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**Implications of
the Nuclear Issue
in the DPRK**

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Abstract

La questione nucleare rappresenta il principale elemento critico nella storia recente della Repubblica Popolare Democratica di Corea (RpdC). È noto quanto la problematica occupi centralità nella discussione attuale circa i rischi di instabilità che pone a livello di sicurezza regionale, date le due crisi nucleari che hanno riguardato il paese. La tesi, che fa ricorso a fonti bibliografiche, si concentra sulle implicazioni storico-economiche, geopolitiche e ideologiche della questione nucleare. Amplia in tal modo lo spettro delle considerazioni attraverso un approccio multidisciplinare, dando ulteriori strumenti per approfondirne l'interpretazione.

Questo scritto si struttura in quattro capitoli. Nel primo, viene affrontata l'ideologia, il Juche, e si forniscono cenni storici sulla sua creazione. Si propone quindi una contestualizzazione storica, focalizzandosi sul periodo dalla divisione della penisola coreana (1945), in seguito alla liberazione del territorio dall'occupazione coloniale giapponese (1910-1945), fino alla Guerra di Corea (1950-1953). Il preambolo storico relativo a tali anni di tumulti è necessario per comprendere l'evoluzione del paese e il modus operandi del suo governo (Cumings, 2010; Lankov, 2013). Questi ultimi elementi vanno a completare l'argomento cardine del capitolo, l'ideologia Juche. Tale dottrina, nelle sue particolarità, rimane poco chiara agli occhi di un esterno, tanto che, secondo Cumings (2004), man mano che si approfondisce, più il significato si confonde. All'origine di tali difficoltà interpretative sta l'errata comprensione di vari aspetti della mentalità nord-coreana, a partire dalla banale traduzione antropocentrica di "fiducia di sé", "essere maestri di sé stessi" o "l'uomo è padrone di tutto e determina tutto" (Kurbanov, 2019, p.3). Di qui la necessità di indagare sull'evoluzione di tale ideologia, il cui percorso si può leggere in chiave storica, in base dunque ai mutamenti in un determinato

momento, ma anche in chiave economica, alla luce dei cambiamenti nel rapporto con il principale alleato e benefattore della Corea del Nord, l'Unione Sovietica. Tale rapporto, caratterizzato da alti e bassi, ha avuto un certo margine di influenza nel Juche. Quest'ultimo, fondendosi con ideali Marxisti-Leninisti e incorporando elementi dal neo-confucianesimo, tra cui il rispetto nei confronti dello Stato, un sistema centralizzato della burocrazia e una gerarchia sociale rigida, ha costituito un punto di forza non indifferente a livello di stabilità politica (Cumings, 2015, p.70).

La correlazione tra ideologia e questione nucleare nella RpdC si rende dunque fondamentale per comprendere in che modo il programma nucleare rappresenta una necessità, nella prospettiva esterna di deterrenza, mentre per quanto concerne quella interna assume importanza ideologica, diventando lo strumento per difendersi dagli imperialisti, e scoraggiare lotte di potere per rovesciare la dinastia Kim (Guthe, 2011).

Nel secondo capitolo si discute la questione nucleare, fornendo un'analisi del *modus operandi* della RpdC a partire dagli anni '90 e di come la questione si è venuta evolvendo a livello internazionale attraverso i negoziati. Benché il programma nucleare risalga agli anni '50 come risposta alla presenza militare statunitense nella Corea del Sud, ha ricevuto particolare attenzione dopo il collasso dell'Unione sovietica, specie nel 1993, in seguito alla dichiarazione della RpdC di voler ritirarsi dal Trattato di Non-Proliferazione Nucleare, di cui era stata firmataria nel 1985, alla luce delle esercitazioni militari congiunte tra Repubblica di Corea e Stati Uniti. Si riscontra, pertanto, una matrice di preoccupazione per la sicurezza nazionale da parte della Corea del Nord nel perseguire lo sviluppo di un programma nucleare, accompagnata da un accento opportunistico su cui far leva nell'ambito dei negoziati, sia svolti bilateralmente che multilateralmente. Un ricorrente errore rimane l'idea di una applicazione concreta delle promesse formulate ai tavoli negoziali, sia da parte della RpdC nel procedere o

dare segni positivi nell'adempiere allo smantellamento dell'arsenale, sia da parte degli altri attori coinvolti in fatto di concessioni. Un generale clima di sfiducia ha caratterizzato le trattative, le quali si dimostrano sensibili anche ai cambiamenti a livello di direzione politica, come si vedrà per Repubblica di Corea, Stati Uniti e Giappone, allineati nell'interesse di denuclearizzare la Corea del Nord (Hur, 2018). Dall'altro lato, il programma nucleare di quest'ultima si rivela una carta utile per Cina e Russia nel controbilanciare la presenza militare statunitense. Nonostante l'interesse comune a garantire stabilità regionale, e dunque per una rimozione della tecnologia nucleare di Pyongyang, i termini secondo cui ciò deve avvenire rimangono oggetto di discussione tra gli attori coinvolti, sia per quanto concerne i costi, che potrebbero acuire una situazione di dipendenza energetica, sia a livello di stabilità del regime, la cui evoluzione e implicazioni rimangono imprevedibili a lungo termine.

Nel terzo capitolo si discutono le implicazioni economiche di tale situazione, ovvero l'orientamento generale dell'economia nord-coreana, l'enfasi sull'industria militare e i metodi adottati per far fronte a momenti critici, in particolare le sanzioni. L'economia nordcoreana rappresenta un'altra lente interpretativa degli eventi, poiché le difficoltà insite nell'orientamento rigidamente centralizzato e focalizzato sull'industria pesante hanno frenato la crescita all'inizio degli anni '80, che si è poi ridotta fino ai tempi odierni comportando una serie di criticità (Guo, 2017; Napoleoni, 2018). Queste difficoltà si riflettono anche nella questione nucleare: grazie al ricatto nucleare, infatti, la RpdC ha potuto beneficiare di ingenti aiuti dall'esterno ottenuti come concessioni ai tavoli dei negoziati, e d'altra parte ha subito a livello economico le conseguenze delle sanzioni messe in atto e accumulate negli anni dal Consiglio di Sicurezza delle Nazioni Unite. Queste, inasprendosi durante gli anni, hanno danneggiato il paese, già in una condizione di fragilità ed isolamento, compromettendo le poche esportazioni e importazioni. Le sanzioni riescono in modo generale nel loro intento punitivo, ma d'altro

canto, producono anche altri effetti. La corruzione e la rete su cui si erge (Bechtol, 2018a) dipendono infatti sia dalle sanzioni che dalla precarietà dell'impostazione economica. Si tratta di fattori importanti da considerare, poiché il rischio di isolare il paese influisce nella valutazione e risoluzione del problema nucleare (Hecker, 2011, p.454). Le sanzioni inoltre fomentano ulteriormente un circolo vizioso che porta la RpdC ad aggirare queste misure (Taylor, 2010). *Ceteris paribus*, l'utilizzo di sanzioni può definirsi limitato nella sua efficacia, dato che da un lato condiziona i partner commerciali minori, mentre Russia e Cina, con le quali si svolge la maggior parte dell'interscambio, sono riluttanti a dare loro applicazione estensiva (Taylor, 2012).

Infine, nell'ultimo e quarto capitolo, vengono considerate le sfide future e gli interessi in gioco, mostrando le complessità a cui si dovrà far fronte, se si intende risolvere la questione nucleare. Nel quarto e ultimo capitolo l'indagine fornisce un quadro dei sei paesi direttamente coinvolti nei negoziati Six-Party talks, suggerendo uno schema alquanto complicato dalla convergenza e sovrapposizione di diversi obiettivi politici. Lo scenario attuale, considerando i problemi precedentemente illustrati, appare delicato e complesso nella sua risoluzione. La tesi intende fornire una visione di ciò che non ha funzionato, di ciò che si è acuito con il passare degli anni, e di ciò su cui è necessario oggi porre l'accento. Dopo un excursus sulla crescente minaccia di un atteggiamento aggressivo della Corea del Nord anche in altri ambiti, come nel cyberspazio, si enfatizza la necessità a livello internazionale di affrontare la questione nucleare. Si inseriscono brevi raccomandazioni sul futuro nell'ottica di un'eventuale tornata di negoziati, che rimane l'unico canale multilaterale a disposizione per interfacciarsi con la RdpC (Cha, 2018). La formulazione di nuove politiche o misure dovrà incastrarsi perfettamente in base alle aspirazioni nazionali e internazionali degli stati direttamente coinvolti, implicando un processo a lungo termine fortemente condizionato dalle mutevoli circostanze del

momento. Fare previsioni di crisi, rovesciamento o collasso del regime, la cui natura risulta problematica a livello internazionale, appare scarsamente utile in questa prospettiva (Foster-Carter, 2015). Benché risulti difficile immaginare una RpdC denuclearizzata senza un cambiamento radicale interno, quanto si prefigura attualmente è uno Stato con cui il negoziato rimane un'opzione più valida rispetto alla totale mancanza di dialogo.

DEDICATION

To Marina Reffo (1960-1998): lawyer, teacher and mother.

Contents

| | |
|---|-------|
| List of Tables..... | p. 9 |
| List of Abbreviations..... | p. 10 |
| Introduction..... | p. 11 |
| Chapter 1: Juche ideology and historical notes..... | p. 16 |
| Necessity to Contextualise History: the Korean War..... | p.17 |
| It takes to two tango..... | p. 20 |
| Bite the bullet..... | p. 22 |
| National Identity and How the War Shaped the North Korean Mind..... | p. 26 |
| Legacy of Communism and the portrait of a Leader..... | p. 32 |
| Military first and Kimilsungism..... | p. 36 |
| Juche in the 21st century..... | p. 40 |
| Chapter 2: Evolution of the nuclear issue..... | p. 46 |
| Reorientation of perspective under the United States..... | p.48 |
| First nuclear crisis..... | p. 53 |
| Second nuclear crisis..... | p.55 |
| First period of the Six-Party talks (First, Second and Third rounds)..... | p.57 |
| Second period of the SPT (Fourth, Fifth and Sixth rounds)..... | p. 59 |
| Considerations behind the purpose of negotiations..... | p. 63 |
| Deterrence..... | p. 66 |
| The Nuclear Issue after SPT and the ascent of Kim Jong-un..... | p.70 |
| Kim Jong-un's era..... | p.73 |
| Changes under the Trump Administration..... | p. 77 |

| | |
|--|--------|
| Chapter 3: Economic Implications of the Nuclear Issue..... | p. 82 |
| Origins of the economic difficulties..... | p. 83 |
| The great imbalance: Defence and Military Capacity..... | p. 89 |
| Sanctions and their implications..... | p. 91 |
| Analysis p.94 | |
| Collateral effects: the arms trade in the mass media..... | p. 98 |
| The almost friends of the DPRK..... | p. 102 |
| Current situation..... | p. 106 |
| Chapter 4..... | p.112 |
| A multi-faceted solution..... | p. 113 |
| Truth will come out, or not..... | p. 115 |
| Further problems: cyber-threats..... | p. 118 |
| The necessity of normalisation and its interests..... | p. 121 |
| The role of China and Russia..... | p. 122 |
| The Republic of Korea and Japan..... | p. 125 |
| Responsibility of the United States..... | p. 127 |
| And the main actor: Democratic People’s Republic of Korea..... | p. 130 |
| The next moves..... | p.131 |
| Conclusion..... | p.135 |
| Appendix..... | p.139 |
| Bibliography..... | p.142 |

List of Tables

Table 1.....p. 86

Table 2.....p. 89

Table 3.....p. 95

Table 4.....p. 99

Table 5.....p. 104

List of Abbreviations

DPRK Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North)

IAEA International Atomic Energy Agency

ICBM Intercontinental ballistic missile

KPA Korean People's Army (North)

KWP Korean Workers' Party (North)

MIA Missing-in-action

NPT Non-Proliferation Treaty

POW Prisoners of War

PRC People's Republic of China

SPT Six-Party Talks

ROK Republic of Korea (South)

Introduction

The North Korean nuclear issue is receiving more attention in the academic research during the last years, as it has become the object of concern within the framework of global security, attracting scholars from different fields (Robertson, 2018) to unravel the complex “work of fiction” (S. Choi, 2014) that the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea represents. This thesis would not present the country per se, but rather the Nuclear Issue and its extensions. The nuclear issue cannot be exemplified as a mere illicit nuclear program, and its resolution cannot be the North Korean denuclearisation alone. Instead, it reflects a multifaceted problem at international level, especially during the last thirty years.

The use of the word “implication” in the title has been chosen for its suitability as instrumental in defining such a controversial subject. According to the definition, implication means “a likely consequence of something” and a connection or a “conclusion that can be drawn from something although it is not explicitly stated” (Oxford University Press, 2020). Therefore, some implications of the nuclear issue can be its causes or its consequences, or even both: the complexity of the problem is based on this specific pattern. As it will be discussed, considering the causes, the nuclear issue is a product of the historical past and the Cold War antagonism, characterising the 20th century. This contributed to the isolation of the country which worsened as the post-Cold War era started, when the nuclear issue became more relevant. As for consequences, behind the nuclear issue, it is possible to find further complexities deriving from it and complicating it. A precarious economic situation that can fuel the nuclear issue, per se, through the incomes generated through arms trade and the humanitarian aid, received as a concession at the negotiations table. A common retaliation gen-

erated from failed agreement is sanctions, whose effects in turn fuel the advancements in the nuclear program, as well as they foster other illicit activities to generate further entries to contain economic damages.

This paper focuses on the structure and the formulation of the nuclear issue, rather than on an overall solution, addressing what went wrong, the wide range of further interconnected problems, which are often downplayed, and the necessity of acknowledging their importance. Throughout four chapters, this thesis would provide an interpretation of this issue, comprising different factors. Firstly, a historical background is delivered, followed by the efficient ideological tool of the Juche and its evolution. Then, the nuclear issue is presented as a central topic through the analysis of all the negotiation efforts attempted to solve it. The most important risk can be a nuclear strike, resulting in a global-scale conflict, which, indeed, represents the highest-risk scenario to be considered. As it follows, in equal measure, attention should be drawn to North Korean proliferation in other countries (Bechtol, 2018a), as well as to the arms trade (Berger, 2017), as a leverage to contain the damages of the sanctions, enforced by the UN Security Council, which are fuelling other critical problems and creating further room for violations, reinforcing such a vicious circle. Finally, the nuclear issue should be regarded as an international problem (S. Choi, 2014), and not solely within the Korean Peninsula, whose fate can be shaped in accordance with other major players, such as the United States, Russia and China, and, to minor extent, Japan (Cha, 2018; I. Park, 2018).

To understand and to formulate the implications of the nuclear issue in the DPRK, it is necessary to use a multi-disciplinary approach. North Korea has been often analysed as a monolith, an attitude that hardly coincides with an expectedly rational actor. Therefore, to counterbalance such narrow outlook, this work starts through the same assumption as the one of Lankov (2013): in order to grasp the *modus operandi* of the Democratic People's Republic

of Korea (from here on DPRK), an historical premise is needed, addressing the circumstances of how the country became the ‘secluded’ nation we know currently, which beliefs are involved and how the political structure maintains a strong control, despite the several predictions by scholars of an imminent collapse. These elements will be provided in Chapter 1, with a discussion on the Korean War, its legacy, and most importantly the Juche ideology, whose influences under three different leaders proved to shape the decision-making of the DPRK government (Payne, 2014). The Korean War (1950-1953), a civil conflict and a mistake of the interventionist foreign policy of the United States (Cumings, 2010) will be functional to explain the ramping Anti-Americanism displayed in the Juche ideology. This would lead to the central point of this paper, the nuclear issue, as dealt with in Chapter 2. The correlation between Juche and the development of nuclear armaments is explained in Lankov’s (2013) reasoning: the nuclear, often defined as the “last bargaining chip” (Cha, 2018; Teo, 2019), reflects the intention of the regime of avoiding structural changes, serving the purpose of its survival. Therefore, the Juche ideology legitimates the country to pursue advanced nuclear technologies over the several difficulties that its society experiences (famines, human rights violations, poverty and social inequality). As a core belief, paired with the leitmotiv of a common cause aiming at defeating the ‘imperialists’, it accomplishes the orientation chosen by the leader. The ideology is evolving according to its challenges, and it is functioning as intended, namely delivering a sensation of constant surveillance (Lankov, 2013). The nuclear program serves the purpose to create the necessary fear not to overthrow the regime both internally and externally. A weaponised regime, especially a nuclear one, discourages any destabilising attempt (Guthe, 2011).

The body of Chapter 2 will describe in detail the relevance of the North Korean nuclear program at international level, discussing its development in the last three decades, whi-

ch were characterised by negotiations with the regional major players and the United States. The persistence of the status quo, as for the current year 2021, can be interpreted as the result of its deterrence in the international context.

The nuclear program in the DPRK can be dated back to the 1950s, more precisely in 1959, when the country committed itself to the first agreement to cooperate for nuclear research with the USSR (Lankov, 2013), a fundamental benefactor investing massively in North Korean heavy industries through conspicuous funds and assistance. Throughout the decades preceding the North Korean signature of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1985, the country progressed in nuclear research, and although it accepted such commitment, the country rejected IAEA attempts to carry out inspections of its sites, once caught breaching the agreement (Myers, 2010). As the Cold War era reached an end, the evidence of the country pursuing plutonium-related technology emerged, despite the efforts of the DPRK to preserve its secrecy. Under these premises, several negotiations would follow, from the first nuclear crisis (1993) to the last steps under the Trump administration (2019), providing the framework under which six nuclear tests were performed so far. Moreover, a discussion on the purpose of engaging the DPRK and deterrence will be addressed. Despite their failure and the criticism concerning the attempted approach, negotiations remain the only viable way to deal with the DPRK (Cha, 2018), as well as necessary in order not to bring about an escalation of the problem.

In Chapter 3 the focus will shift to the economic implications deriving from the nuclear issue, providing another ground to assess its magnitude, alongside the precarious representation of problems such as nuclear proliferation in mass media and in central discussion on policy-making (Bechtol, 2018a). Furthermore, the North Korean choices surrounding the economic model would determine its vulnerability (Guo, 2017; Napoleoni, 2018). The distinctive

attention and reliance on heavy industries, in particular the sector of defence, should be interpreted as well through the lens of *sŏn'gun* (military-first), under Kim Jong-il, and *byŏngjin* (parallel development), during the current leadership of Kim Jong-un. The precariousness of North Korean economy and the sanctions linked to the nuclear issue instigate poverty, as well as a complex web of illicit activities, through which the government secures itself conspicuous capitals, through overseas workers, nuclear proliferation or mere arms trade, and most recently, cyber-attacks (Chapter 4). Although a certain degree of change can be seen through informal and partial privatisation through markets, the state maintains an overall control of the apparatus, and North Korea still remains a non-market economy (Rhee & Messerlin, 2020).

Finally, Chapter 4 will provide a conclusive approach to the previously discussed points, focusing on the geopolitical interests of the actors involved, the incoming challenges and future prospects concerning the regime that should be taken into account if such issues should be efficiently addressed. Therefore, as long as the nuclear issue persists, such interconnected problems would persist and reciprocally reinforce: if a normalisation can be a possible path, however it can be difficult to combine such a scenario with the current circumstances that characterise the DPRK. Few recommendations and expectations can be found, thus the necessity of continuous engagement with the country remains the only instrument available, based on a day-by-day engagement without preconceptions and prejudices (Cumings, 2015; Cha, 2018).

Chapter 1: Juche ideology and historical notes

조선민주주의인민공화국은 사람중심의 세계관이며 인민대중의 자주성을 실현하기 위한 혁명사상인 주체사상, 선군사상을 자기 활동의 지도적 지침으로 삼는다.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is guided in its activities by the Juche idea, and the Sŏngun idea, a world outlook centred on people, a revolutionary ideology to achieve revolution of the masses.

Article 3 of North Korean Constitution (2016) opens with this declaration, summarising the political and economic guidelines of the country (Kurbanov, 2019, p.2). The word Juche (주체, chuch'e¹) in Korean broadly means independence, self-reliance², and it was introduced by the Supreme Leader, Kim Il-sung in on the 28th of December 1955, through the famous speech "On Eliminating Dogmatism and Formalism and Establishing Juche in Ideological Work", aiming to explain the vocational role of the country to bring about a revolution. The equivocal interpretation that can emerge from different analyses and research is that Juche can be meant as a mere autarkic and isolating attitude of DPRK. Moreover, another misinterpretation concerns its analysis as a pure anachronistic communist regime. Instead, it describes its essence permeating every aspect of its citizens' life since their birth through propagandistic indoctrination (Park, 2015). As Cha (2018) stressed, the sense of autonomy relies

¹ This thesis will follow McCune–Reischauer romanisation system concerning specific terms, however, notably to widely used or acknowledged terms, such as Juche, Korean cities, Leaders' names.

² Several discussions concerning the etymology of the words had been brought about by various scholars: the translation above is conventionally adopted to describe the core of the ideology. The word has a Chinese origin; Lim (2008) provides a more detailed analysis as the first syllable, chu or ju, refers to master, and the second one, che or ch'e, body, meaning being 'the master of one's own body'. Further information has to be found in Kurbanov, S. (2019). North Korea's juche ideology: indigenous communism or traditional thought?, *Critical Asian Studies*, DOI: 10.1080/14672715.2019.1566750

on antagonism towards external influences and capitalist powers primarily Japan, the United States, and South Korea. The decision to underline this uniqueness lies in the ethnic homogeneity, represented as the myth of the cleanest race (Myers, 2010).

In order to understand deeply the nature of this nation, often perceived as an antagonist in the international scene, a deep examination behind Juche is needed. The latter represents a core pillar for political stability, thanks to the coexistence of different values, such as Neo-confucianism and Marxist-Leninist principles, translating into a highly centralised system and a rigid societal pattern (Cumings, 2015, p.70). Despite the harsh difficulties endured by the country, from the collapse of the USSR until nowadays through a wide usage of sanctions, economic backwardness and quasi international isolation, the country hardly has been shaken from its status quo. This chapter would display the adaptability of the ideology, mutating and adjusting according to the historical circumstances, combined with a successful means of deterrence. The following consideration will entail the evolution of the DPRK, since its independence and some past notes, Juche and its development, and the contemporary implications shaping the regime in the 21st century.

