

North Korea's "Alliance Coercive Diplomacy" against China (1992-2022)¹

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Abstract

China withholds support to North Korea in the alliance game when North Korea commits provocations that undermine China's interests on the Korean Peninsula. Meanwhile, China's estrangement exacerbates North Korea's abandonment anxieties. In addition, Pyongyang's survival will be jeopardized when China's support is absent. Nevertheless, North Korea commits provocations that neglect China's pressure.

Hence, this paper develops a concept of "Alliance Coercive Diplomacy" to explore the reasons behind North Korea's provocations without considering China's opposition even though North Korea's economic development and security heavily rely on China. To develop this concept, I will provide a standard to measure abandonment fear, and analyze conditions engendering North Korea to adopt "alliance coercive diplomacy" against China. In this research, I argue that when North Korea suffers from intense abandonment anxieties, Pyongyang adopts "alliance coercive diplomacy" to keep China's support to deter the U.S..

Key Words: (1) Sino-DPRK Alliance; (2) Alliance behavior; (3) Abandonment Anxieties; (4) North Korea

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I. Introduction

Since the Post-Cold War era, North Korea has suffered from diplomatic hardship as Pyongyang lost support from the Communist bloc. Before the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev amplified its engagement with the Republic of Korea (ROK) in order to restore Russia's lethargic economy by obtaining South Korean economic investment; Moscow eventually established diplomatic ties with Seoul in 1991.³ After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Moscow terminated the economic assistance and security guarantee to North Korea.⁴ Also, despite China maintains its alliance relationship and economic assistance with North Korea, Beijing amplified the relationship with Seoul that neglected Pyongyang's opposition. The reduction of support from China and Russia causing North Korea's diplomatic and economic hardship in the 1990s. Moreover, due to natural disaster and economic hardship, North Korea suffered from famine (North Korean referred it as the "Arduous March") and the shortage of energy supply. Therefore, Kim's family believes that the development of nuclear capability is the only way for North Korea to overcome its diplomatic hardship.

Although the United States provided energy assistance to encourage North Korea to discontinue its nuclear development, Washington adopted a hawkish approach against North Korea after the Cold War.⁵ In response to the 9/11 attack, the Bush administration launched a "War on Terror" campaign to counter terrorism; North Korea was one of the targets of the campaign. Although officials from the Bush Administration declared that Washington did not intend to promote a "regime change" in North Korea, the U.S. military operation in Iraq sent a signal to North Korea that they might be the next target of the U.S. if they did not protect itself. Thus, North Korea found its exigency to develop its nuclear weaponry to deter the possible attacks launched by the U.S.; North Korea successfully launched a nuclear test in 2006.

As a patron of North Korea, China understands the reasons behind North Korea's nuclear development. Beijing maintains its support (both economic and security aspects) to Pyongyang.⁶ Nonetheless, North Korea's nuclear development and provocations undermine China's border security. To ensure China's security, Beijing opposes North Korea's nuclear tests and its nuclear development; Beijing looks for a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula. To encourage North Korea to dismantle its nuclear program, Beijing initially opposed enforcing strict economic sanctions and opposed the U.S. and South Korea to conduct joint military drills. Instead, Beijing tried to introduce the Chinese style economic reform to North Korean officials in order to distract Pyongyang's attention from nuclear development to economic development; the Chinese

³ Tae Dong Chung, "Korea's Nordpolitik: Achievements & Prospects," *Asian Perspective* 15, no. 2 (1991): 149 – 78; Seung-ho Joo, "South Korea's Nordpolitik and the Soviet Union (Russia)," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 7, no. 2 (Summer/Fall 1993): 404 - 50.

⁴ After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Russia refused to offer economic assistance to North Korea due to economic recession. In addition, Russia terminated its alliance treaty with North Korea. Although Russia and North Korea signed the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness, and Cooperation in 2001, the treaty does not provide a firm commitment for Moscow to provide support to North Korea. See: Seung-Ho Joo, "Russia and North Korea, 1992-2006: From Distant Allies to Normal Neighbors," *Korea Observer* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2007): 65–99; Alexander Lukin and Oksana Pugacheva, "Russia's Priorities and Approaches to Issues Regarding the Korean Peninsula," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 34, no. 1 (March 2022): 81–99.

⁵ Christopher Lawrence, "Normalization by Other Means: Technological Infrastructure and Political Commitment in the North Korean Nuclear Crisis," *International Security* 45, no. 1 (July 2020): 9–50.

⁶ Anne Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (March 1, 2005): 35 – 48.

government expected that this measure helped moderate North Korea belligerence. Moreover, the Chinese amplify its investment in North Korean border cities with China and strengthen its access to North Korea's ports by launching infrastructure projects. Chinese officials expected they can adopt its economic instruments to constrain North Korea from committing provocations.

However, North Korea was reluctant to adopt the Chinese style economic reform and committed provocations without considering China opposition; Pyongyang's behaviors undermined Beijing's geo-political interests. To ensure China's interests on the Korean Peninsula, Beijing China gradually adopted the following measures actively to constrain North Korea's provocations after China's leadership transition in 2012. First, Beijing tried to equivocate its alliance commitment to North Korea; some officials even suggested not to enact article 2 of the alliance treaty if North Korea were to trigger a conflict.⁷ Second, the Chinese government became more supportive to enforcing the United Nations sanctions on North Korea in order to prohibit North Korea from obtaining funding and materials to develop its nuclear programs.⁸ Finally, Beijing tried to consolidate its relationship with South Korea to produce more pressure against North Korea.

In fact, North Korea's regime survival would be jeopardized when China's security guarantees and economic assistance are absent. North Korea receives China's economic assistance and investment to sustain North Korea's economic development; China's provides 90% of foreign trade to North Korea. In addition, North Korea only relies on China's security assurance to deter the U.S.-ROK alliance. However, why does North Korea keep on undermining China's interests without considering China's pressure?

To answer this question, scholars argue that North Korea takes advantage of its geo-political values to keep China's support in the alliance game. More specifically, when North Korea experiences *abandonment anxieties* caused by China, North Korea tried to coerce China to maintain its support.⁹ Although some Chinese officials, scholars and military leaders suggested to abandon North Korea, Beijing rejects this suggestion. Hence, the following questions deserve a deep discussion. To begin with, how to measure abandonment anxieties in alliance politics? Given the fact that Beijing does not fundamentally abandon North Korea, is it necessary for North Korea coerce China? Even if North Korea needs to coerce China for its support, which conditions do North Korea find its exigency to provoke China to keep its support? Most importantly, how to measure "*abandonment anxieties*" in alliance politics?

To address the puzzles, this paper attempts to establish an "alliance coercive diplomacy" framework to explore how a weaker member in an alliance address its fear of abandonment caused by its member. To develop this framework, I will analysis reasons behind "alliance coercive

⁷ Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Why China Won't Rescue North Korea: What to Expect If Things Fall Apart," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 1 (January 2018): 58–66; Sumi Jeon, "Preemptive Strike on North Korea: Explaining the Sino–North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 30, no. 2 (June 2018): 247–63.

⁸ Wenxin Li and Ji Young Kim, "Not a Blood Alliance Anymore: China's Evolving Policy toward UN Sanctions on North Korea," *Contemporary Security Policy* 41, no. 4 (October 2020): 610–31.

⁹ Victor D. Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Ecco, 2018): 344; Hongseo Park and Jae Jeok Park, "How Not to Be Abandoned by China: North Korea's Nuclear Brinkmanship Revisited," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 29, no. 3 (September 2017): 371–87.

diplomacy” would be the most feasible measure for a weaker state to adopt to maintain its patron’s support. Subsequently, I will provide a standard to measure the degree of *abandonment anxieties* renders the weaker state has to adopt an “alliance coercive diplomacy” against its ally to keep its support. Cases of this research will apply North Korea’s alliance management with China since the Sino-ROK normalization in 1992 to 2022. In this paper, I agree that China is one of the targets of North Korea’s provocations. Nonetheless, Pyongyang only provokes China when it suffers from *intense abandonment anxieties*.

To justify this argument, the development of this research proceeds as follows. First, this paper will establish a concept of “alliance coercive diplomacy” based on the existing alliance theory. This section will explore risks in alliance politics and why the “alliance coercive diplomacy” would be the most effective way to address the *abandonment anxieties*. Also, this paper will provide a standard to measure *abandonment anxieties* and conditions that a weaker state will coerce its ally in order to keep its support in the alliance game. After establishing the theoretical framework, I will apply the case of North Korea’s alliance management with China; this case will be divided into three episodes: (1) 1992-2002; (2) 2002-2012 and; (2) 2012-2022. The first episode begins with the interaction between China and North Korea since the Sino-ROK normalization in 1992; I will explore how North Korea gain China’s support to deter the U.S. during the first nuclear crisis in 1994. The Second episode covers North Korea’s alliance management with China during the Hu era. In this episode, I will explore the interaction between China and North Korea during the six party talks. The final episode falls into the Xi Jinping Era from 2012 to 2022; this episode intends to explore North Korea’s measures to keep China’s support despite their relations was deteriorated.

