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The Long-Term Strategic Influence of Russia in the DPRK from 1946 to 1999: an
Evolution with Leadership

by

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Approved _____ Dr. Jeff Keuss _____

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to show a correlation between change in Soviet-Russian leadership and actions reflecting variance in Russia's strategic influence in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) from 1946 to 1999. As part of applying the strategic perspective in this analysis, I include an argument for the rationality of the Kim regime. I approach the analysis using a structured, focused comparison with process tracing to expose within-case variance.

As a result of this analysis, this thesis finds a direct, measurable relationship between the change in Russian leadership and variance in Russia's strategic influence in the DPRK. Because this finding can be drawn out of this particular context and applied in a broader manner, it can be used in understanding present-day political situations concerning Russian leadership and Russian strategic influence. Furthermore, this result also supports the strategic perspective and thus can be used in the formulation of the West's foreign policy toward the DPRK.

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I would also like to thank the experts who recommended authors and reliable sources for this work: Dr. Bradley Murg, director of Global Development Studies at Seattle Pacific University; Dr. Rouben Azizian, director of the Centre for Defense and Security Studies at Massey University; and Dr. David Fouse of the Daniel K. Inouye Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies. Without their passion for the subject of Northeast Asia and their knowledgeable input, I would have struggled to lay a sturdy, reliable foundation to begin my research.

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throughout these undergraduate years has both left a permanent impression on who I am and set an example for the kind of person I want to be when I grow up.

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The Long-Term Strategic Influence of Russia in the DPRK from 1946 to 1999: an Evolution with Leadership

Introduction

My Honors Project asks the question, “is change in Russian leadership correlated to the actions reflecting variance in Russia’s strategic influence in the DPRK?” Throughout this research, I use *Russia’s leaders* as a catch-all term encompassing both USSR leaders and later Russia’s leaders after the USSR dissolved. This research question is important because it speaks to the impact Russia’s leaders have on their country’s ability to influence the DPRK which, in turn, can shape the reactions the DPRK implements toward the international community, as argued in “Justification.”

Context for the three authors most often cited in this paper is in the section labeled “Interpretation of Facts and Biases.” This section explains specific experiences and lenses through which these scholars interpret historical fact. In addition, it covers the possible biases that each may have in regard to this topic.

Building the proper analytical context to thoroughly address this question is a necessity. In “Theoretical Framework” I explain the primary assumptions under which I am operating; this includes an explanation of the strategic perspective as well my argument for the rationality of the Kim regime, a necessary component of this work.

The “Methodology” section then covers the research style taken from the political-science discipline. The approach is a structured, focused comparison in which I use process tracing to expose within-case variance analysis.

The findings of my research begin in the “Analysis” section. It is organized into three subsections: “Stalin Era,” “Post-Stalin Soviet Era,” and “Post-Soviet Era.” *Strategic influence* is defined as ideological influence and military aid, and evidence of each facet is under the applicable subsection. As the analysis shows, there is indeed a correlation between the change of Russian leadership and the actions reflecting variation in Russia’s strategic influence in the DPRK.

After the analysis, there is a brief conclusion synthesizing the findings. After the “Conclusion” section, there is a section dedicated to “U.S. Policy Implications.” This section examines what the findings of this thesis mean for the United States, especially in relation to its currently foreign policy toward Northeast Asia. The advice contained in this section is my opinion based upon my own research and analysis and should be received as such.

The “Works Cited” section is at the end of this paper, followed by a short section on “Integration of Faith and Learning” from my perspective as a Christian and graduate of Seattle Pacific University.

Research Question

In this thesis, I ask the question, “is change in Russian leadership correlated to the actions reflecting variance in Russia’s strategic influence in the DPRK?” For the purpose of this paper, *strategic influence* will be defined, analyzed, and explained in two facets: ideological influence and military aid.

The scope and focus of this paper is on Russian leadership from 1946 until 1999. These years encompass the transition of Soviet-Russian leadership from Stalin to Yeltsin, and DPRK

leadership from Kim Il-Sung to Kim Jong-Il. Initially, the DPRK and the USSR operated under Marxist-Leninist ideology, but as Kim Il-Sung became more powerful, the DPRK adopted a “Korea first, communism second” mindset. The Soviet Union’s emphasis that each communist state should focus on the well-being of the collective states making up the Soviet Union, as opposed to prioritizing individual countries, proved contrary to the culture of the DPRK (this culture having roots in both Japanese imperialism and Korean nationalism’s emphasis on hierarchy). The DPRK’s leaders felt their power threatened by this new development, which then spurred on the radicalization of Marxist-Leninism and Stalin’s cult of personality into an ideology known as *Juche*. This in turn changed the relationship between the USSR and the DPRK to one of convenience rather than one of communist brotherhood. The Cold War did spur on a temporary improvement in relations, but upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union and Russia’s pivot away from Marxist-Leninist ideology, the relationship between the two countries largely deteriorated.

Justification

As of early 2016, tensions between the DPRK and the West have risen to unprecedented levels. With the rising animosity from the DPRK toward the West and the DPRK’s self-declared status as a nuclear power, Russia has become increasingly involved in the region by participating in both international sanctions against the country and political rhetoric pressuring the DPRK to limit its nuclear program and tone back both its threats and overtures.

It is important to understand the history surrounding the DPRK’s tensions with Russia, especially with the frequent development and testing of both missiles and nuclear weapons in the Korean Peninsula. If the foundation and pattern of the relationship between these two countries

is understood, there will be a greater context from which to understand current political environments. In this time of globalization, Russia is deeply tied to the West economically and politically; arguably, Russia can be considered a part of the West as much as Europe and the United States. Thus, the historical context between Russia and the DPRK can provide insight into the range of possible actions from the DPRK toward the West, including the United States. Investigating the relationship in a systematic fashion would allow methodological justification as well as policy justification to be created in an informed manner.

While the systematic investigation will unearth facts, it is important to remember these facts can be interpreted in a number of different ways, leading to a dynamic and multi-dimensional analysis. Below is the response to these concerns on bias and the interpretation of facts.

Interpretation of Facts and Biases

Within the field of international relations, the topic of North Korea is one of great disagreement. The nation's closed nature makes in-depth and first-hand study difficult, and the anti-West attitude ingrained in the culture of the DPRK often takes precedence in both policy decisions and their nation's unique presentation of history. However, for those scholars who dive into this difficult puzzle, agreeing on the facts is not the problem; rather, the interpretation of the facts can wildly vary, depending on the author's background. The three scholars I pull from the most in this thesis are Victor Cha, Bradley Martin, and Andrei Lankov. Each provides a unique look at the situation in the DPRK—a variety of perspectives from which I intend to synthesize the strengths and compile an alternative approach to understanding Russia's long-term strategic influence in the DPRK from 1946 to 1999.

Reading each author's works, I found it very rare for them to disagree about historical facts themselves; they often cross-reference each other in their writings. However, there is debate on how these facts should be interpreted. The contrast between the academic, policy, and journalistic perspective is stark in the interpretation, but allows for an excellent and multi-faceted perspective on North Korean history and the country's relationship with Russia.

One example of this is the way these authors cover the method by which Kim Il-Sung rose to power within the Workers' Party of North Korea (WPNK). Playing four factions within the WPNK against each other, Kim Il-Sung used the different background and experience of party members to build tension. In August of 1946, the WPNK was composed of four factions: the Soviet Koreans (ethnic Koreans who were born or raised in Russia), the Domestic faction (Korean communists who lived under the Japanese occupation), the Ya'an faction (Korean communists who had lived in China before returning to Korea after the Japanese occupation), and the Guerrilla faction (which was led by Kim Il-Sung and composed of soldiers who had fought in Manchuria during the Japanese occupation). However, by June 1949 the WPNK had undergone vast changes and purges, choreographed by Kim Il-Sung. The Domestic faction was completely eliminated, and the Ya'an and Soviet factions were considerably weakened, which built the strength and influence of the Guerilla faction. These three remaining factions created the Workers' Party of Korea, and Kim Il-Sung once again began systematically removing opposition: the Ya'an faction in 1958 followed by the Korean Soviets in 1962. Only the Guerilla faction remained and held the majority of seats, which were then passed down to family members—a tradition that has continued to early 2016. (It is important to note that this historical context provided grounds and legitimacy for the *Songun* ideology of "military-first politics")

adopted by the DPRK in the 1980s and 1990s. This will be further expanded upon in the subsection “Theoretical Framing.”)

Bradley Martin, an American journalist who has written extensively on North Korea for the past three decades and is former bureau chief for the *Asian Wall Street Journal* and the *Asia Times*, believes this systematic purging to be the result of a North Korean mindset that was “so exclusive of non-Korean influences to be almost xenophobic” (Martin 2004). With this argument, the definition of true loyalty and patriotism was continually narrowed and redefined until only the “approved” remained: a group with a mindset, goal, and life experience similar to those of Kim Il-Sung.

However, Dr. Andrei Lankov—a Russian scholar who teaches history at Koomkin University in Seoul and attended Kim Il-Sung University in Pyongyang—asserts that this was a strategic move to undermine the power of specific factions within the Korean Workers’ Party (the Chinese-influenced Ya’an faction and the Korean Soviet faction) to create an opportunity to seize power and influence within the party’s ranks (Lankov 2005). Kim Il-Sung used the clashing ideologies of the factions as a tool for personal gain, merely the means to an end.

Victor Cha, the former director for Asian Affairs at the National Security Council from 2004 to 2007 and department chair of Asian Studies at Georgetown University in 2016, asserts that this purging of Chinese and Soviet members was the result of a personal dispute between Kim Il-Sung and the Stalin-backed Mao (Cha 2012). The removal of the two factions was a personal message of strength to Mao and Stalin and had nothing to do with ideology or the factions themselves.

None of these scholars dispute the purging of these party members, but each interpretation of the facts leads in a different direction. This remains the case throughout the comparison of their writings. It is my humble intention to contribute another interpretation of the facts regarding the USSR and the DPRK from 1946 to 1999 in order to gain a clearer understanding of the current situation of these countries. The strength of each author's perspective is drawn upon in the formation of my perspective for this thesis. Victor Cha provides an excellent national security perspective and helps set the scene for current U.S. policy implications. Bradley Martin's experience as a journalist is showcased in his numerous interviews with North Korean citizens, and his extensively researched history of the nation provides valuable information for the process and facts behind this thesis' process tracing. Andrei Lankov's in-country experience studying at Kim Il-Sung University and his upbringing in the USSR allow him to speak from an informed position on the relationship between Russia and the DPRK with inside knowledge of their cultures and ideologies.