Necessity to Contextualise history: the Korean War

The emergence of Juche ideology³, as a leading idea in shaping North Korean minds, happens in a precise historical context, when the Korean peninsula was leaving behind the turmoil experienced during the Korean War (1950-1953). Besides these circumstances, all the features surrounding Juche per se originated before; nevertheless, the conflict between the two Koreas leveraged the final picture when it was mentioned and created. Therefore, histori-

³ The term ‘ideology’ throughout this chapter serves the general purpose to indicate a set of values and beliefs that one person is holding. Often, the word ‘doctrine’ is used as its synonym. Although the two nouns contain different nuances, the aim is to prove how the North Korean mindset is linked to the nuclear issue, and not to start a discussion on philosophical perspectives in the DPRK.

cal considerations and a discussion surrounding the Korean War are a necessity to understand North Korea, as Lankov stresses (2013). As society moved forward, in accordance with the evolution of the national and the international scene, Juche throughout decades evolved as well.

The defeat of Japan during World War II, after the bombing of Hiroshima (6th August, 1945) and Nagasaki (8th August) and its unconditional surrender on the 16th August, brought about the consequent liberation of the Korean peninsula, after 40 years of occupation, i.e. five years under Japanese protectorate and 35 years of colonisation. The United States, being afraid of a Soviet invasion of Japan, focused primarily on the latter, and only in September , the 9th, US soldiers arrived in Korea, establishing shortly after a military government.

The Korean peninsula was divided at the level of the 38° parallel under Truman Administration, as agreed with Moscow, where Americans could focus only on the southern part, as the USSR reached the territory directly during August 1945. However, the project entailing the Korean sovereign legitimacy on this area started two years before, through the Cairo Declaration, signed on the 27th of November 1943 by Churchill, Roosevelt and Chiang. The concerns related to the Soviet interest on the peninsula had been shown through several US governmental documents, such as the correspondence between President Truman and the Chaplain of the Senate, Harris, (1945, p.2) depicting Russian intention to settle a puppet government and nullifying the efforts of American soldiers fighting for democracy.

Three years later, in 1948, the southern part of the peninsula was proclaimed as the Republic of Korea (ROK), while the northern part as Democratic Popular Republic of Korea (DPRK). On one hand, the presence of United States forces in the South influenced the attitude against communism (De Benedittis, 2016a), while on the other, from the DPRK's per-

spective, the presence of the US was seen as a mean of oppression, shifting from Japanese oppression to the imperialist one.

Communist ideology was no novelty in the Korean Peninsula, since it spread during the 1920s, under the Japanese occupation, among many intellectuals, but the repressive regime obliged them to exile or to be detained as political prisoners. According to Lankov (2013), these circumstances contributed to the fact that at the arrival of the Soviet forces in 1945, communists were rare in the northern area, nevertheless, the ideological values were interpreted as an approach to overcome the colonial dependency, and to pursue a modernisation and enhancement of the nation. Thus, the establishment of the relations with the USSR was seen as redemption and liberation, meaning a consent from the citizens and not only the usual description of a mere Soviet satellite. Alongside this formulation, the splitting of the Korean peninsula in 1945 can be interpreted as a further factor of fragmentation. The common agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to divide the country was temporary, aiming to a period of transition to normalisation after the oppressive rule of the Japanese. The political turmoil, as a consequence of a foreign colonising agent, was misunderstood and its origins can be found before the liberation (Cumings, 2010), since part of the society tried to resist, while another joined and accepted its role, being collaborationists of the Japanese.

After the geographical creation of 'two Koreas', both sides of the peninsula portrayed themselves as the legitimate nation on the area and both aimed at the reunification of the country. Despite common goals, the antagonism seemed tangible. The bellicose rhetoric used during this period, oriented to accomplish this goal regardless of the means, is instrumental in understanding the frictions created through the crucial division at the 38° parallel (Lankov, 2013; Napoleoni 2018). The northern part was led by Kim Il Sung, who became the prime

minister and the secretary general of North Korean workers' party in June, 1946. The southern one, instead, was governed by Syngman Rhee, an exiled politician endorsed by the US. Meanwhile, the tensions between the United States and the USSR were temporarily suspended on this matter. Therefore, in 1947, a joint committee was set up in order to cooperate for a unification to be achieved in the following years. As Wada (2013) stresses, Moscow's prudent line towards the US was based on the burdensome war damages, massive funds allocated for the troops occupying North Korean territory and for the Soviet expansion in the Eastern bloc, and the US advantage in possessing the atomic bomb.

Besides superpowers' affairs, different events testified that the inter-Korean situation was far from being calm after the division. Between and within the infant countries, the Republic of Korea and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, clashes took place before reaching the result in the Korean War (De Benedittis, 2016a). The anti-communist line of Syngman Rhee led to the violent suppression of the South Korean Labor Party, the faction gaining more consensus by the population. Moreover, this harsh attitude was addressed to anyone, both right-wing or left-wing, trying to oppose or argue against Rhee (Kolko & Kolko, 1972), bringing about several uprisings that took place and terminated in massacres of the sympathisers. The most striking purge happened in Jeju island in 1948. In accordance with these enmities and concerns, it is possible to analyse the different actors' viewpoint. The deployment of American troops on the ROK area was interpreted as a necessary means for deterrence against the North, as stated in the telegram to General George Marshall by John Muccio, US ambassador in Korea. The distress related to the current situation could be found in another actor that should be considered in this framework, China. During the same years, the Chinese civil war (1946-1949) brought about the rise of the Chinese Communist Party under Mao Tse Tung culminating in the foundation of the Popular Republic of China in 1949,

against the US-supported Kuomintang of Chiang Kai-Shek. A further concern of the US was linked to the first economic agreement between the DPRK and the USSR, in 1948, and the consequent dispatch of Soviet troops in the North (Wada, 2013).

The explanation above can be summarised in a two-level game. The first one points out that there is the confrontation between the 'two Koreas', while the second one focuses on a further and determining confrontation between the Soviet Union and the US. Both levels overlapped, considering one's own interests, fear and advantages.

It takes two to tango. The year 1949 is crucial in the conflict perspective. It coincided with the US Bill to promote peace and aid to the Republic of Korea, meaning economic investments aimed at a reconstruction of the country and urging for training and form a military cooperation between the two parties. On the other side, Kim Il-sung's concerns, related to the presence of the US troops in the South, resulted in a request for their withdrawal through the Soviet ambassador Shtykhov. Both sides were acting under a general mistrust and depicting the rival as the hindering cause for a unification, and the establishment of a sovereign and democratic country. Espionage and microaggressions as well played an important role. Significant US troops were deployed near the border with North Korea on April 16, alarming Moscow that was expecting an evacuation during May (Wada, 2013). Reports concerning a possible invasion of the North by the South influenced Stalin to train and provide warfare to the DPRK. The main factors that influenced Stalin's decision, shifting from a cautious line to engage in a bellicose support to its ally, were the success of nuclear tests and the final triumph of Mao (Lankov, 2013). North Korea asked China as well for military aid, which guaranteed help in case of an outbreak, considering the historical ties, consistent active Korean communi-

ties in China and the past of Kim Il Sung fighting in Chinese guerrillas against the Japanese in Manchuria during the 1930s.

Moscow sent Shtykov for an espionage mission to investigate the South Korean military capacity. Meanwhile, in the ROK, Muccio tried to persuade Syngman Rhee, reproaching his statements and intention to invade the North, and also specifying that the US aid was warranted only in case of defensive reply, and not of aggression. Furthermore, Muccio stopped the transfer of warfare to South Korea.

According to Wada (2013), both superpowers condemning and discouraging “unilateral action—had stated the same policy: if attacked, they would counterattack and unify the peninsula by force.”(p.33). Nevertheless, both North Korea and South Korea were preparing through foreign aids to an imminent conflict. Prior to the actual outbreak of the war in 1950, another clash took place in the same district, namely the peninsula of Ongjin, in August, 1949, when North Korean soldiers attacked a mountain occupied by the South Korean counterpart.

Bite the bullet. The Korean War could be divided in four phases as follows (De Benedittis, 2016a). The analysis will entail the main events in accordance with a chronological order, but the fundamental focus seeks to prove that the Korean War represented the cradle of Juche ideology.

The first phase covered a period going from January 1950 to June, the 25th, 1950 (De Benedittis, 2016a). The famous speech delivered by the US Secretary of the State, Dean Acheson, on the occasion of the National Press Club, on January 12, 1950, defined the US defensive perimeter and the foreign policy to be adopted in East Asia. Alongside the Asian countries mentioned and the amicable line of commitment and collaboration proposed, no reference was expressed concerning the situation of the Republic of Korea. In the following

days, the Congress blocked further funding for South Korea. Different interpretations have been formulated of this speech: the Soviet politburo perceived this message as a claim of Washington of not interfering (Wada, 2013): according to the North Korean viewpoint, the Republic of Korea was included in the speech, even it not being explicitly mentioned (Cumings, 2005). The other perspective, as Martin (2004) proposes, it was a sort of prudence warning by Washington towards Syngman Rhee. Besides these different theories, in April 1950, Kim Il-sung rushed to Moscow to explain his intentions to attack considering the soaring threatens coming from the South counterpart, stressing his belief of a fast conflict—three days—and a consequent rapid unification (Lankov, 2013). After the blessing from Moscow that either way promised warfare supply and its indirect support on the operations. In May 13-16, Kim met Mao, who granted his contribution as well to the North Korean offensive.

On the 25th of June 1950, the morning Korean war started. From both North and South Korean perspective, the respective counterpart attacked first. The widely accepted opinion sustained by scholars and the general public, depicts the Democratic People's Republic of Korea as the aggressor. The hesitancy of Cumings (2010), after decades of research on this specific subject, through classified documents, led only to the certainty that North Korea was planning to attack, but the conclusive evidence did not entail the intention of the latter to start the conflict in June or that it was the responsible to make the first move. Again, the first intelligence reports are depicted as “inconclusive as to who started it. Later on, attacking elements were said to be from the 3rd Brigade of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Border Constabulary, joined at 5:30 A.M. by the formidable 6th Division”(p.9). The scepticism dealt with the starting hour, around 3 or 4 AM local time. Notwithstanding this debate, the issue can be considered a key element for North Korean rhetoric related to Juche doctrine. Be that as it

may, North Korea conquered all the southern territory, except Busan, during the following three months.

The second phase of the conflict comprised a length of time from the 27th of June to the 25th of November 1950, approximately (De Benedittis, 2016a). The North Korean occupation received the reproach of the United Nations Commission, requesting the ceasefire of hostilities and withdrawal of North Korean troops. As it endangered the stability of the peninsula, the US armed intervention, led by commander MacArthur, received approval in July. During their advance, the DPRK army liberated numerous political prisoners, attracting supporters for their fight against the imperialists (Robinson, 2007). It was the 5th of July, when the US troops arrived in Incheon, despite the expected Busan landings. By the 28th of September, Seoul returned under ROK's control, and a few days later US-ROK troops crossed the border at the 38° parallel, marching towards Pyongyang. On the other hand, a total of 42 countries provided their assistance to South Korea as shown through the report of status UN offers, dated October 6th. Besides Stalin's initial scepticism on intervention, sending aircrafts as suggested by Mao, based on communications between the two Soviet great leaders, the Chinese decided to intervene, aiding North Korean troops on the 13th of October. The USSR purpose-made indirect involvement was meant to avoid direct confrontation with the United States (Wada, 2013). On the 27th of October, Pyongyang fell under the US-ROK army, also through the recent endorsement of Japan.

The third phase coincided with the arrival of a large number of soldiers, sent by Mao and remaining in Korea until the attempted cease-fire between the two factions, meaning from the 26th of November, 1950, to the beginning of July, 1951 (De Benedittis, 2016a). In this lapse, the Chinese participation was instrumental in the re-occupation of Seoul. The most critical part for the US perspective covered December 1950 and January 1951 (Wada, 2013),

when President Truman vowed for the national emergency, on 16th December 1950, through Proclamation 2914. Advocating a more moderate line, General Ridgway replaced General MacArthur after his dismissal. Under the former, Seoul returned again under the US-ROK army control. In the months before the initial stages of the talks, assaults, casualties, destruction and raids took place between the two factions. Problems related to coordination and the huge losses experienced by the DPRK, in particular, were due to the superior arsenal of the United States (Napoleoni, 2018). Another reason to be taken into account was the squabble between Mao and Stalin in relation to self-interests and related to the line of action to embrace during the conflict, where the Soviet Union adopted a more cautious involvement.

The fourth and last phase covered the longest period of time, two years, from the 10th of July 1951 until the 27th of July, 1953 (De Benedittis, 2016a). The first date represented the starting point of the peace talks in Kaesong, lasting until the signature by both parties of the P'anmunjŏm armistice, two years later. Despite the negotiations characterised in this period, combat proceeded alongside the discussions. The request to pause, and to open a discussion with the counterpart, came on the 23rd of June, 1951, by the Soviet UN delegate, Jakob Malik, and was accepted by Truman. Kim and Mao requests dealt with withdrawal of foreign troops and warships from both the North and the South, exchange of prisoners within a few months, no movement across the 38° parallel and so forth. Stalin suggested to scale down these proposals in order not to compromise the meeting (Wada, 2013). On the end, Truman's initial conditions had to be linked strictly on military matters and not political ones, without imposing limitations on Ridgway's bellicose activities taking place simultaneously to the talks, according to the US state document: Far East: An armistice in Korea, dated 11 July 1951. Concerning international law, the Geneva convention, which entered into force in 1949, was violated throughout the conflict. The evil nature of the communist enemy served as the

scapegoat adopted in front of the public opinion (Cumings, 2010; Napoleoni, 2018). Despite the fact of a possible deployment of atomic bombs was being considered by Washington, it has been estimated that American bombings in the Korean war surpassed the amount of tons employed in the Pacific during World War II (Napoleoni, 2018). The armistice had several interruptions because of disagreements between the two sides, mainly related to the reluctance and mistrust of the main leaders involved, Kim Il-sung and Syngman Rhee, as well concerning the USSR and PRC, and the US. Moreover, the latter tried to contain Rhee's aspirations, especially during the last phases of the talks, when the new US President in charge, Eisenhower, tried to bribe him through massive aid funds (Cumings, 2010).

The most intense and violent period concerning the war covers the first three phases, influencing the final result of the death toll at the end of the conflict (De Benedittis, 2016a), counting approximately 3 million victims. Both sides adopted methods of brainwashing on imprisoned people (Kim, 2019), and several war crimes had been reported and recognised, such as torture, deportations and civilian massacres. However, the final signature of the armistice disappointed Koreans of the whole peninsula, because the desired peace, considering both leaders' discourses, was never accomplished. Furthermore, the main issue, a divided Korea, remained, or rather deepened, and slightly modified through some territorial repartition. In a nutshell, the status quo was maintained as before, thus Cumings (2010) states:

The true tragedy was not the war itself, for a civil conflict purely among Koreans might have resolved the extraordinary tensions generated by colonialism, national division, and foreign intervention. The tragedy was that the war solved nothing (p.35).

National Identity and how the War Shaped the North Korean Mind

Before analysing the propaganda of North Korean during the Korean War, it is preferable to have a broad premise concerning a few definitions surrounding the nation. Certain details may in fact be ignored if lacking notions regarding the Korean language or Korean history, thus a further explanation is needed.

Starting from the official name of the country, the current term ‘Korea’ derives from a specific phase, namely from 918 to 1392, the Goryŏ dynasty. The historical records, meaning the Chinese sources, were the instruments through which the world acknowledged the existence of this kingdom. Focusing on North Korea, officially known as the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, its name in the original language, 조선민주주의인민공화국 (Chosŏn Minjujuŭi Inmin Konghwaguk), underlies a sort of continuity of the last ruling dynasty, Chosŏn (1392-1910). Therefore, the Democratic People’s Republic of Chosŏn implies a more valid degree of legitimacy. Alongside the official national flag of the country, while exploring this concept, the flag of the Workers’ Party of Korea (조선로동당, Chosŏn Rodongdang) is worthy to be examined. The diametrical similarities that emerge with other communist countries are: the same bright red as a background, and the presence of the hammer and sickle that represent the core for communist parties, respectively symbolising workers and farmers. The way North Korea distinguishes from the common features of the other ones lies in the Confucian brush, representing the intellectuals.

As Christianity influenced the Western World, Confucianism, and then Neo-Confucianism⁴, did it with Far East Asia. Confucianism, deriving from Confucius, the most important scholar in China (4th century BC), is a system of philosophical and ethical teachings

⁴ Neo-Confucianism derives from Confucianism and entails a more rational approach while rejecting Buddhist and Taoist superstitious elements (2001). The doctrine adjusted according to the East Asian country in which developed, and in the case of Korea, as Cumings (2015) defines, the “neo-Confucian ideology emphasized clearly defined hierarchies, centralized bureaucracy, obedience to the state, and social stability elements that would prove to be of great use to today’s regime” (p.70).

founded by Confucius, according to the definition of the Oxford Dictionary. The teachings are contained in the dialogues (Lanyu) and, as Cadonna (2016) expresses, they depict the way human beings should act following the ritual behaviours, reciprocity of humanity, and fairness or justice. Following these principles, the society is structured on 5 different types of relationships: elder-younger, father-son, husband-wife, ruler-subject, and friend-friend. The attention is attributed to the first compared to the last one, where a social and family hierarchy is observed. These founding values influenced the societal pattern of Far East Asia since the most ancient times, and they are relevant until now.

Communism, when it spread in the Korean Peninsula during the Japanese occupation, had a connotation as a movement aiming to freedom and emphasis of nationalism, as Lankov (2013) stresses while describing the adaptation of this theory to East Asia. Therefore, in the case of North Korea, Neo-Confucianism and communism overlapped, and were combined together, representing the initial pillars of the DPRK. This convergence can appear far fetched and, to a certain extent, incoherent, although it represents a strength: using Cumings' (2015) words, "The DPRK has survived in part because it has diverged so fundamentally from Marxism-Leninism. It revived a political tradition that harks back to the ancient neo-Confucian ideology that was the ruling doctrine of Korea's old Choson Dynasty for centuries" (p.70).

The hierarchy translates into the subordination of citizens to the leader, having a sort of divine nature, and social roles that are rigidly defined according to the superior or inferior position of the scale. Nevertheless, these differences appear as complementary, one side cannot function without the other, thus the state equilibrium is guaranteed when every man is behaving under these implicit principles. Indeed, in East Asia this legacy has been bequeathed throughout time, remaining assimilated during millennia.

Returning to the war, the immediate consequence that can be considered is a resentment towards the outcome in North Korea, which emerged as a nation to be built and protected. But the war resulted essentially in a spiritual orientation, dealing with the shocking aftermath of the conflict. Indeed, from the North Korean perspective and according to the storytelling provided to the people, the winner is the DPRK that defeated the American imperialists and their puppet regime, South Korea, in a confrontation initiated by these two. The regime created such ideology ad hoc, to control its people and ensure order under the Kim dynasty throughout the decades, to such an extent that Cumings (2004) observed that “DPRK ideologues would embarrass even Stalin in their absurd presumptions that the Juche idea contains the solution to all problems” (p.161). Following the cliché of a personality cult, plenty of slogans emerged directly under a sense of anti-Americanism and exaltation of the nation and its leader, through a variety of propagandistic tools: from the common mass media (radio, newspapers, posters and television) to constant rhetoric permeating every aspect of daily life (such as speeches, architecture, education, etc). Under this logic, terrible stories about the atrocious nature of capitalists are manufactured and taught, and only the Great Leader could have saved the nation from these threats (Cha, 2018). Furthermore, from a Western perspective, the quite unusual way to apply this influence on Education, relating also fields of studies that difficulty can be influenced ideologically, such as arithmetics (Karp & Lee, 2010; Lankov, 2013; Y. Park, 2015). Every textbook, independently of the subject, contains in some elements and stories to fuel this sentiment, thus Lankov (2013), analysing an elementary math textbook, estimates a 20% of the content being as the following example:

During the Fatherland Liberation War [North Korea’s official name for the Korean War] the brave uncles of Korean People’s Army killed 265 American Imperial bastards in the first battle. In the second battle they killed 70 more bastards than they had in the

first battle. How many bastards did they kill in the second battle? How many bastards did they kill all together? (p.63).

Again, the politicisation starting from childhood is displayed through the reportage of Red Tomato (2017) and an article of Radio Free Asia (Noh, 2016). The first one displays textbooks for children of the elementary school containing propagandistic exercises and anecdotes: for example, an exercise of phonetics, whose rhyme related to the child's desire to chase out the American 'brats' with his tank (Red Tomato, 2017, 1:23), or the definition of the 'South Chō-son' as an "hell on Earth" where childrens are surviving while cleaning the shoes of the American Army (Red Tomato, 2017, 4:44). The second exemplification, provided by Noh (2016), concerns a middle school textbook of 'socialist morality' and the ten precepts to follow for a moral life of the students.⁵

The war alone can be defined the reason of this hostile depiction of the Americans, as well as a missed chance of a unification of the peninsula, and the legitimate result of the rising of this country. However, as the conflict could be ascribed as the *casus belli* that led to this rhetoric, the criticism is fuelled also because of the American imperialism in the second half of the nineteenth century (Lankov, 2007). The general overture of the Korean Peninsula was forced, in Cumings's words (2005) in 1860, after several attempts by the Western superpowers, and the United States managed to succeed after the notorious and manufactured incident of the vessel 'General Sherman' in 1866. After five years, in 1871, an American punitive expedition was organised, and this episode led to the ratification of the Kanghwa Treaty in 1875, undermining the sovereignty that Korea was enjoying so far. The document brought about trade exchanges, opening for the first time three ports, the use of 'good offices', meaning em-

⁵ Complete translation in the appendix

bassies, diplomatic relations and consulates in the country, concession of residence to foreigners, and so forth⁶.