II. The Argument: “Alliance Coercive Diplomacy”

This research attempts to explore how a weaker member addresses its fear of *abandonment* within the alliance by coercing its patron. To achieve this goal, I develop a concept of “alliance coercive diplomacy” to explore the weak state’s alliance management with its patron. To understand the application of this concept to North Korea’s interaction with China, it is necessary to review the existing literature related to risks in alliance politics.

In alliance politics, not only do members need to overcome risk from their adversary, but they also need to address risks caused by their allies. In other words, alliance politics consist of adversary and alliance games; impacts from both will have a feed-back effect on each other. Within the alliance, members need to deter their adversary (and its campaign) from undermining the security of members. By forming up an alliance, a weaker member within the alliance can obtain support to counter its adversary to ensure its security, whereas a patron of the alliance can enlarge its influence at its campaign or ensure its existing interests.¹⁰ Nonetheless, states in alliance also need to overcome risks caused by their ally. There are two risks in alliance game, members need to overcome the risks of “Entrapment” and “Abandonment.” The former one means a state involves into an unrelated conflict reluctantly between an adversary and an ally, whereas the letter one refers to an ally fails to receive support from its member(s) within the alliance.¹¹ In this respect, it is true that junior members would have more possibilities to suffer from abandonment anxieties

¹⁰ Stephen M. Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

¹¹ Glenn H. Snyder, *Alliance Politics* (New York: Cornell University Press, 2007).

as they are more rely on the alliance to ensure their security, there are some factors that influence members' concern over their risks in alliance politics.

To begin with, member's level of dependence to an alliance in maintaining its regime survival influences its alliance decision making. This concept refers to the members' need of alliance in maintaining its security. When a member is more rely on its patron's security guarantee and other forms of support such as economic assistance to remain its regime survival, the member has less autonomy within the alliance.¹² Under this circumstance, the weaker member is more likely to suffer from the fear of abandonment when its patron suspends the assistance to the member.¹³ For instance, Russia terminated the alliance and suspended the economic assistance to North Korea that makes North Korea becomes more dependence on China to ensure its regime survival. Hence, if China were to reduce its security guarantee or suspends its economic activities with North Korea, Beijing measures would increase the degree of Pyongyang's abandonment anxieties.

Second, member's strategic values contributing to the alliance has an impact to their concern over the anxieties of entrapment and abandonment. Although the weaker state has more possibility to experience abandonment anxieties when it is more dependent on its patron, the strategic value of the weaker state renders the patron's necessity to maintain the alliance with the weaker state. The great power needs to maintain the alliance with its weaker partner in order to ensure its geo-political buffer, assess the natural resources from the weaker partner, and ensure the great power's presence in the region.¹⁴ In the case of the Sino-DPRK relations, China needs to maintain its alliance with North Korea so that it helps deter the U.S. from enlarging its influence in Northeast Asia through the U.S.-ROK alliance and access North Korea natural resources in maintaining the energy supply in China's Northeast region. In this regard, China maintains the minimum support to North Korea even though Pyongyang's provocations undermine Beijing's interests. For instance, Beijing opposes Washington to impose pressure against North Korea, including to conduct military drills and deploy missile system targeting North Korea.¹⁵

Furthermore, commitment of members within the alliance influences members' concern regarding risks in alliance politics. When terms and conditions of the alliance commitment with more clarity, there is more possibilities for the patron suffers from the entrapment anxieties as its partner(s) may take the patron's support for granted. By contrast, when the agreement has more ambiguity, there is more possible for a weaker partner experience the abandonment anxieties. With an ambiguous alliance commitment, there would be an uncertainty about whether the patron will provide support to its weaker ally when necessary; it would be more likely to suffer from abandonment anxieties. Consider the case of China's alliance management with North Korea, Beijing tried to downgrade its alliance commitment with Pyongyang after the leadership transition in 2012. The reduction of security guarantee to Pyongyang helped reduce Beijing entrapment anxieties and show a signal to Pyongyang. Nonetheless, North Korea suffered from abandonment

¹² James D. Morrow, "Alliance and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggression Model of Alliances," *American Journal of Political Science* 35, no. 4 (November 1991): 904–33.

¹³ Glenn H. Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World Politics* 36, no. 4 (July 1984): 461–95.

¹⁴ Victor D. Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism: The United States-Korea-Japan Security Triangle* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000).

¹⁵ Ming Lee, "Obama's Policy toward the Korean Peninsula: 2009-2012," *Prospect Quarterly* 14, no.2 (April 2013): 1-52. [in Chinese]

anxieties and China's vague support undermined North Korea's loyalty to China; Pyongyang behaved belligerent that violated China's interests.¹⁶

After considering the above-mentioned factors, members (particularly the patron ally) adopt the following options to attenuate its entrapment anxieties. The patron adopts a conciliatory policy in the adversary game to reduce the tense relationship with the adversary campaign and thus reduce the possibilities of triggering a conflict between both sides. Also, states withhold support to its ally. For instance, they reduce their security guarantee and economic assistance to its ally, criticize their ally's behavior, and even terminate the alliance treaty.¹⁷ However, the above-mentioned measures have some limitations. First, states cannot guarantee whether the conciliatory policy helps reduce the tense relations with the adversary. Second, when a state reduces its support to its ally, there is still a possibility of an ally entrapping itself. Meanwhile, a distancing policy to an adversary may encourage the adversary to provoke the ally; the state also suffers from entrapment anxieties when its ally maintains a distance from the state.

Thus, Victor Cha suggests a "Powerplay" tactic to avoid *entrapment anxieties*. In this strategy, the great power should amplify the alliance relations to promote an asymmetrical alliance between the great power and its ally. In this type of alliance, the ally largely depends on its patron's support to deter its adversary so that the great power can leverage dependence to alleviate entrapment fears caused by its ally. With the "Powerplay" strategy, a great power may completely control its ally thus helping alleviate the fear of entrapment. Nevertheless, there is a possibility that the ally may use its vulnerability and strategic values to make coercion against the great power in order to address the ally's fear of abandonment.¹⁸

Another risk in alliance politics is the abandonment dilemma. Members experience abandonment anxieties primarily due to its ally fail or reluctant to provide support to help itself to deter the adversary. To reduce the abandonment anxieties caused by an ally, the member will adopt certain tactics to secure itself: (1) return to internal balancing, that is— to enhance its military capability to deter the adversary alone; (2) exit the alliance and join other alliance to seek security guarantee from other states; (3) turn to the adversary side or appease the adversary and; (4) leverage other agendas as a bargaining chips to keep its ally support.¹⁹ However, these strategies have their shortcomings, especially in the case of the weaker members at the asymmetrical alliance. First, even if the weaker member enhances its military capability, it may have sufficient capability to counter the adversary alone. Second, when there is a bipolar order or other parties consider a state as a major "source of threat," it is difficult for the state to exit the existing alliance and join a new alliance. Third, a state cannot guarantee its adversary would favor its interests even though the state has turned to the adversary side. Finally, when a state is deeply relies on its partner in economic and security aspects, the former one would be difficult to keep its partner's support by leveraging other issues.

¹⁶ Man Fung YEUNG, "The Development of the Sino-DPRK Alliance during the Xi Jinping Era," *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs* 25, no. 4 (May 2022): 117–70.

¹⁷ Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics."

¹⁸ Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018).

¹⁹ Cha, *Alignment Despite Antagonism*.

To overcome the limitation from the above-mentioned measures, this research introduces another strategy to address the abandonment anxieties, called the “alliance coercive diplomacy.” In this strategy, a junior ally tries to coerce its ally to keep its patron’s support when it needs to overcome abandonment anxieties, rather than internal balancing or adopt a consolidatory policy to its adversary. In alliance politics, members are interdependence, regardless of whether the power relationship between members is asymmetrical or symmetrical. The weaker member receives donor’s security guarantee and economic assistance to deter its adversary, whereas the donor needs to maintain the alliance to ensure its political influence, power projection in the region, and even its security. In this case, the donor also cannot afford the negative impacts of losing its junior ally even though the partner deeply relies on the donor’s support.

During the Sino-Soviet split after Khrushchev came into power, Pyongyang managed to maintain an equidistance diplomacy between Beijing and Moscow in order to maximize its interests; North Korea established a bilateral alliance with China and the Soviet Union respectively in 1961. Within the alliance, North Korea received economic assistance and security guarantee from China, whereas maintained its border security in Northeast Asia to deter the U.S.-ROK alliance and its power projection on the Korea Peninsula.²⁰ Moreover, China obtained North Korea’s political support to ensure its prestige in the Communist bloc. Hence, given North Korea political and strategic values to North Korea, Beijing cannot afford the cost of losing Pyongyang even though its behavior may undermine China’s interests.