Theoretical Framing

1. Strategic Perspective

This case study will examine evidence from a strategic perspective. The strategic perspective is a "unique blend of constructivism, liberalism, and neorealism" (Frieden 2013).

Bruce Bueno de Mesquita provides more detail of this perspective in *Principles of International Politics*.

Like the constructivist viewpoint and unlike neorealism or liberalism, the strategic perspective is firmly rooted in the interplay between domestic and international interests and influence. Unlike the constructivist approach, however, the strategic perspective

assumes all parties to international affairs are strategic, hence the name of the perspective. By “strategic” I mean that each decision maker and each individual or group trying to influence decisions looks ahead, contemplating what the likely responses are if they choose this action or that action . . . in other words, everyone in the strategic perspective is a chess player in a very complicated, many-sided, many-player chess game. (Bueno de Mesquita 2014)

To summarize this definition, the strategic perspective operates under the assumption of an international policy shaped by domestic politics which, in turn, are influenced by the interests of the country’s leaders who are motivated to maintain their power. If my findings were to further support this perspective, we can expect the evidence to point to the leadership of the USSR, whose decisions would influence the approach taken by the USSR towards the DPRK. Furthermore, evidence would convey that as this leadership changes, so do the actions reflecting variance in the strategic influence in the DPRK. The strategic perspective has special applicability toward the DPRK; analysis of its leadership will expose struggles otherwise difficult to pinpoint due to the closed nature of the country. In Dan Kang’s book *Leadership Change in North Korean Politics*, he writes, “Analysis of North Korean politics is less a matter of assessing policy issues and debates than of searching for clues and symbolic actions that shed light on personal relations and political struggles at the highest levels of the system” (Kang 1988).

If the theory is supported, we can expect to see change in USSR leadership aligning with the timeframe of change in the strategic influence of Russia in the DPRK. This change in strategic influence, in turn, would spur on a reaction in the DPRK—a prediction that will be further examined in “Analysis.”

Intrinsic to the strategic perspective is the concept of rationality. Rationality is boiled down to two key requirements: an actor has autonomy over his own opinion as well as a coherent preference between options (also known as completeness and transitivity). Bueno de Mesquita asserts the necessity of using “completeness and transitivity as the minimal requirements for rational behavior . . . with these two requirements in place, we can move on to think carefully about what might be in the national interest” (Bueno de Mesquita 2014).

Rationality means the respective actor makes decisions that he believes to be in his own best interest. If there are asymmetrical levels of information or a lack of context, then an actor can certainly appear to be making “irrational” decisions to outside parties. However, it would be incorrect to label the actor as such and would undermine the ability of outside parties to predict future decisions of the actor. This approach of rationality applied to individuals in leadership is neither new nor untested.

If we analyze people as doing what they think is best for them, they could prove to be mistaken in their beliefs—then we have a straightforward way to think about the relationships that tie individual objects to individual actions. That straightforward way is to assume that whoever . . . or whatever . . . makes choices, makes those choices rationally. Standard accounts that treat states as the important players in international affairs routinely assume that states are rational actors. Thus, the commitment here to the assumption of rationality is nothing new or out of the ordinary; it is standard practice. (Bueno de Mesquita 2014)

With this information in mind, in order to consider the DPRK a rational actor, we must first understand the context under which it is operating. To grasp this mindset, we must find examples of the Kim regime making its decisions in light of one goal, discover the end to its

means. If we can find an objective that is supported by, or is parallel to, the decisions made by the Kim regime, we can make a stronger case for rationality. Once we can make the case for rationality, applying the strategic perspective will be both intuitive and illuminating.

A strong connection exists between the advice given by Machiavelli and the logical flow of the strategic perspective, particularly when it comes to arguing for rationality. In Chris Carter's *Strategy as Practice*, he makes note of the ways "writers such as Machiavelli could be read as anthropologies of power conceived as strategy . . . from their perspective, strategy would be a practice that focuses on the forming of coalitions, on the control of obligatory points of passage, the capturing of the right rhetorical tone, the building of convincing discursive scenarios and so on. From this perspective, the apparent rationality behind strategy can be seen as an instrument used to create legitimacy." (Carter 2008).

Another misconception that must be cleared up is that escalation and rhetoric undermine the rationality of an actor. Rather, the DPRK uses these tactics as tools to improve its bargaining power. Escalation and credible threats can remain valid and rational options in this regard. Even if it leads to all-out war, use of these devices is not enough to negate the rationality of either party. Decisions must not be classified rational or irrational in a manner suggesting rationality is a finite element. Frank Zagare's work *Reconciling Rationality with Deterrence* expands this concept: "Mutual deterrence can (but need not) fail, even when both players have capable and credible retaliatory threats. The reason is that even when deterrence is consistent with the strictures of rationality, there are frequently other rational possibilities, some of which are associated with an all-out conflict" (Zagare 2004). This is not a "zero-sum game" situation: there can be prominent options within several rational avenues to bring about an actor's intended solution.

The motivation of the Kim regime has been to obtain and maintain sovereignty. Unlike other leaders, the Kim family has historically placed a low priority on the health and safety of the North Korean population. The citizens of the DPRK are viewed as expendable and are cared for only insofar as they can uphold and support the Kim family. Because of this, negative repercussions felt by the North Korean community will rarely sway the decisions made by leadership. Sustainment of power motivates the actions of the Kim leadership, and it is under this goal Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and Kim Jong-Un tailor their decision-making. Maintaining their status and sovereignty takes priority, even if it means implementing laws and policies that lead to the violation of innumerable human rights.

2. Argument for Rationality

I would argue against the assumption of irrationality of the Kim regime. In fact, the leadership of the DPRK acts in the best interest of the sustainability of the regime. The fastest way to highlight this is to show the correlation between the actions of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and Kim Jong-Un and the advice written by Machiavelli in *The Prince*, which was written specifically on how to obtain and maintain power. Machiavelli remains among the most notable political scientists of all time. His advice—while controversial—is widely regarded as valuable within the academic sphere and is ultimately useful toward understanding the Kim regime as a rational, strategic actor.

The relevance of Machiavelli's teachings is not lost on scholars leading the study of the DPRK. For example, Andrei Lankov makes special note of the way the Kim regime has followed Machiavelli's instructions as a means to obtain and maintain power.

The Kim dynasty in Pyongyang remain masters of their country. In defying the “political laws of gravity,” North Korea today faces an almost universally hostile world. It is a small country with few resources and a moribund economy. In spite of all this, however, it has managed to survive and exploit divisions between the world’s major powers to maximum effect. You simply cannot achieve this by being irrational. The North Korean leaders know perfectly well what they are doing. They are neither lunatics nor ideological zealots; rather, they have shown themselves to be remarkably efficient and cold-minded calculators, perhaps the most ruthless and Machiavellian leaders in the world today.

(Lankov 2014)

In this argument for rationality, I will pull passages from *The Prince* and provide examples of the Kim regime following Machiavelli’s directives. Six guidelines in particular that I will highlight from *The Prince* show a strong correlation with the actions of leadership of the DPRK. By the end of this section, I hope to make the point that to write off the Kim regime and, by extension, the DPRK as irrational and illogical, one must first claim the same of Machiavelli’s advice and teachings, for the two are closely interwoven. If we can come to the conclusion that North Korean leadership is, in fact, rational, then we can analyze their actions and interactions with Russia in an informed manner, allowing us to further parse answers to the question of the USSR’s strategic influence in the DPRK.

2a. Power over Population

But to this I answer that a brave, strong prince will overcome all these problems, giving his subjects hope at one minute that the storm will soon pass, stirring them up at another moment to fear the enemy’s cruelty, and on still other occasions restraining those who seem too rash. (Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005)

The DPRK's unique ideology of Juche is one of the driving forces behind its culture. This philosophy is unique to the DPRK and is separate from communism or Stalinism; it is instead the result of the contact of the communist ideology of the USSR and the remnants of Japanese imperialism and Korean nationalism. While there is no exact English word that can encompass all that Juche represents, the closest phrase that explains the essence of this ideology is "the revolutionary zeal of North Korean self-reliance." This is further brought to light by the unwavering dedication of North Korean citizens to the leadership, and their extreme work ethic that supposedly contributes to the well-being of their country. The "communism" in the DPRK is not *true* communism as their culture is still very hierarchical when it comes to age and gender. Within the nation's borders, the culture places those of Korean nationality far above all other races. This history of Juche is further expanded in "Analysis."

With Juche, the struggle is not necessarily between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie but rather the struggle of the North Korean people against the rest of the world. This struggle is exemplified by a leader who is portrayed to the people as faithfully standing up to outside forces striving to take away the DPRK's sovereignty. Victor Cha expands on this aspect of the ideology: "The *Juche* ideology's insistence on Koreans as a unique race was in this sense more fascist than it was communist. And at the top of it all, Kim Il-sung was the embodiment of everything good about this race, its fierce defender against external impure forces, and its trailblazing leader to utopia" (Cha 2012).

Ironically, the acceptance of foreign aid does not take away from this idea of self-sufficiency; instead, it is viewed as a means by which to pursue self-sufficiency. In *The North Korean Economy*, Nicholas Eberstadt notes that "North Korea's food trade . . . has been abidingly subject to a relatively strict administrative standards of financial self-sufficiency."

During the time of Kim Jong-Il in the 1990s, authorities operated under the understanding that their country should *spend* no more on the purchase of food from foreigners than the foreigners themselves were buying from the DPRK. However, accepting food aid “imposes no additional burdens upon the DPRK’s foreign exchange account allocated to the food trade” (Eberstadt 2007). Viewed in this light, the acceptance of foreign aid does not undermine this ideology of self-reliance and instead is used to continue self-reliance, albeit narrowly defined.

This definition of Juche is used as a tool to control the North Korean population. Riling up this “revolutionary zeal toward self-reliance” follows Machiavelli’s advice of conjuring hope of success in their struggle against the outside world, and this has kept the blame from resting upon the Kim regime’s shoulders. Blaming outside “imperialism” for the economic situation within the DPRK has historically stemmed uprising within the country. This struggle is one that the population imagines they take on willingly as a sacrifice toward the continuation of North Korean sovereignty and independence. This bond, this ideology of Juche, gives them hope that the storm will pass and motivates the people to continue their struggle against the enemy, all the while discouraging action against the Kim regime itself.