The famous speeches of the leaders are learnt by heart, and comprise, indeed, this rhetoric (Y. Park, 2015). Kim Il-sung, throughout the decades shaped his discourses, emphasising the nationalistic nature and the necessity to lead to auto-determination of the masses, without contamination from the capitalistic ideology. Alongside this orientation against the United States, the hostile attitude can be applied as well towards Japan, and South Korea, described as oppressed by the United States or its partners in crime. During the first decades of his government, Kim Il-sung declared both nationally and internationally, participating actively in the Non-Alignment movement and keeping up relations with other communist countries through visits, besides the Soviet Union. Through the following discourses, it is possible to identify his ideals and intentions that constitute a core component of the dominant ideology. Despite the signature of the armistice in P'anmunjŏm on June, the 27th, 1950, the aggressive nature of US imperialism is frequently reminded. During the fifth anniversary of the liberation from the Japanese, on the 15th of August 1950, Kim Il-sung (1950, p. 51-54) addressed his people:

Korean people were confronted with the task of building a unified, independent and democratic state [...] by quick removing the miseries, which are the aftereffects of the many years of Japanese imperialist rule [...] With an eye to enslaving the Korean People, the US imperialists have introduced colonial slave education and are following the

⁶ The Korean Peninsula can be described as the latest country to engage in international trade. Foreign contacts were unique, to a certain extent, and the only stable relation maintained was with the Chinese empire. China tried to mediate during this transition, underlying several times the hermit nature and the lack of interest in any sort of foreign contacts. The Korean kingdom had a sort of subordination in regards to China, being a 'satellite', namely entailing a tributary relation (Riotto, 2005). In a nutshell, theoretically there was a sort of subordination of power to China, but practically Korea enjoyed independence with its own laws and decision-making. The arrival of the American, and the Japanese endorsement reversed the situation, freedom on paper, subordination in reality (Cumings, 2005).

policy of obliterating our nation's cultural tradition and encouraging a decadent Yankee culture. [...]

Another example can be the message delivered by Kim Il-sung on the occasion of the new year as "Today hundreds of millions of people all over the world are raising their voices louder and louder in the cry, "US imperialists, hands off Korea!" (1951, p. 204).

Every mention of the United States is usually paired with negative connotations, thus 'imperialism' can be defined as one of the most common one (Y. Park, 2015). Other uses refer to the colonialist past of Japan and the fact that South Korea is on the 'wrong side'. Emotional discourse underlying the evil of imperialist aggression and a rivalry with the latter was officialised through the Armistice in 1953, a civil miniature of the bipolarism of the Cold War during the following decades (Lankov, 2007). The constant reminder of the Japanese colonialism that led to starvation and suffering of the Korean people is at the basis of tensions: children are taught that solely North Korea was able to defeat the nation and lead to freedom in 1945. Then, both Japan and South Korea are portrayed as a US colony, and in the case of the South, due to the presence of American troops before, during and after the war. Moreover, the claim entails also the US control of their economies, due to the allocation of funds to enhance their economy.

Legacy of Communism and the portrait of a Leader

Juche appears flexible and, indeed, has been influenced, when it is stressed the fact that North Korea 'joined the side of communism', alongside the Soviet Union and the Popular Republic of China, under the logic of the Cold War. Besides being an ally of Moscow, and having hostilities towards the United States and Japan, the DPRK moved searching and moulding its identity, aiming to a uniqueness, a pure Korean nature (Myers, 2010). A current

formulation of North Korea can be pointed out by Cumings (2010) as “a modern form of monarchy, realised in a highly nationalistic, postcolonial state” that had relatively small changes since the war, and based its construction on Confucian patriarchy and filial piety that strengthened the power of the leader in charge.

A deeper discourse is needed to broaden the few immediate communist symbols mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Juche appears only in 1955, almost a decade after the foundation of the country, through a discourse held by Kim Il-sung, although it will emerge as a defined concept in the first half of the 1960s (Jung, 1999). After the foundation of the DPRK, the constant references to Marxism-Leninism permeated the ideology and it served as a vehicle to the formulation of Juche (Kihl, 1994). Thus, the communist rhetoric, per se, seems to fade away gradually throughout the following decades, reaching the point that the country itself denies ideological relations with communism, Marxism and socialism (Kurbanov, 2019). The timing behind the elaboration of this ideology is fundamental and the overlapping with communist ideas shapes the way North Korea wants to appear in a given period of history, nationally and internationally and how it can be influenced by these two levels. As Cha (2018) remarks, besides the respect towards the Soviet Union, and its support and prestige, historical revisionism was enacted by the DPRK, removing all references related to Soviet endorsement to North Korea, censorship of records concerning troublesome figures in the narration, in order to spotlight the deeds of the leader.

As stressed before, communist sympathisers and a communist party appear mainly during the 20s, a few years after the revolution in Russia in 1917. However, the Japanese repression leads to the active engagement of these groups outside the country, where the next leader-to-be, Kim Il-sung, served in the Chinese guerrilla units after Japan occupied Manchuria (1931-32). Straight after the creation of North Korea he was indeed assigned as

minister of the defence, but Stalin chose him in 1946 as head of the temporary political committee during the occupation of Soviet forces. Different resistance groups, inspired by the socialist discourse, were created during the Japanese colonisation, however the Moscow-sponsored Korean Workers Party became the main group, and eventually, in 1949, Kim Il-sung shifted his role from being the vice-president to main leader, under the favour of the USSR (Woo, 2017).

An immediate analogy concerns the rhetoric used to entail the guidelines of the country: the focus on masses leading the revolution, general criticism of capitalism in its ultimate form, imperialism, as Kim Il-sung said, quoting Lenin in his speech at a Meeting of Military and Political Cadres of the Korean People's Army, on the 23rd of December, 1954. However, besides the nationalisation of economy and a wide range of basic free services for North Korean citizens, in the DPRK the class division, and thus the social rank, has a paramount significance, namely the *성분*, *söngbun*⁷.

Juche ideology considers the man as the center of the universe and its main goal is to pursue happiness in its realisation. Its nationalistic nature and late appearance in 1955, two years after Stalin's death, coincides with the 'de-Stalinisation' (David-West, 2007, p.139) performed by his successor Khrushchev. Consequently, the direct references to communism were kept until the end of the 1970s as the USSR was the main economic contributor of North Korea, besides its chauvinistic elan. The central role as a guide to bring about the revolution of the masses can be indicated as the gradual result of a shift from the importance attributed to

⁷ The role of every citizen is determined according to the economic, social, and political background of one's own family, entailing the trustworthiness to the government. This means that, in order to access to work or educational opportunities, having bad legal records or ancestors linked to the collaborationists of the Japanese or defection, during occupation, the legitimacy of individuals and the following generations is undermined (Y. Park 2015, Napoleoni 2018).

the working class, under a Marxist logic, and to the ruling party, as displayed in Leninism (Kihl, 1994).

A remarkable evolution from the Marxist-Leninist doctrine can be detected through the comparison of the first Constitution and the last one under Kim Il-sung. The first one, promulgated in 1948, emphasised the socialist principles, collectivism, rigid democratic centralism and Marxism and Leninism appeared as guidelines, as it was formulated under the supervision of Soviet forces (Lankov, 2013). Modifications were applied in order to justify the social hierarchy, and the main role of the president, namely Kim Il-sung, who regulated the activities of the state bodies and their subordination. As the constitution of 1992 coincides with the collapse of the USSR and the Chinese orientation towards an open socialist economy, thus the only guideline of the country remaining is Juche (Cavalieri, 2008). During the interval of time between the two codes, Juche was included explicitly into the Marxist-Leninist doctrine, and the gradual removal of the latter was influenced by the crisis of the last years in the Soviet Union, that should be highlighted as the major contributor for the industrialisation of the DPRK. The intent of uniqueness behind Juche remains clear, as Kim Il-sung (1975) stresses that all the great victories related to revolution were due to the fair politics and fair guideline of the Workers's party that is oriented according to the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism, but the successful application of these norms depended on the historical and national circumstances that are special.

In this pseudo-religious representation, the leader legitimises his power as a paternal figure, recalling its confucian principle and position, as he embodies the loving care of a mother taking after his children (Cha, 2018). On the other hand, in order to avoid confusion and reversing the hierarchical roles, the way the citizens address their ruler is that of a father as they were his sons, demonstrating that Juche contains the confucian principle of filial piety.

Considering the succession of the leaders so far, Kim Il-sung, Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un, every ruler had a specific and glorifying connotation, and not simply being called 'leader': as Lankov (2013) stresses, Kim Il-sung is the Great Leader, as well the son Kim Jong-il is the Dear Leader, and the current one, Kim Jong-un, the Supreme Leader, and North Korean citizens have the duty to address them, whenever they are mentioning them, using the official leader-chosen title praising them (Y. Park, 2015). The biographies of the rulers are meant to be learnt and are supported through official and detailed hagiographies. According to Cha (2018; Napoleoni 2018), besides entailing an ideology to guarantee the control, Juche is also functional in maintaining the divinity and cult of the leaders. Similar approaches are no novelty; however the pervasiveness of Juche is excessive when compared to other societies in history (Lim, 2015; Kihl, 1994). As Hassig (2004) claims, myths represent a fundamental basis to justify the hierarchical power, as are used to "fabricate, reorganise and reinterpret the historical facts" (p.14). Even though North Korea remains a less developed country with scarce contacts with the globalised world, as far as the average citizens are concerned, the central position of the ideology maintains, guarantees and legitimises the stability of the Kim dynasty (Lim, 2015).

In Kim Il-sung's words, the man is a social being gifted with an ideological consciousness. The ideological consciousness determines man's value, quality and regulates every activity. Paying homage takes different forms: universities are dedicated to leaders, as well as squares, metro station, and any sort of element related to the urban landscape. Advertisements, campaigns, and essentially the organisation of daily life are aimed to emphasise the leader and the virtuous values of North Korea as the perfect land.

Military first and Kimilsungism

Kim Il-sung passed away in 1994, when he was 82 years old, as he had ‘over-cared for North Korean people’ (Cha, 2018). Thus, he will be honoured as the Eternal President of the DPRK, even after the succession of his son, Kim Jong-il, and then during the current nephew’s rule, Kim Jong-un. The new leader in charge was expected by the citizens, since the propaganda machine of the government was organised ad hoc to create a storm of hype surrounding the heir. Moreover, as Napoleoni (2018) claims, an internal support in the elite was secured by the Dear Leader, gaining the loyalty of the supporters through luxurious gifts and favours, while eliminating his opposers.

The preparation linked to the accession started in 1974, when Kim Jong-il was appointed as heir of the father, although only a few years later this decision was presented and officialised publicly. According to Lim (2015), this operation was based on the glorification of every member of Kim Il-sung family, comprising the personality cult and strengthening the importance, the participation in political affairs, and the devotion under a ‘blood line principle’ that was welcomed and legitimate by North Koreans.

The most iconic policy orientation during his mandate is the *선군정치*, *sŏngun chŏngch’i*, translated as ‘military-first’ policy, meaning the focus on the military power, not only as the main economic sector of the nation, but also as its source of identity and political stance⁸. A clarification is needed in this discourse: Kim Jong-il, alongside being the Secretary of the Workers’s Party, was also his father's successor as the head of the National Defence Commission, the decision-making organ of the state. The other high positions are assigned to the members that represent the elite. However, as Myers (2010) clarifies, the expression is not referring to the fact that the government is not ruled by the army, instead it was the party that

⁸ Other aspects related to the *sŏngun* will be discussed in chapter 3, concerning the economic management of the country.

prioritised it as the main goal in 1997. Three years from the succession and the effective taking office had to be taken into account, since the country was observing the mourning of their Father.

The relevance and the influence of the Korean People's Army dated back to the 1960s, when it was put under control of the Korean Workers' Party, leading to joint decisions in military issues by both institutions (Ku, Lee & Woo, 2017). This new slogan can be interpreted as symbolic, as a sort of projection of image, since Kim Jong-il had had no military experience, besides appearing to the public with a military uniform to underline this value. The accession produced no radical changes in the state policies, in the very first moment, also contemplating the fact that the space given to the importance of the enrolment to the army, as the majority of public events committed to emphasise military pride and virtuosity, were no novelty. Thus, this primacy assigned to state control led to a 'new ideological significance', according to Dukalskis (2017). Moreover, it is possible to observe that the KPA under the Dear Leader would become the watchdog of the army.

As the deterioration of the economy was proceeding, the focus on the military can be considered a manoeuvre to sustain the country and to overcome the shock due to the death of Kim Il-sung. Then, the applicability of self-reliance may be depicted as compromised in practical terms, as the main 'ally', the USSR, eclipsed, and a new image was needed (Scalapino, 2014). Thus, the innovation of Juche ideology, implying a further elan to nationalism, maintenance of the ideology, and the immutable glorification of the leaders led to the rise of Kimilsungism. As Lim (2008) claims, the first appearance of this additional element in the narration was in 1974, when Kim Jong-il was beginning his ascent on the political scene through his participation in propagandistic activities:

During a speech, Kim defined ‘Kimilsungism’ as a system surrounding the ‘idea, theory, and a method of *juche*’ [...] making all the people ‘Kimilsungists’ who would be endlessly loyal to the Great Leader. By using the term ‘Kimilsungism’, Kim Jong-Il demonstrated his ambition to develop the *juche* idea into a systematic ideology like Marxism was (Monolithic Ideological System Section, para. 2).

This stance can be considered a sort of introduction considering the new shape of the ideology that aimed to distinguish it from any previous formulation. Again, in the following two years, in 1976 (October 2), a direct stance revealed a new evolution of this thought, as Kim Jong-Il stated in *On Correctly Understanding the Originality of Kimilsungism*, in a talk delivered to the Propagandists of the Party:

Formerly, the revolutionary idea of the leader was called a contemporary Marxism-Leninism. Of course, there is some truth in that, but this is not a correct definition since it refers primarily to its inheritance of Marxism-Leninism. (para. 2)

Through other speeches delivered by Kim Jong-il, it is possible to notice the leitmotiv, and a progression in widening the gap from this standpoint. An example is the discourse *The Juche Philosophy is an Original Revolutionary Philosophy*, published in the *Theoretical Magazine of the Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea*, on the 26th of July 1996. The main objective is to depict *Juche* as “fundamentally different from the preceding philosophy” (Kim Jong-il, 1996, p.2), and to remove its Marxist ties. Hereinafter, as *Juche* studies the relationship between the world and the man, the interpretation using a Marxist lens can appear as wrong, following the Great Leader’s words, since Marxism investigates the relationship between the material and the being, and the materialist dialectics that is found may be considered as mere premise. Before taking office officially in 1997, Kim Jong-il devoted himself to

cultivating and publishing about Juche and promoting the values of the country, as the discourse above can display.

A remarkable discourse concerning the ideology is that the military-first policy is enshrined in the Juche theory, and eventually the revolution of the masses to realise independence can be possible if they are armed, and this is legitimate since men are ‘masters of everything’, as Jeon (2009) highlights.

The new leadership had to tackle the new changes, namely keeping the interest and the devotion to Kim Jong-il, through an innovative modulation of the doctrine initiated by his father and seeking a constant fuelling of the personality cult. Furthermore, the sentiment spread by the bipolarity of the ‘Cold War’ was transformed and maintained, to a certain extent. The demise of most communist countries produced no changes in the Anti-American logic in the propaganda, and the increase of military relevance and resources involved in this sector aimed to strengthen the North Korean deterrence.

Juche in the 21st Century

The 21st century reflects three major events in the political scene in North Korea, the continuation of the mandate of Kim Jong-il, in which what is remarkable is the Sunshine policy, his death caused by a heart attack (due to overwork to take after North Koreans), and the consequent succession of Kim Jong-un in 2011.

Firstly, the internal framework of the DPRK between the end of the 20th and the beginning of the 21st century can be described as damaged, considering the consequences of the floods that destroyed agricultural lands and caused shortages of electricity and famines. FAO’s investigations depict a tragic situation, estimating that 3 million citizens died because of starvation. Different humanitarian missions were organised to give aid to North Korea, by

the WFP (World Food Programme) and the United Nations, and by single countries without using NGOs' channels. However, the leader left the conspicuous expenditures to the military sector unchanged, as they approximately amounted to 15% of the national GDP. Moreover, besides the pillar of 'self-reliance', the external aids appeared as necessary to improve slightly the burdensome conditions of the population. Kim Jong-il accepted tonnes of food provisions, and as Noland (2006) accentuates, the Japanese help was well welcomed and presented to the North Korean population as a reparation of the past colonisation. Other participants, such as the United States and South Korea were not fitting in the rhetoric. Humanitarian aid from this moment started to become one of the most common concessions in negotiation channels to the DPRK, as the tensions related to the nuclear issue and security gradually escalated.

A crucial historic turning point in the narration is the Sunshine Policy, 햇볕정책, heatbyŏt chongch'i, the policy created by the South Korean president, Kim Dae-jung, who drafted it in 1993. It became effective in 2000, and was then interrupted in 2008 because of new frictions experienced under the South Korean administration of Lee Myung-bak. Three basic principles composed the policy: firstly, no military provocations would be tolerated from the North; secondly, the South declared no intention to absorb the North; and finally the South was willing to attempt a cooperation with the North. The two leaders then met on the 15th of June 1993, a meeting that permitted the North to receive unilateral free aid without the debt-like common conditions. The two countries involved agreed to pursue an independent unification without intrusion by third-parties, joint efforts to organise diplomatic relations in order to solve humanitarian matters and meetings for divided families, and an economic col-laboration that gave birth to special areas in the north where specialised workforce from the

South was allowed to move as commuters⁹. A decade later, in 2003, the South Korean administration was caught in a huge scandal, the so-called ‘Cash for Summit’, since alongside the \$400 million allocated for economic joint-ventures and joint activities, Kim Jong-Il was paid \$100 million to participate in this meeting (“S Koreans charged over summit cash”, 2003). The following years under the mandate of the Dear Leader were characterised by constant global tensions related to the nuclearisation or denuclearisation of the DPRK, fuelling the vicious circle or deadlock of aid and sanctions to this country. Moreover, individual and private economic activities, being pursued not only under the control of the state, were authorised due to the fragility of the internal conditions. The quasi-interruption of aid from the South was presented to the North Korean population as a way to follow ‘their own way’ in the name of Juche, according to Buzo (2017).

After less than two decades, North Korean people acknowledged the death of Kim Jong-il, and as a consequence prepared to welcome a new leader, the young heir Kim Jong-un. As the succession was manufactured and meticulously created by the propagandistic machine of the State for Kim II, the same process concerned the Supreme Leader, whose title is ‘commander’. Kim Jong-il was also given, like his father, the same glorifying connotation, thus becoming the Eternal Secretary of the DPRK, adding another figure in their necrocracy. However, some remarkable differences can be found. Ford (2018) suggests that Kim Jong-un’s presentation on the international stage in 2012, compared to the one of his father, makes him more revolutionary, and dynamic, to a certain extent. Indeed, the preparation and the mourning of the predecessor, although being shorter than the ones of his father, can be portrayed as a continuation of the personality cult as vital to political legitimacy. As Dukalskis

⁹ Other points achieved during the summit comprised exchanges to promote environmental, cultural and sport activities, finding a common ground to create a national federation of the peninsula, and maintaining contacts between the two nations through diplomatic visits.

(2017) stresses, the leader annually delivers a speech, promising prosperity to his people, insisting that the realisation of improvements is depending on their stakhanovism.

The scepticism from outside, concerning this unexpected event of the passing away, and the state of emergency that was declared in the country afterwards, entailed predictions concerning the new leader in charge, leading to assumptions of political crisis and, the most extravagant ones, of an imminent collapse of the country (J. H. Park, 2018). Following the pattern of authoritarianism, the Supreme Leader, being the chosen one, suppressed any possible threat on his path. The usual evocations of the past, the glorious mission of the Korean people under Juche, as well as the prominence of military results, were represented as a preservation of the historical guidelines of the North Korean regime. Nevertheless, Kim Jong-un has his own innovations and seems to adjust to the rampant globalisation and challenges of the new millenium (Napoleoni, 2018; J. H. Park 2018).

The image of North Korea as a modern nation, and the intention of making it so, is palpable to the citizens of the DPRK, as well as to the other nations of the world. Starting with the ideology per se, it has been noted a further evolution of Juche. Despite remaining a religious belief of people and the focus on man-centrism, the new guidelines for the country lie in **병진**, (byŏngjin), roughly translated as ‘keeping pace with’ or ‘simultaneous advancement’. As Pence (2019, p.7) points out, the new orientation is not meant to dismiss the previous formulations: the military would remain a core feature of the regime, although the economy can be seen as a new priority, including the pursuit of market prosperity, paired with an opening to leisure consumption. The exposure of Kim Jong-un to Western countries plays a significant role, since he has been educated in Switzerland (J. H. Park, 2018; Pence, 2019, p. 6), and more tolerance towards marketisation and privatisation can be its consequence, a sort of “laissez-faire”, while maintaining a strong state control with an iron fist (Napoleoni, 2018).

The situation, besides some comforts destined to a part of the population and few attitudes concerning the policy changes, is far from a 'normalisation' at international level (Buzo, 2017). False alarms originated with international press news, also in the framework of the current coronavirus crisis, testify the solidity of the apparatus of the state ("Trump Says He's 'Glad' Kim Jong Un 'Is Back, and Well'", 2020). Chairman Kim did not participate in other few symbolic national celebrations, due to frail health conditions, and the WPK continued to exercise its power. The presence and the directorship is held by his sister, Kim Yo-jong, as First Deputy Director of the Propaganda and Agitation department who served as a delegate in remarkable occasions, such as the winter Olympic games in Pyŏngchang in 2018. After speculations concerning her true role and a possible change of brand image concerning the Kim dynasty, due to the opaque information and dynamics available on the DPRK, recent insight seems to confirm the internal stability of the country as shown during the last (eighth) congress of Workers' Party of Korea: the power centrality and exaltation of one leader are reinforced as Kim Jong-un officially covers the position of Secretary General of the KWP, a role thought to be given eternally to his father. Moreover, as a result of the congress it can be found the necessity to pursue military advancement remains a pillar, whilst remarking a skeptical attitude towards the US and the ROK, and (Frank, 2021).