In this regard, the following conditions enable a state to adopt an “alliance coercive diplomacy” against *abandonment anxieties* caused by its patron: (1) common adversary; (2) geo-political values that the state enjoys, (3) power asymmetry between the patron, and; (4) the availability of alternative options can be adopted by the state. There must be a common adversary against the alliance; pressure imposed by the adversary provides the most direct reason for a donor to keep its support in the alliance game. In addition, when the adversary impose pressure against the weaker ally that undermines the donor’s geo-political interests and security, the donor would find its exigency to support its partner. Thus, the donor would solidify its support to the ally in the alliance game. Moreover, if the power asymmetry between the patron engenders a weaker ally has a lack of policy options to assuage *abandonment anxieties*, than “alliance coercive diplomacy” is a feasible policy choice for the weaker state to keep its patron’s support.

Although the reduction of a patron’s support to its junior ally engenders the abandonment anxieties, the junior ally adopts “alliance coercive diplomacy” is determined by the degree of abandonment anxieties it suffers.

Definition 1: Abandonment fears are *moderate* when ally A *might* have to encounter its adversary without ally B’s support.

Definition 2: Abandonment fears are *intense* when ally A *must* have to encounter its adversary without ally B’s support.

²⁰ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations, 1949–1976* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

Based on the definition of abandonment anxieties, the following indicators help measure the degree of an ally suffers that renders the ally needs to adopt “alliance coercive diplomacy” against its partner in order to keep its support in the alliance game.

1. Adversary game: Ally A situates in a confrontation with the adversary that is unescapable.
2. Power relations with an adversary: There is a power asymmetry between ally A and is adversary that makes ally A cannot encounter the adversary alone.
3. Ally’s dependence on the alliance: An absence of ally B’s support (both verbal and material support) to ally A causes an unaffordable cost of maintaining the regime survival of ally A.
4. Alternative policy options to hedge risk: There is an absence of alternative policy options for ally A to reduce its abandonment anxieties.

In the context of “alliance coercive diplomacy,” the alliance behavior of a weaker state is determined by the degree of *abandonment anxieties* a weaker state experiences. Therefore, the following propositions proceed as follows.

Proposition 1: If ally A experiences *moderate* fears of abandonment, the ally A will employ *internal balancing* to reduce its fears.

Proposition 2: If ally A experiences *intense* fears of abandonment, the ally A will employ “*alliance coercive diplomacy*” against ally B to keep B’s support in the alliance game.

In proposition 1A, internal balancing is a preferable measure for a weaker member to address the abandonment anxieties with the following reasons: (1) an ally may remain minimum support to a state in the alliance game; (2) a state is capable to withstand pressure from the adversary and; (3) there are alternative policy options for a junior ally to assuage its abandonment anxieties. In this situation, seeking support from patron ally is one of the policy tools to withstand pressure from the adversary; returning the internal balancing helps address an ally’s abandonment anxieties.

However, in proposition 2, a weaker member has an incentive to adopt the “alliance coercive diplomacy” and a confrontational policy against adversary when it suffers from an *intense* level of *abandonment anxieties*. Under this circumstance, a weaker member has no choice but to overcome its adversary without support from its patron partner. In addition, there is an absence of alternative policy options for the member to attenuate pressure from the adversary as its capability alone is not sufficient to counter the adversary.

Under such circumstance, the member has an incentive to coerce its patron ally in the alliance game. There are some measures that the junior member to coerce its patron. For instance, a member behaves obstinate to undermine the patron’s geo-political interests and security; censures its partner from reducing its support, and; undermines patron’s credibility vis-à-vis the adversary that reduces the possibilities of the conciliation between the adversary and the patron. In the meantime, the member will provoke the common adversary to escalate the tense relationship

between the adversary and itself to entrap the patron partner; the latter one has no choice but to provide support in the alliance game to ensure its existing interests. The implementation of the “alliance coercive diplomacy” may damage a member’s reputation within the alliance. Nonetheless, this strategy is the more proactive way for a weaker state to address intense abandonment anxieties as the preservation of the existing geo-political interests and security is the prime concern for the patron ally during the tense relationship between an ally and an adversary.

Applying the “alliance coercive diplomacy” model into the alliance relationship between North Korea and China, Beijing tries to reduce support to North Korea when the former one experiences the entrapment anxieties. Meanwhile, North Korea will suffer the abandonment anxieties. To ensure China’s support in the alliance game with North Korea, Pyongyang’s provocations not only target the U.S. (along with South Korea), but also against China. When North Korea escalates the threat level in Northeast Asia, China needs to maintain support to North Korea in order to ensure its existing interests in the region even though China gradually feel restive to North Korea’s provocations. By maintaining China’s support, North Korea can reduce its fear of abandonment, thereby ensuring its regime survival. The following section will adopt the framework to explore conditions of North Korea adopts the “alliance coercive diplomacy” against China since the Sino-ROK normalization in 1992.

III. North Korea’s Alliance Management with China from 1992-2002

After the Cold War, the Clinton administration tried to reduce the U.S. presence in the Asia-Pacific as the U.S. chief threat, the Soviet Union, was no longer existed. Washington attempted to reduce the number of the United States Forces in Korea (USFK) from 135,000 to 120,000, including 7000 modest troops.²¹ In response to North Korea, not only did the U.S. refuse to normalize the diplomatic relationship with Pyongyang as Washington assumed North Korea would collapse after Russia and China reduced their support as well as North Korea suffered from an array of domestic instabilities.

Meanwhile, North Korea suffered from abandonment anxieties after the integration of the Soviet Union. North Korea’s chief allies, Russia and China, either terminated or reduce their support to North Korea after the Cold War. Prior to the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Gorbachev consolidated the Soviet’s relationship with Seoul in order to encourage South Korean enterprises from investing in Russia; Moscow established diplomatic relations with Seoul in 1991. Moreover, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia terminated its economic assistance and alliance relationship with North Korea. In addition, even though China did not terminate the alliance and maintain the minimum support to North Korea. Beijing established diplomatic ties with Seoul in 1992 without considering Pyongyang’s opposition. Therefore, in response to North Korea’s diplomatic hardship, Pyongyang developed its nuclear capabilities to ensure its regime survival.

After the Cold War Era, the major task for the Chinese government was to accelerate its pace of China’s economic reform and global engagement. Since the Deng Xiaoping era, the Chinese government promoted “Reform and Open Door” policy (改革開放) to restore China’s

²¹ Richard D. Fisher, “The Clinton Administration’s Early Defense Policy toward Asia,” *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 6, no. 1 (June 1, 1994): 103–21.

lethargic economy caused by political movements before 1976 and enhance China's global engagement for the sake of enhancing China's economic development and international influence.²² However, due to the political incident in 1989, China was sanctioned by the U.S. that impaired the process of China's "Open Door Policy."²³ Under these circumstances, Beijing needed to overcome its diplomatic pressure in order to secure the achievement of Chinese economic reform.

In this regard, engaging with South Korea was a great opportunity for China to achieve its policy goals. The Roh Tae-woo government in South Korea adopted "Nordpolitik" that aimed to engage with the Communist Bloc to enhance South Korea's international influence and leverage their influence to counterbalance North Korea's threat; China was one of the targets in Roh's policy.²⁴ Moreover, unlike other democratic countries such as the U.S. and Canada, South Korea did not impose economic sanctions against China due to political incident took place in Beijing during 1989. Instead, South Korea strengthened its engagement with China. For instance, Seoul dispatched delegates to attend the 1990 Asian Game that held in Beijing and encouraged South Korean enterprises to invest in China. For China, Seoul's engagement policy with China would be an opportunity for Beijing to overcome its diplomatic isolation after 1989. In this case, China took this advantage to consolidate its relations with South Korea. The Chinese representative at the United Nations (UN) agreed South Korea to join the UN and established diplomatic relations with South Korea formally on August 24, 1992. However, Beijing's engagement policy with Seoul neglected Pyongyang's opposition and undermined Pyongyang's regime legitimacy.

Although China retained minimum support to North Korea after the normalization of Sino-ROK relations in 1992, North Korea experienced abandonment fear as China reduced its support. After 1992, there was no bilateral leader summit between China and North Korea. According to the data "China-North Korea High Level Visits Since 1953" from CSIS Korea Chair, there was not meeting between both leaders until 2000 even though there were meetings at ministerial level.²⁵ In the security realm, China did not terminate the alliance treaty with North Korea. Nonetheless, Beijing decided to withdraw the delegation of the Chinese People's volunteers from the Military Armistice Commission (MAC) in October 1994.²⁶ In the economic realm, China suspended its supply of raw material such as coal, crude oil to North Korea with a lower price; food supply to North Korea drooped by half after 1992.²⁷

China's move to North Korea not only undermined Pyongyang's legitimacy, but it also generated a negative impact to North Korean economic development, especially when North Korea experienced a natural disaster and food shortage after the first-generation leader, Kim Il-sung passed away in 1994. In response to abandonment anxieties and domestic hardship, North Korea tried to develop its nuclear capability. For North Korea, developing its nuclear capability helped

²² Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2013).