This is not to say that the Kim family has overlooked opportunities to place themselves in a positive light. Yes, there is the continuous struggle against the outside world, but the Kim family rewards this struggle by making a great show of their benevolence and care toward their country. Celebrations are not uncommon within the DPRK, but state-sponsored holidays go far beyond simple cultural traditions. Instead, these days are used to pay homage to each leader—living and dead—and his accomplishments during his rule. The necessity of these traditions are outlined in *The Prince*.

2b. Spectacles and Portrayal of Power

The prince should bestow prizes on the men who do these things, and on anyone else who takes pains to enrich the city or state in some special way. He should also, at fitting times of the year, entertain his people with festivals and spectacles. (Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005)

The DPRK's largest festivals are directly related to the honoring of the Kim family. Everyone in the country gets a day of rest on the 16th of February to celebrate Kim Jong-Il's birthday. April 15th is another important celebration; labeled Day of the Sun, it commemorates Kim Il-Sung's birthday. Most importantly, however, is the Day of Victory in the Great Fatherland Liberation War. This day, July 27th, marks the signing of the armistice and the beginning of the cease-fire between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea (ROK) after the Korean War in 1953. As the name insinuates, this cease-fire is seen as a victory in the DPRK, a shining example of the Koreans successfully fending off the American imperialists and thus maintaining the long-awaited liberation of the North Korean people.

Despite the harsh conditions and strict rules of everyday life in the DPRK, emphasis on celebration provides many benefits to the Kim regime. This state-sponsored honoring of leadership not only supports the Kim cult of personality but also feeds into Juche ideology by implementing regularly observed nationalistic rallying. Commemorating events specifically related to milestones in the Kim family members' lives and their successful wartime achievements strengthens the communal bond of the people and reaffirms the god-like status of the leadership.

Depending on how loyal a citizen is to the regime, he or she can move up in the political hierarchy and the DPRK's class system. This class standing is then inherited through the male line, leaving the descendants of war heroes North Korea's elite and the country's parliamentary seats bequests from father to son. Only in extenuating circumstances can individuals change class standing themselves. This hierarchical social standing revolves around dedication and loyalty to the Eternal President and his family (Lankov 2014).

The portrayal of the outside world as a continual threat to the DPRK is included in almost every piece of national propaganda. The nation's citizens are told that they must be ever-vigilant and prepared to face incredible hardships for the good of their country, even if it means fighting the West to protect the nation's sovereignty. This emphasis on war is perpetuated by the leaders of the DPRK and has roots in the advice given by Machiavelli.

2c. Continual Preparation for War

Therefore the prince should never turn his mind from the study of war; in times of peace he should think about it even more than in wartime. (Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005)

Evidence of continual study of and preparedness for war is reflected in the country's prioritizing of funding and attention to the military. It is such an important part of the DPRK's internal system for self-sufficiency that the concept of "military-first politics" has its own term: *Songun* ideology. Implemented by Kim Jong-Il after the death of his father to further solidify his position as new leader (Habib 2010), this ideology put military affairs as the country's highest fiscal priority. While this ideology was not named during the early days of the DPRK, it is evidenced in the political priority that Kim Il-Sung placed on former soldiers within the WPNK

and the Korean Workers' Party as well as the emphasis on financial dedication to the DPRK's military (Lankov 2005).

Songun ideology continues in the DPRK: even during times of peace, almost 23% of the nation's GDP is dedicated to maintaining its military. In addition, this army is in the top five largest in the world. While the DPRK has fewer active-duty personnel than the United States, the number of military-ready individuals in the DPRK's reserves is over four times the number of the United States' reserve soldiers (Cha 2012).

These numbers are not the only resources dedicated to wartime preparation: as a self-declared nuclear power, the DPRK also dedicates resources to weapons of mass destruction, which adds an additional layer of complications. The creating and growing of a nuclear arsenal speaks to anything but irrationality. The country's "costly decision to go nuclear is anything but irrational—rather it is deeply intertwined with the peculiarities of the DPRK's domestic and international situation and is therefore unlikely to ever be reconsidered" (Lankov 2014). The Kim regime uses this capability in a strategic manner, often using threats to guarantee a spot at the negotiating table with the international community. The indication of nuclear capability alone is of concern to the West, and this capability's capacity to raise tension is not lost on the Kim regime. Despite consequences carried out on the DPRK by the United States and the international community to pressure the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons, this powerful card is too valuable of an asset for the DPRK to give up. "Had North Korea had no nuclear weapons, few in Washington would care about this faraway country. Pyongyang decision-makers rightly assume that nuclear weapons are their major leverage in dealing with the developed world—and they have made great use of this leverage during the last two decades" (Lankov 2014).

An example to drive this point home is to compare the DPRK to a nation of almost identical population and per capita GDP: the West African country of Ghana (as of 2012). Despite their statistic parallels, the DPRK receives far more foreign aid (Cha 2012). In addition, the ability of the DPRK to manipulate the international community and dominate the headlines in Western media is miles above its peer.

While war and its study are not pushed aside by the Kim family, the seemingly constant threat of nuclear retaliation against their neighbors is often used to provoke a response rather than for the retaliation in and of itself. “The overemphasis on the nuclear issue has obscured [for the general public] the reality that for North Korea’s leadership, its nuclear weapons program is not an end in itself but rather one of many strategies they deploy to achieve the overriding goal of regime survival” (Lankov 2014). Due to its frequent use, this strategy has been mapped by scholars (including Lankov, Cha, Martin, and Bueno de Mesquita, among others) into a cyclical pattern. The DPRK will first “generate a crisis, then escalate tensions, and, finally, extract payments and concessions for the restoration of the status quo.” This is not to say North Korean leaders believe an actual war resulting from the execution of their threats would be short *or* victorious; rather, their motivation lies elsewhere.

They are hedging their bets that no one will want to set in to solve the mess that a war would result in. Pyongyang’s strategists therefore decided to increase pressure by reminding the world of their ability to create additional problems for the United States and the ROK. This might seem illogical, but such an approach is rational, since North Korea *does not risk too much by driving tensions higher*. Certainly, North Korean policymakers know that if a war were to break out, they would lose it quickly. But they

also know that war would be prohibitively costly for democratically elected politicians in Seoul and Washington. (Lankov 2014, emphasis my own)

Thus, *threatening* war is seen as a logical, “safe” option as long as no one arrives at an actual war. These continual threats are often misinterpreted by the general public within the West to be the result of erratic or irrational leadership, but in reality it is a calculated strategy. Conflict in the region can be predicted due to the aforementioned pattern: after the DPRK experienced cuts to their humanitarian aid in 2009 that were extended into 2010 (Johnson 2011), analysts predicted a military overreach to drive an increase in regional tension. As anticipated, November of that same year saw the DPRK shelling of the Yeongpyeong islands, disputed territory between the DPRK and the ROK. This shelling resulted in deaths of ROK citizens, but, as the DPRK predicted, did not escalate into war. The ROK would not view this as enough reason to justify the bloody, costly war. “This asymmetry means that North Korea can raise the stakes with relative impunity when it chooses to do so—as long as the risk of skirmishes escalating to a full-scale war remains low” (Lankov 2014).

Despite all of his advice, Machiavelli provides exceptions to his own rules and explains scenarios in which a leader can violate his instructions but remain in power. Indeed, despite the evidence presented above, one must wonder why this regime has remained in place for generations with blatant human rights violations and extravagant lifestyles of the few noble elite. Machiavelli’s answer? Religion.

2d. Personality Cult

They [ecclesiastical states] can be held without either of those qualities. They are sustained by the ancient principles of religion, which are so powerful and of such

authority that they keep their princes in power whatever they do, however they live.

(Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005)

Not only has the Kim family followed Machiavelli's instructions, but they also fall within the "exception" category. Despite religion in the DPRK being illegal, I still would argue that this passage of *The Prince* remains applicable. While not ecclesiastical in the way Machiavelli may have pictured, the cult of personality within the DPRK aligns with the spirit of what Machiavelli wrote. The DPRK's leaders are viewed with a god-like devotion, and much of the daily life is dedicated to the admiration and worship of Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and Kim Jong-Un. Having cultural roots in Stalin's personality cult from the USSR, this mindset was adopted and radicalized within the DPRK. This created a transition from nationalistic devotion to a darker, extreme version of leader-worship as Kim Il-Sung grew older. "While the elder [Kim Il-Sung] . . . increased tensions with the United States, his son set out to intensify the personality cult . . . it was during this time that the senior Kim made the transition from mere dictator to official deity" (Martin 2004). The line between worship and brainwashing is blurred in the rules each citizen must follow. North Korean citizens are required to wear a red lapel pin on special occasions (this pin has the image of Kim Il-Sung, sometimes alongside his son Kim Jong-Il), and every house must have a portrait of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il.

These likenesses of Kim Il-Sung and Kim Jong-Il are honored as if they were the leaders themselves. During every holiday, all citizens are required to visit statues of the leaders and leave small gifts or flowers, but expected obedience does not end there. One incident in the summer of 2007 showcases the loyalty indoctrinated into some citizens.

In an emergency, statues and portraits are to be protected whatever the cost, as any sacred object should be—and North Koreans are reminded that they must safeguard the

images . . . During severe flooding, Kang Hyong-Kwon, a factory worker from the city of Ich'on was trying to make his way to safety through a dangerous stream. Before leaving his flooded house, he took the two most precious things in his life—his five year old daughter and portraits of Leaders Generalissimo Kim Il-Sung and Marshal Kim Jong-Il. Suddenly overwhelmed by the current, he lost grip of his daughter, who fell into the swollen water, but still managed to keep hold of the sacred images. The media implored North Koreans to emulate Kang Hyong-Kwon, a real-life hero. (Cha 2012)

As mentioned before, those who show extreme loyalty to the regime can improve their social standing. Individuals who do heroic deeds, as well as their descendants, are honored for their bravery. There are two sides to this coin, however: actions of disloyalty or slander toward the leaders or country are not taken lightly. Punishment is dealt swiftly and harshly to not only the perpetrator but the individual's family as well. This cruelty is something that is justifiable in Machiavelli's eyes and something that the Kim family seems more than content to capitalize on comfortably.