Juche remains the basis of the population's belief, both for the North Korean elite and its citizens, to exercise and regulate the social equilibrium of the country. As it has been argued, the emphasis on the military element, especially during Kim Jong-il and his successor Kim Jong-un, served its purpose. In particular, it remains an essential element to understand the reasons behind the nuclear programme: as Guthe (2011, p.482) remarks, a highly militarised nation possessing nuclear power succeeds as a means of deterrence externally, whilst it internally justifies it as a source of pride and commitment for an ideological cause. Even

though it can be disputable whether the population, especially the ruling class participating in this rigid apparatus, could sincerely believe in it or not, it creates a stalemate in the issue, hindering internal power struggles and containing external damages and threats.

Chapter 2: Evolution of the nuclear issue

Nuclear technology in North Korea: the origins of the debate. The nuclear issue is one of the most common topics related to research and the press while investigating North Korea, or rather it can be depicted as the main obstacle towards a peaceful normalisation of the peninsula (Kwak, 2016). A remarkable quantity of information has been collected throughout the last part of the 20th century, dealing with its implications on the political and economic viewpoints. Despite the scarce contacts with the ‘Hermit Kingdom’, it is possible to analyse the history of the issue, its modus operandi, its crucial necessity for the regime, and secondly, its importance for the other players in the international scene.

An entire field of academic research has been focusing on the peculiar relationship between these factors. However, some interpretations provided by governments or journalists filtered to the public opinion providing a partial reconstruction that might be considered misleading in the explanations provided through a detached approach or an essentialised vision, often without any clues of proof (Cumings, 2004). This chapter aims to show the substantial rationality within this specific framework, the nuclear issue, where a distinction should be made between terrorists and state leaders, following Payne’s words (2014) since the first ones “are likely to be ‘undeterrable’”, while the second category (including North Korea) will ultimately prove deterrable because they are not “irrational” (p.4).

The relevance of this issue, unmistakably, has increased during the last decade of the 20th century, receiving uneven attention throughout the 2000s and 2010s until today. However, the origins of nuclear technology can be dated back to the 1950s, under the first Leader, Kim Il-sung, through substantial Soviet aid. Moreover, as Lee (2017) points out, the historical

evolution of the country has to be taken into consideration, since it is the consequence of the threat experienced during the bipolar confrontation in the framework of the Cold War period. The North Korean arsenal was started as a response to the deployment of nuclear armaments in South Korea by the United States in 1953, after the Korean War. Thus, it led to the first co-operation agreement through the Charter of the Soviet Union's Joint Institute for Nuclear Research, signed in February 1956. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea received basic training and know-how from its allies, and at the beginning of the 1960s the creation of its main nuclear complex, the Yongbyŏn Nuclear Research center, was finalised. During the entire existence of the USSR, North Korea, as a Soviet satellite, enjoyed funding and assistance from Moscow, and it could implement nuclear technology programs and experiments.

A significant turning point could be considered the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), namely the legal instrument to control nuclear proliferation adopted by the international community, which entered into force in 1970. Focusing on the peaceful employment of nuclear power, including promotion and cooperation and the prohibition of aggressive purposes, the DPRK joined NPT in 1985. Its adherence was not a spontaneous action or a manifestation of North Korean willingness to follow its enemy's rules. The decision was carried out by intense pressure on Moscow by the United States, after an entire decade of intensification of international nuclear ambitions. North Korea got light-water reactors in return for its participation. Moreover, this time coincides with significant events: the competitive decreasing economic gap with South Korea, the consequent electric power shortages to boost heavy-industrial production, and new relations of the Hermit Kingdom with Soviet-satellite countries. Therefore, the DPRK tried to achieve compensation through nuclear development to enhance its position rather than pursuing amicable intents, according to the NTI (Nuclear Threat Initiative).

At the moment of the signature on the document, inspectors were sent to North Korea to monitor the gradual denuclearisation. As soon as the controls ceased, the Pyongyang government could continue its activities secretly. Despite the obligations contracted through the ratification of the treaty, the following year, the 1994, corresponds to the activation of a nuclear reactor after seven years of Soviet aid. It could be considered illogical to enter an international pact, knowing beforehand one's inability to follow its clauses. However, this pattern that has been forming relies on rational decision-making, demonstrating North Korean ability to deceive the enemy.

Officially, North Korea threatened with its withdrawal from NPT in 1993, being the first and the only country to have breached the agreement. The International Atomic Energetic Agency (IAEA) discovered various violations by the DPRK after inquiries, dated to 1989, 1990 and 1991. The most evident action carried out by the DPRK is the deployment of the ballistic missile Rodong in the Eastern Sea in 1993. Throughout this period of binding commitments, it is possible to draw a connection between DPRK's different external factors and its internal significant implications: the increasing US-South Korea joint military drills, the opening of relations between the latter and the USSR in 1990, and also with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1992. Nevertheless, the most striking event dealt with the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, which produced an identity crisis within the regime.

The dismantlement of the Soviet Union represented a new phase, entering a U.S.-centered multipolar global system in which the nuclear armaments became a meaningful tool to guarantee the national security environment, according to Cha (2018).

Reorientation of Perspective under the United States

This section aims to provide a deeper explanation of the nuclear issue, particularly focusing on the relations between the US and the DPRK. The North Korean viewpoint, indeed, is necessary to understand such matters, as well as the one of regional third parties that are involved and affected by the existence of the nuclear program. The role played by the United States, alongside other nations, can be interpreted as pivotal: as described in the previous chapter, in many historical circumstances the US demonstrated strong interest and ambitions towards the Korean Peninsula throughout the Cold War, an interference that the DPRK interpreted as hostile. Endorsing the dominant rhetoric of antagonism against the ‘imperialist and capitalist’ US and lacking a counterbalancing superpower such as the USSR, the DPRK found itself alone in a new era, without strong allies to depend on, strategically and economically. As Pardo (2014) observes, the presence of China and the Soviet Union ensured the survival of the country, guaranteeing a “strong deterrence to a possible attack from the US and South Korea” (p.18). The Soviet legacy, despite being found in the ideology, can be found in the nuclear arsenal as well: as Lankov (2013) remarks, a nuclear research program was started in 1959 following the Nuclear Cooperation Agreement, signed by both countries. Throughout the subsequent decades, the DPRK evolved its nuclear capabilities, receiving assistance from China as well, and asking for the assistance of experts from Moscow in order to enhance its nuclear development in 1991, before the USSR demise (Cindifer, 2017). Despite the Soviet refusal to accept such an offer, North Korea continued its activities, while submitting regular reports concerning its commitment to the NPT. As the CIA discovered discrepancies and violations by the DPRK at the turn of 1992 and 1993, despite the fact that the IAEA carried out investigations in the country, the latter refused the agency further visits (Clemens, 2016). This episode marks the starting point of the international interest towards the nuclear issue in the DPRK, especially from the United States.

The overall US attempts to approach the DPRK can hardly be described as successful throughout the following decades. The US persistence in obliging North Korea to abandon nuclear programs can be summarised in a reciprocal mistrust that hinders any advancement. As Kang (2003) states in his study:

In a nutshell, the problem is this: the United States refuses to give security guarantees to North Korea until it proves it has dismantled its weapons program. The North refuses to disarm until it has security guarantees from the United States. (p. 43)

Before analysing the reasons behind this lack of success that deepened the ideological concerns, a brief chronological frame of the interactions between the two countries will be provided. The collective image about North Korea, which is still present nowadays, could be defined as a legacy of the Bush administration (1989-1993), considering the increased involvement of the US during the 1990s (Anderson, 2015). The efforts of his predecessors were oriented to a sort of neutralisation of the tensions: President J. Carter in 1977 declared the withdrawal of the US military troops from the South Korean territory, and President R. Reagan attempted to persuade the Republic of Korea to institute mild relationships with the Pyongyang Government in recognition of a near end of the Cold War. However, according to Kang and Cha (2003), the line adopted by Bush Sr. aimed at isolating the DPRK. The fundamental point on the global scene was to define the role of nuclear armaments after the ceasing of tensions, and in the case of diplomatic relations with the "Hermit Kingdom", it led to their worsening.

1991 represented a pivotal moment for the East Asian scene as it coincided with the Soviet withdrawal of nuclear military equipment around the globe by Gorbachev, which was followed by South Korea. 1992, the following year, was characterised by the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula, signed the 20th of January by the Prime

Minister of ROK, Chung Won-shik, and by the Premier of the Administration Council of DPRK, Yon Hyong-muk. The ban on the production and experimentation of nuclear technology was viewed as a means to start a transition towards unification and peaceful relations (Everard, 2012). However, it emerged soon that the DPRK had infringed the agreement. Considering the possible withdrawal from NPT and the Rodong missile release in quick succession in 1993, it is evident that nuclear research for military purposes had never stopped, despite international compensation and economic aid as means of repayment.

From the North Korean perspective, the US attitude appears intrusive since the division of the peninsula in 1945, and to a certain extent, hostile for their internal security environment. This logic reproduced itself in the years covering the period of DPRK's adherence until its official withdrawal from NPT on January 10, 2003. North Korea had its so-called 'golden age' under the patronage of the Soviet Union, which never exercised excessive pressure on internal political or economic matters, in contrast to what its counterpart, the US, did with South Korea. Thus, after the Korean War, the DPRK was not considered a main priority in the US foreign policy, as Pardo (2019) remarks, since the relations between them can be depicted as mild until the end of the Cold War period.

In regard to this situation, the reason behind the threat of DPRK withdrawal from NPT was contained in several statements of the members of the Party. They clarified the North Korean reluctance to further investigations, beyond the regular ones conducted by the IAEA inspectors. According to Kang Sok-chu, the DPRK vice-minister of foreign affairs in 1993, the US imposed special inspections solely on North Korea through pressure on the IAEA committee. The triggering factor was that the decision was based on US intelligence inquiries, meaning an influential interference by third-parties, breaching the international law and the IAEA Board of Governors' judgment.

In order to understand the hard line of the United States' approach towards North Korea, a brief digression is needed. According to Anderson (2015), the attitude of the US in foreign affairs is a combination of exceptionalism and universalism¹⁰. Thus, the approach adopted during the Korean War and the period of Cold War included caricatural depictions of the DPRK, alongside to the label of 'rogue state' and nuclear threats perpetuated by the United States when Kim Il-Sung was leading the country. As Cumings (2004) points out, the South Korean Administrations pursued illegal nuclear programs during the 1970s and 1980s: "Park ceased the activity only under enormous American pressure, while retaining formidable potentialities. [...] Most of the technologies for the South's missile program came from American firms, along with expertise garnered from the coproduction of missiles." (p.55-56).

The tough or confrontational strategy, depending on the US Administration in charge in a given period, clashed with the North Korean ideology, i.e. 'Juche'. Both approaches seem to address improperly the North Korean denuclearisation, and even the mere creation of a neutral and long-term diplomatic relationship. The chronology of the North Korean nuclear issue comprises checkered strategy, in particular from the early 1990s until the Trump presidency. As Hur (2018, p.31) states, republicans criticised Clinton when he dealt with DPRK during the Agreed Framework negotiations in 1994, after the first nuclear crisis. Democrats as well disapproved the way of thinking of G.W. Bush during six-party talks (2003-2007), and, despite this political difference in addressing a problem, the outcome has been inconclusive.

The administration viewed the first nuclear crisis with hostility, but the negotiations were conducted for the regime and without acting with hostility against the DPRK, according to the chief negotiator, Robert Gallucci. During the second nuclear crisis and the Six-Party

¹⁰It implies a self-consciousness about its uniqueness compared to the other countries. However, the internal security concern overlaps its international prestige. Since its independence, it has played an active function in the international scene in two ways: the leading role to spread moral values, namely the manifest destiny; and global capitalism that ensures economic and military leadership.

talks, especially in the first three rounds, negotiators refused instead to engage directly with the North Korean counterparts. The communication was possible through the Russian role of 'honest broker'. Thus, the continuous frictions that characterised the US-DPRK relationship were never overcome even if a Joint Agreement was signed on the 19th of September 2005.

First Nuclear Crisis

Drawing back the origins of the first nuclear crisis involving the DPRK in more details, the discourse should start after the collapse of the USSR through the line adopted of the United States dealing with the remaining strongholds of the socialist world in Asia and new threats in a multipolar world (Lee, 2018). As Husenicova (2018, p.69) stresses, the US attitude was influenced by the concerns related to the end of the Cold War and the liberalisation of the Eastern Bloc after the demise of the USSR. North Korea was expected to fit with the same process, but, on the contrary, it moved towards the opposite direction. Pyongyang was 'obliged' to ratify the NPT in 1992, due to the increasing pressure of the international community and the information gathered through satellites in 1989 that showed activities of nuclear explosive tests. The first move of the United States, as Ludvik (2016) argues, was intended at de-escalating possible tensions by removing unilaterally all military nuclear weapons from the South of the Peninsula within the end of 1991 during the Bush Sr. Administration. The US kept its intention in guaranteeing protection and assistance in the case of further serious threat, meanwhile the North and the South signed for the Joint Declaration on the Denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula in 1992. A critical factor that followed as the new President Bill Clinton started his mandate during January 1993, according to Cumings (2004), was his objective to resume massive military drills, the Team Spirit war games, interpreted as a threat by Pyongyang.

However, ratification does not translate into effective enforcement or application, since the North objected to transparency in investigations by the IAEA, as O'Neil (2013) stresses, because it could have constituted an intrusion by the United States. The Clinton Administration declared its willingness to respond massively to any illegal use of nuclear power by the DPRK, as partly motivated to the crisis experienced by the latter because of famine, shortages and the death of Kim Il-sung (in July 1994). As a response, the threat to remove the commitment of the NPT by the North led to the first nuclear crisis, as well as the starting point of the vicious circle of negotiations experienced also in the twenty-first century.

The spirit of the discussions during the nuclear crisis created different premises about new alignments and the modus operandi that would return in the following occasion of the second nuclear crisis. China indirectly endorsed North Korea, trying to restrain Washington, which sought to impose sanctions against the DPRK. Another factor that can be worthy to be considered is the support of Russia to the US while attempting a hard line on DPRK (Pardo, 2019), alongside France and the United Kingdom. During the three rounds of the negotiations, sanctions were used as a response to North Korean violations and to push for IAEA inquiries of nuclear facilities. The resistance to such demand from the DPRK was due to the Team Spirit exercises that were asked to stop. However, despite their temporary suspensions, since the entry of the IAEA was not guaranteed, even if North Korea was interrupting the activities of the reactors, UN sanctions were imposed in June, 1994 (Cerami, 2012). The diffidence of the DPRK to resume the meetings was overcome through the intervention of the former President Carter through his visit in the DPRK in the same month, bringing about resumption of the talks.

The negotiations culminated with the creation of the Agreed Framework, and the DPRK accepted the deal. Behind the decision-making process, economic and humanitarian assistance

played an important role, but also the death of the Great Leader, Kim-Il-Sung, in 1994. This event brought about a national social identity crisis, and the famine that resulted throughout the region pushed the country to consent to what it was asked for. In 1995, the KEDO (Korean Energy Development Organisation) was created by the United States, South Korea, and Japan, in order to implement the outcome of the Agreed Framework, assisting North Korea in the procedure of building light-water reactors and to compensate with energy supply free of charge until the finalisation, that was expected to be concretised approximately in 2003 (Husenicova, 2018, p. 70). However, different circumstances hindered this process. From one perspective, aid was magnanimous considering the previsions of a country on the brink of a crisis, the famine and the shortages struck severely the country (Lankov, 2013), on the other the reluctance expressed by the DPRK can be linked to the demands of the IAEA since their special inspections were performed under the supervision of the American intelligence (Cumings, 2004)¹¹.

Second Nuclear Crisis and Six Party Talks

The principal events that took place, from the end of the first nuclear crisis until the emergence of the second one, were as follows: the changing of the North Korean guidelines in reforms (Neo-Juche) by the successor of the Great Leader, the Dear Leader, Kim Jong-il, the presidency of Kim Dae-jung (1998-2003) and the change of the US Administration line, with the election of George W. Bush in 2000.

¹¹ The technical role of the IAEA in carrying out investigations acts according to the permission of entry by a given nation accused of illegal activities related to the proliferation of nuclear power, even in cases of suspicious or certified illicitness by third parties. The independent role of the agency cannot force the compliance of the procedure. The political implication stated in this paragraph is also based on remarks by Väyrynen and Cortright (2013) pinpointing the case of Iraq in the framework of the Gulf War, namely lying in the decision-making process in targeting a country, as well as its necessity, as linked to provide legal evidence to UN Security Council resolutions and countermeasures.

Firstly, the Dear Leader reoriented the Juche ideology under the so-called ‘sŏn’gun chŏngch’i’ (선군정치), meaning military first as a guideline for economic reforms in the country. As Cha (2018) states, the economic perspective in this framework did not coincide with the modus operandi of DPRK, which appeared more based on political purposes. This led to the conspicuous investments in the National Defence sector aimed to create and encourage the military programs, hiding from the international attention for what concerned the nuclear ones. This attitude was at the basis of the incidents provoked by North Korea during the second part of the 1990s.

Secondly, the Sunshine Policy (햇볕정치, haetbyŏt chŏng’ch’i) created by the South Korean President, Kim Dae-jung, could represent the main attempt to neutralise the relationship with the Hermit Kingdom during these years. The aim of this policy was to settle an amicable relationship with the DPRK, that worsened during the previous South Korean Administration, under No Tae-woo (De Benedittis, 2016a). Thus, in 2000, the two Korean leaders met with the purpose of working on economic exchanges between the two nations. Moreover, South Korea offered its aid, and the establishment of the divided families' reunions¹².

This inclination was endorsed by other actors of the North-East Asian region, as Japan as well endeavoured to build calm relations with the ‘Hermit Kingdom’ through the Pyongyang Declaration of 2002. This document officialised the Japanese intentions to remove the imperialist rifts from North Korea, in return for investigations about the previous abductions of Japanese citizens by the Hermit Kingdom¹³ (Hur, 2018, p.89). As for the Republic of

¹² The issue of the divided families dates back to 1948 when the Korean Peninsula was split into two portions at the 38th parallel. Koreans were invited to decide in which area would have lived, and internal movements were banned as illegal acts.

¹³ During the 1970s dozens of abductions of Japanese citizens happened in coastal areas. North Korea had different purposes, such as stealing identities, using them as Japanese language teachers and spies (De Benedittis, 2016b).

China, the relations with North Korea were never interrupted, despite the Chinese late overture to the international scene. The Popular Republic of China has always represented a faithful partner since the Division of the Korean Peninsula, concerning military aid during the Korean War, economic aid and affairs (Cha, 2018) The Chinese decision was aimed to escape from a crucial dilemma: supporting the US hardline and improving relations while condemning North Korea, or safeguard the North Korean regime. Therefore, having a leading role and vouching for the organisation was the appropriate balance between the two positions (Hur, 2018).

These overall attempts were undermined by the Bush Administration, which pursued its international commitment in the fight against terrorism after 9/11, including North Korea as part of the 'Axis of Evil', alongside Iran and Iraq. The famous speech of the President delivered on January 29, 2002, blaming 'North Korea to be a regime armed with missiles and weapons of mass destruction while starving its citizens', created remarkable tensions. Consequently, the US accusations caused the withdrawal from NPT, starting the Second Nuclear Crisis.

In order to understand clearly the tough attitude of the US, a digression about the technicalities of the Six-Party Talks negotiation stages is needed.

First period of the Six-Party talks (First, Second and Third rounds). Six-Party Talks aimed to be the resolution to scale down the second nuclear crisis. They can be analysed in two parts: the first, the second and the third rounds can be gathered together since the countries involved did not produce a substantial agreement. However, since the first round (27-29 August 2003), a consensus was reached, discussed in bilateral and plenary meetings.

The shared interests reflect the ones of the first nuclear crisis: denuclearisation, the stability of the Korean Peninsula, and the respect for the DPRK's security, assessed before the SPT and reaffirmed as goals through all this first period.

During the three stages the United States refused to interact directly with North Korean negotiators, mistrusting the counterpart and an adversarial approach. Concerning the first circumstance, it was Russia to deliver the North Korean proposal as an 'honest broker'. Secondly, the Bush Administration tried to persuade the other actors aligning against the DPRK in a 5:1 coalition (Ha & Shin, 2008, p.194), demanding unilateral concessions and threatening sanctions. However, the others focused on a neutral approach, aimed to build a trustful atmosphere. As it can be observed, Wang (2003), Chinese Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs, stressed in his evaluation from the first round: "The DPRK is willing to peacefully coexist with the United States as long as the US side changes its policy towards the DPRK and stops threatening the DPRK". Yabunaka, the ambassador representing Japan, supported the same line, stating that "No country, including the United States, has a hostile policy toward North Korea".

Discrepancies emerged among the parties through the second round (25th–28th February 2004), since the US opted for complete denuclearisation, while the other countries supported the legitimacy of North Korea in its usage of nuclear energy for pacific purposes, as stated by the South Korean President, Roh Mu-hyun. Similar concerns were expressed by China, since the economic and energetic aid as compensation would be too costly to sustain (Shen, 2013).

The third round (23rd–26th June 2004) presented the initial drafts of the measures to dismantle the nuclear programs and the instruments to balance the future energetic deficits of North Korea. Every actor pledged assistance in economic development, payments, and med-

ical and food provisions in return to the North Korean freezing of all military nuclear programs.