²³ David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing U.S.- China Relations, 1989-2000* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Parris H. Chang, "Deng's Last Stand on China's Reform Movement," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 4, no. 1 (Summer 1992): 105-28.

²⁴ Scott A. Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy and Alliance in an Era of Rival Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

²⁵ Victor Cha and Andy Lim, "Dataset: China-North Korea High Level Visits Since 1953," *Beyond Parallel*, March 17, 2017, <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/china-dprk-high-level-visits-since-1953/>.

²⁶ "Evolution of UNC," accessed October 23, 2022, <https://www.unc.mil/History/Post-1953-Evolution-of-UNC/>.

²⁷ Cha, *The Impossible State*, p. 317.

North Korea to overcome its difficulties. First, nuclear capability provides a stable energy supply for North Korea to develop its economy and reduce North Korea's reliance on foreign energy aid. Second, the Kim family believed that when North Korea developed its nuclear weaponry, North Korea could overcome its diplomatic isolation since the Post-Cold War Era.²⁸

Therefore, North Korea attempted to develop its nuclear capability and escalated the threat level in the region in order to overcome its diplomatic hardship. In 1993, violated the North Korea rejected the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) from inspecting its nuclear in Yongbyon and announced to withdraw from the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT). In addition, North Korea discard the fuel from the 5 MW(e) reactor that precluded the verification of the IAEA in May 1994.²⁹ In addition, North Korea threatened to make Seoul as "a sea of fire" and conducted a missile test in 1993.³⁰

In response to the nuclear crisis in North Korea, the Clinton administration deployed the U.S. fleet to the Eastern Coast of North Korea; President Clinton attempted to launch a military strike against North Korea's nuclear facilities. However, during the crisis, the U.S. pressure was constrained by South Korea and China. South Korea opposed the U.S. from adopting military tactics against North Korea and Kim Yong-sam did not support the U.S. military operation against North Korea's nuclear facilities. Other than South Korea, China disagreed to impose any type of pressure, including economic sanctions against North Korea. Also, the Chinese government proposed to resolve the nuclear crisis by diplomatic means and avoid escalating the tension in the region.³¹ To resolve the depute after Kim Il-sung passed away, former U.S. president Jimmy Carter visited North Korea. Eventually, the U.S. and North Korea signed the Agreed Framework in 1994. Based on the agreement, North Korea needed to suspend its nuclear development and comply with IAEA in order to receive Light Water Reactors (LWR) provided by the U.S.; the Korean Energy Development Organization was formed to implement the construction projects of LWRs.³²

To sum up, North Korea developed nuclear capabilities aimed to overcome its diplomatic isolation. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Moscow terminated its alliance relationship and economic assistance to North Korea. Although China did not terminate its alliance and economic aid, Beijing amplified its diplomatic relations with South Korea that undermined North Korea's regime legitimacy and caused Pyongyang's abandonment anxieties. Nonetheless, in this episode, the U.S. tried to reduce its presence on the Korean Peninsula that did not generate pressure on North Korea. Also, during the nuclear crisis, pressure from the U.S. was staunch by South Korea and China; Pyongyang did not need to handle the U.S. alone. In other words, North Korea tried to enhance its military capability to overcome the U.S. pressure and abandonment fear as

²⁸ Jina Kim, *The North Korean Nuclear Weapons Crisis: The Nuclear Taboo Revisited* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

²⁹ "Fact Sheet on DPRK Nuclear Safeguards," International Atomic Energy Agency, accessed October 23, 2022, <https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/dprk/fact-sheet-on-dprk-nuclear-safeguards>.

³⁰ Don Oberdorfer, "The Remilitarized Zone," *Washington Post*, May 1, 1994, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/1994/05/01/the-remilitarized-zone/c2b93255-7840-4c7b-89e8-6b87a90ae548/>.

³¹ Kihyun Lee and Jangho Kim, "Cooperation and Limitations of China's Sanctions on North Korea: Perception, Interest and Institutional Environment," *North Korean Review* 13, no. 1 (2017): 28–44.

³² Christopher Lawrence, "Normalization by Other Means: Technological Infrastructure and Political Commitment in the North Korean Nuclear Crisis," *International Security* 45, no. 1 (July 2020): 9–50.

China's support was presented. Thus, North Korea triggered a crisis did not target China during this period.

IV. North Korea's Alliance Management with China from 2002-2012

In response to the 9/11 attack, the Bush administration launched its "War on Terror" campaign against terrorism. Although the Bush Administration shifted the U.S. attention from Asia to the Middle East, North Korea was included as one of the targets of Bush's anti-terrorism campaign. The Bush Administration adopted "HAWK Engagement" approach to handle North Korea's threat. Compared with South Korea's Sunshine Policy, Bush's HAWK engagement policy assumed North Korea never sincere to fulfill its commitments. To safeguard the U.S. interests in Northeast Asia as well as South Korea's security from North Korea's threat, Washington amplified its alliance with Seoul and Tokyo, imposed economic sanctions against North Korea to retard North Korea from obtaining necessary resources for developing its nuclear programs, and sought cooperation with China to constrain North Korea.³³

In China, President Hu Jintao proposed a diplomatic policy line of "Peaceful Development" (和平發展); he proposed a vision of "Harmonious World" (和諧世界) at the summit for the 60th anniversary of the founding of the United Nations. In Hu's strategic line, the Chinese government tried to maintain international security by multilateralism. In the meantime, China played an active role in promoting peace in the world, including to participate in the United Nations mechanism actively.³⁴ By proposing this policy line, the Chinese government aimed to promote a positive image to the world that China is a peace-loving country, thereby eliminating an apprehension about the rise of China would cause a threat to international security.

To achieve Hu's diplomatic strategy, the Chinese government played an active role in resolving North Korea's nuclear issues. Beijing did not want to see a nuclear North Korea as it caused instability on the Korean Peninsula as well as undermined China's interests in the region. Despite China hoped to discourage North Korea's nuclear development, Beijing did not want to promote the denuclearization by imposing pressure against North Korea. Instead, the Chinese government sought to resolve North Korea's nuclear issues by using diplomatic channels. In this period, China hosted the three- and six-party talks in Beijing to show China's willingness to play a role as a facilitator of promoting a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.³⁵ Other than ensuring China's interests on the Korean Peninsula, Beijing's active role in resolving the issue hoped to construct a positive image of being a responsible state and improve China's relations with the U.S. after the Hainan Island incident.³⁶

³³ Victor D. Cha, "Hawk Engagement and Preventive Defense on the Korean Peninsula," *International Security* 27, no. 1 (Summer 2002): 40–78; Chung-in Moon and Jong-Yun Bae, "The Bush Doctrine and the North Korea Nuclear Crisis," *Asian Perspective* 27, no. 4 (2003): 9–45.

³⁴ Keyuan Zou, "Building a 'Harmonious World': A Mission Impossible," *Copenhagen Journal of Asian Studies* 30, no. 2 (January 2012): 74–99; Xue-feng Sun, "The Idea of Harmonious World and Chinese Studies on Theory of International Relations," *Teaching and Research*, no. 11 (2007): 55–60. [in Chinese]

³⁵ Chang Kwoun Park, "Negotiation Strategy and a Roadmap for the Denuclearization of North Korea," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 30, no. 2 (June 2018): 153–70.

³⁶ Kurt M. Campbell and Ely Ratner, "The China Reckoning: How Beijing Defied American Expectations," *Foreign Affairs* 97, no. 2 (March 2018): 60–70.

Due to North Korea's nuclear development would undermine China's border security, there were some debates about whether North Korea helped ensure China's strategic interests during the Hu Jintao Era.³⁷ China's cooperation with the U.S. to discourage North Korea's nuclear development. Furthermore, the Chinese government reprehended North Korea's provocations and agreed to enforce multilateral sanctions at the United Nations channel. Despite China's cooperative policy in the adversary game undermined Pyongyang's interests and loyalty to Beijing. Nonetheless, in the alliance game, Beijing maintained its support and amplified its economic ties with North Korea bilaterally.