2e. Logical Application of Cruelty

Cruelty can be described as well used (if it is permissible to say good words about something evil in itself) when it is performed all at once, for reasons of self-preservation, and when the acts are not repeated after that, but rather are turned as much as possible to the advantage of the subjects. (Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005)

Many believe there is no logic, no rhyme or reason, to the cruelty witnessed in the DPRK. Logic is a necessary benchmark of leadership used in the strategic perspective (Bueno de Mesquita 2014), so it is of the utmost importance to clarify the ways in which leadership in the

DPRK is logical. Before diving into the meat of this subject, I would first like to preface my statements with the following: The punishments implemented by the Kim family and the conditions in which they force citizens to live are beyond cruel. They are evil. Unfortunately, evil is not synonymous with illogical or irrational. “People are less concerned with offending a man who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared: the reason is that love is a link of obligation which men, because they are rotten, will break at any time they think doing so serves their advantage; but fear involves dread of punishment, from which they can never escape” (Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005). Within the DPRK, the methods by which fear is used to control can be considered rational in that they create stability and enforce loyalty.

When Kim Jong-Un first came to power, the United States’ intelligence community hoped his international education in Switzerland would result in a tempered form of leadership more benevolent than the style of his father. However, these hopes were quickly dismissed when Kim Jong-Un began an immediate purge of his father’s former advisory circle. They were all replaced by new faces, and even within this new group of advisors there was a fast turnover rate. This sudden onslaught of killings solidified his power and removed potential threats to his rule. However, anyone (politician, soldier, or civilian) who spoke against him, even in the small form of voicing a dissenting opinion or questioning his judgement, faced execution. It is important to note that while some of the executed were indeed family by marriage, as of early 2016 there has yet to be the death of a blood relative, “accidentally” or otherwise. This idea of absolute loyalty and accountability to blood relatives, as opposed to ties by marriage, is a cultural normality on the Korean Peninsula. Andrew Nahm explains in *Korea: Tradition and Transformation* the root of this tradition: “People were extremely conscious of familial values and their own family identities. Korean women keep their surnames after marriage based on traditional reasoning that

it is what they inherited from their parents and ancestors, and [that] cannot be changed” (Nahm 1988).

This idea of strong blood ties within the family unit is also used in punishments. Another process that implements extreme cruelty is the DPRK’s three-generational rule. This punishment technique is unique to the North Korean judiciary system: if one individual is caught committing a crime, three generations of his family can be punished. Whether it be a failed attempt to flee the country or disloyalty to the Kim family, the lawbreaker, his parents, and his children will be punished (or, if the lawbreaker has no children, then his grandparents). Cruel? Incredibly. Effective? Yes. (After working with North Korean refugees myself, I learned that this three-generational punishment is the reason it is common for large groups of family members to escape together; it is the only way to guarantee the escapee’s family will not be imprisoned or killed, as is commonly the case for family left behind.)

Machiavelli’s advice holds a caveat to this cruelty. He states that this cruelty should not remain the status quo and that it should “not be repeated” after the desired impact has been made. Thus, if we are to say leadership in the Kim family acts in accordance with Machiavelli’s advice, then we could expect to see a tapering of political executions after the nomination of a new leader.

As of early 2016, this expectation is being fulfilled. Politicians and high-ranking military members who were previously pronounced dead by state-sponsored media have been shown alive after returning from reeducation courses, albeit demoted and thinner than before (Grisafi 2015).

Given these recent examples, Kim has apparently moved beyond the violent purges of his early reign and into a phase of punishing officials through reeducation or labor before allowing them to return, much as his grandfather Kim Il Sung did . . . North Korean elites need to believe that, as long as they are not seriously disloyal to the regime, they are safe. However, the regime will want to ensure that these elites know they will face reeducation and punishment for failures to please the leader. This helps continue to demonstrate Kim's authority while also reassuring people they won't necessarily die. (Grisafi 2015)

Time will show if Kim Jong-Un will continue to favor reeducation rather than execution of those in his inner circle. There may be exceptions to this trend depending on the internal political factors at play, but if the overarching method continues to decrease in severity, then we will know the DPRK is entering the next stage of Machiavelli's advice. Kim Jong-Un must walk a careful line when it comes to his image and public perception within his own country; he must show firmness in his rulings but also appear benevolent to loyal subjects. Machiavelli writes on the steps that a ruler must carefully adhere to in this dance of maintaining a reputation.

2f. Maintaining a Reputation and Credible Threats

What makes the prince contemptible is being considered changeable, trifling, effeminate, cowardly, or indecisive; he should avoid this as a pilot does a reef, and make sure that his actions bespeak greatness, courage, seriousness of purpose, and strength. In the private controversies of his subjects, he should be sure that his judgment once passed is irrevocable; indeed, he should maintain such a reputation that nobody will even dream of trying to trick or manage him. (Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005)

The media in the DPRK is state-sponsored, and the nation takes great steps to avoid outside news sources reaching the general population. As a result, the image of the leaders can be tailored and the reputation of the Kim family can be maintained at the discretion of the leadership. Evidence of this tailoring is the “fluid” reputation of history in the DPRK. State-approved periodicals are destroyed after three to five years (Martin 2004), allowing the past to be reevaluated and adjusted accordingly to the evolving political goals of the country.

This intentional shaping of the leadership’s image is not only targeted toward the citizens of North Korea, but is also used to manipulate the country’s neighbors. Pyongyang adjusts its actions and agreements depending on the country it is currently collaborating with. This is commonly used to play Moscow and Beijing against each other in order to increase Pyongyang’s strategic value to both countries. “Neither believed that it could afford to let the North’s allegiances fall fully to the other camp . . . Kim Il-Sung benefitted immensely from this competition, alternating loyalties between the two sides while maximizing assistance from each . . . back and forth between the two camps, not so far as to lose the support of either one but far enough so that they noticed the distance and would vie for this loyalty” (Cha 2012). By slightly modifying their image and stances, the Kim family often coax a deal by allowing themselves to become the thorn in the sides of both China and Russia.

Using the six passages from Machiavelli’s *The Prince*, it becomes clear that someone arguing for the irrationality of the Kim regime would first have to prove the irrationality of Machiavelli’s advice. The two are intrinsic and interwoven: the ruling styles are cruel, harsh, and calculating. Digging past stereotypes, we find that the leadership of the DPRK is intentional and has laid thorough groundwork for control over the people.

The citizens of the DPRK and those who work directly for the Kim family have been conditioned to truly believe their survival is linked to the continued “self-sufficient” model of their country. “There is no doubt that North Korean leaders are humans who love their families—actually, such noble sentiment might be the core driver behind what they are doing . . . they believe that not only their futures but those of their loved ones are contingent on the continued existence of their regime and that this regime can be maintained only through skillful diplomatic brinkmanship and the generous use of terror within the country’s borders” (Lankov 2014).

In closing, the leadership of the DPRK is no more irrational than the advice given by Machiavelli. When reading the criteria in *The Prince* and comparing it to the actions taken by leadership in the DPRK, we see the parallels in the actions taken by Kim Il-Sung, Kim Jong-Il, and even the newest leader Kim Jong-Un. Though there are still years ahead to study this new leader, thus far he has shown to be following Machiavelli’s ideals to the letter. As for Machiavelli himself, this passage where he praises the actions of an Italian duke gives insight into what he himself would have thought of Kim Jong-Un and the way this young man is transitioning into the leadership of the DPRK:

Any man coming into a new state, therefore, who finds it necessary to guard against enemies and win friends, to overcome by force or fraud, to make himself loved and feared by the people, followed and respected by his troops—if you have to destroy those who can or might hurt you, revamp old laws with new measures, be severe and indulgent, magnanimous and liberal, disband old armies and replace them with new, meanwhile managing your relations with other princes and kings in such a way that they will be glad

to help you and cautious about harming you, you can find no better recent examples than those of his career. (Machiavelli & Bondanella 2005)

If we approached the situation without an understanding of the framework the leadership is operating within, it would become all too tempting to write off the leadership as illogical or irrational. However, once the ideology of Juche and the parallels between Machiavelli's advice and the actions of the Kim family are taken into account, the argument for irrationality slowly loses ground. The clever ways in which the DPRK has played the international community must not be overlooked, and the use of weaponized ideology to brainwash a population for three generations cannot occur by happenstance. To imagine this leadership style as anything other than rational is to grossly underestimate the lengths to which the Kim regime will reach in order to maintain power. Its leadership style is also consistent with the strategic perspective adopted by modern political science, and this consistency allows us to use the strategic perspective as the theoretical framing for the analysis of logic and actions of the DPRK's leadership.

Methodology

This thesis uses an established political science methodology to consider the relationship between Russia and the DPRK over time and how the change in Russian leadership impacted variance in the relationship and influence between these two countries. Based on George and Bennett's (2005) "structured, focused comparison" approach, this thesis uses process tracing in a within-case variance analysis as explained in their book *Case Studies and Theory Development in the Social Sciences*. This approach will be used to examine and document a connection between the change in leadership and variance in Russia's strategic influence in the DPRK.

The purpose of the “structured, focused comparison” (George & Bennet 2005) method is systematic qualitative analysis of case studies capable of producing valid inferences from historical experience and generating policy implications (Drozдова & Gaubatz 2014), which is aligned with the objectives of this study. “The method of structured-focused comparison was developed to study historical experience in ways that would generate useful generic knowledge for important policy problems. The method enables drawing explanations of each case of a particular phenomenon into a broader, more complex theory. The systematic results can inform a better understanding of historical events and, most important, help diagnose and deal with possible new cases” (Drozдова & Gaubatz 2016). This study in particular is structured upon the leaders’ strategic interactions over time within the given timeframe and focused on the evolution of Russia’s strategic influence toward the DPRK with each new leader.

Within this approach, we will look at the strategic influence by leadership era and then by leaders within that era. The concept of strategic influence is defined in two facets: ideological influence and military aid. Focus variables are limited to different timeframes and then further categorized by leader. The three timeframes, or “eras,” are the Stalin era, post-Stalin Soviet era, and post-Soviet era. The same methodological approach is used when tracing the answer to the research question within each era, enabling both systematic comparison and synthesis of findings across each era.

Analysis examines within-case variance (based on variation in leaders) to see if there is deviation in Russia’s strategic influence associated with the change in leadership. The explanation for the within-case variance approach is as follows: “Working with the preexisting theory, the researcher establishes the value of independent and dependent variables in the case at hand, and then compares the observed value of the dependent variable with that predicted by the

theory, given the observed independent variables. If the outcome of the dependent variable is consistent with the theory's prediction, then the possibility of a causal relationship is strengthened" (George & Bennett 2005). The hypothesis in this thesis is that the change of leadership in Russia, the independent variable, results in a change of Russia's strategic interests in the DPRK, the dependent variable.

This hypothesis itself is influenced by the strategic perspective applied and advanced by Bruce Bueno de Mesquita (as explained in "Theoretical Framing") and his assertion that domestic politics shape a nation's international policy. "Leaders define national interest to coincide with their personal interest" and "relations between nations and between leaders are driven by strategic considerations" (Bueno de Mesquita 2014). If the leadership in a country is the driving force behind that nation's international policy, then a change in the leadership of the country will most likely lead to variance in the nation's international policy.