From its end, more than one year was spent, because of frictions between the US and the DPRK. The US realised that their contending led to a stalemate, thus the new negotiator in charge, Christopher Hill, Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, engaged in a back-channel negotiation with the North Korean representatives to avoid spoilers from the conservative American constituencies. Furthermore, a delicate political situation in the ROK contributed: the nation and politicians related to the Uri party, the one of President Roh, were quite skeptical about endorsing the attitude of the US, preferring a more independent approach (Buszynski, 2013). Simultaneously, Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice's statements in front of the public audience pursued the strict approach of the Bush Administration to prevent a loss of face, appearing as a weak actor. Nevertheless, the DPRK exploited this behaviour responding to the provocation and publicly affirmed to hold military nuclear programs and threatened to abandon SPT (Hur, 2018). The North Korean attitude sought to "maximise the concessions" from the US, and the overture that was created with the ROK hardly produced concrete progress, but only on minimal matters (Buszynski, 2013).

Second period of the SPT (Fourth, Fifth and Sixth rounds). The first phase was characterised by discussions between the parties when the US declared it had no intention to invade North Korea. Although Hill talked directly with the DPRK's representatives, adopting a moderate line, the North Korean peaceful use of nuclear was considered unacceptable, as it hindered the United States' reputation.

On the contrary, China, Russia, Japan, and South Korea agreed, thus when the second phase started, China gave an ultimatum to the US. China threatened to blame it publicly to

have caused the failure of the negotiations, exploiting the general Anti-Americanism of those years, if it did not change its position. Despite the hegemonic role of the United States, it had to increase its flexibility about uranium-enrichment (Hur, 2018, p.89). At the end of the second phase, the six parties signed a Joint Agreement on the 19th of September. It comprised six points that concerned: the return to NPT of North Korea and its verifiable dismantlement of the military nuclear activities, and the normalisation of the US-DPRK relationship. North Korea asked for its removal from the list of terrorist nations by the US, economic and humanitarian aid, and the end of military nuclear power on the Peninsula. All the five parties agreed to provide payments and assistance to the DPRK under its interest in peace and stability.

While investigating the fifth round of the SPT, divided in three different stages (9th—11th November, 2005; 18th—22nd December, 2006; 8th—13th February, 2007) the first phase began because countries were delaying assistance to North Korea, and they met to reaffirm their commitments. However, the US-DPRK relationship worsened. The Bush Administration blamed North Korea of money-laundry through Banco Delta Asia bank (BDA), and it imposed sanctions. The DPRK reacted by abandoning the SPT and conducting its first military nuclear test after the first phase, on 6th of October 2006. The parties signed the UN Resolution 1718 unilaterally, aimed to impose a ban on weapons to the DPRK and additional sanctions.

North Korea returned to negotiate for a second phase and third phase, demanding both the removal of sanctions and freezing of BDA's money. Parties re-asserted their engagement, and IAEA was appointed to monitor the dismantlement of military nuclear facilities. An agreement was produced to implement the previous Joint Agreement of 2005, convincing the DPRK through an economic aid of \$400 million.

The six and last round, held in three rounds (19th–22nd March, 2007; 18th—20th July, 2007; 27th—30th September, 2007) was marked by tensions between North Korea and Japan since the beginning of the Abe Administration. It argued that the DPRK was not fulfilling its commitment to the Pyongyang Declaration, complying with the investigation concerning the abduction of Japanese citizens, as pledged to Japan in bilateral meetings. Consequently, the latter refused to provide the promised aid, but China and South Korea criticised this deleterious attitude for SPT, emphasising on the true purposes of that negotiation table (Hur, 2018, p. 86-87). This event marked interruption of the first phase and it was resumed during the following months when countries aimed to accelerate their aid. The second phase started with the initial steps to concretise the compensation to North Korea, and IAEA guaranteed to have sealed all the implants. Parties agreed to accomplish their obligations and planned to organise further meetings within the SPT framework. However, they would not have ever resumed after, and on April 14, 2009, the DPRK withdrew its participation officially.

Different interpretations can be provided about the outcome of negotiations. Indeed, the attitude of the US endangered several times the procedures and the effective resolution of the conflict (Hur, 2018, p. 86-87), resulting. The multilateral format aimed to create an influential majority to persuade the DPRK to renounce nuclear weapons. However, the conspicuous number of actors increased the complexity of the agreements: each actor had its issues besides the denuclearisation, issues that had to be balanced in the logic of the two-level game, i.e. the entanglement of international and domestic spheres appeasing the domestic pressure on foreign policy issues, and exploiting the presence of other actors (Putnam, 1988, p.434)¹⁴.

¹⁴ Most negotiations at international level follow this scheme, and it is taken into account by negotiators or policy-makers, fundamental in the decision-making process and its cost-benefit calculation. The complexity lies in the fact that, on one hand, some choices can reflect the national aspirations resulting rational, on the other, appearing irrational on the international one and vice versa (Putnam, 1988, p. 434).

Despite several concessions to North Korea, the latter never trusted the other parties and its attitude has been depicted as unforeseeable. It is still complex to investigate a successful mechanism to dismantle the nuclear facilities or to persuade North Korea. Excessive yielding through aids, and sanctions, paradoxically, reinforce the DPRK (Napoleoni, 2018), and as Shen (2013) stressed, it is difficult to define the Six-Party talks a success.

This negotiation process raised different interpretations, focusing on the needs of North Korea and investigating the purposes of its behaviour. An important viewpoint, identifying and summarising the possible reasons behind the North Korean modus operandi, is the one of Bruce Klingner (2018). The necessity for owning nuclear weapons, and the difficulty of dismantling the related military programs lies in the various explanations that follow: the logic of deterrence, the recognition of being a military power negotiating as a peer with the US, national and international pride, coercive diplomacy, and the use of nuclear armaments as an instrument to decrease the influence of Washington on the Korean Peninsula. As Buszynski (2013) remarks, in diplomacy it is strongly ill-advised to engage a country with belligerence, since as a response this would increase the degree of resistance of the ‘adversary’, “yet the US ignored this basic lesson” (p.13).

These elements lead to another problematic issue, whether it was plausible to stop or, at least, to modify the DPRK's attitude. A remarkable difficulty defined by the academic research is that usually the standpoint of analysing the North Korean logic is provided by external actors, and few information is available by the internal ones. Some intellectuals tend to disassociate from defectors' statements: on one hand, their knowledge can be depicted as fundamental, but, on the other hand, it is limited, since it has been constrained by the DPRK's censorship (Napoleoni, 2018). A viable option that still has to be applied, rather than focusing solely on the nuclear threat, can be the recognition of the DPRK as a legitimate actor in the

international scene, possibly aiming to a normalisation of relations, and then pursuing the resolution of the nuclear issue (Feng, 2013). Nevertheless, the applicability of such suggestions is hindered by economic and geopolitical factors to be investigated in the third and fourth chapter.

Considerations behind the Purpose of Negotiations

It is difficult to define the Six-Party talks as a success from the diplomatic, security and political perspective. Taking into account the fact that the rounds brought no change in the DPRK's attitude, it is rather possible to detect uneven, but soaring frictions concerning this country that managed to increase his nuclear arsenal. A point that has been stressed concerns the actual motivation of North Korea to engage in such negotiations: according to Clemens (2016), its ups and downs can be interpreted as a mere strategy to gain time and to pursue its national goal of independent defence. Moreover, besides historical frictions with Japan or South Korea, the DPRK was willing to create a dialogue, but bilaterally, and thus the main attempts to catalyse the attention of the US can be redirected to the missile test conducted in the middle of the talks, after the initial interruption of the North. The US, back then, were also concerned about the situation in the Middle East, as Kwak (2016) points out, and thus North Korea tried to catch the attention to induce the 'enemy' to remove the presence of its troops from the 38th perimeter.

The logical standpoint that emerges while engaging with difficult actors in negotiations is making concessions or a problem-solving approach, preferring a win-win resolution. However, the puzzled circumstances and the entangled interests lead to stable solutions purely in the short-term horizon (E. Tan, 2013). The antagonist sentiment between the US and the DPRK can be defined as persistent besides the few agreements reached. Moreover, scrutinis-

ing deeper the intention of the US in the talks, the avoidance of bilateral meetings with the North in the first part of the rounds can also be interpreted as a matter of a facade towards the public opinion, although the presence of other neighbouring powers was aimed to increase the pressure on North Korea (Haggard & Noland, 2017). However, some purposes of Washington were not met, since the Roh Moo-hyun administration opted for a direct channel to address North Korea independently from the hardline of Bush, and also Russia, although being the "honest broker" as China, questioned its usefulness, as both powers were seeking a stable situation at their borders.

The needs stressed by the DPRK can be demonstrated also through the previous nuclear crisis, considering its requests and goals that can be valid also in the following decade (Cumings citing Harrison, 2004):

a new peace treaty to replace the armistice, mutual force reductions, removal of trade restrictions and Trading with the Enemy Act items, a consortium to provide the LWRs, American support for Japanese and South Korean aid and investment in the DPRK, the admission of North Korea to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) organization, combined with American encouragement of private sector investment, and an American willingness to discuss ground force withdrawals from South Korea”(p. 70).

Beyond the nuclear concern, in the case of an irreversible denuclearisation, would it be total, in the case of removal of all nuclear implants despite the purpose, or partial, if removing only nuclear weapons, the arsenal of the DPRK comprises more aspects. The reality is far from simple in both cases.

Firstly, a total denuclearisation implies removing implants providing a portion of energy to the country. Furthermore, the nuclear has served as a partial substitute to the supply provid-

ed by the Soviet Union, underlining a further necessity for maintaining the facilities. Several times, during the negotiations, the counterpart of North Korea proposed aid in supporting and creating facilities to replace nuclear reactors with other sources of power. However, according to Hur (2018, p.81), the concrete response, in the framework of SPT, was not sufficient and rather late due to a lack of coordination among the participants, which is underestimated in the context of resolution of the nuclear issue, as well as in other circumstances outside the SPT format.

Secondly, the partial denuclearisation can be depicted as less burdensome from an internal perspective, and less puzzling in accordance with the economic costs to sustain the country. As displayed above, North Korea would have refused the requests without the removal of the freezing on the money kept in the BDA, despite international aid. Furthermore, other sanctions imposed on the country are a hindering factor. The ups and downs concerning the nuclear situation at the table of international discussions can be proved through the timeline of the commitment of the IAEA towards the DPRK (IAEA and DPRK: Chronology of Key Events, n.d, IAEA). A surprising fact is that North Korea underwent a procedure of irreversible denuclearisation a few times, and after some years it started to be active again in its nuclear activities, despite the investigations carried out in orbit by the commission of the IAEA, since from 2009, the latter is not allowed to enter the country for further inquiries.

Indeed, nuclear-related activities can be defined as a core element, although it should not be underestimated what Bush jr. administration could have affirmed not so casually in the famous speech of the ‘axis of evil’, blaming the DPRK to have been owning MDW (Mass Destruction Weapons). In this regard, M. Tan (2015) stresses that North Korea breached other weapons-related international conventions that it ratified, such as the Biological Weapons Convention and the Geneva Protocol (Protocol for the Prohibition of the Use in War of As-

phyxiating, Poisonous or other Gases, and of Bacteriological Methods of Warfare), and eventually the CIA and KCIA found North Korean research programs on biological weapons dating back the 1960s.

Constant approaches from the White House, as well as the international community, were characterised by accurate diplomacy, and even if carrying their part of flaws (as displayed above), they cannot be blamed alone. Regular breaches by North Korea regarding ratified agreements and treaties entails an improper approach, leading to a more complicated margin of manoeuvre.

The frequent threats and provocations by the DPRK are based on sound motivations, but the lack of fulfilment of the standards, besides being rational, cannot be justified. For this same reason, the aims pursued by the other countries involved, having their own national interests, often mismatch among them, and thus, towards North Korea. The overlapping game can be per se a deadlock, meaning that pressure from the US brings about intimidations by the DPRK. It can also be true the opposite order of cause and effect. Then, neighbour nations can agree or disagree with the line adopted by Washington: the main concern of being a neighbour country is to maintain stability at the border, containing North Korean 'ambitions' through aids or dialogue. On occasions, the South Korean line had criticised the American approach, despite a military alliance and good diplomatic relations, a situation depending on the South Korean leading Administration.

Deterrence

The deterrence discourse entails different aspects when an actor faces another one trying to understand the decision-making process and reaching an agreement. Following the paradigm provided by Payne (2014), in *Understanding Deterrence*, the theory is not only based

on the mere target of a given negotiation, rather there are other eight factors, besides the defence, to be taken into account: ideology, religion, culture, political structure, proliferation, domestic politics, and geopolitics. As it has been covered throughout the first chapter concerning Juche ideology, which necessity derived from this perspective, the covered cultural matrix and the evolution of the present beliefs in the DPRK should be kept in mind, as it is an authoritarian one-party state with all powers concentrated in the semi-god leader. The intention is to provide clarity in this framework, while the warning of Payne can suit properly with the secrecy of North Korea:

Despite the accepted wisdom of decades of classic US Cold War Deterrence theory, there are no universal verities regarding opponent decision making that render the functioning of deterrence so predictable that specific force structures can be labeled inherently adequate, stabilising, or destabilising. (Payne, 2011, p. 401)

The necessity of obtaining and owning nuclear weapons can be interpreted as a logical behaviour, since other countries rather than superpowers can appear as redoubtable opponents as they represent serious risks in the global scene and can bring about political instability. Indeed, the fact that North Korea increased its nuclear notoriousness specifically after the demise of the Soviet Union adds another element to the geopolitical analysis. Following the reasoning of Väyrynen and Cortright (2013), a multipolar world compared to a bipolar order created more volatility in alliances and coalitions among nations, complicating the challenges and further factors have to be taken into account as the manoeuvre becomes more delicate.

When it comes to defining the line adopted by the ‘Hermit Kingdom’, the fact that its only purpose to engage in a negotiation process is linked to its benefits is a common misunderstanding (Klingner, 2018). Both the first and second crises provide analogies to this argument. First of all, the main issue is related to the recognition of North Korean sovereignty and

security. According to the field of research about negotiations, when parties' different positions are based on basic needs, such as the ones mentioned above, the US hard positional bargaining led to deadlocks (Fisher et al., 2011). The main security concern expressed by North Korea was related to the joint military drills between the US and South Korea taking place near the borders of the DMZ (Demilitarised Zone) and in the Eastern Sea (De Benedittis, 2016b). North Korea stressed this point on every occasion it had while engaging in talks with other nations. Both in bilateral and multilateral discussions, participating parties did not respect what they agreed through different ratifications. According to Napoleoni (2018), this strategy, paradoxically, created the circumstances to reinforce the regime and the nuclear issue itself. As the core argument remains nuclear power, Väyrynen and Cortright (2013) stress that alongside North Korea, Iran and Pakistan and so forth seek this instrument to grant themselves an international role, despite their unstable internal economies or politics.

The fundamental concern raised from the concretisation of the dangers of nuclear weapons remains, however serious actions have to be taken to move from the deadlock. The premises and the risks can be high, on one hand, also maintaining and fuelling the vicious circle that has been explained so far. On the other, significant intervention by third countries can be paired with an escalation and lead to an armed conflict. Nuclear missile tests and micro-aggressions are often portrayed as attempts to change the fragile equilibrium or as initiatives dictated by the 'craziness of the regime' (Cha, 2018), through intense weeks of alarmism spreading through conventional mass media claiming for a possible nuclear war, followed by long silent periods as reports cease to address the issue or generally the DPRK. Moreover, the scenographic declarations and arguments between the United States and North Korea could provide a far-fetched vision to the general audience, and far from it, the issue remains constantly a huge discussion to be tackled with a prudent and rational approach. In this regard,

following Payne's theory (2014), the counterparts of the DPRK tend to avoid responses to low-level aggressions, provocations or "other forms of irregular warfare" (p.98) with the aim to abstain from escalation, leading to considerable costs for all the participants and allies involved. In this perspective, the DPRK can be defined as a revisionist state, meaning that it has aspirations to expand or change borders.

Nuclear power secures the power in the nation against opposers of the ruling elite, that acquire ties and more legitimation, besides being exploited for acquiring an international position. This element constitutes another aspect strengthening the North Korean deterrence and creating a thicker pattern. The intimidations serve the rational purpose of preserving the country and the status quo, and despite the continuous progress and development of nuclear warfare in the DPRK, as Lankov (2013) stresses, the nation can count on military creativity or tricks. However, "US leaders do not lose sleep in fear of a North Korean nuclear attack on the United States" (Lankov, 2013, p.180). Hereinafter to say that the intent of the DPRK to attack, due to the superiority of Washington, represents a remote possibility, and even smaller is a possibility in favour of North Korea. In particular, according to Kang (2003), the latter if compared only to the ROK, results having disadvantages from the defence perspective, considering the total budget allocated annually from the 1960s until nowadays with a soaring gap recorded in the last decades.

A paradigm that has been used to explain the rationality of a risk-seeking attitude is prospect theory, which can be helpful to investigate the internal behavioural perspective, often neglected in comparison with the amount and the emphasis on the external implications of this issue (Feng, 2013). It means that as the country finds itself in a situation of uncertainty or losses, it is inclined to venture through this mechanism of intimidations in order to restore the previous status quo. As Napoleoni (2018) points out, nuclear weapons can be built or tested to

serve as a possible prevention on future aggression, not to be deployed as offence, and the fact that it would not be deployed, per se, represents the aimed stability.

The concern surrounding a nuclearised state is that it can likely spread its technology and achievements to other peers. The hardline under Bush Administration towards these countries can be depicted as functional from the political perspective, due to the popularity he gained among conservative groups (Clemens, 2016), and to a certain extent, it was poisoned by being susceptible to the influence it obtained in the decision-making process (Buszynski, 2013)

Nuclear Issue after SPT and the Ascent of Kim Jong-un

The uneven nature of relations between Pyongyang and Washington continues currently under the third leader of the DPRK, Kim Jong-un, between humanitarian assistance and energy aid, mistrust from both parties, nuclear tests and threats. As President Obama took office in 2009, his aim to engage again with North Korea, and other ‘problematic countries’, was made clear, while criticising the diplomatic attitude of his predecessor. Indeed, Pyongyang’s provocations increased after the SPT, the so-called brinkmanship intensified throughout the last years, as well as its sceptical attitude with ups and downs. The renovated invite from the White House was rejected by North Korea, which labelled the attempt as fruitless, rather focusing its attention in fortifying the nuclear arsenal (Pardo, 2019). A possible explanation related to the improvement of nuclear weapons and continuous resistance, paired with confidence of their deterrent capacity, can be found in the reasoning of Cha (2018): the American intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, alongside the Libyan upheaval against Qaddafi, who dismantled WMD, are a lesson for the DPRK, stressing the necessity of security in the international sphere through their nuclear program.

The successful missile test conducted in May 2009 testifies a significant upgrade to the deterrence of North Korea, translating in further attention to the country and new UN resolutions comprising sanctions. The following issues that pressured other countries in this framework, regardless of security, can lie in economic matters. As Lankov (2013) stresses, common citizens in the South can be concerned of nuclear threats differently from the interpretations that can alarm the West, since “South Korean voter cares about the North much less than North Korean policy makers presumed” (p.176). The then current South Korean Administration led by Lee Myung-bak, despite several counter responses to reduce such bellicose elan and having interrupted the diplomatic exchange under the Sunshine Policy in 2008, found itself to moderate its strict line, due to the usual financial instability that these intimidations created. A quite common and unusual approach at the same time can be displayed by China. The PRC strengthened its significant role: it remains a fundamental honest broker between the international requests and the counteracts of the DPRK, since, from one hand, it endorsed UN decisions, and, on the other, it remains the main trade partner, as well as an important capital contributor of the DPRK.

The intention of the DPRK to pursue normalisation in the international scene remains a priority to the country, and as stressed several times, as a recognition of a legitimate country is depicted as a first step, and the implications concerning the denuclearisation is afterwards. Indeed, due to the situation, the North Korean approach can be defined as rational (Pardo, 2019), and the line and the projects pursued by Kim Jong-il during his last years faced no stop, despite some difficulties because of frail health conditions. Since the successful tests performed independently from the investigations of IAEA, in September 2009, the DPRK announced to the international community its objective and its activities related to the uranium-enrichment programs, also detected through the research carried out by the nuclear expert

Hecker in 2010, which triggered the reaction of United States, Japan and South Korea. Aggressions towards the latter are also worthy to be mentioned such as the Cheonan sinking and attacks to the ROK marine¹⁵, blamed to have crossed in North Korean waters, as a form of retaliation.

The evolution of the nuclear issue, far from being simple, saw another approach under the first Obama administration, that during its first two years, 2009-2010, despite evidence, kept being perseverant in waiting for positive response or willingness from the DPRK, as Cha (2018) points out. Nevertheless, the change in the leadership with Kim Jong-un played higher stakes on the issue.

During the transition North Korea strengthened its deterrent ability, however its aggressions received further condemnation by the UN and brought about further tensions. Meanwhile, the relations between Japan, South Korea and China improved, leading to another soft counterbalance of power, independently from the United States (Pardo, 2014), aiming to an autonomous approach to the DPRK. Nevertheless, in the occasion of the Chōnan sinking, Lee Administration sought a firmer engagement from the US, trying to dissuade it from the ‘wait and see’ attitude (Hur, 2018), challenging his ‘leading regional power’(p. 263). In 2011, North Korea expressed its willingness to open for a dialogue with Washington, seeking anew normalisation and recognition, without disclosing a decisive standpoint related to the future of its nuclear programs. Throughout the last months of Kim Jong-il leadership, as Haggard and Noland (2017) remark, the intention to consolidate exchanges with the PRC was successful, becoming a leitmotiv of support, from one hand, while keeping its concerns, and on the other.

¹⁵ An issue created by violations of maritime territories lies in the demarcation provided by the United Nations, since it does not correspond to the one decided by the DPRK.

Kim Jong-un's Era

Providing more details on the turning point in leadership, after the death of Kim Jong-il in December 2011, through the succession with Kim Jong-un, it is possible to notice that the emphasis on the nuclear was provided with another revision on the North Korean constitution during April 2012. As S. Park (2016) displays, the institutional description of the DPRK as a 'nuclear armed' state precluded its willingness to pursue and to underline the intention of the regime. Furthermore, as detailed in the previous chapter, the *byōngjin* orientation appears, mentioned as a core element in *juche* ideology under Kim Jong-un. This has implications as well within this framework, as a combination of policies focused on military strength and economy. Its image was reinforced through nuclear tests and satellite launches. Nevertheless, the doctrinal aspect and the representation of the leader represent a continuity with the past and at the same time a novelty, thus it can reflect the quick sequence of intimidations.