In this regard, China amplified its economic engagement with North Korea. The Chinese government (in central and local levels) tried to promote economic projects and encourage private investment in North Korea. In fact, there were two major reasons behind China's economic engagement with North Korea. In the economic realm, the Chinese government aimed to improve the stagnant economic development in Northeast region. The economic interaction between both sides helped stimulate the production of major industries in China's Northeast region and improve the quality of infrastructure in those areas. In addition, China could obtain North Korea's natural resources to maintain China's energy supply.³⁸ Beside economic concern, China's economic engagement with North Korea aimed to ensure its border security. The Chinese government aimed to shift North Korean attention from nuclear program to economic development by promoting the Chinese style economic reform to North Korean officials. The Chinese government believed that North Korea would behave moderate as they were to receive the fruit of economic reform. Furthermore, when North Korea's economy is more rely on China, Beijing can use of its economic instruments to constrain North Korea from entrapping China into an unnecessary conflict between the U.S. and North Korea.³⁹

In 2005, the Jilin government proposed an economic project called a 'Road Port Zone Integration Project' that aimed to promote inter-connection between the provinces and attempted to access North Korea's ports. In addition, four economic agreements were signed in order to promote cooperation on science, investment, joint development of natural resources such as oil and coal. During the period, China's investment to North Korea increased from around 488 million US dollar in 2000 to around 1,580 million US dollar in 2005; the proportion of North Korea's trade with China reached to almost 40% in 2005.⁴⁰ By 2007, China provided around 70% income of foreign trade to North Korea.⁴¹

In the adversary game, the Chinese government tried to seek cooperation with the United States over North Korea's nuclear issues. Nonetheless, China remained its support to North Korea in the alliance game when the U.S. imposed pressure against North Korea. On September 15, 2005,

³⁷ (how) See: Heungkyu Kim, "From a Buffer Zone to a Strategic Burden: Evolving Sino-North Korea Relations during Hu Jintao Era," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 22, no. 1 (2010): 57–74.

³⁸ Kevin Gray and Jong-Woon Lee, "The Rescaling of the Chinese State and Sino-North Korean Relations: Beyond State-Centrism," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 48, no. 1 (September 2017): 113–32.

³⁹ Xiaohu Cheng, "The Last Resort: China's Economic Coercion against North Korea," in *China's Economic Statecraft: Co-Optation, Cooperation and Coercion* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, 2016), 117–37.

⁴⁰ Jin-Moo Kim, "North Korea's Reliance on China and China's Influence on North Korea," *Archive* 23, no. 02 (June 2011): 257–71; James Reilly, "China's Economic Engagement in North Korea," *The China Quarterly* 220 (December 2014): 915–35.

⁴¹ James Reilly, *Orchestration: China's Economic Statecraft Across Asia and Europe* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021).

the Department of Treasury designated Banco Delta Asia (BDA), a bank in Macau, as “primary laundering concern” due to its role in providing financial services for North Korea to conduct illegal economic activities. In response to the designation, the BDA froze 25 million USD of North Korean deposit.⁴² Despite the BDA froze North Korea’s deposit, Beijing tried to resolve the dispute in order to ensure North Korea’s interests. Before the Sino-US strategic economic dialogue, the Chinese government urged the Treasury Department to remove financial sanctions against BDA or otherwise would bring a negative impact to the bilateral talk.⁴³ Eventually, Washington agreed to return the 25 million deposits from the BDA to North Korea to ensure the stable bilateral relations with China and the six-party talks.

In fact, China’s response to the BDA sanctions manifested the fact that Beijing was on North Korea’s side in alliance. game. During the dispute, the Chinese government attempted to convince the U.S. to unfreeze North Korean deposit. Ultimately, the Department of Treasury unfroze the deposit and return it to North Korea in 2007 to ensure the procedure of the six-party talks. During the BDA dispute, North Korea engaged with missile and nuclear tests to express its displeasure to U.S. regarding the BDA sanctions. However, North Korea’s provocations triggered China’s dissatisfaction; Beijing’s response generated North Korea’s abandonment anxieties.

In the UN Security Council, China showed its willingness to work with the U.S. to enforce sanctions against North Korea. After North Korea’s missile test in 2006, China agreed to enforce Resolution 1695 and showed its willingness of working with the U.S. to pressure North Korea. Followed by North Korea’s first nuclear test, the Chinese government condemned the test as “flagrant and brazen” and agreed to enforce Resolution 1718. Nonetheless, China’s measures engendered North Korea suffering from a *moderate* fear of abandonment. The Chinese representative at the expressed the disagreement of some terms and conditions of the Resolution 1718. For instance, the Chinese government disagreed to enforce cargo inspection to or from North Korea and urged to resolve North Korea’s nuclear issues by diplomatic means and resumed the six-party talks.⁴⁴ Furthermore, after the adoption of the resolution, China did not suspend its economic engagement with North Korea. Instead, China enlarged its energy cooperation with North Korea, including to construct underground facilities and pipelines that connect the Bonghwa Chemical Factory and Daqing oil field through the Yalu River.⁴⁵ In this case, North Korea was able to withstand the U.S. pressure with China’s support.

Furthermore, U.S. pressure against North Korea decreased gradually After January 2007. The Denuclearization Agreement of February 13, 2007 was reached during the third sessions of the fifth round of the Six-party talks. The Bush administration agreed to remove North Korea from the designation of “state-sponsor of terrorism” and terminated trade sanctions against North Korea

⁴² Daniel Wertz, “The Evolution of Financial Sanctions on North Korea,” *North Korean Review* 9, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 69–82.

⁴³ Demetri Sevastopulo and Andrew Yeh, “Rice Helped Unfreeze N Korean Funds,” *Financial Times*, March 22, 2007, <https://www.ft.com/content/5dbb224a-d7d9-11db-b218-000b5df10621>; He Xingqiang, “The Diplomatic Practice under the One Country, Two Systems Policy: The Case of Banco Delta Asia as an Example,” *Journal of One Country Two Systems Studies* 2 (October 2009): 17–23. [In Chinese]

⁴⁴ “Security Council Condemns Nuclear Test by Democratic People’s Republic Of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1718 (2006),” *The United Nations Security Council*, October 14, 2006, <https://press.un.org/en/2006/sc8853.doc.htm>.

⁴⁵ Julia Joo-A Lee, “To Fuel or Not to Fuel: China’s Energy Assistance to North Korea,” *Asian Security* 5, no. 1 (January 2009): 45–72.

in exchange for Pyongyang to shut down its main nuclear facilities in Yongbyon with international inspection of the process.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, North Korea continued to commit provocations against the U.S. and South Korea as they refused to fulfil Pyongyang's demand. Pyongyang refused to accept the verification process and withdrew from the talks.

After the U.S. and South Korea had their leadership transition, new leaders from both countries did not show their good will to North Korea. The Obama administration was reluctant to fulfill North Korea's demand unless Pyongyang fulfilled the requirement of "Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Dismantlement" the nuclear program. In addition, Lee Myung-Bak, who is a conservative hard-liner on North Korea, became South Korean president. Lee terminated an engagement-oriented policy with North Korea from the progressive government. In this case, Lee's policy line entitled "Denuclearize-Open-3000" suggested providing economic aid and investment to North Korea *only* after Pyongyang denuclearized and adopted an open-door policy. In addition, the Lee Myung-Bak administration amplified South Korea's alliance relationship with the U.S. and adopted a cooperative policy in the sanction campaign.⁴⁷

Same as the case of the BDA sanctions, North Korea engaged with military provocations to express Pyongyang's dissatisfaction of hardline policies from Washington and Seoul. Not only did North Korea conduct its second nuclear test on May 26, 2009, but it also launched direct military attacks against South Korea in 2010—North Korea sunk the ROKS *Cheonan* and attacked on the Yeonpyeong Island in March and November respectively. In response to North Korea's provocations, the UN Security Council enacted Resolution 1874 to strengthen the enforcement of sanctions campaign on North Korea. Moreover, the U.S. conducted joint military drills with South Korea to prevent North Korea's possible provocations.

Even though North Korea's military operations may entrap China, Beijing remained its support to Pyongyang in the alliance game; North Korea's abandonment anxieties decreased gradually after its provocations. First, the Chinese representative at the UN Security Council expressed his concern about the implementation of Resolution 1874 should avoid undermining North Korea's sovereignty even though China gave a green light to enforce the resolution.⁴⁸ Second, when the U.S. and South Korea conducted joint military dills in July and November 2010 respectively that prevented North Korea's possible military strikes, Beijing expressed its opposition toward the military drills; Chinese officials urged Washington and Seoul to attenuate the tense situation by diplomatic channels.⁴⁹ Finally, the Chinese government behaved circumspectly in response to North Korea's attacks against South Korea. Beijing expressed its condolence to the victim of the *Cheonan* incident after a month and muted to the bombardment on

⁴⁶ Suk Kim, "The Denuclearization Agreement of February 13, 2007, and Its Implementation," *North Korean Review* 3, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 5–18.

⁴⁷ Scott Snyder, "Lee Myung-bak's Foreign Policy: A 250-day Assessment," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 21, no. 1 (March 2009): 85–102.

⁴⁸ "Security Council, Acting Unanimously, Condemns in Strongest Terms Democratic People's Republic of Korea Nuclear Test, Toughens Sanctions," *The United Nations Security Council*, June 12, 2009, <https://press.un.org/en/2009/sc9679.doc.htm>.

⁴⁹ Jeremy Page and Jay Solomon, "China Warns U.S. as Korea Tensions Rise: Beijing Bears Rising Cost for Support of Pyongyang; New Take on Exercises," *Wall Street Journal*, November 27, 2010, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052748704008704575638420698918004>.

the Yeonpyeong Island.⁵⁰ In fact, China's passive response to North Korea's provocations primarily due to economic concern. During the period, the Chinese government attempted to enlarge the joint development in North Korea's special economic zones near the Sino-DPRK border in 2010. Thus, to ensure the economic cooperation with North Korea, Beijing remained support to North Korea in the alliance game.