The focus in this thesis is two-dimensional: ideological influence and military aid. Ideological influence can be measured by how the USSR's embracement of Marxism-Leninism and the adoption of, and disassociation with, the Stalin cult of personality impacted the DPRK's creation of Juche and the adoption of the Kim cult of personality. Military aid is measured in the promise and delivery of both funding and materials for the purpose of defense. These two dimensions were chosen because they clearly showcase the relationship between leadership change and policy change.

Process tracing is completed by following the policy process in terms of each era and then chronologically by leader within that era. By examining a leader's policies regarding the DPRK and the resulting response from the DPRK, we can measure the consistency of the relationship between the two variables, where change in Russian leadership represents an

independent variable and change in strategic influence toward the DPRK represent a dependent variable. Evidence of a causal relationship would mean seeing changes in leadership correlate with change in the strategic influence of Russia in the DPRK, which would then be further verified by the DPRK's reaction to the USSR's change in policy.

The data includes a combination of both primary sources—public statements, archived telegrams—as well as secondary sources such as scholarly analysis and published transcripts from interviews of North Korean citizens. Secondary sources are used to establish the context for interpreting historical facts, as well as triangulate evidence supporting this research and verifying the respective findings. On occasion, propaganda from the DPRK is referenced as subtle trends in the propaganda can be triangulated with internal political environments. This technique is not uncommon among scholars studying the DPRK, and is justified by historians such as Dan Kang: “Even though the editorial content of *Rodong Shinmun* [DPRK's official newspaper] appears uniform and rigid in style and ideology, subtle changes in nuance, tone, and description hint at changes and potential sources of conflicts in the North Korean system” (Kang 1988). Excerpts from speeches made by the Kim family fall under these references.

Analysis

It should be noted that while this thesis covers leaders from Stalin to Yeltsin, not every leader imposed policies separate from his predecessors. This is particularly noted in instances where the leaders held office for a short time or were occupied with realms of influence external to the DPRK. The leaders who did not have as many unique aspects with regard to the DPRK were Malenkov, Bulganin, and Chernenko.

It is my belief that the shortened time in office for these leaders explains the apparent lack of change in the country's policy toward the DPRK during their leadership. After the death of Stalin in 1953, a bitter power struggle emerged over who would lead the USSR. Malenkov briefly held the formal leadership position, and Bulganin replaced Malenkov for a short period of time before Khrushchev rose as the ultimate successor and led the USSR for a substantially longer time. In the 1980s Chernenko ruled briefly before dying in office. During my research process, no evidence of a change in policy toward the DPRK was found aligning with the time spent in office by these three short-lived leaders. This lack of change, however, is important methodologically as it shows variance in the dependent variable: not every leader effected a change.

This does not take away from the outlook that "leaders make decisions." The unchanging North Korean policy could be the result of several factors: different priorities or interests of these leaders in their other spheres of influence, higher-risk situations within spheres of influence, and shortened times in office (sometimes only a few months) due to internal political upheaval or power struggles. This is not to assume that no evidence of action is evidence in and of itself, but the sparsity of information can certainly act as an indicator as to how much their decisions (or lack thereof) impacted the status quo. The majority of historical evidence overall suggests that these three Soviet leaders had no impact on the DPRK.

In this study, I investigate other changes in leadership that occurred and evaluate each leader's actions toward the DPRK when it comes to ideological influence and military aid. I then examine both the reactions of the DPRK to the USSR's influence and the effects of these reactions. The scope of this paper is from 1946 to 1999, and the leadership of the USSR (and subsequently Russia) is divided into three eras: Stalin (1946–1953), post-Stalin Soviet (1953–

1991), and post-Soviet (1991–1999). Each era is investigated chronologically by leader, first in terms of ideological influence and then by military aid. These subsections will expose the leader’s relevant decisions and the way these decisions impacted the DPRK.

1. Stalin Era

Starting with the formation of the Workers’ Party of North Korea (WPNK) in 1946 (which would lead to the formation of the DPRK in 1948), the Stalin era in Soviet-DPRK relations speaks to a time of great influence and support from the USSR to the DPRK both militarily and ideologically, more so than any other era in this paper. Even though Stalin had been in power within the USSR for many years, this timeframe was chosen because it is when the “Stalin Era” in the DPRK began, formalized with the creation of the WPNK. After the end of World War II, Japan relinquished control of the Korean Peninsula and its other East Asian territories. With Soviet presence in the northern section of the peninsula and American presence in the south, each country propped up its respective sphere of influence. Along with this presence came each country’s economic outlook and opinion on how to run a country. Looking to the north, we see how the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the USSR merged with the remnants of Korean nationalism to form the beginning of the DPRK’s national ideology: Juche.

1a. Ideological Influence

Russia’s Marxist-Leninist ideology acted as a catalyst with Korean nationality to form Juche. Because the USSR’s influence was limited to the northern region of the Korean Peninsula, Juche is uniquely North Korean. Because of this, it can be hard to translate the idea of Juche and fully understand the dimensions of its meaning. The definition I believe to be most accurate is a phrase scholars such as Bradley Martin (2004) have pieced together as “national self-reliance,”

which has “the broader meaning of putting Korea first.” While the name “Juche” was not used until a speech by Kim Il-Sung in 1955, we can trace events leading to the creation of the ideology itself.

Korean nationalism, which itself has roots in Confucianism, emphasizes the solidarity among the Korean people and the unified way they should face the rest of the world. This outlook was solidified within the Korean Peninsula during the Japanese occupation as the Korean people were treated as second-class citizens; this shared experience and its impact on the Korean people lasted far beyond the Japanese presence. The importance of one’s family ties and national loyalty can be seen today in both the DPRK and the ROK independent of the ways this manifests itself at the government level. This strong nationalist identity, when mixed with Marxism-Leninism, created a new identity with traits of each ideology. Brian Myers, author of *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*, notes the way “*Juche* is all about Korean state, Korean sovereignty, and Korean identity and independence” (Myers 2010). Park Han-Shik, a *Juche* expert and professor at the University of Georgia, claimed when interviewed that Korean nationality is not a new concept as “the prizing of Korean ethnic identity as part of a political ideology was something that resonated with all Koreans,” but *Juche* takes it to the extreme as it also perpetuates the “claim of Korea as a chosen land from which human civilization emerged” (Cha 2012).

Juche also redefines the notion of collectivism, pulling more from a Confucian background rather than adopting the Marxist definition. The ideology of the USSR pushed for equality of the people, whereas *Juche* is solely in the interest of the Korean people while simultaneously maintaining an internal hierarchy. “Confucian values still had a hold in North Korean culture alongside *Juche*. In a typically Korean Confucian behavior pattern that Karl Marx

surely never envisioned as a component of communist rule, Kim Jong-Il likened to ascribe merit to himself on account of his descent from the pure revolutionary line. And he insisted that others acknowledge his superiority in that regard” (Martin 2004). This is supported by the assertion that “filial piety is not a Marxist concept, but it is an Asian one. Kim’s grip on the people was therefore accentuated by the fusing of the Stalinist personality cult-like order with these neo-Confucian values” (Cha 2012). By redefining collectivism in a context more Confucian than Marxist, “masses serve the state leader just as children would show filial piety to their parents, and the father of the country would then distribute the benefits accordingly” (Cha 2012). The “us versus them” mindset was not assigned domestically, but rather portrayed as the entire capitalist world against Korea in particular. “It [Juche] accepted, for example, that capitalists and imperialists were the enemy and that the Revolution would be won in a class struggle of laborers over their oppressors” (Cha 2012).

1b. Military Aid

Military aid within the Stalin era is divided into two categories: people and materials. While Stalin did not want to risk a full out war with the United States, it was within the USSR’s national interests to grow its sphere of influence within the Korean Peninsula. The optimal solution for Russia would be a Korea unified under communist ideology, with the least optimal being a wholly capitalist nation sharing a border with the USSR. The evidence for Stalin providing military aid and support to the DPRK in the USSR’s expansionist endeavors is best displayed in these two facets.

When it came to dedicating troops, Stalin wanted to avoid enablement of the Soviet Union in any way that would lead to outright war against the United States. Considering ways to help the DPRK while minimizing the possibility of a war between the two great powers, Stalin

decided to bring Beijing into the mix. In their book *Uncertain Partners: Stalin, Mao, and the Korean War*, Goncharov, Lewis, and Xue wrote “Stalin was willing to support Kim only if the possibility of a Soviet-American clash in Korea would be included. He determined the way to do this was to implicate Mao in the decision and thereby make him bear the full burden for ensuring Kim’s survival if the Americans intervened” (Goncharov et al. 1993). This strategic behavior on Stalin’s part was prudent: history shows the United States’ response to the attack from the DPRK unexpectedly pushed the North Korean effort up to the border of China and Russia with no signs of stopping, and it was the Chinese who shouldered the burden of pushing the United States back down the Korean Peninsula.

This is not to say China and the DPRK received no Soviet support. Materials and financial compensation were provided. During the DPRK’s preparation to invade the ROK, Moscow sent shipments of equipment to North Korea. July of 1950, Stalin sent a telegram to Sktykov (the Soviet ambassador to the DPRK from 1948 to 1951) stating, “In our opinion the attack absolutely must continue and the sooner South Korea is liberated the less chance there is for intervention . . . we have decided to fulfill fully by July 10 the Koreans’ requests for delivery of ammunition and other military equipment. Report about this to KIM IL SUNG” (CIPHERED Telegram 1950). Martin (2004) observes that, upon the cusp of their invasion of South Korea, “the North had twice as much manpower and artillery as the South and at least a six-to-one advantage in aircraft and tanks” according to Soviet estimates. When the United States came to the aid of the ROK, the USSR pivoted to support the Chinese in their supplies as well. However, this help came at a cost, and the Chinese, with a personal stake in the issue, were not in a position to back out. Dr. Zhisui Li, confidante of Mao and later author of *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*, reveals a discussion between the leadership in Beijing and Moscow during this

time. “Thereupon the Chinese leader [Mao] asked Stalin to give or—if Stalin feared such aid would provoke the West—at least Sell China weapons it could use to intervene. Stalin agreed only to a sale, and some 90 percent of munitions China used in the war came from Moscow—Financed by loans totaling \$1.3 billion” (Li 1994). Katheryn Weathersby of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars wrote in her article *Stalin and the Danger of War with America* that “as the US continued to refrain from directly attributing responsibility for the invasion to the Soviet Union, and thus from using the attack as a *casus belli*, Stalin regained his composure. He began energetically to manage the Soviet supply and support effort” (Weathersby 2002). Because of this, the Chinese were successful in pushing back the Americans to the pre-invasion demarcation between the DPRK and ROK, where the fighting continued without advancement by either side until a cease-fire was agreed upon in 1953.

