its de-

termination to develop nuclear power, the possibility of this bilateral relationship coming to an end is higher than before. The indication of the potential separation has already been seen, because China has been involving itself in the acts like supporting the United Nations' Proposal to apply sanctions against North Korea.

The present research may have several implications for the IR study and the analysis of the Sino-Korean relations, in particular. First, our comprehensive timeline of various events shaping China's geopolitical policy towards North Korea will help further research in this field. This work provides grounds for continuous analysis and revision of the existing causal links between North Korean domestic and international undertakings and Chinese support for North Korea at the international arena. Second, the information presented here would be of help to other parties interested in the future of North Korea, its nuclear programs, and relationships with the rest of the world. It might be of particular interest to the United States who is looking for best ways to handle the unpredictable North Korean leadership and ruling out the possibility of nuclear war. Meanwhile, it will also be easier to position and understand Chinese foreign policies in both regional and international context, their future and effects on the rest of the world. Finally, the present work may also become a useful academic source for researchers and policymakers in other areas of IR to explain geopolitical developments outside the Sino-Korean framework.



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## 7.0 Appendix

1. **Figure I:** Showing the location of the sinking and the US-South Korean Naval Base.

**Source:** maps.google.com



1. **Figure II:** Payoff matrix of the prisoner's dilemma game

**Source:** <<http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/12/4/7.html>>

Player A \ Player B	Defection	Cooperation
	Defection	Cooperation
Defection	( <b>P</b> : 1, <b>P</b> : 1)	( <b>T</b> : 5, <b>S</b> : 0)
Cooperation	( <b>S</b> : 0, <b>T</b> : 5)	( <b>R</b> : 3, <b>R</b> : 3)