In this episode, North Korea suffered from a moderate level of abandonment anxieties; Pyongyang adopted internal balancing to assuage the fear. China tried to be cooperative with the U.S. to handle North Korea's threat to construct its positive image to the world and ensure the stable relationship with the U.S.. The Chinese government reprehended North Korea's provocations revealed its cooperative attitude with the U.S.. Nonetheless, Beijing remained support to Pyongyang in the alliance game. During this period, China enlarged its economic engagement with North Korea even though North Korea's provocations would undermine China's interests. Facing U.S. pressure against North Korea, China was in North Korea's side in the alliance game. The Chinese government alleviated pressure on Pyongyang by opposing the strict economic sanctions and military drills. Given the fact that China's support to North Korea did not absent during the period, North Korea adopted an internal balancing against the U.S. and South Korea. Therefore, in this episode, Pyongyang's provocations were aimed at Washington and Seoul rather than Beijing.

V. North Korea's Alliance Management with China from 2012-2022

After President Obama came into office, Washington's attention shifted from the Middle East to the Asia-Pacific region. The Obama administration launched a strategy called the "Pivot to Asia"; the strategy was subsequently called the "Rebalancing Asia" in 2012. In Obama's strategy, he tried to enhance the U.S. presence in order to ensure the U.S. leadership position and address challenges in the region.⁵¹ To address North Korea's missile issues, he adopted a "Strategic Patience" approach to North Korea. In this approach, the Obama Administration would negotiate with North Korea only after Pyongyang showed its sincerely of fulling the requirement of the CVID. The U.S. intensified its pressure on North Korea, including to strength the alliance system and the enforcement of economic sanctions on North Korea. Meanwhile, Washington attempted to seek cooperation with China to resolve North Korea's nuclear issues.⁵²

In China, after Xi Jinping came into power, he announced a strategic line called the "Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation." (中華民族偉大復興) In this strategic line, Xi aims to enhance China's international influence and accelerate the pace of achieving China's technological and military modernization.⁵³ In the context of Sino-U.S. relations, Xi Jinping sought to establish a "New Type of Great Power Relations" (新型大國關係) to ensure the stable and cooperative

⁵⁰ David Kang, "China and the Cheonan Incident," *38 North*, June 2, 2010, <https://www.38north.org/2010/06/china-and-the-cheonan-incident/>.

⁵¹ Kurt Campbell, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia* (New York: Twelve, 2016).

⁵² Changsop Pyon, "Strategic Patience or Back to Engagement? Obama's Dilemma on North Korea," *North Korean Review* 7, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 73–81; Jeffrey A. Bader, *Obama and China's Rise: An Insider's Account of America's Asia Strategy* (Washington, D.C: Brookings Institution Press, 2013).

⁵³ Avery Goldstein, "China's Grand Strategy under Xi Jinping: Reassurance, Reform, and Resistance," *International Security* 45, no. 1 (July 1, 2020): 164–201; Elizabeth C. Economy, *The Third Revolution: Xi Jinping and the New Chinese State* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018).

relationship with the U.S..⁵⁴ However, North Korea's provocations was an obstacle for China to pursue its national interests. Instead, Pyongyang's missile and nuclear tests undermined China's border security. To prevent North Korea from impairing China's interests, Beijing kept a distance with North Korea; those measures exacerbated Pyongyang's *abandonment anxieties*. Thus, facing the U.S. pressure and China's entanglement, North Korea adopt "alliance coercive diplomacy" against China in order to keep China's support in the alliance game.

Due to North Korea's provocations would entrap China into unnecessary conflicts with the U.S. and South Korea, the suspicion of North Korea's values in preserving China geo-political interests became conspicuous. Not only did scholars expressed their suspicious about North Korea's geo-political values to China, but elites from the party and the military also argued that China should abandon North Korea.⁵⁵ Although the Chinese government rejected the voice of abandoning North Korea, Beijing withheld support and imposed pressure to constrain North Korea from committing provocations.⁵⁶

First, in the alliance game, China reduced its support to North Korea. China became more active to enforce sanctions against North Korea. After North Korea's third nuclear test in 2013, the Chinese government supported the enforcement of Resolution 2094 at the UN Security Council and subsequently required the Bank of China suspended its financial service to North Korea. Even though China did not terminate its economic aid to North Korea and informal trade activities along the Sino-DPRK border remained exist, China's attitude toward sanctions produced a political pressure on North Korea.⁵⁷ Moreover, the Chinese government downgrade its commitment to North Korea. During the period, the Chinese officials considered China's relationship with North Korea as "Normal State-to-State" Relations. In other words, China considered whether the maintenance of Sino-DPRK relations helped ensure China's interests rather than considering ideological factors and their historical bonding since the Korean War.⁵⁸

Second, in the adversary game, China amplified its engagement with South Korea. Economically, Beijing enlarged its economic interacted with Seoul. South Korea signed the bilateral free trade agreement with China in 2015 which made Seoul became one of the countries

⁵⁴ Jisi Wang, *Big Power Relations* (Hong Kong: Chung Hwa Book Company, 2016). [in Chinese]

⁵⁵ During the Xi Jinping Era, members of the party and the People's Liberation Army expressed their dubious attitude about North Korea's values to China and argue that China should abandon North Korea. For instance, Deng Yuwen, a former deputy editor of the Study Times (Xuexi Shibao, 學習時報), explicitly claimed that North Korea's military adventurism undermines China's interests. Also, Wang Hongguang, a retired general from the People's Liberation Army (PLA), argues that China does not have the responsibility to protect North Korea due to the discrepancies between China and North Korea over political interests and ideologies. Refer to: Yuwen, Deng, "Beijing should Abandon Wayward North Korea", Financial Times, March 27, 2013, <https://www.ft.com/content/9e2f68b2-7c5c-11e2-99f0-00144feabdc0>; Hongguang Wang, "If North Korea Collapses, China Cannot Save It, China Should Not Wage War for North Korea," Guancha. December 1, 2014 https://www.guancha.cn/internation/2014_12_01_302090_1.shtml. [in Chinese]

⁵⁶ Global Times, "Geopolitics Makes Abandoning NK Naive," Global Times, April 12, 2013, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/content/774425.shtml>.

⁵⁷ Thomas Biersteker and Zuzana Hudáková, "Are Sanctions on North Korea Working?," *Global Asia* 16, no. 3 (September 2021): 42–49.

⁵⁸ Ren Xiao, "Toward a Normal State-to State Relationship: China and the DPRK in Changing Northeast Asia," *North Korean Review* 11, no. 2 (Fall 2015): 63–78.

that have bilateral free trade agreements with China and the U.S. simultaneously.⁵⁹ Because of China's economic engagement, China becomes the biggest trade partner of South Korea. Politically, Xi Jinping regarded Sino-ROK relations as "the best-ever national relationship in history" after President Park Geun-Hye attended China's military parade in 2015.⁶⁰ By amplifying the relationship with Seoul, Beijing attempted to isolate North Korea and managed to reduce the influence of the U.S.-ROK alliance to South Korea.⁶¹

Despite China dissatisfied with North Korea's provocations, Pyongyang conducted a nuclear test without considering China's attitude. In January 2016, North Korea's fourth nuclear test attempted to demonstrate North Korea's nuclear capability and consolidate Kim Jong-un's ruling power.⁶² After the test, both China and the U.S. intensified their pressure on North Korea. In the diplomatic realm, the United States agreed the Security Council to enforce Resolution 2270 to expand the scope of economic sanctions. In this resolution, North Korea was prohibited to export its raw materials abroad and denied receiving technical support to develop its nuclear capabilities. In the military aspect, Washington and Seoul agreed to deploy the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD) on South Korea's soil in response to North Korea's possible provocations. Meanwhile, China Beijing managed to keep a distance from North Korea even though Beijing opposed the missile deployment in South Korea. Not only did the Chinese officials reprehended North Korea's nuclear test from escalating the tension in the region, but the government also enforced unilateral sanctions on North Korea. In April 2016, the Department of Commerce denied restriction items covered by the Resolution 2770 from importing to China.⁶³

Response from China and the U.S. to North Korea's nuclear test in January 2016 created *intense abandonment anxieties* to North Korea. The Chinese government once again actively expressed its support to the enforcement of the United Nation sanctions and reprehended North Korea's nuclear test from undermining the stability on the Korean Peninsula. China's distancing policy engendered North Korea's diplomatic isolation; Pyongyang needed to overcome threat from the U.S.. Also, due to the increasing pressure from the U.S. (along with South Korea), space for North Korea to adopt alternative measures to alleviate its pressure decreased gradually. While President Moon tried to adopt a dovish approach to China and North Korea, Seoul does not have intention to remove the THAAD system targeting North Korea. In this case, North Korea was either difficult to counterbalance the U.S. and South Korea alone or adopt a conciliatory policy with them to reduce its pressure.