2. *Post-Stalin Soviet Era*

Khrushchev became the leader of the USSR’s ruling Communist Party following Stalin’s death in 1953 and formally succeeded in the post-Stalin leadership power struggle. While Bulganin still formally held the leadership title for several years after Stalin’s death, Khrushchev steadily grew in power within the country and was officially recognized as leader in 1958. Thus was ushered in the era marked by this paper as Post-Stalin Soviet era. This is defined as the leadership of Khrushchev, Brezhnev, Andropov, Chernenko, and Gorbachev.

The end of the Korean War did not mark a new ideological peace, but instead contributed to building tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States. Despite other countries vying to join the Soviet Union (and become satellite nations of Russia), the DPRK was not interested in participating in the Soviet’s vision of a global communist brotherhood. This asymmetrical enthusiasm resulted in the USSR gradually weakening its ties with the DPRK—

unless the relationship was in the Soviet Union's national interest, as portrayed by the interest of the Soviet Union's leaders. The drifting away of the Soviet Union radicalized the now-growing ideology of Juche in the DPRK.

2a. Ideological Influence

Seeing the necessity of a strong union, the USSR prioritized strengthening its own sustainable economy. This led to the increasingly collective identity of Soviet-aligned socialist nations: each satellite nation could contribute to the well-being of the others. However, this collective mindset meant losing the Stalin personality cult. While initially made in a closed meeting, comments by Khrushchev soon became known that "criticized the Stalin personality cult and proposed collective leadership in the Soviet Union to replace the dead leader's one man rule. Clearly, other communist countries were expected to follow that lead" (Martin 2004). The idea of pivoting away from "one great man leading the rest" did not rest well with Kim Il-Sung, who at that time was enjoying the slow consolidation of power within the WPNK and his growing Stalinesque following. While still a "People's Democracy" like many of its communist neighbors, the DPRK's leadership had followed its own self-interest. Now that there was a perceived lack of support coming from Khrushchev, it was easy to emphasize and thus radicalize the idea of Juche. Lankov (2002) points out that this ideology was "coined on the eve of the 1956 crisis, in December, 1955." This crisis Lankov mentions is in reference to Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin and his cult of personality. Once the ideology had a name, it was easier to polarize against this new Soviet ideal. Dr. Robert Scalapino and Dr. Chong-Sik Lee explain the diverging ideals of Khrushchev and Kim Il-Sung in their book *Communism in Korea*. Kim Il-Sung viewed the Soviet Union as "mishandling" communism: in a translation of one of Kim Il-Sung's speeches, we hear his belief in "applying the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism

and the experience of other countries to suit the historical conditions and national peculiarities of your own country” (Scalapino 1972). After 1963, the use of Juche in rhetoric and official speeches jumped and “afterwards, he never tired of talking about it” (Martin 2004).

The implementation of this ideology did not end with rhetoric, however. Once radicalized, it was necessary to protect it from those who would disagree. Action was taken against those who followed Khrushchev’s lead in critiquing the DPRK’s approach. Hwang Hang-Yop, who was the DPRK’s Ideology Chief in 1958 and thus one of the nation’s highest ranking defectors, spoke to the way these critical individuals were handled. In a story about a fellow refugee, he told of how the man’s brother had “gone to the USSR and was confronted with ideas countering Juche. Picking up on that theme, the brother joined some friends in criticizing Kim Il-Sung’s Stalin-style personality cult and his increasingly one-man rule. ‘That got him executed . . . he wasn’t an activist in the movement, just a scholar. But his friends were involved in politics. When they were executed, so was he, in 1958’” (Martin 2004).

In 1964 Soviet leadership changed, and with the removal of Khrushchev came the arrival of Brezhnev. Ideologically, Brezhnev and Kim Il-Sung disagreed from the very beginning, specifically where the scope of “self-reliance” was concerned. Tensions rose when Brezhnev “urged his North Korean hosts to import Soviet consumer goods instead of machines” to promote internal economic growth, which led to Kim Il-Sung criticizing Brezhnev for the “notion that socialist countries should form an ‘integrated’ economy, each specializing rather than trying to produce a full range of products domestically” (Martin 2004). By relying on the specialization of other nations, Kim Il-Sung feared that the DPRK would never achieve self-sufficiency. Once it became clear the DPRK was unwilling to fully participate in the Soviet marketplace, the USSR shifted the DPRK lower on its priority list behind other satellite nations and spheres of influence.

It is important to realize this was not a dismissal rooted solely on principle, but rather because the disagreement made investment in the DPRK less cost-effective. There would be no benefit to exhaustively using the USSR's time and resources toward the DPRK. This more or less apathetic approach to the DPRK continued throughout Brezhnev's time in office.

However, by 1982 Andropov had become the new leader of the USSR and the atmosphere of the USSR's foreign relations had changed as well. The political tension between the USSR and the United States (later to be known as the Cold War) was blossoming into peak tension: the United States had decided to completely boycott the Olympics only a few years before, and Andropov had completely left behind Brezhnev's idea of friendly competition between the USSR and the capitalist world. Maintaining an armed ally was necessary, especially when the DPRK provided an "ideological buffer zone" between the Russian border and capitalism in South Korea. Once again, this change in relationship was not born of loyalty or shared principles, but out of the strategic use of the Korean Peninsula. The relationship with the DPRK was merely a means to an end; the DPRK's cultural hatred for the "American imperialists" could be utilized to improve regional security.

Andropov, though he played a large part in the mending of Soviet-Korean relations, was only in office for fifteen months. Chernenko did nothing to change the relationship between the Russians and the Koreans, and it wasn't until Gorbachev that the relationship began to evolve once more. The international geostrategic situation changed immensely during his leadership, eventually culminating in the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. Although the USSR and the DPRK were initially on good terms, Gorbachev's decision to officially recognize Seoul in 1990 "undermined" the DPRK to such an extent that the action caused a permanent rift between these two countries.

To understand the severity of this decision, one must understand the way Korean nationalism had evolved in the DPRK and the ROK. Initially, the entire peninsula identified as one Korea before and during Japanese occupation. There was a single national identity, language, and cultural experience. However, after the Japanese surrendered in WWII and gave up their spheres of influence, the Soviets and Americans took responsibility for the peninsula. With the influence of two outside superpowers, the cultural experience of each realm began to change. Slowly the conversation within the peninsula changed to, which Korean *government* is the legitimate government? as opposed to, which ideology should Korea unify under? To the citizens of the DPRK, following Juche was integral to being a good Korean, and their brothers in the ROK were misled under the sway of an “imperialist ideology.” This view of self was reflected in each country’s politics: the DPRK proclaimed themselves as the only legitimate government in the peninsula, even going as far as to include extra seats in their parliament to hold the “representatives” from the southern half of the peninsula. The DPRK even “claimed Seoul as their official capital until 1972, with Pyongyang listed only as the ‘temporary capital’” (Willoughby 2014). For the USSR to initiate diplomatic ties with the ROK completely undermined the DPRK’s proclamation of regional autonomy, giving international legitimacy to the “posturing” government and making the DPRK lose face in front of the international community.

Thus, Gorbachev’s term “began with attempts to strengthen solidarity with communist comrades in North Korea and ended up forging friendly links with Seoul at the expense of the alliance with Pyongyang,” Bazhanov and Bazhanov (1994) write in the *Evolution of Russian-Korean Relations*. The DPRK had been declining in economic power, leaving the ROK a better force to align with in Northeast Asia. By officially recognizing the sovereignty of the ROK, the

USSR completely undermined the autonomy of the DPRK and gave legitimacy to the “posturing” government. This destroyed the solidarity that had existed between the USSR and the DPRK for decades. When *Washington Post* journalists Joseph Yang and Eleanor Randolph asked Gorbachev to explain this shocking news, he replied “we must improve relations with everyone who lives there [Northeast Asia]. We can’t do it selectively” (Yang 1990).

Gorbachev’s *Perestroika* and *Glasnost* policies concerning the restructuring of the Soviet economic and political system were not officially allowed to be spread in the DPRK, but that is not to say this new ideology did not influence members of the DPRK in some small manner. North Korean citizens who studied abroad or knew someone who did soon heard of the shifting ideology within the USSR. Bradly Martin (2004) included three interviews from North Korean citizens who were exposed to Gorbachev’s ideas during this time. Their experiences showcase various opinions present in the DPRK and provide a glimpse into the ideological change of North Korea on a microscale. It is important to note that many of these doubters were youths. As Martin (2004) quoted one man saying, “Toward the end of the 80s people started having doubts about the socialist ideal, and about whether we could really beat South Korea in war. The difference is that the new younger generation are doubters, not fanatics.”

Kim Ji-Il, a former exchange student to the USSR, spoke about his time abroad: “In essence, I think the mentality of Russians and Americans was essentially the same. I got there during the time when Konstantin Chernenko held the top job, but he was quickly followed by Gorbachev. I watched the unfolding of *perestroika* and *glasnost*. I became anti-regime after about a year in the Soviet Union” (Martin 2004). Martin cited another interview with a man who spoke about his initial disbelief of a changing ideology, but later recanted his opinion: “The North Koreans knew little or nothing about Soviet liberalization and restructuring . . . once he

understood the meanings, though, he dismissed any need for reform in North Korea. ‘Our country has no *glasnost* or *perestroika*,’ he boasted. ‘Our policy is unchanged for forty years. No one wants to change . . . [but] after 1987 I believed socialism could not succeed in North Korea’ (Martin 2004). This shift did not go unnoticed by the Kim family, and years later they would privately blame Gorbachev for the collapse of the Soviet Union: “Revisionists weaken socialist systems by overemphasizing laws and ignoring political indoctrination. Gorbachev brought down the Soviet Union using this tactic” (Martin 2004).

2b. Military Aid

Within the post-Stalin Soviet Era, each leader placed less emphasis on providing military support to the DPRK, even going so far as to ignore clauses in defense treaties and publically condemning the militarized actions of the DPRK.