A possible progress in 2012 can be the Leap Day deal, when the Obama administration could be able to arrange negotiations imposing preconditions with North Korea. Dialogues started when Kim Jong-il was still in power, and for the first time North Korea agreed to temporarily suspend its nuclear activities, and in order to contain potential actions, the White House stipulated aids hoping for a new attitude from the leader (Panda, 2016). However, as a missile launch was performed, it constituted a fiasco, and as a consequence the US interrupted its energy and food supplies. A doubt concerning an effective breach of the agreement is provided by Clemens (2016), since no written formality was produced to consolidate this commitment, as it was sufficient the banning of proliferation and illicit nuclear activities by the UN, otherwise there could have been a miscommunication between Kim Jong-un and the diplomats.

Moreover, according to research conducted by the South Korean authorities in 2012, the DPRK has developed the capabilities to carry out atomic tests, and few launches continue to worry the international communities, reaching the point of a third nuclear test on the 12th of February 2013, the first one under Kim Jong-un, that once again provoked a response by the UN through other sanctions (Napoleoni, 2018), eventually legitimised nationally as a deterrent and defensive purpose with a law (Clemens, 2016). The DPRK provided a clear-cut perspective on a possible resumption of the SPT, despite few attempts after its interruption, rejecting the format and giving a black-and-white option, as Haggard and Noland (2017) stress: denuclearisation would be embraced by the country only if a global scale removal of nuclear weapons will be pursued. Meanwhile, despite the initial North Korean willingness to open for a dialogue with the United States, a fundamental change in the South Korean Administration brought about a worsening in earlier precarious relations. After the end of the government of Lee Myōng-bak, the new elected President Park Geun-hye displayed an adverse attitude toward North Korea. As Buzo (2017) remarks, the previous long-range missile test in December 2012, and the third nuclear test proved on the 12th of February, 2013, provoked a counteraction from the ROK on the 25th, as the opening ceremony of her mandate had a military nuance that irritated Pyongyang¹⁶. This once again caused a gradual escalation, with an intensification of joint US-ROK military drills and the US menaced to be the target for the next pre-emptive attack.

The third nuclear test led to inter-Korean negotiations that resulted again in a failure, conducted under a hard bargaining position: Kim Jong-un concentrated on emphasising the

¹⁶ As Snyder (2018) widely explains throughout chapter 7, the chosen posture of President Park, the Trustpolitik, was based on “(over)confidence” and strengthening ties with regional actors in order to secure stability in North East Asia, high bellicose emphasis. Simultaneously, closer relations with Unites States were combined with a detachment from the Sunshine Policy, where peace with the DPRK should be necessary paired with denuclearisation.

nuclear state posture, and Park insisting on denuclearisation, alongside the suspension of joint economic activities in the Keasong plants. The atmosphere characterising the table of negotiations comprised, following Snyder's (2018) words, "North Korean favourite tactics: threats, brinkmanship, and extortion-like demands for greater financial support" (North Korean Policy in Practice Section, para. 2).

Despite a more active engagement with North Korea, Russia and China decided to revise their approach towards the country: in the case of the PRC, elite advisors of Xi Jinping pressured to harden its line, and such demonstration was welcomed also in Washington. Embracing the sanctions and carrying out investigations on commercial terms with North Korea are part of the Chinese answer, as well as suspensions of bank businesses, in the name of a firm attitude and internal stability (Hur, 2018). However, the Chinese position aiming to stand alongside the US can be defined as nominal, considering the soft-balancing capability of North Korea in this situation, since according to Y. Kim (2020), the PRC has seconded the country commercially and providing a flux of capital activity that permitted the development of the nuclear arsenal. On the other hand, Russia found an opportunity to ameliorate its relations with the DPRK, almost removing the total debt it had towards the former USSR and starting economic joint projects. As Ponomareva and Rudov (2016) remark, uneven exchanges between the two countries have been noticed throughout the post-Cold War period, mixing favourable and unfavourable opinions towards the nuclear issue: denuclearisation has been supported by Moscow, while simultaneously it endorsed the concern of national security in the North East Asia, comprising also North Korea.

Throughout the period between the third nuclear test and the fourth one, performed in January 2016, the application of *byŏngjin* principles concretised, meaning a complete development of the nuclear arsenal as a deterrence strategy, as Pardo (2019) stresses. Meanwhile

frictions progressed towards the ROK and provocations to the US. In 2014, the tension with South Korea increased after the announcement of a fourth nuclear test, paired with evidence of a North Korean micro aggression with bombing in South Korean waters, and as a consequence the ROK reacted on the 30th and the 31st of March. Throughout 2015, North Korean declarations served as intimidations to the international community, underlining its last successes concerning the development of nuclear bellicose technologies. However, the investigations concerning the capabilities of the country seem to debunk these statements. Indeed, North Korea conducted tests during May, claiming them to be efficient according to the expectations, despite evidence of few fiascos. These reassurances soon disappeared as the DPRK reactivated the Yongbyon implant on the 15th of September, and followed the fourth nuclear test in January and the fifth one in September 2016, whose detonation was also perceived by the South Korean Agency of Meteorology, as Napoleoni (2018) provides. The resonance of these actions generated further sanctions by the UN security council, and the impact of the experiment alarmed the international community. However, as S. C. Kim & Cohen (2017) points out, the system of blackmailing enacted by North Korea still can be defined unconvincing, and at this point of the narration it exhausted the 'strategic patience' of the Obama Administration, that concretely engaged in more intense military drills. Security in North East Asia remains a priority, and instability creates further concerns in other grounds, such as financial stability hindering the flux of capitals, or the political image, shaping the public opinion and the reception of the threats by citizens. Continuous provocations and the presence of a deadlock seem to show the weak side of the administration in charge, in South Korea, in the United States, in Japan and so forth, while dealing with the DPRK, and it can be interpreted in this way by other small powers pursuing nuclearisation.

Changes under the Trump Administration and the Moon Mandate

Once abandoned the strategic patience of Obama, under the Trump Administration the approach to North Korea became the opposite, with aggressive rhetoric and strong pressure on the adversary. A sign of discontinuity could be envisaged in his earlier announcements on Twitter¹⁷ concerning the situation in North East Asia, before being elected President in 2016: criticism against the ROK receiving protection, depicted as a unilateral effort and expenditure, and against China and the Obama Administration, blamed for being excessively loose towards the nuclear threat, with an emphasis on the importance of denuclearisation, while aiming to nuclear weapons to fight back military threats.

As Trump took office in January 2017, the premises translated in his foreign policy towards the DPRK, that continued its missile launches and menaces against the United States. This brought about an innovative attitude never explored so far: a continuous escalation made of direct provocations on Twitter by Trump, and the consequent replies of the DPRK through announcements. The main event of 2017 can be once again the sixth nuclear test on the 3rd of September, whose potential exceeded the previous ones, and was used as a tool for internal political consolidation and as a manifestation of the pressure by Washington, testifying a maximisation of its brinkmanship orientation and avoiding a multilateral approach (Pardo, 2019).

Considering what has been discussed until 2017, the deadlock on the overall nuclear issue evolved in its approach, with a more direct confidence and belligerence from the United States, while remaining imprecise on its concretisation as Murakami (2018) stresses. Different UN resolutions¹⁸, applied so far and again on this occasion, were not able to hinder or stop the

¹⁷ A complete chronology can be found on Napoleoni (2018, Appendix A)

¹⁸ The entire list providing the criteria of sanctions can be retrieved from United Nations' website: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718>

process, also considering the mechanisms the DPRK applied to avoid their enforcement (Napoleoni, 2018¹⁹). Nonetheless, after one last provocative intercontinental ballistic missile test (Hwasong-15), on the 28th of November, 2017, the 2018 represents a crucial year as Kim Jong-un engaged in his first official visit abroad to China between the 25th and the 28th of March²⁰, a summit with President Moon Jae-in on the 27th of April, and with President Trump, a meeting that then took place on the 12th of June.

The surprise visit of Chairman Kim represented a prelude, providing the Chinese claim and assurance of North Korean intention to denuclearise, a necessary condition and offer to engage in a dialogue. Alongside discussions on common issues and cooperation, the positive remarks to General Secretary Xi, aimed at peace guarantees and stability gave an elan to the meetings that follow (Sigal, 2020, p.171).

The new presidency in South Korea currently in charge, after the impeachment of Park Geun-hye in March 2017, opted for a new attitude, based on opening peace dialogues and inter-Korean summits that represented a core on its foreign policy. A window for opportunity was the Winter Olympic Games held in Pyeongchang in 2018, where a delegation from the DPRK was sent and the sister of the leader, Kim Yo-jong, was sent to represent him under the core message of a unified Korea, reaching a level of appeasement never experienced before. In this light, the summit between the ‘two Koreas’ took precedence over the unexpected announcement of President Trump to a future meeting with Kim Jong-un in March 2018. North Korea stressed its intention to pursue denuclearisation only if peace is undertaken. However, besides positive messages from the actors involved, and considering the previous failed at-

¹⁹ Further discussions on sanctions and the North Korean response can be found in the following Chapter 3.

²⁰ Other rounds were held during 2018 and 2019: the second meeting on May, 7th and 8th, the third one on June, 19th and 20th, the fourth one on January, from the 7th to the 10th, and the last and fifth one, during June, 20th and 21st.

tempts to investigate the status of nuclear programs, such as the investigations under the IAEA, the promises remained imprecise (Doyle, 2019). The attempted approach sought a gradual line, in order to ensure stable commitment. The Moon Administration, as mentioned before, concretised its effort during the end of April 2018, meeting in the Joint Security Area (JSA) of DMZ, and in another meeting on 27 May. The DPRK and the ROK, as a continuation of the progressive orientation of the Kim Dae-jun and Roh Administration (Sigal, 2020, p.173), discussed common issues: denuclearisation, economic cooperation, peace, unifications and de-escalation of military tensions. The last meeting organised between the 18th and the 20th of September served to assess the previous talks and to implement the Panmunjom Declaration on Peace, Prosperity and Reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

The aftermath resulted in a joint action in the last months of 2018, comprising the removal of the residual landmines dating back to the Korean War at the 38th parallel, as well as guard posts, and a major portion of armed soldiers at the JSA. The Special Economic Industrial Area in Kaesong was restored, sport and health related cooperation was enhanced, and further meetings of divided families were agreed upon.

After the first two summits, in June the first summit between the DPRK and the US was held in Singapore, as the first occasion of an official meeting between the two leaders of these nations, with the aim to pursue diplomatic relations. North Korea presented different points as goals in the summit, such as changing the armistice of 1953 into a peace treaty, the common requests related to the joint drills of the US and the ROK, guarantees of national security and non-aggression by the US, as well as the removal of the nuclear arsenal in the proximity of the country. A plausible reason behind the unconventional decision of Kim Jong-un to seek ties with the US can be, according to Pardo (2019), the fact that during his leadership the DPRK experienced its boost in developing its nuclear programs ensuring a certain possibility

of defence. During the one-day meeting, Trump recognised the aggressive nature of joint military drills, claiming the intention to suspend them and remove 32000 soldiers (Cloud, 2018) against the interruption of the anti-American campaign by the DPRK and the repatriation of MIA/POW according to the joint statement issued during the summit. These main points had to be implemented in the following months.

Despite positive remarks throughout 2019, the nuclear issue continues throughout the 2019, under the format of diplomatic summits, while reaching the notorious question, whether denuclearisation is possible, or if some progress has been achieved in 2020, and future hopes.

The second summit between the DPRK and the US took place in Hanoi in February 2019, and it was a confirmation of the points assessed in the previous occasion, with a concomitant attempt at implementing the aimed gradual denuclearisation. On the other hand, the DPRK asked to soften the sanctions. However, the overall result, compared to the aftermath of the previous meeting, can be far considered a success, translating into a mutual hard bargaining of “all or nothing” with an emphasis on the requests to the other party, and a minor willingness to concessions (Nishino, 2019, p.155).

The current crisis of COVID-19 hindered the common approach to the nuclear issue, as well as North Korea decided to isolate definitely since the 20th of January 2020, as the pandemic started spreading. During general global lockdowns, claims by the leadership of the DPRK, through KCNA (Korean Central News Agency), of a disengagement of the promises stressed so far. Already at the end of the year, in December 2019, North Korea condemned the line of the US, blamed not to maintain its ambitions to normalise bilateral relations and to pursue its own diplomatic interests (Sigal, 2020, p.164-165). A few intimidations during April 2020 displayed the weak nature of the results achieved until now. An open window was left to

further developments of the nuclear issue and to new details concerning the deadlock, although not its solution.

Chapter 3: Economic Implications of the Nuclear Issue

Outlining the economic panorama. The economy of the DPRK can be considered a minor competitor in the global economy, despite official records that are unavailable due to its secrecy. No official record can be found on IMF, World Bank and OECD. However, recent information, such as the database of CIA estimating North Korea to be ranked 214th out of 228 countries in the GDP per capita, and the last statistics available, provided by the National Accounts Section of the United Nations, prove a decrease in its economy, with a growth rate of -4,1% in 2018, following the contraction of -3.5% in the previous year. As Cha (2018) stresses, common depictions of the media, such as CNN, show the public a misfortunate nation. This strategy is defined as ‘survival economy’ (Napoleoni, 2018), a term often used also in depicting the behaviour of the country from the political perspective (Cha, 2018; Lankov, 2013). Such term lies in the fact that the North enjoyed a conspicuous help from the Soviet Union and it could count on the mineral resources of the territory, ensuring a certain degree of stability, while the United States endorsed a country mainly agricultural through aid that appeared rationed, to a certain extent, if compared to the economic relationship between the USSR and the DPRK (Cha, 2018). Thus, it can be possible to affirm the DPRK lived its golden age thanks to its benefactor, a period of time that permitted the country to realise its main infrastructures and to guarantee to its citizens a good level of free basic healthcare, while continuing to increase its wealth under Kim Il-sung, as Lankov affirms (2013).

The dependency on other superpowers, the USSR and in some occasions the PCR during Kim Il-sung, hit the country with the collapse of the former. Already in the 1970s and the 1980s the gap separating the ‘two Koreas’ decreased and the ROK paved its way to become one of the ‘Asian Tigers’. In the classical framework created under the Cold War paradigm,

indeed, the DPRK and the ROK found themselves in a competition (Cha, 2018). North Korea experienced a slowdown in the economy throughout the 1970s. As Haggard and Noland (2007) point out, the premises could be found in the atypical structure of the national economy and its aspirations, since the DPRK could count on a heavy industry due to its resources, while the autarkic objective, specifically concerning being self-sufficient on the food side, met a natural obstacle. Primary-sector based imports constituted a disadvantage that in the following decades would grow, as well as other aspects concerning dysfunctionalities: as Cavanaugh (2017) stresses, the consumerist economy remained lower compared to the Soviet standards since the independence of the country, while the massive amounts allocated to military expenditures and propagandistic goals, a lack of specialisation or time given to expertise in the scientific field, and the limited international exchanges became a more acute problem in the 90s. Alongside these factors, the demographic discrepancy with the ROK, as the majority of the population was located in the South, and a ruling elite that was more prepared on the bellicose viewpoint rather than on the economic one, led to a deficient functional planning, and reforms that lacked of efficient results.

Origins of the Economic Difficulties

The DPRK, as it will follow, finds itself in constrained circumstances that should be handled in 'unconventional ways' from the economic perspective. Starting from Väyrynen and Cortright (2013), who correlate security concerns to the 'necessity' of nuclear deterrence as an instrument to enhance the role of the country internationally, and following the traditional dichotomy in political terms, it is possible to reflect on the challenges posed by a multipolar world in the economic field. At a global level, nuclearisation has become more complex in its resolution, and reveals a further vulnerability of the issue: the void created by the demise of

the Soviet Union. As this argument can be applied to security concerns, it can be also demonstrated under an economic viewpoint.

As the Korean peninsula was divided, after the Korean War, the DPRK could be defined, as Lankov stresses (2013), the most industrialised economy in the East Asian region after Japan, and its wealth under Kim Il-sung was guaranteed by its two important allies, the USSR and the PRC, through enormous amounts of capital: as Cha (2018) stresses, after the conflict the DPRK received a conspicuous help, approximately \$250 million, and mitigated its debts concerning the initial financial aid received after the foundation of the country in 1948. The initial model, the centrally planned economy, gave a short-term efficient output.

As Guo (2017) explains, however, the premises of this orientation created friction in the overall development: the intrusion of the state hindered the flexibility of the market, as well as the creativity that would be necessary to produce competition and a better performance, blocking the investigation of further paths to create wealth and innovation. At the same time, differences under the social rank spectrum (the *songbun* system) lead to discrimination in possibilities. Moreover, it is worthy to mention the precarious specialisation of those who were in charge: Napoleoni (2018) observes that the leadership and its officers, composed of former soldiers and farmers, lacked knowledge in its management, providing rigid and improvised responses to possible changes, and only the flux of funds from its benefactors granted its survival. The war, indeed, destroyed a plethora of infrastructures, but the initial advantage compared to the South was also based on the reuse of constructions dating back to the Japanese occupation, mainly built in the North, which created a remarkable basis for the economic orientation toward the heavy industry, which warranted an annual conspicuous growth, instead of focusing on consumption that resulted unbalanced (Buzo, 2020).

Such an unbalance can be also found in the model, per se, as growth under the Soviet model can be defined as extensive, thus based on continuous increase of investments and human capital (Kotkin, 2010, p.87), the first provided by Moscow. Therefore, the eighties represented a turning point, when it was possible to observe the reduced gap with the South, which eventually surpassed the performance of the DPRK, even if a remarkable slowdown could be observed since the 1970s, to be summed to the influence of decreased funding from the Soviet.

The endemic subsidising taking different forms hindered even small amounts of autonomy, and this factor became more evident after the ‘good old days’. According to Napoleoni (2018), the governmental program based on the rationing of natural resources and collective lands under a public system of distribution failed, moving from the pursuit of a full-centralised management of the resources to a semi-private one, since the population could not live on it, especially when it faced shortages. This specifically applies to the average population and rural areas, as the ruling class and high-middle class in Pyongyang could secure a well-off living standard, despite the many hardships suffered by the nation.

A full opening of the economy never concretised, and currently the DPRK is still considered a non-market economy (Rhee & Messerlin, 2020). The bipolar frame of the Cold War guaranteed a certain degree of trade with the Soviet bloc, but despite its demise and the North Korean efforts to engage with other countries, the US Trading With the Enemy Act of 1917 was never removed since its application to North Korea in 1950, cutting out the nation from exchanges with the Western world (Guo, 2017). The DPRK attempted an overture already in the 1970s, following the Chinese example after the visit of President Nixon in 1972, possible under the condition of a removal of the US troops from the South (De Benedittis, 2016b). Previous episodes of microaggressions towards the South and the US were negatively per-

ceived and hindered the process, as well as the clause under which the prohibition of trade was applied was not fulfilled, since the peace in the peninsula was never achieved²¹.

The 1990s represented a difficult decade because the country experienced famines, floods and the political crisis as Kim Il-sung passed away, transitioning to Kim Jong-il. Under the new leader, the country authorised partial privatisation, but the socialist orientation regarding the public and cooperative ownership prevailed in the main industries, especially in the military, as the core heavy industry (Hartley & Belin, 2019). Private marginal profits, in particular in agriculture and in consumption goods, are permitted, however the means of productions, prices and profits are established at constitutional level (Cavalieri, 2008). The consequences of mismanagement with the collapse of the Soviet world are still currently visible. Despite the efforts to open it to commerce with other countries, the nation remains an unattractive place for investments and to trade with, regardless political reasons.

Table 1

Statistics (1970—2018).

| Years | GDP growth rate | IMF based exchange rate/\$ |
|-----------|-----------------|------------------------------|
| 1971-1975 | 10.4 | 2.57 |
| 1976-1980 | 4.1 | 2.57 |
| 1981-1985 | 3.7 | 2.57, 2.12, 2.20, 2.40, 2.50 |
| 1986-1989 | 1.4 | 2.26, 2.18, 2.20, 2.20 |
| 1990 | -4.3 | 2.17 |
| 1991 | -4.4 | 2.15 |

²¹ In 1968, the DPRK organised an attack toward the Blue House, the presidential residence in the ROK, that eventually failed. In the same year, another aggression against the US, kidnapping the personnel on board of the military ship ‘US Pueblo’, then released after negotiating one year. It followed the blasting of an American spotter plane to celebrate the Great Leader’s birthday (De Benedittis, 2016b).

| | | |
|------|------|--------|
| 1992 | -7.1 | 2.10 |
| 1993 | -4.5 | 2.12 |
| 1994 | -2.1 | 2.13 |
| 1995 | -4.4 | 2.15 |
| 1996 | -3.4 | 2.15 |
| 1997 | -6.5 | 2.15 |
| 1998 | -0.9 | 2.15 |
| 1999 | 6.1 | 2.15 |
| 2000 | 0.4 | 2.15 |
| 2001 | 3.8 | 2.15 |
| 2002 | 1.2 | 150.00 |
| 2003 | 1.8 | 150.00 |
| 2004 | 2.1 | 150.00 |
| 2005 | 3.8 | 138.25 |
| 2006 | -1 | 141.32 |
| 2007 | -1.2 | 139.07 |
| 2008 | 3.1 | 139 |
| 2009 | -0.9 | 139 |
| 2010 | -0.5 | 100.80 |
| 2011 | 0.8 | 96.45 |
| 2012 | 1.3 | 100.26 |
| 2013 | 1.1 | 98.92 |
| 2014 | 1 | 98.74 |
| 2015 | -1.1 | 107.56 |
| 2016 | 3.9 | 107.75 |
| 2017 | -3.5 | 107.74 |
| 2018 | -4.1 | 104.92 |

Note. Data available from nautilus.org and <https://unstats.un.org/unsd/snaama/CountryProfile>

As displayed through Table 1, it is possible to observe the rampant growth of the early 1970s, and then the rate falling sharply after the mid of the decade, still continuing with minor but positive values. As it proceeds, the information collected shows evidence of a slowdown, coinciding then with the decreased availability of aid in the 1980s from the USSR, as for the first time in 1990 the DPRK registers a negative value that will continue until the end of the century. It is possible to relate the collapse of its main patron, in 1992, to the steep contraction of the economy. During the following years, the country would deal with serious damages in the food sector, affected by the limited amount of energy available and precarious transport infrastructures (Cavanaugh, 2017). From 1999, the economy presents an unsteady recovery, recording small catch-up effects alternating other negative values, culminating with a progressive decline in the last years.