Under these circumstances, North Korea adopted "alliance coercive diplomacy" to keep China's support in the alliance game. First, North Korea considered China as one of the adversaries same as the U.S. and South Korea. North Korea labelled China as a "detested enemy" because Beijing favored to sanctions enforcement; Pyongyang considered Beijing's measure as a sign of

⁵⁹ Ellen Kim and Victor Cha, "Between a Rock and a Hard Place: South Korea's Strategic Dilemmas with China and the United States," *Asia Policy*, no. 21 (January 2016): 101–22.

⁶⁰ Shannon Tiezzi, "South Korea's President and China's Military Parade," *The Diplomat*, September 3, 2015, <https://thediplomat.com/2015/09/south-koreas-president-and-chinas-military-parade/>.

⁶¹ Suk Hee Han, "Resetting the South Korea–China Relationship: The THAAD Controversies and Their Aftermath," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 31, no. 4 (2019): 539–57.

⁶² Victor D. Cha, "The North Korea Question," *Asian Survey* 56, no. 2 (2016): 243–69.

⁶³ 〈商務部海關總署公告2016年第11號關於對朝鮮禁運部分礦產品清單公告〉，中華人民共和國商務部，（2016年4月5日），〈<http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/b/c/201604/20160401289770.shtml>〉。

betrayal. Thus, the Worker's Party of Korea suggested to “*crush China's pressuring schemes with the force of a nuclear storm for its betrayal of socialism.*”⁶⁴ Second, North Korea verbally criticized China from adopting a distance policy. For instance, the Korean Central New published an editorial to censure China from participating the sanctions campaign with the United States and neglect their “sealed in blood” relationship.⁶⁵ Most importantly, North Korea engaged with a nuclear test in September 2016. By adopting these measures, North Korea attempted to undermine China's reputation vis-à-vis the U.S. and South Korea. Pyongyang's recalcitrant behavior against China manifested Beijing's difficulties in moderating itself. Pyongyang expected Washington and Seoul would not seek cooperation with China but to solidify their alliance. In other words, North Korea intended to abandon anxieties by a nuclear test as China to oppose their pressure that aligned with Pyongyang interests. However, China became more alienated from North Korea.

Once again, China reduced support to North Korea in the alliance game after the nuclear tests in September 2016. In the economic realm, the Chinese government enforced economic sanctions against North Korea. The Chinese government endorsed Resolution 2321 and banned North Korean coal from importing into China.⁶⁶ In the diplomatic realm, response from the Chinese government did not in line with North Korea's interests. Wang Yi, China's foreign minister, proposed two approaches to temperate tense situation on the Korean Peninsula to ensure China's interests, that is— “Double Suspension” (雙暫停) and “Dual Track Approach” (雙軌並進). The former one urged North Korea and the U.S. (along with South Korea) to suspend all military operations that escalated tension on the Korean Peninsula, whereas the latter approach suggested establishing a peace mechanism to overcome the deadlock of the denuclearization process.⁶⁷ Wang's suggests seemed to have common interests with North Korea, his approaches showed his unwillingness to see the U.S. from enlarging its influence in Northeast Asia by the U.S.-ROK alliance and opposed Washington and Seoul to adopt a hostile gesture Pyongyang. Nevertheless, Wang's approaches expressed his dissatisfaction about North Korea's military operations as it also undermines China's interests on the Korean Peninsula. Wang's proposals demonstrated that China would not unconditionally support North Korea.

After President Trump came into office, North Korea's alliance behavior with China revealed the same pattern from its nuclear test in September 2016. In other words, North Korea committed “alliance coercive diplomacy” to keep China's support in the alliance game. The Trump administration replaced Obama's “Strategic Patience” by a “Maximum Pressure” approach. Although the Trump administration adopted the same policy instruments to overcome North Korea, such as military alliance and economic sanctions, the Trump administration pressured against

⁶⁴ Daily NK, “WPK Lays out Scathing New Approach in Relations with China,” March 31, 2016, <https://www.dailynk.com/english/wpk-lays-out-scathing-new-approach/>.

⁶⁵ 〈揭穿當今世界政治秩序的不公正性〉，朝鮮中央通訊社，（2016年4月1日），〈<https://www.kcna.kp/cn/article/q/caa9ae0a7c70c4bb93e731f00a9b03b42c7e6d3170b9551e3dc03a38f0d01fc5f3a1ff570e23518a42a734aba6ba929d.kcmsf>〉。

⁶⁶ William Brown, “China Cuts Off Imports of North Korean Coal: Economic Impacts Depend on Pyongyang's Reaction,” Korea Economic Institute of America, February 21, 2017, <https://keia.org/the-peninsula/china-cuts-off-imports-of-north-korean-coal-economic-impacts-depend-on-pyongyangs-reaction/>.

⁶⁷ “China Proposes ‘Double Suspension’ to Defuse Korean Peninsula Crisis,” *Xinhua*, March 8, 2017, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2017-03/08/c_136112435.htm.

North Korea proactively.⁶⁸ For instance, during the summit between Trump and Xi at Mar-a-Lago in April 2017, President Trump tried to seek Xi's cooperation to constrain North Korea's provocations.⁶⁹

Meanwhile, China expressed its dubious attitude to the value of the Sino-DPRK alliance which undermined the solidarity of the alliance. The Chinese government allowed scholars to express its criticism over North Korea's provocations and the negative impacts of China's maintenance of the alliance with North Korea. For instance, a distinguished scholar in the history of Korean War, Shen Zihua, publicly rebutted the tradition viewpoint regarding Sino-DPRK relations from Chinese officials. He claimed that the relationship between China and North Korea does as close as "lip and teeth." Instead, their relationship is conflict-ridden; the alliance does not fulfill China's interest.⁷⁰ Also, Shen disagreed China's hawkish response against South Korea over the THAAD deployment. Shen believes that Beijing should further cooperate with Seoul to further isolated North Korea rather than imposing pressure against South Korea.⁷¹

In response to China's conciliatory policy toward the U.S., North Korea amplified its use of coercive measures to retain Beijing's support in the alliance game. To begin with, North Korea criticized China from reducing support. From 2016 to the first half of 2017, Korean Central News Agency published editorials criticized China's cooperative policy with the U.S. from undermining the solidarity of the Sino-DPRK relationship. Also, North Korea conducted missile test when China held important events. For instance, North Korea conducted a missile test on May 17, 2017 during the Belt and Road Forum to express its disappointment to China's cooperative gesture to the Trump administration.⁷² By adopting these measures, North Korea attempted to reduce the U.S. and South Korea's expectation of using China leverage to constrain North Korea's provocations. Meanwhile, Pyongyang attempted to escalate the threat level in the region to justify Washington and Seoul to deploy missile system. In this regard, China needed to ensure its interests on the Korean Peninsula by maintaining its security guarantee to North Korea.

After North Korea conducted missile tests in July 2017, pressured from the U.S. and China was intensified that rendered Pyongyang suffered from intense abandonment anxieties. The Trump Administration amplified its "Maximum Pressure" campaign against North Korea. First, President Trump threatened to meet North Korea with "Fire and Fury" after the missile test in 2017 and

⁶⁸ Seong-ho Sheen, "U.S. Coercive Diplomacy toward Pyongyang: Obama vs Trump," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 32, no. 4 (December 2020): 517–38.

⁶⁹ Steve Holland and Koh Gui Qing, "At U.S.-China Summit, Trump Presses Xi on Trade, North Korea; Progress Cited," *Reuters*, April 7, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-idUSKBN1792KA>.

⁷⁰ Zhi-hua Shen, "The Formation of the Sino-Soviet-North Korean Triangular Alliance in the Beginning Period of the Korean War: A Study Based on Declassified Archives in China and Russia," *The Journal of History, NCCU* 31 (May 2009): 165–98; Shen and Xia, A Misunderstood Friendship; Shen, "As Close as 'Teeth and Lips' or a 'Marriage of Convenience'—The Origins and Development of the North Sino-Korean Alliance, 1946-1961."

⁷¹ Chris Buckley, "Excerpts From a Chinese Historian's Speech on North Korea," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/world/asia/north-korea-south-china-shen-zihua.html> ; Chris Buckley, "Criticism of Beijing's North Korea Policy Comes From Unlikely Place: China," *The New York Times*, April 18, 2017, sec. World, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/18/world/asia/china-north-korea-war.html>.