Military aid in Khrushchev’s time dropped substantially. The aforementioned emphasis on friendly economic competition between capitalist and communist countries left no room to support the expansionist endeavors of Kim Il-Sung, who still had his sights on a second attempt to reunite Korea. Kim Il-Sung’s biography includes his goals and agenda of the time, including his dreams of “leading to victory the revolutionary struggles of the South Korean people, to sweep away US imperialism and its agents, and [to fulfill] the struggle of the entire Korean people for national unification” (Paek & Kim 1973). Thus, Khrushchev’s encouragement toward communist nations to put down their weapons fell upon deaf ears, and Kim Il-Sung’s request for support to “liberate” the ROK was dismissed once more. Supporting another Korean war against America did not fit with the strategy of the USSR. Kim Il-Sung did not receive this news well, as witnessed in the way “the month of Soviet-Korean friendship was not celebrated in 1956” and

the way Kim Il-Sung “ordered the end of all performances of Russian plays in Korean theaters” (Jager 2013).

Brezhnev maintained this aloof stance toward the DPRK and artfully disentangled the USSR from military involvement with Korea. This approach allowed for stability in the region, despite the actions of the DPRK. One of the biggest examples of this is the USS Pueblo incident. In 1968, the DPRK captured a ship of the United States Navy, which they claimed had sailed into North Korean waters. The 83 American men on crew were captured and held for 11 months, undergoing torture. Foreseeing the possibility of being dragged into a conflict against the United States, Brezhnev distanced the Soviet Union from these actions. “During the Pueblo crisis in 1968, the Soviet leadership made it clear to Kim Il Sung that it was not going to support his adventurist course in dealing with the United States and South Korea, and Article 1 of the Moscow-Pyongyang Treaty of 1961 would not be put into force automatically” (Zhebin 1995). This treaty that Brezhnev mentioned entangled the militaries of the USSR with the DPRK and had “stipulated automatic military involvement of parties in case of war” (Kwak 1996). Disengaging the Soviet Union from this obligation was in the best interest of stability between the USSR and the United States. One can only speculate if the situation would have ended differently if the DPRK believed they had the full support of the USSR or if Brezhnev saw fit to uphold Article 1 of the Moscow-Pyongyang Treaty.

Andropov retained this Soviet-first foreign policy, but in a way that led to great improvement of Soviet-DPRK relations. When the former KGB leader became the leader of the USSR’s Communist Party in 1982 and subsequently the formal leader of the USSR, he viewed the DPRK as an asset rather than a liability. Seeking to use the DPRK as a pawn against the United States, he made the decision to invest in the DPRK’s nuclear capabilities. Kang Myong-

Do, who grew up among the North Korean elite during this time, spoke of the exchange of information. In an interview with Tae Won-Ki, he revealed how the USSR “sent about seventy nuclear specialists to North Korea. The specialists stayed until August of 1993” (Martin 2004). This development of nuclear capabilities made history as “this was the first time a small Third World power managed to do so” (Becker 2005). Military aid was given not only in the form of new technology, but also in materials. In 1992 the DPRK received two nuclear submarines from the USSR for “scrap,” though they were never scrapped. Andropov even went so far as to prod the DPRK into action, saying “the Soviet Union will help you” in the event of an attack (Martin 2004). Once again, if Andropov had been in office for longer than fifteen months, the 1980s may have held a very different story from the one we know today.

Despite posing as a liability to international stability, Andropov fortified the relationship between the USSR and the DPRK. Chernenko’s leadership continued this trend, so Gorbachev’s comparatively gentler stance regarding official business and military rhetoric was a break from the methods of previous leadership. However, as noted earlier, the ideological shift soon bred incompatibility between the two countries. After officiating ties between Moscow and Seoul, any military funding from the USSR toward the DPRK’s army would have been counterproductive. By the end of Gorbachev’s term, the damage done toward Soviet-DPRK relations was irreversible.

3. Post-Soviet Era

The collapse of the Soviet Union marked an end to both Gorbachev’s presidency and the post-Stalin Soviet era. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia and other Soviet Republics acting at satellite nations became separate, independent countries. Russia’s President Yeltsin was faced with distancing the country from its communist roots and attempting to

integrate the country into a democratic, capitalist worldview. This era is labeled the post-Soviet era and is limited to Yeltsin due to this research's scope.

3a. Ideological Influence

With the massive ideological change within Russia, Juche and personality cult within the DPRK seemed archaic and useless to Russia. Yeltsin was “repulsed by the DPRK and saw its leadership as weak, backward, and dictatorial” (Joo 2010). The ideas formerly uniting the two countries were now obsolete, and even association with the DPRK brought little benefit to Yeltsin. Ties were strengthened with the ROK, which proved to be a wise decision as “a generation of sustained rapid growth in South Korea had left the North Korean economy lagging behind ever more obviously in an increasingly unequal competition” (Eberstadt 2007). Yeltsin “went further than Gorbachev, and demonstrated almost total indifference toward relations with Pyongyang while privileging those with Seoul . . . the choice between the DPRK and ROK represented the choice between the old and new Russia, and therefore was not a hard one to make” (Cha 2012). The DPRK's refusal to change its ideology of self-reliance soon resulted in its inability to “withstand the shocks it faced with the end of Soviet bloc subsidies and the end of politically-guaranteed Soviet bloc demand for its produce” (Eberstadt 2007). The country experienced a food shortage and famine unprecedented by any other country during peacetime. Pyongyang began to rely more and more upon Beijing due to Moscow's cold shoulder.

3b. Military Aid

Military aid under Yeltsin continued to decline exponentially. Cha observes how “the Soviets would not sell military arms to Pyongyang, they sold fighter aircraft, T-80 tanks, armored fighting vehicles, and anti-aircraft missiles to Seoul” (Cha 2012). This action spoke

loudly: by observing Russia militarily supporting Seoul, the DPRK could no longer hope for Russia to remain neutral should war break out. Yeltsin went beyond neutrality. Along with stripping the DPRK of military support, he withdrew almost all of Russia's economic support as well. "Even less desire existed in the Kremlin to bolster the DPRK economically. Not only did Moscow not want to prolong the Kim Il Sung system but economic cooperation with North Korea was simply not profitable, and crisis-stricken Russia curtailed all the aid that had been provided in the past" (Bazhanov 1994).

Kim Il-Sung died during these changes, leaving his groomed but still-inexperienced son, Kim Jong-Il, to handle this new turn of events. Ideologically and militarily the DPRK had been abandoned by Russia, and the leader who had been the constant object of worship for North Korean citizens had gone from them suddenly as well. Entering the 21st century, the DPRK lived with the same mindset that it had since the early fifties. With its identity built upon a foundation that did not evolve with the world around it, the country sought recognition and validation. While the majority of the international community strove to become interconnected, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea sealed itself, turning to the further development of its nuclear capabilities to regain the "respect" the country's leadership felt was slipping away.

Conclusion

In the above analysis, change in Soviet-Russian leadership and variance in Russia's strategic influence are shown not only to be correlated, but to have a direct and measurable relationship. Russia's influence in the DPRK shaped the nation's ideology and sparked their military capability, the aftereffects of which are felt by the international community well into the 21st century. This confirmation of the hypothesis further supports the strategic perspective and its

approach to international politics. With this information illuminating the foundation and pattern of the relationship between Russia and the DPRK, there is a greater breadth of historical context from which to both understand and predict the possible range of the DPRK's interactions with the West.

U.S. Policy Implications

Given the DPRK's historically reactionist role spurred by policies implemented toward their country, the United States must measure policies toward the DPRK in light of the range and extent of reactions which may be sparked as a result. Threatening rhetoric from the DPRK is hardly anything new, but frequency of threats has no impact on the credibility of the threats themselves. Because the DPRK's nuclear capabilities would allow the country to inflict incredible damage to its neighbors in the region, promises of action—no matter how frequent—must not fall upon deaf ears.

However, this does not necessarily mean that the DPRK has utter control of the status quo. The international community's reaction to these threats is in their own hands, and as long as the Kim regime does not feel that its sovereignty is threatened, the DPRK has no incentive to begin a nuclear war. However, with the continued development and testing of nuclear weapons, sanctions have been placed against the DPRK until it limits its nuclear program. Because these nuclear developments are the reason its threats hold credibility, it would be illogical for the DPRK to adhere to the guidelines of these sanctions. As a result, 2016 has unveiled a high-stakes standoff in Northeast Asia between the DPRK and the international community. In light of this situation, I would recommend that the United States government consider the following actions: discourage excessively inflammatory rhetoric from other countries toward the DPRK; begin a

discussion with Russia, China, and the ROK on the potential regional dynamics in a post-Kim DPRK; and develop steps to preemptively neutralize the DPRK's nuclear arsenal in the event of a regime collapse.

The sanctions against the DPRK were imposed by the United Nations Security Council in response to a nuclear test and missile launch that defied international sanctions (Roth et al. 2016). The nuclear test occurred in the Punggye-ri region, in the northeast part of the DPRK. The Security Council's sanctions target the imports and financial support that benefit the DPRK's nuclear program, asserting "the country's nuclear program must be abandoned" (White House 2016). However, given that this nuclear program is the credible backing to the DPRK's threats, abandoning this program would severely limit its bargaining power and limit the ability of the DPRK to uphold its sovereignty. Without this power, the international community will not have the same incentive to give attention to this region outside of occasionally providing humanitarian aid. If the international community can dismiss the Kim regime and this reaches the DPRK's population, then the feared image of strength held by North Korean citizens which has stemmed uprisings against the Kim family for generations will shatter, leaving a question mark in its place.

Understanding that the legitimacy of Kim's rule is tied to the leader's image, "saving face" becomes a matter of regime survival rather than mere pride. As a result, it would be counterintuitive to expect Kim Jong-Un to act in a way that would undermine his own sovereignty. Continuation of the nuclear program means continuation of the sanctions, which have a far greater impact on the lives of North Korean citizens. Historically, hardships felt by the population have held little to no sway over the decisions of the DPRK's leadership. However, if this disengagement with the people means Kim pushes the population too far or takes for granted

the hardships the citizens will tolerate, then he may ruin his image of a “Benevolent Leader” on his own.

If the citizens of North Korea face hardships as a result of these sanctions that are too weighty to fuel only the “revolutionary zeal of self-reliance,” there is an increased chance of political dissatisfaction and a resulting coup from the DPRK’s military. Even if this dissatisfaction does not directly lead to a military junta, the military may be receptive to helping outside governments such as China or Russia undermine the regime.