The last column shows the yearly average of exchange rate, composed of market, official and principle rates, i.e. referring to the value of North Korean won compared to the USD. The monetary authorities exert control of the currency, subjected to multiple rates and a fixed system. A significant change can be seen from 2002, with a move towards a floating exchange system and a strong devaluation in order to protect trade balance and to prevent further losses in the growth rate of the economy.

Moreover, from the international perspective, the first nuclear crisis brought about harsh sanctions that severely damaged the country, as well as the second one with the withdrawal of the country from the NPT. The country continued its nuclear activities, despite further measures accumulating alongside its infractions. Nevertheless, the DPRK tried to cope with the consequent difficulties by circumventing these penalties, and becoming a prolific actor in the global nuclear market.

The great imbalance: Defence and Military capacity

In the first chapter, the rhetoric used by the leaders, especially Kim Jong-il, emphasised the bellicose character of the country, as a means of pride and strength. The constant insistence on an anti-American attitude and the indoctrination of citizens prepared to face future attacks from the enemy is revealed in the outstanding importance of the defence sector, in its development and in its maintenance.

So far, the investigations that were carried out provided a profile of the DPRK as a prolific seller of military technology and assistance. The revenues obtained through this business guarantee conspicuous funds that result in further national military spending. The few official records, dating back to the period of the rise in sanctions, hardly correspond to the actual capabilities of the country. According to the United Nations Register of Conventional arms, North Korea had only military trade exchanges with Belarus and Russia. Indeed, the database formulates data according to a given country's availability in declaring its purchases: Belarus provided 19 battle tanks in 1992, and two combat aircrafts in 1998, while Russia declared in 2000 to have sold to the country ten armoured combat vehicles, and in the following year another supply of 22 units. However, an overall military balance by Cordesman and Ayers (2017) demonstrates a complete vision of the ability of the country (in quantity and not necessarily quality, as they precise), while making a comparison with the ROK in the following table:

Table 2

Conventional military capability of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

| Soldiers | Army equipment | Navy | Air force | Soldiers in reserve |
|----------|----------------|------|-----------|---------------------|
|----------|----------------|------|-----------|---------------------|

| | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-----------|--------|-----|-------|-----------|
| Democratic People's Republic of Korea | 1,200,000 | 21,000 | 820 | 1,650 | 7,700,000 |
| Republic of Korea | 650,000 | 10,900 | 160 | 1,360 | 3,100,000 |

Note. These data are a summary of Figure II.1 by Cordesman and Ayers (2017, p. 81). The term army comprises tanks, armoured vehicles, cannons, MLRS, missile launchers, while navy refers to ships and submarines.

The defence sector, as well as other sectors aimed at the well functioning of the former, experienced no decline of investments and focus in the economic framework, thus guaranteeing the capabilities displayed above. The DPRK ranks first among the most militarised country per capita²² (Lankov, 2013) and as the one investing the largest portion of GDP per capita in military expenditures and armed forces personnel in the eleven-year period 2007-2017 (Buchholz, 2019). This report, submitted in 2019, observes that the country allocated to the military from the 13.4% to the 23.3% of its GDP: estimating the GDP average in eleven years at \$15,42 billion, it would correspond to an amount ranging from \$2.06 billion to \$3.59 billion, using the available data of UN Statistics Division. As Hartley and Belin (2019) suggest, the importance of the defence sector started to increase massively from the 1970s, with a national production designed on imitation of Soviet and Chinese technology: armoured vehicles (T-59, T-62), aircrafts (MI-2 helicopters, Yak-18 jet trainer, MIG-21 jet fighter) and missiles, whose production increased since the 2000s. This specific attention of the country had no stop despite the difficulties experienced during the 1990s, when the country, devastated by the famine, the floods and the severe economic crisis, started to receive food aid from the international community, through the World Food Programme (still ongoing), that was

²² The DPRK counts 25,5 million inhabitants, according to the World Bank (2018), while the ROK 51,64 million.

interpreted to replace internal efforts, rather than as a reserve. As Cha (2018) stresses, in the same period the North Korean government continued to massively devolve resources to the defence, approximately 25 percent, as well as to import military technology.

The core military industries, located in underground sites as a prevention of damages in a potential conflict, as Hartley and Belin (2019) claim, include the Munitions one comprising activities such as:

assemble and manufacture guns, artillery, ammunition, tanks and warships, munitions parts factories that manufacture weapons parts; and ordinary military supplies factories that manufacture military supplies such as uniforms, military shoes and accessories (The current position Section, para.1).

Secondly, the military sector includes infrastructures related to the manufacture of chemical weapons as well as plants committed to nuclear development. All the activities related to the defence are subordinated to the Korean Workers' Party supervision, whose institutions, the Central Committee and the General Staff Department, operating in a two-sided coordination, guarantee the functionalities of the sector (Bermudez, 2017). Finally, the remaining portion of the defence budget is devoted to the army, its training, assistance and maintenance, since the sector represents a comfortable source of income for those enrolled, with higher salaries and incentives compared to the income of the North Korean average population.

Sanctions and their Implications

Sanctions can hinder the margin of manoeuvre of a country and are often used as a direct political weapon to induce the adversary to change its attitude on a given issue. They can be successful, leading the country on which they are applied to act according to the hoped behaviour, while, on the other hand, they can trigger mechanisms to deceive them, or to insist

in the criticisable attitudes, namely they can be used as a negotiation card to claim the hostile line of the applicant, which can be seen as an obstacle of the talks, per se. Thus, the DPRK refused a further participation in a multilateral format such as SPT until the removal of the UN resolutions.

Sanctions can be considered on an individual basis, as an expensive financial penalty, trying to create difficulties in managing businesses of a nation affecting a sector or more, or else they have the figurative result of damaging the country as it would lose money in financing a military conflict with those deciding to impose them, according to the definition of Nephew (2017). As this paradigm additionally provides, in a war the two sides are equally involved in investing in military expenditures, while the use of sanctions avoids the tragedies of military intervention, such as deaths, casualties, MIA, POW and so forth, and guarantees the same outcome to damage the economy, especially for minor economies. The DPRK can be categorised under this group, while being dependent on China in trade terms, and not vice versa with another country.

Sanctions, therefore, can be considered under two perspectives, as Taylor (2012) exemplifies, a negative one, following Galtung's reasoning, or an efficient one, implying a symbolic meaning or providing a concrete effect. Firstly, bypassing sanctions is an option available for the sanctioned country, through trade modifications of the economic apparatus opting for a self-reliance orientation. North Korea as a country cannot sustain itself, as mentioned above, from the agricultural viewpoint, relying on China and unilateral aid from the ROK. Another factor that brings about an unsuccessful aftermath can be the political system of the nation, per se. As previously mentioned, an authoritarian state, differently from democracies, is likely to control the economic resources, thus it can modify its assets and the distribution in an easier way and can lead to an exacerbation of the propagandistic machine fuelling the vi-

cious circle of being threatened by foreign superpowers (Do & Lee, 2017), especially considering the strong censorship enacted by the government and the lack of opponents. In this regard, nevertheless, damages were produced, but compliance of ratified conventions, such as the Chemical Weapons one, or commitments related to the denuclearisation still could not be addressed.

Secondly, following Taylor (2012), in the ramification considering sanctions as a useful instrument, sanctions represent a moral counteraction where military intervention is not taken, internationally or regionally, because of lack of resources or high-cost implications. The emblematic use can work if a multilateral side endorses them, as the affected country would be in a constrained situation without allies. This is hardly the case of the DPRK. Sanctions can be successful if properly planned or targeted, damaging the party, while trying to avoid affecting first-necessity sectors, namely the so-called ‘smart sanctions’. Imports under unilateral aid from foreign countries are not included in this framework, meaning that usually the intent is to exclude the humanitarian help the nation is receiving. However, in Taylor’s theory (2012), the sanctions themselves can appear as a paradox, as simultaneously condemning and damaging the country, and fuelling the critical issues, because of a lack of total or partial compliance by both the target and those who are supporting it.

Analysing the Effects of Sanctions

Smart sanctions, theoretically, can function pushing for the capitulation or reaction. Following Nephew’s reasoning (2017), this effect can be present in both cases: as Lankov (2016) stresses, the majority of citizens will face the consequences, exposing the fallacy in the declarations of diplomats under this typology, since the workers and the employees of coal or iron companies will have a consequent reduced salary. Moreover, as Napoleoni (2018) re-

marks, the average population ‘adjusted’ according to a self-sufficient principle, as the government reacts cutting public expenditures and will opt to obtain its imports acting as a black marketeer, paying in cash rather than traceable bank transactions, but this benefit will entail a small part of the population, fuelling the vicious circle. Furthermore, the propaganda can hide the management of the investments made in different sectors and, thus, strengthen the mechanism.

The economic difficulties perceived by the citizens are essentially to be blamed on the sanctions as demonstrated by D’Angelo (2020, 10:01): while discussing during his journey with his North Korean guide about the energy burdens and resources of the country, which is “suffering plenty of deficiencies”, also considering the lack of trade and capital entries. Indeed, this can be true, as Berger (2017) clarifies, since the UN sanctions pushed North Korea to consolidate its role and its notoriousness in the global market of weapons, providing devices and services, through diplomatic offices abroad, comprising clients such as Nigeria²³, Israel, Egypt, Yemen, Libya and so forth.

According to an expert survey in 2017 whose participants are academics, sanctions created an opposite effect considering that they were imposed because of illicit nuclear proliferation: Park considered the approach of the international community as mere condemnation, without concretising a resolution to stop North Korea to develop its programs. As Zhang claims, sanctions seem to be an inefficient strategy to apply, although they represent the sole step enforceable. The DPRK would refuse to renounce its goal of national security, pursuing a defensive intention rather than offensive, following Cai’s reasoning (Hotham, 2017).

²³ The proliferation of arms trade with Nigeria, comprising missile technology, dates back to 2003 and 2004. Although the intention of starting a cooperation has been sealed only through the inscription of a memorandum, further evidence has not been provided (NTI)

The 2017 represented the toughest year in regard to the number of sanctions imposed after the sixth nuclear test on the 3rd of September and ICBM tests conducted in the proximity of the Japanese area. On the 5th of August, the UNSCR 2371 was approved and piled up on the previous one, penalising the country in banking and financial activities, imports and exports of weapons and exports of minerals and iron. The new provision consisted of prohibitions concerning exports of seafood, lead and coal, and most significantly it applied on hiring further North Korean workers abroad. Additionally, in the next month, on the 11th of September, as a response to the nuclear test, with the Resolution 2375 new bans applied to North Korean joint ventures, exports of textile and import energy resources, and the work of its citizens abroad was prohibited, tightening the previous measure. Once again, the Resolution 2379, expelled directly the workers established already in a foreign country, as well as forbade every export and imposed stricter prohibitions on import on machines and industrial products. According to Carbaugh and Ghosh (2019, p.138), the card played on North Koreans working abroad let emerge an interesting aspect of how the DPRK can obtain a portion of its entries, revealing a weakness of its economy, the need of a constant flux of hard currency. Nevertheless, the expulsion had some difficulties in implementation, as it is possible to observe through the following table concerning the number of workers still abroad according to the last estimations of 2020, despite the issuing of UNSCR 2379.

Table 3

Workers of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the world in 2020.

| Country/Continent | Number estimated | |
|-------------------|------------------|--|
| Africa | 1500> | |
| Asia | 2500> | |

| | | |
|---------------------------------|---------|--|
| Europe (only Malta and Belarus) | N/A | Evidence of DPRK workers in Belarus, without any specification, and dozens in Malta. |
| North America | N/A | No workers are present. |
| Oceania (only Guinea) | N/A | Evidence of DPRK workers, although the country still has to prove the implementation of sanctions |
| Popular Republic of China | 50.000> | |
| Russian Federation | 1.000> | |
| South America (only Uruguay) | N/A | No estimation, the country is working on repatriating the fishermen, according to its last notice. |

Note. Some countries are counted separately considering the high number of people registered. The real number can be difficult to assess considering lack of reporting of the respective governments, updating the data available or evidence of North Korean workers without specifying the quantity, or even illegal workers. In this table the countries that declared to have interrupted working ties are not taken into account. Information based on <https://www.northkoreaintheworld.org/economic/north-korean-overseas-workers>

From the smallest scale, the tourists admitted visiting the country are not allowed to exchange their national currency for the North Korean won, unlike other soft currencies available, instead they are encouraged to spend using it. As Napoleoni (2018) remarks, discussing legal activities, exports were possible since the 1990s, while the joint-ventures, mainly with China, ensured a workforce obtaining the needed money. This desired result of the sanctions was due to several investigations performed by analysts to understand the effects of the previous measures. So far, North Korea could contain significant damages: it opened to more privatised small businesses, it granted itself an annual economic growth, despite an internal pauperism concerning most of the citizens and resulting in making the DPRK an undesirable country to invest in (Zakharova, 2019, p. 201). Currently, despite the promises made by the Trump administration of lifting the sanctions and dating back to 2019, North Korea is still officially penalised.

The use of sanctions has not only served as a penalisation by international institutions, it also entailed the intention to create a change in the behaviour of Pyongyang. As the DPRK agreed to engage in a dialogue with the United States, decreasing or softening the sanctions were viable possibilities. As Taylor (2012) stresses, the uneven character of the SPT depended on this strategic application: North Korea accepted the conditions and performed according to the expectations because of the promise of lifting this constraint, which was finalised in 2008 by President Bush, despite the interruption in 2009. However, this operation represented a short-term solution as soon as other provocations emerged and were fully followed by the proponents.

The limits of this kind of measures can be detected in every attempt to restrain the country since the end of the Korean War with embargoes and so forth, as the country managed to face bankruptcies and survive. For example, as Do and Lee (2017) point out, the role of China, detaining the 90% of the trade volume of the DPRK, creates friction in this mechanism: on the one hand, it supports actively this imposition, but on the other, its enforcement remains loose, as the DPRK should be targeted only for its violations, being a counterpart of the alliance between the US and the ROK. Despite the contraction of the trade volume, Noland (2019) states that some data can be vague in the interpretation, pointing out misreporting by the PRC, excluding activities related to the black market or smuggling, that remained stable, or highlighting that the country prepared to paper over the eventual shocks beforehand the enforcement of the sanctions, importing massively the needed resources.

The regime enacted different remedies to contain the effects of sanctions from Kim Jong-il's era, in the 1990s, such as falsifications of import-export account books (Napoleoni, 2018). For this reason, some scholars have defined the corrupted system as a hidden economy. Another example concerned the "surprise currency reform", as Joo (2014, p.59) observes,

when people were encouraged to exchange money until a certain amount was kept outside official bank accounts, and eventually all the funds disappeared.

One of the problems that creates concern at the international level is the proliferation of nuclear armaments in other countries, an issue that is usually downplayed by the attention to threats of a nuclear war or just possessing a nuclear arsenal. This leads to the next section, describing how the DPRK can ensure a conspicuous amount of money, covering the multifaceted implications hidden behind the main issue.

Collateral Effects: The arms Trade in the Mass Media

As Bechtol (2018a) declares, the discussion on the issue concerning the DPRK selling nukes to other critical countries that aim at nuclearising or arming themselves, has had a marginal role in academic research, mass media and policy making. Downplaying the proliferation coincides with underestimating the nuclear war, per se, and the dimension that the problem can assume as a global threat. Furthermore, the average public perception of the problem, due to superficial coverage of media lacking of detailed analysis, has been proved to lead to unrealistic interpretations, according to surveys and research about the public knowledge and the possible scenarios concerning a conflict against the DPRK performed by Haworth, Sagan and Valentino, (2019). They stress that the pessimistic experts' opinion contrasts the belief of the general public in the “75 percent probability that a US conventional strike would successfully destroy all of North Korea’s nuclear weapons, eliminating North Korea’s ability to retaliate” (Haworth, Sagan & Valentino, 2019, p. 182). This would lead to the following Table 4, an experiment illustrating the attention given by main news broadcast corporations to DPRK arms trade. The aim is to display the attention given to the nuclear threats, rather than focusing on actual nuclear proliferation (2) and armaments proliferation (3). The latter 2) and 3)

results concern both nuclear and weapon dealing, while the last parameter (4) shows how many articles are actually mentioning the topics (summing up results in column 2 and 3).

Table 4

Mass media interest in the DPRK arms trade.

| News media | 1) N° of results under “North Korea nuclear war” | 2) N° of results under “North Korea selling nukes” | 3) N° of results under “North Korea proliferation” | 4) Actual articles dealing with North Korean engagement in importing or exporting weapons |
|------------------|--|--|--|---|
| CNN (US) | 1554 | 9 | 206 | 5 |
| Fox News (US) | 3970 | 551 | 541 | 5 |
| Korea Times (KR) | 890 | 13 | 122 | 4 |
| Al Jazeera (QA) | 100* | 100* | 41 | 15 |

Note. The table has been elaborated using the search engine on their respective website as for November 2020. The results have been ranked according to the relevance, rather than the date, and where the number of results exceeded 100, only the first ten pages of online articles have been checked.

*Al Jazeera website does not display more than ten pages of results, each providing ten articles, thus the broad number can exceed.

While searching under the first parameter, North Korea nuclear war, the algorithm displayed accurate matching with the topic, providing updates concerning all the negotiations made so far, alongside all the intimidations between the DPRK and US, concerns of every country directly interested, adding to the list China, Russia, South Korea and Japan. Moreover, all the general diplomatic efforts regarding de-escalation of nuclear threats, opinions, editorials and so forth addressing the country dominate the scene in communicating the up-

dates. Nevertheless, the second and the third filters applied separately demonstrate a less precise range of content that might be blamed on the website. Thus, the fourth column shows the marginal presence of North Korea as an active actor in the global arms market.

Despite a marginal focus that could be deepened through more detailed academic research, the mass public cannot be properly addressed about the collateral effects of sanctions and negotiations. Nevertheless, the problem matters and fuels further problematic issues. Among the few results collected from CNN, a complete article citing Susan A. Thornton, Assistant Secretary of the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs. It tackles the investigation of illegal traffic of weapons from the DPRK to Syria and Iran, as well as the concerns of the international community about North Korea as a significant player in the proliferation: Gen. Paul Selva, Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, while denying evidence of the export of ICBM, added “but they have proliferated every other weapons system that they've ever invented” (“Could North Korea help Iran develop nuclear weapons?”, 2017).

Secondly, Fox News mentioned the exchange of missile technology between Iran and the DPRK, exposing the concern that has been stressed by many analysts and the necessity to prevent a worst-case scenario also in the Middle East (“Iran will soon have ICBMs armed with nukes by way of North Korea. Team Trump must act now”, 2017). Alongside these statements, an article mentions a UN report drafted by experts providing information of the North Korean breach of imposed sanctions, shipping equipment to Yemen, Libya and Sudan: “North Korea attempted to sell small arms and light weapons and other military equipment via foreign intermediaries, including Syrian arms traffickers” (“UN experts: NKorea hasn't stopped nuke and missile programs”, 2018).

The Korea Times, on the one hand provides an insightful coverage of all the details concerning the negotiations, as well as all the implications of regional and national security,

South Korea being the direct area to be exposed, but on the other, offers only a few details on the bonds with other actors concerned with illicit proliferation. Despite the small number of articles found on the issue, the one written by Donald Kirk (2020) provides a deeper explanation in comparison with the other media mentioned above. Kirk, supporting his information on Bechtol's research, points out once again the link with Iran, not only connected through a commercial relation based on technology and service, but also sharing the same scientist for creating the devices, the Pakistani nuclear physicist Abdul Qadeer Khan. Further disclosures deal with the transportation of armaments, both by sea and by air, through Chinese and Pakistani involvement, using the aircrafts of the first and arriving at the latter. The cooperation lies in the fact that China is providing military help to Pakistan, both countries are important buyers of Iranian oil, as well as North Korea, which receives it through China.

Lastly, Al Jazeera provided more content concerning the North Korean ties with other countries, such as India, where some citizens went by train in Dehradun at the Centre for Space and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP), eventually becoming the personnel involved in the development of a nuclear arsenal ("India's embarrassing North Korean connection", 2016). Further articles report the White House allegations on Syria, whose nuclear activities are to be related to the help of the DPRK ("US statement on Syria nuclear links", 2008), and the participation of the latter in arming Syria under Assad, according to Gillespie (2018). These move the attention away from nuclear technology and criticise the danger concerning the skyrocketing sums of money that conventional weapons create.

Despite this modest, although revealing coverage, academic papers, experts, and niche or international affairs magazines balance the discrepancy, providing a complementary analysis of the contours of proliferation, usually passing unnoticed and in all cases remaining outnumbered.

The Almost Friends of the DPRK

The most evident form of proliferation blamed on North Korea concerns WMD and ICBM, a tool that allowed the country to create quasi-alliances around the world, going against the mainstream assumption defining it as the 'Hermit Kingdom'. The DPRK may represent an isolated actor in a trade framework of average commodities and services, but the military industry is not only a national pride as well as the threat used strategically in negotiations to be recognised to receive aid, it is also the finest sophistication in North Korean diplomacy. Nuclear and missiles proliferation constitutes a serious threat; however, as Betchol (2018a) observes, to this typology follow other three that should not be neglected: "(2) the conventional weapons sales, (3) refurbishment of Soviet-era weapons for countries that still use them, and (4) technical and military assistance and advising", where it is possible to find North Korean involvement in different countries, and with militant and terrorist organisations:

in recent years including Iran (ongoing), Syria (ongoing), Libya, Burma, Pakistan, Ethiopia (ongoing), and a plethora of countries in sub-Saharan Africa (ongoing). But it does not stop there. North Korea has proliferated weapons to non-state actors (and continues to do so) such as the Tamil Tigers, Hezbollah, Al-Shabab, and Hamas (Setting the Context Section, para.2).