⁷² James Griffiths, "North Korea Blights China's One Belt, One Road Party with Missile Launch," CNN, May 14, 2017, <https://edition.cnn.com/2017/05/14/asia/china-north-korea-missile-obor/index.html>.

claimed to destroy North Korea completely.⁷³ Second, the U.S. agreed to enforce Resolution 2321 and Resolution 2397 to cut off North Korea's economic activities with foreign countries; President Trump regarded both resolutions were the "toughest-ever" sanctions on North Korea. Finally, the administration planned to adopt a "bloody nose" strike on North Korea's nuclear facilities. Meanwhile, China enforced Resolution 2371 and required its national banks to suspend their financial services to North Korean entities.⁷⁴

The simultaneous pressure imposed by Beijing and Washington generated North Korea's intense abandonment anxieties. China fully enforced economic sanctions after July 2017 which targeted North Korean major industries and source of incomes that render North Korea suffered from economic hardship. Beijing's attitude to sanctions enforcement manifested it was being restive to North Korea's provocations. Also, Trump's "Maximum Pressure" approach and possible use of the "bloody nose" strike locked North Korea in an escapable confrontation. Even though military option was less feasible for the U.S. to encounter North Korea's aggression,⁷⁵ the Trump administration conducted military drills with South Korea and dispatched bombers flied near North Korea's coast; these gestures seem that the U.S. was ready to launch an attack against North Korea.⁷⁶ Under these circumstances, Pyongyang had found it difficult to adopt other measures to reduce U.S. pressure and diplomatic isolation.

To overcome North Korea's abandonment anxieties, Pyongyang once again amplified its use of "alliance coercive diplomacy" to keep China's support. On September 3, 2017, North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test during the BRICS summit. Pyongyang's nuclear test aimed to achieve the following purposes. First, Pyongyang aimed to express its dismay to China's sanctions and estrangement with North Korea. Second, Kim Jong-un aimed to deter the U.S. "Maximum Pressure" campaign toward North Korea. Finally, Kim aimed to escalate the threat level in the region, thereby generating more common interests between China and North Korea. More specifically, when the U.S. imposes more pressure against North Korea, the Chinese policymakers need to prevent the U.S. from undermining China's political interests on the Korean Peninsula. In this case, China will ensure its support to North Korea even though the Chinese policymakers being annoyed by North Korea's frequent provocations.

There was a détente period after the brinkmanship game between North Korea and the U.S.. To achieve a bilateral negotiation with President Trump, Kim claimed that North Korea suspended nuclear tests and focus on economic development. During this period, China provided support to North Korea during the alliance game in order to prevent the recurrence of the U.S.-DPRK confrontation. Politically, China urged the U.S. to suspend its "Maximum Pressure" to reduce political pressure against North Korea, thereby encouraging Pyongyang's denuclearization. In addition, China provided support for North Korea to ensure the success of the Singapore

⁷³ Jalel ben Haj Rehaïem, "Madman' Game in North Korea and the Pakistan Model," *North Korean Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 82 – 102.

⁷⁴ 〈商務部公告 2017 年第 47 號 商務部關於執行聯合國安理會第 2371 號決議禁止同朝鮮新設合資合作企業和追加合資企業投資的公告〉，中華人民共和國商務部，（2017 年 8 月 25 日），〈<http://www.mofcom.gov.cn/article/b/f/201708/20170802633705.shtml>〉

⁷⁵ Da-jung Li, "Trump Administration's North Korea Policy: From "Strategic Patience" to "Maximum Pressure" ," *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs* 22, no. 3 (January 2019): 1–47.

⁷⁶ Jalel ben Haj Rehaïem, "Trump's 'Madman' Game in North Korea and the Pakistan Model," *North Korean Review* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2020): 82–102.

summit.⁷⁷ After the Singapore summit, North Korea and China have consolidated their ties and alliance relationship as the U.S. imposed pressure generates common interests between both China and North Korea.

In this episode, the degree of North Korea’s abandonment anxieties increased gradually; Pyongyang suffered from *intense abandonment anxieties* during the nadir of Sino-DPRK relations from January 2016 to the end of 2017. Not only did China reduce its support in the alliance game, but also be cooperative with the U.S. to enforce sanctions with the U.S.. In this case, North Korea suffer from both diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions exacerbated North Korea’s economic hardship. In the meantime, the United States amplified its pressure against North Korea. Facing the U.S. “Maximum Pressure” campaign, North Korea did not have alternative to assuage pressure from Washington by adopting alternative policy measures. To overcome North Korea’s abandonment anxieties, Pyongyang adopted “alliance coercive diplomacy” to coerce China in order to retain Beijing’s support in the alliance game. When North Korea committed provocations that escalate the threat level, China needed to prevent the U.S. from undermining China’s interest in Northeast Asia; Beijing maintained its support to North Korea in the alliance game for ensuring its geo-political interests. Therefore, based on the discussion of North Korea’s alliance behavior with China from 2012-2022, North Korea’s provocations not only targeted the U.S. and South Korea, but it also targeted China.

VI. Conclusion

This paper establishes a framework of “alliance coercive diplomacy” to explore North Korea’s alliance behavior with China. Facing abandonment anxieties caused by China, North Korea would escalate the threat level in Northeast Asia; China needs to retain its support to North Korea to ensure its interests in the region. Table 1 reveals North Korea’s alliance behavior with China from 1992-2022.

Table 1 North Korea's Alliance Behavior with China from 1992-2022

Drafted by Author

| Episode | China’s Support | U.S. Pressure | North Korea’s Alternative Policy Options | North Korea’s Degree of Abandonment | Outcome |
|-----------|-----------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 1992-2002 | Moderate | Moderate | Available | Moderate | Internal Balancing |
| 2002-2012 | High | High, but decreased gradually | Available | Moderate | Internal Balancing |
| 2012-2022 | Low | High | Not Available | Intense | Alliance Coercive Diplomacy |

In this paper, I argue that North Korea will adopt “alliance coercive diplomacy” to keep China’s support when Pyongyang suffers from *intense abandonment anxieties*. As table 1 show, North Korea suffered from moderate abandonment anxieties from first two episodes. During these two decades, China support to North Korea decreased due to the normalization with South Korea.

⁷⁷ Kihyun Lee, “What Factors Determine China’s North Korea Policy? Uncertainty, Instability and Status Quo Risk Management,” *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 31, no. 4 (December 2019): 519–38.

However, rather than abandoning North Korea, China instead enhanced its support to North Korea. The Chinese government amplified its economic engagement with North Korea. In addition, facing the U.S. pressure, China tried to preserve North Korea interests by diplomatic mediation. Regarding U.S. pressure, although the Bush administration intensified its pressure to North Korea, Washington became mollified to Pyongyang during the six-part talks. Under these circumstances, North Korea had alternative policy options to attenuate its abandonment anxieties. In this case, North Korea adopted an internal balancing to provoke the U.S. and South Korea.

Unlike previous episode, North Korea needed to overcome pressure from both China and the U.S. simultaneously. After China had a leadership transition in 2012, Beijing gradually withheld its support to North Korea despite the alliance treaty remained valid. The Chinese government enforced sanctions, equivocated its commitment to North Korea, and engaged with South Korea. Meanwhile, the U.S. intensified its pressure against North Korea. During the Obama administration, not only did Washington amplify its use of economic sanctions, but it also deployed missile system in South Korea to encounter Pyongyang's provocations. Moreover, the Trump administration pretend to adopt a military strike on North Korea. In this case, pressure from both China and the U.S. limited North Korea to adopt other policy instruments to overcome pressure from China and the U.S.; North Korea suffered from *intense* abandonment anxieties. In this case, North Korea's provocations not only aimed target the U.S. (along with South Korea), but also China.

Based on the discussion of North Korea's alliance behavior with China, this research is expected to make to following contributions. First, in the theoretical aspect, this research provided measures a weaker member adopts to remain the alliance solidity. In this paper, I argue that the junior member coerces its patron would be the most effective way to avoid abandonment anxieties. When the member attempts to undermine the patron's geo-political interests, the latter cannot afford the cost of involving into a conflict. In this case, the patron would maintain its support the junior ally in the alliance game. Also, this paper tried to provide indicators to measure abandonment anxieties. Although the patron would be one of the targets of its junior's provocations, only the ally suffered from intense abandonment anxieties would adopt "alliance coercive diplomacy" to retain the patron support; North Korea's alliance behavior with China helps justify this argument.

In addition to theoretical contribution, this paper helps provide some policy implications for the U.S. and South Korea to handle North Korea's possible provocations. Washington and Seoul attempted to seek cooperation with China to constrain North Korea's belligerence. However, China's leverage to North Korea is limited because North Korea is able to coerce China during its abandonment anxieties. In this case, Washington and Seoul have found more difficult to use China's influence to alter North Korea's behavior. In this case, Washington and Seoul should have contingency plans in response to North Korea's threat. Both countries should stand firm against North Korea's provocations. Washington and Seoul should amplify their alliance relationship and consider seeking trilateral cooperation with both South Korea and Japan to deter North Korea collectively. Meanwhile, the enforcement of sanctions should be strengthened to impose political pressure on North Korea and produce more cost for North Korea's provocations. Given the possibility of using China's leverage to pressure North Korea decreases gradually, enhancing the deterrent capability and political are effective to deter North Korea's threat.