In the event of imminent loss of sovereignty, there is no question as to the lengths Kim Jong-Un would go in order to maintain power: at the 7th Party Congress in May of 2016, Kim Jong-Un was directly quoted as “vowing not to use nuclear weapons first unless its [the regime’s] sovereignty is violated” (Kim Jong-Un 2016). This threat to use nuclear power speaks to the necessity of a preemptive defense plan of the surrounding countries against nuclear attack. It is imperative that the United States develop and tailor strategies to seize, destroy, or deactivate the DPRK’s nuclear arsenal before the weapons can be fired and used against the ROK, Japan, or the United States. While this may require coordinating with both China and Russia, I recommend limiting expected involvement in order to streamline the process in the event of additional external political circumstances which may bar the swift completion of this defense.

Regardless of the countries participating in this defense, it is imperative that this action is not started unless it can be executed swiftly and followed through to completion. Any non-DPRK military action occurring within the borders of the DPRK will warrant retaliation: at best, failed foreign involvement will serve to further vilify the West to the citizens of North Korea, and at worst, it may result in a nuclear response ordered by a man who believes he faces imminent loss of both sovereignty and life.

If the DPRK were to indeed collapse entirely, one question looms above the rest: Which country will claim responsibility for the region? By nature of the economic disparity between the DPRK and the surrounding region, any country wishing to shoulder this burden would face a sharp economic downturn, which would then affect the economic climate beyond Northeast Asia. Logically, nations will want to avoid this scenario as it would lead to the financial crippling of any one country. This is why it is imperative to begin a dialogue with major powers in the region—primarily China and Russia—as to the possible dynamic of the region before all members are faced with an imminent economic black hole. A power vacuum is not the only possible outcome of a post-Kim DPRK, but any alternatives would require great care and intentionality.

For lack of a better term, implementation of a puppet leader (PL) within the DPRK to replace the Kim regime is one of the more feasible alternatives. The PL would follow the directives of either China, Russia, the US, or the ROK and slowly implement new policies to both improve the country's standard of living and decrease the economic gap between the DPRK and the surrounding region. However, this strategy comes with many risks. Among these risks is the possibility that an outside country could use the PL to benefit their own country's sphere of influence at the expense of a unified Korea, regardless of the initial goal behind the PL's placement. Even if this risk was somehow mitigated, the PL's legitimacy in the eyes of the population is a factor beyond the outside country's direct control. Transitioning away from the regime and toward this new leader would be fraught with potential instigations of a power struggle in the DPRK. These risks point to a few questions showcasing the complicated nature of North Korea and the lack of an easy and immediate solution. Communication between the United States, Russia, and China is necessary to minimize risks in the response to the DPRK.

Above all, time is the most important factor in this solution. Development of strategies takes time, particularly when more than one country is involved. During this time, care must be taken to stabilize the region and prevent sovereignty loss, perceived (by Kim) or otherwise. This can be difficult to choreograph with the number of actors in the region: while the 2010s found Pyongyang forming close ties with Beijing, the role of Russia in the region must not be underestimated.

As the analysis in this paper reveals, Russian leaders will want to maintain regional security and, as asserted by Bueno de Mesquita, resolve political situations that would threaten their positions of power. Domestic politics shape international interests, and a nation that is unstable within its own borders poses a risk to its elected officials. Thus, it is imperative for leaders to promote internal stability. Robert Kaplan of the Center for a New American Security asserts that increased nationalism often helps overcome internal disputes and increases stability, which in turn leads to higher ratings for leaders. As of 2016, Russia has undergone economic troubles without a clear and immediate fix. However, as reported by the *Washington Post*, President Putin has received a jaw-dropping 83 % approval rating (Birnbaum 2016). Why this discrepancy? Kaplan believes that these downward economic trends have a direct influence on the nation's international involvement; the fastest way to increase nationalism, and thus stability, is to create an "us versus them" mindset, often expressed by an increase in international involvement.

Evidence that this correlation benefits President Putin has already been documented, such as "during the invasion of Georgia [in 2008], where national approval ratings for Putin jumped" (Kaplan 2016). Russia's international involvement did not end there, and neither did the increased approval ratings. The beginning of the century also saw Russian involvement in both

Ukraine (2014) and Syria (2015), and as of 2016, “two years after Putin’s ratings skyrocketed at the start of a geopolitical conflict with the West, they have stayed there, week after week, month after month” (Birnbaum 2016).

The West is not the only region that has warranted Russia’s attention: inflammatory words toward the DPRK were exchanged in March of 2016 as a response to one of the DPRK’s nuclear tests. The message from the Russian Foreign Ministry is translated below.

Pyongyang should be aware of the fact that in this way the DPRK will become fully opposed to the international community and will create international *legal grounds for using military force* against itself in accordance with the right of a state to self-defense enshrined in the United Nations Charter. (O’Carroll 2016, emphasis my own)

Care must be taken that these words, while not untrue, are not escalated to the point of being mistakenly interpreted by the DPRK as imminent loss of sovereignty. Attempts to raise nationalistic morale through increased rhetoric for the sake of Russian stability opens the door to misunderstandings and misinterpretations, which can result in a disastrous situation. Thus, the United States must discourage the escalation of rhetoric from Russia toward the DPRK, lest it sever the time allocated to develop the other two defense recommendations. Communication with Russia on this issue must be concise and clear, but most importantly it must be held in private so as to avoid placing either country’s leadership in a bad light and proclaiming unenforceable red lines. If concern is not vocalized, it may lead to premature involvement in the Korean Peninsula. The emerging trends seen in Russia of “exporting their troubles in the hope that nationalism will distract their disgruntled citizens” must not be lightly dismissed (Kaplan 2016). The strategic perspective comes into play once more, and the findings of this analysis unearth trends that can be used in the development of policies outside the scope of this thesis.

The connection between Russian leadership and variance in Russia's foreign policy is timeless and thus can be applied to President Putin in 2016.

The *Economist* summarized the 2016 tensions very well: "North Korea is not bound by any global rules. Its hereditary dictator, Kim Jong Un, imposes forced labour on hundreds of thousands of his people in the gulag, including whole families, without trial or hope of release. Mr. Kim frequently threatens to drench Seoul, the South's capital, in 'a sea of fire'. Nuclear weapons are central to his regime's identity and survival" (Nuclear 2016).

The future of the DPRK and the Kim regime is unknown. To mitigate risks of volatile instability resulting from the potential collapse of the Kim regime, it is best to use the present time as a time to strategize. This is aligned with the interests of my recommendations: developing steps to preemptively neutralize the DPRK's nuclear arsenal in the event of a regime collapse; beginning a discussion with China, Russia, and the ROK on the potential regional dynamics in a post-Kim DPRK; and actively discouraging excessively inflammatory rhetoric from other countries toward the DPRK. While following these steps will lessen the damage from a conflict in the region and its aftermath, it will by no means alleviate it completely. The situation in the DPRK is one with no easy fix or clear solution. The political situation in 2016, while deplorable, provides the best regional stability. Any alternative, whether or not it results in a better, more moral society in the DPRK, will first mean years of conflict, instability, and a crippled regional economy. However the Kim regime ends, it will mark the beginning of a new age, leaving behind more broken pieces than any one country can pick up.

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Integration of Faith and Learning

I remember when I was very young looking over my mom's shoulder at an emailed survey sent by a Christian organization. It was titled "What denomination are you?" I asked her what denomination meant, and she replied Christians sometimes placed emphasis on different aspects of the Bible; the word "denomination" was used to explain what parts you believed without clarifying your stance on issues one by one. When I asked her which denomination we were, she said we attended several on the list; they all followed Jesus and preached what was written in the Bible, and at the end of the day that was the only part that mattered to our family.

This mindset meant my family never attended a set denomination. Because my dad was in the army, we moved every other year. This led to a childhood of experiencing different styles of churches over the years. Grand buildings where the entire congregation would kneel in prayer, Baptist services where the pastor would *literally* thump the Bible at the pulpit, shockingly casual services held in school gyms—this was just a taste of the constant variety. We regularly attended a small, twenty-person congregation only to then turn to a megachurch at the next duty station. Worship varied from singing quiet hymnals to dancing along with the praise hula ministry. When we lived overseas, I learned to sing Japanese (and on a later tour, Korean) worship songs at dual-language services. At one post, stained-glass windows filled with images of uniformed American soldiers praying would capture my attention during long sermons.

This exposure to various kinds of worship within the contexts of different countries and regions provided a wholesome foundation from which to study and learn of different cultures. As I got older, this study of countries became more political in nature, and I soon grew enamored

with the interactions different countries and cultures had with each other. When it came to picking a major for college, international affairs was the logical choice.

International affairs is not just the study of other cultures and government systems: the discipline also encourages students to learn the context of each viewpoint. If someone can understand the lens another person uses to view the world, an agreement can be reached with greater ease and respect.

Issues in the international arena often arise from individuals or countries not understanding the leadership or government of another. Just as someone should be above reproach when first connecting with someone of a different denomination or religion, prudence is required when communicating with agents or actors of another country's government. Misunderstandings can have deadly consequences—particularly at the international scale—and thus grace should be expended. When contradicting cultures collide without preparation or grace, it is shocking how quickly arms can be taken up and insults hurled.

However, this is not to say that all political systems are created equal. There are objectively bad leaders and organizations where no amount of research on context will lead to satisfactory, moral reconciliation. For example, violation of basic human rights cannot be considered objectively moral, regardless of the geographic location, and leaders who treat their dependents as worthless or expendable cannot be justified. In these situations, researching leadership or political systems remains important, but it is for the purpose of predicting and counteracting decisions that may harm innocents.

When it comes to applying my studies to the world beyond Seattle Pacific University, I am exploring different avenues. I completed the GRE in the summer of 2015 and am considering

graduate school opportunities. I want to continue to add to my fifteen years of Japanese language studies, but most of all I hope to continue researching the military dynamics in Northeast Asia. Such a topic requires continual learning—development and dynamics in that region show no sign of simplifying. I think that I have been given this passion for a purpose: a drive that I can use to educate myself and synthesize this information to share with others. Whether this is expressed by teaching or by working for the government of the United States, my dream is to decipher the constant flow of information and put the “puzzle pieces” together. The current puzzle for me is the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, and I am thirsting for the opportunity to glean whatever informational puzzle pieces I can.

International affairs is so important in the dynamic world. This discipline provides the tools to approach, engage, and understand differences between cultures. I am grateful to have attended Seattle Pacific University, an institution that not only instructs students in the use of these tools, but also provides practical application of what is taught. When it comes to interactions between nations, studying leadership and cultural context is paramount for both strategizing to mitigate risks and building positive, lasting relationships.