The intense global attention and more stringent sanctions, as well as consequent monitoring, cannot facilitate eventual exchanges and diplomatic ties with the actors mentioned above, although it cannot represent a synonym of a definitive end of illicit activities. On the one hand, the convenient price can be a remarkable side, as it can be a window of opportunity for those who are not allies of the United States (Cumings, 2004). On the other, the DPRK seems not to keep high standards in the competition on this market, where the embargoes represent a hin-

dering factor for its commerce and its research program, resulting in backwardness. The demand is then eventually set to decrease, despite the recent progress (Berger, 2017).

However, there are still clients willing to put themselves in jeopardy softening their commitment with the sanctions. Among these ones, for example, the DPRK entertain ties in different countries in the African Horn, since the 1970s: according to geopolitical analyst and journalist Ramani (2018), Somalia, Eritrea and Ethiopia were involved in the purchase of weapons since the 1990s taking advantage from the regional upheavals. The attractive factor for these countries was the cheap cost of the equipment: behind the machine guns of Al-Shabaab, in Somalia, there was North Korea, as well as Eritrea and Ethiopia were buying its military technology, and these purchases continued despite admonitions by the United States and the risk to violate the sanctions. Ramani (2017) provides further evidence of additional ties of the DPRK in his coverage for *The Diplomat*, concerning Egypt and following the same pattern. Diplomatic exchanges date back to the NAM (Non-Alignment movement) and to the collaboration in military service against Israel during the Kippur War, sealed with Mubarak, then commander in 1973: relations continued under his presidency, based on investments, military devices and supervision in order to boost the domestic production in the 1990s, until nowadays, cultivating an interest, despite changes in the leadership, a pro-American facade and the rejection of nuclear proliferation in theoretical terms. The attention and interest of the DPRK towards this specific area relates to the decolonisation, when the sale of conventional weapons represented a profitable occasion (Berger, 2017), without any distinction between the actors of internal conflicts, their political preferences at international level and so forth.

Following the analysis of Bone (2019), a slightly different evolution concerned Uganda: North Korea during the Cold War era started a diplomatic connection with the aim to train solely the police and the marine forces, which ended up in a military cooperation between the

two countries, when the DPRK served as a supervisor in the Ugandan production of weapons, in the 1990s. Despite the following sanctions, and the public endorsement of Uganda until 2018, the country was found maintaining this cooperation with the DPRK.

Despite the troublesome circumstances for acquiring arms from the DPRK, some countries found themselves in the conditions to have no other options, as Berger (2017) expresses. It is the case of Ethiopia, or of nationalistic or militant groups, or again of governments under embargo that cannot obtain arms under licit terms, such as Syria or Iran. The political instability in other countries benefited economically North Korea in creating connections: the plethora of partners and the targeted proliferation type, using Bechtol’s categorisation (2018a) can be summarised below.

Table 5

The military customers of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (1990s—).

| Country | WMD and ballistic missiles | Conventional weapons sales | Refurbishment of Soviet-era weapons for countries | Technical and military assistance and advising |
|-----------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---|--|
| Iran ^a | X | X | X | X |
| Iraq ^b | X | | | |
| Somalia ^c | | X | | |
| Eritrea ^d | | X | | |
| Ethiopia ^e | | X | | |
| Syria ^f | X | X | X | X |
| Egypt ^g | | X | X | X |
| Uganda ^h | | X | | X |
| United Arab Emirates ⁱ | | X | | |

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Libya ^j | | X | | |
| Lebanon ^{*k} | | X | | X |
| Democratic Republic of the Congo ^l | | X | | X |
| Burma ^m | X | | | X |
| Cuba ⁿ | X | X | X | |
| Sri Lanka ^{*o} | | X | | |
| Yemen ^p | X | X | X | X |

Note. This table aims at collecting the known data concerning the illicit arms trade with the DPRK, including the articles mentioned above and further research available. The asterisk implies a non-state actor, i.e. militant groups. Sources: ^{a,b} Cha (2018), ^{c, d, e} Ramani (2018), ^f Cha (2018) and Ramani (2017a), ^g Ramani (2017b), ^h Bone (2019), ⁱ Ramani (2017c), ^j Lee (2011), ^k attributed to Hezbollah, Young (2014), and ^{l,m,n,o,p} Berger (2017).

There are only a few official statistics available from the country, and, indeed, the real economic benefit of the hard currency deriving from this illegal trade, implying a skyrocketing amount of profits, remains difficult to detect due to marginal success in monitoring and interception (Cha, 2018). Some estimations have however been made in this perspective. Betchol (2018), defining Iran as the most significant client of the DPRK, gives an amount of approximately \$3 billion yearly, or again Cha provides the figure of \$500 million from Syria throughout the 1990s (2018). North Korea eludes controls using intermediaries abroad to do the business, who are in contact with some DPRK's officers or diplomats, or maintaining ties with foreign banks or companies (usually in the country of the buyer). Despite having a relatively small number of embassies compared to the current usage, some infractions were found as it can be observed through a report of the UN Security Council of 2019: the Panel of experts assessed attempts to avoid the licit procedure through North Koreans appointed to those

diplomatic offices, or through ‘entrepreneurs’ under a fake identity. Examples of this evidence emerging from the report is due to the collaboration of Sudan, when the UN started urging the nation to provide verifications concerning a collaboration with the DPRK. Thus, the Sudanese government, opting for an overture on the allegations, provided the name of two enterprises, namely SMT (Sudan Master Technology Engineering Company) and FEC (Future Electronic Company), with contracts alluding to the implementation of “air warfare, communication, maintenance and training” (p. 41). The tie had been secured with a North Korean entrepreneur under two different identities²⁴. Further involvements of the DPRK, congruous with what has been stated above, concern Uganda (p.43) and the supply of light weapons to the latter, a deal involving “substantial amount of cash”, using diplomats operating in KOMID. The Korean Mining Development Trading Corporation has been pointed as the main exporter company of the country for ballistic missile-related equipment and conventional weapons, according to Iran Watch, in its coverage in collaborating with the Iranian and Syrian governments, and the company is also known under a several number of other names²⁵.

The troublesome implication related to these collateral effects lies in the sophistication and the articulation of the North Korean financial system globally, as Bechtol (2018b) observes, comprising:

networks, run like a modern-day crime family, [...], using phony front companies empty banks, conspiring individuals (including criminals) in nations all over the world [...] constantly generating funds into Kim Jong-un’s slush funds, support the North Korean military, and keep the elite living in a high fashion (p.63).

²⁴ The same man, entering the third time to the country has been reported under another passport, precisely Hong Man-bak, after being registered as Kim Song-chol.

²⁵ Other names under which has been reported: Korea Kumryong Trading Corporation, Kapmun Tosong Trade, Korean Mining and Development Corp., Korea Mining Development Trading Corp., CSC, Changgwang Shinyong Corporation (Iran Watch).

This system can be further explored through the allegations and investigations reported by the Panel of Experts of the UN, comprising other potential purchasers or countries called to refer on lack of full compliance on the resolutions, therefore representing another fundamental factor within this proliferation framework: an example can be the moderate approach blamed on Russia (p.318-328), specifically in accordance with the UN resolution 2375, concerning the ban on additional North Korean workers overseas, and their expulsion with the following UNSCR 2379. The Russian reply does not consider the activities of citizens of the DPRK, regulated under national laws and registration, such as restaurants, constructions, agriculture and so forth, as potentially dangerous in regard with the proliferation issue, towards which Russia has declared opposition. The problem of legal interpretation lies in the fact that major powers have different views on proliferation and the target of sanctions. There are different possibilities to prescribe a more rigid enforcement, however national interests, as in the case of Russia and China, usually prevail. Ambiguous adherence cannot be solved suing a country successfully, as Dethomas (2014) observes, since the effort would require a long period of time in framing a legal case, the involvement of many institutions, while nations have the possibility to prepare beforehand to prevent eventual damages, before the verdict.

The problem surrounding the proliferation seems to ramify rather than simplify, while discussions considering the proper measures to act are still developing. Since it has been assessed the limited role of North Korean banks with other international branches, while payments in cash through intermediaries or North Korean citizens going abroad prevail, an option can be strengthening the tools available, such as intelligence agencies and customs checks. An example is the successful case involving the DPRK and Egypt, with the discovery and the hindering of a vessel entrance to Egypt with a Cambodian flag, that was shipping “more than 30,000 rocket-propelled grenades, defined as the largest ammunition in the history of sanc-

tions” (TRT World, 2017). Thus, a feasible path tried can be a stricter monitoring of movements by air and by sea in order to prevent and contain the problem.

Current situation

The years 2020 and 2021, alongside issues covered before, were characterised by the compelling crisis of COVID-19 and a series of heavy rainfall damaging the country, worsening already existing problems such as deforestation, backward agricultural planning and fragile housing conditions (Silberstein, 2020). The unexpected pandemic has achieved, according to Babson (2020), the desired effects that were never carried out with the sanctions, i.e. a hard seclusion of North Korea from trade with China: as borders closed, the volume of trade dropped of 74 percent in January and February, compared to the previous year, proving that a strong commitment of China in applying entirely the resolutions could produce the aimed ‘capitulation’, and a more responsible usage of the budget resources in order to solve economic discrepancies.

Even if economic hardships hardly interrupted the flux of investments in the defence sector, certain branches of the production remain limited, such as the one of aircrafts: following Cordesman and Ayers’ research (2017), assuming that the innovation level of the conventional apparatus remains low, however the nuclear development reaches worrisome status, as well as proliferation. To a certain extent, according to the journal *Strategic Comments* (2018), this is the reason why the DPRK decided to compensate with weapons outside the category ‘conventional’. Sanctions reduced the volume of trade, but on the other side reinforced illicit actions, fuelling the vicious circle operating nationally, and stimulating ties within troublesome partners in other parts of the globe. Furthermore, on one hand, sanctions, per se, in the current overall application, hardly create the conditions to move out from the deadlock, while,

on the other, countries accused of loose enforcement of sanctions towards North Korea, such as Russia, and especially China, stress reasons related to maintaining political stability in order not to have repercussions in their internal situation, as the main affected from the fact of sharing their borders. Superpowers, from the US until China, have generally opposed the activities linked to nuclear development. However, whether the negligence of controls by the Chinese custom authorities, or “limits in China’s willingness to punish its neighbour” (Hiim, 2018), allowing certain forms of trade (exporting to the DPRK primary goods and luxury ones), produce a degree of economic survival of the DPRK, whose collapse would bring about enormous responsibilities and burdensome consequences that the PRC is reluctant to handle.

The goal of the country, moving towards modernisation under Kim Jong-un, whose priority still remains the military sector, can be achieved with the indirect aid of nations that are not completely compliant while trading with the DPRK. Conventional arms-related exports seem to decrease, as they are devoted to internal capabilities, while the missiles production from the 1990s began to represent a priority, according to the official data available (Hartley & Belin, 2019), to guarantee a certain political relevance in negotiations through the conspicuous amounts of money exchanged under the counter. If the first represents the surface issue to tackle, the latter still remains underrated in the general literature available, from mass media to academic research.

The problematic factors explained throughout this chapter perpetuate currently, in 2020, as Frank (2020) highlights, in analysing the North Korean Plenary Session about the economic development of the country and the annual growth of the state budget, whose optimism hardly coincides with the reality of repeating deficits. The main official sources of money for the DPRK were and are the profits realised by the state and cooperative owner-

ships, and ‘taxation’²⁶. The State is not experiencing a sharp fall in its revenues, despite spending more than its earnings, the impossibility to access international loans and the constraints of sanctions. As Frank (2020), once again, stresses, “the question remains: How does North Korea finance its deficit? One could speculate that either the numbers are fake, or that there are illicit activities, or both” (Source of Growth Optimism Remains Unclear, para. 4).

This ‘seclusion’ from an internal perspective, where people are unable to access sufficient information or to doubt the conduct of the government, hardly concedes steady reforms. The *juche* ideology limits the citizens, as well as the ruling class, which would prefer no alternatives to the current system, otherwise the elite in charge would collapse (Lankov, 2013). Throughout the first two decades of the 21st century, it has been noted a decline in the international humanitarian aid, from the United States, that has been a major contributor from the famine until 2008, to South Korea, which from the administration of Lee Myung-bak has decreased sharply its support, until the general fiasco of UN fundraising under the World Food Programme that registered hardly the half of the necessary donations to assist the nation, exponentially diminishing throughout the years (“North Korea: Who is sending aid?”, 2019).

Furthermore, COVID-19 posed challenges, while the government expresses to have managed to record zero cases, and a positive attitude for the economic prospects. Although the contacts with the PRC have been resumed, relieving partially the adversities experienced, the orientation of 2020 coincides with another attempt of the tightening of the intervention. The rationing of resources and consequent re-centralisation of market prices represent the intention of the DPRK to strengthen the state control. However, the corruption and the ongoing de-collectivisation functioned, because of the flawed system imposed (Wertz, 2020). A glim-

²⁶ Officially taxes do not exist, Kim Il-sung abolished them in 1974: the Day of the Abolishment of Taxes is celebrated on the 1st of April. However, the government deducts the 70 percent of incomes without formally calling these measures ‘taxes’ (Tudor, 2017).

mer of opportunity will be discussed in the following chapter: so far, the reins of the economy are kept by the government, although the partial privatisation could represent a possibility for change.

Chapter 4: Is it Possible to Solve the North Korean Nuclear Issue?

Premises. The identification of a possible alternative to the status quo, which may be interpreted as a normalisation of relations and overcoming the nuclear issue, is perhaps depicted as the main solution. However, on one hand, it is quite difficult to reply to such a dilemma considering the available information and the unpredictability of the DPRK as a country, or merely the fact that it is hard to foresee a future scenario that can comprise a coexistence of the Kim dynasty as it is and a peaceful Korean Peninsula (Cha, 2018). On the other, it is also true that there are people unsatisfied with the current conditions and have knowledge about another alternative, such as the elite, or the small percentage of the population receiving information from outside, represent a threat to the stability of the regime.

As long as it has been discussed, if the survival of the regime can be guaranteed through the rigid control of the propagandistic machine that alienates its population from the reality of the country, as well as the nuclear arsenal and its proliferation remain the strategic card in negotiating to maintain the status quo. Then, on the economic perspective, the nation struggles to perpetuate its budget spending, improperly balanced in order to sustain the military capabilities, including nuclear development, within the framework of deterrence. Illegal activities such as proliferation ensure a certain flux of money to keep pace with the functioning of the State, but it was demonstrated that instability in the Korean Peninsula can influence other critical situations in other countries the DPRK keeps ties with.

Despite time being the only sure element to prove a change within this deadlock, some elements are worthy to be analysed that may contribute to an eventual future transformation

of the country. Therefore, this chapter aims to analyse the different interests involved, the next challenges to address, and a few approaches proposed by scholars.

A peaceful situation in the peninsula is in the interests of the North East Asian actors, in particular for the North and the South of Korea, as stated in their respective constitutions, as well as for their neighbours (Akaha, 2013), paired with the international interest to prevent every possible scenario of a nuclear war, expressed with the creation of the NPT. The options can be two: containing the DPRK in its critical moments, thus accepting the current framework, or acting to induce a change in the country. The intent of shaking the status quo, a circumstance that can appear necessary, however problematic as an alternative, can create a worse situation internally and internationally. Indeed, to solve an overlapping problem of national and international nature, the answer should address both levels (S. Choi, 2014). Yet, despite several external attempts trying to coerce or convince the country to opt for a different attitude, the promises at the negotiation tables never concretised from both sides, as well as the overall aid of a given superpower involved. Moreover, the influence of outside actors appeared limited on different occasions (Akaha, 2013), such as the two nuclear crises, which started and ended under the same premises. Considering the escalations following the subsequent nuclear tests, the negotiations could hardly testify a margin of success.

A Multi-faceted Solution

When defining a solution, some scholars have advocated for regime change as a condition for the normalisation of relations, while others push for normalisation as a tool to achieve an effective change. On the one hand, the first option postulates that the tight state control hardly can coincide with the partial privatisation of the market, thus undermining political stability (Bennett & Lind, 2011; Y. Choi, 2017). In international relations, normalisation

can be the establishing of norms of relations between countries that before were not having this sort of engagement, and this can comprise “trade agreements, creation of embassies and direct flights, and so forth” (Al Jazeera English, 2020, 0:56).

These formulations contain worthy elements that define the issue, and they can be further articulated, leading or to a negative interpretation, or its resulting response. The first, namely the acceptance of the status quo of North Korea as a nuclear power, and the unsuccessful resolutions proposed so far are proof of the American failure. The engagement dating back to the origin of the division of the peninsula (Cumings, 2015) is based on an idea of the country straightened by the “collapsist” school, which failed in its hopeful expectations of events that never concretised (Foster-Carter, 2015). Another position can be exemplified by Cha (2018), who highlights the necessity of not recognising this actor as a nuclear power: to a certain extent, this recognition could legitimise its behaviour. Indeed, the current issue can date back to the Korean War, to be considered as a pivotal event in this interpretation of the nuclear issue. However, putting all blame on Washington for the current complexity of the nuclear issue can be an easy scapegoat. As Cha (2018) remarks once again, the DPRK also had several occasions with non-aggressive statements by the United States. Therefore, attributing the sole responsibility to the latter downplays the overall diplomatic efforts. Furthermore, it dismisses the complicated structure of the nuclear issue, which depends on other major players in the region and on the way these actors address it.

Different possible scenarios of change of the regime have been provided to imagine a different future of the DPRK, from the collapse to a military intervention, or even an overture. However, the attitude of the country aims to prevent them all under their nuclear certainty. Moreover, the attempted negotiations to cast some changes resulted in a failure, reaching the end of 2020 with less explicit threats, and North Korea continuing its development of nuclear

technology, alongside its other illicit activities of proliferation. In order to assess a possible change, it is necessary to reflect again on the implications of prospect theory, which stresses the likeliness of provocations, based on a risk-seeking behaviour of a given actor in the case of potential losses, and a risk-averse one if the actor finds itself in the context of gains (He & Feng, 2013). The same decision-making process can be applied, once again, to the possibility for North Korea of giving up the nuclear arsenal permanently: as long as the country would feel secure, basing its deterrence on nuclear means, it would not renounce until gains exceed the losses (Väyrynen & Cortright, 2013).

Considering the previous discussion on the fallacy of negotiations and its response, the sanctions, which can constrain and damage the target, do not allow for the resolution of these factors and are problematic due to their limitations in lack of full compliance of other nations and revenues through illegal means, reinforcing the vicious circle. The bellicose posture re-confirms itself: the last inauguration of the new ICBM, Hwasong-16, in the occasion of the parade of the 75th anniversary of the KWP, on the 10th of October, if interpreted as successful, can be a disputable threat, while in terms of a peaceful commitment, it can be defined as rather alarming (Elleman, 2020). The latest approaches adopted by the international community lie in the fact that it would be sufficient to have an impact through sanctions. Nevertheless, other actors' interests are to be taken into account under the paradigm of prospect theory. Moreover, the vision of a status quo, although controversial, seems to be the only feasible. Nevertheless, this chapter will investigate the next prospects, and the downsides of neglecting such problems.

Truth Will Come out, or Not

As the title suggests, eventually the regime as it is conceived currently would be modified, and it will have its consequences. Defectors' news and stories have represented a prolific source of materials to understand the biased vision that is provided to the average citizens, but the vision from the inside is not the one of those who are outside, remaining the major constraint of what it can be provided under Cha's words (2018):

How can one trash an economy as bad as the North has? What do they want to achieve with their nuclear threats? Why won't they accept help from others? And what does the leadership ultimately want? In one sense, the answers to these questions are simple. North Korea has survived as the Impossible State because no one on the inside is empowered to overthrow it, and no one on the outside cares enough to risk the costs of changing it. But the answers are also quite complex (The Argument section, para. 2).

The hardships faced by the DPRK, such as famines, energy shortages, floods, increasing sanctions, hardly stopped the activities of the regime that tried to adapt, independently from the circumstances. The demise of the USSR brought about some changes, such as the partial tolerance related to private profits, which were introduced in order to cope with the economic imbalances displayed in the previous chapter, as well as an improvement in the living standards, at least in Pyongyang. As Lankov (2013) stresses, differently from the catastrophic titles of the mass media throughout the last decades, which depicted the difficulties of the DPRK as a symptom for an imminent collapse of North Korea as it is known so far, a quite opposite scenario should prefigure its radical change: "A minor but insufficient improvement in people's lives is what authoritarian regimes should fear most." Therefore, slightly better conditions or consciousness of their existence in the overall population would decrease the control of the citizens by the propagandistic machine, and the perspective of a better alternative to the current status quo can endanger it. The first chapter, concerning ideology, demon-

strated how the state control is performed and it is also adapting to the different external challenges, and how the DPRK resorts to every method to guarantee the functioning of all the mechanisms of censorship. As long as the high levels of social inequality will persist, a conscious elite and leadership about the outside world would secure the structure of the country (Tudor, 2017), fuelling the nuclear issue, as a means of deterrence.

Among defectors' experiences, the example of the journalist Blaine Harden (2012), author of *Escape from Camp 14*, deals with the story of the defector Shin Dong-hyuk escaping from a forced labour prison led to desperation, ignoring other realities but the one provided by the regime. On the other hand, celebrity-defector Park Yeon-mi (2015), author of *In Order to Live*, represents the most alarming type for Pyongyang: yet, this is a defection motivated by desperate circumstances, although boosted by hints of the outside world, and contrasts with what is acknowledged. These two 'categories' entail an evolution of the reason why people that abandoned the country, as Tudor (2017) suggests, from the 1990s until the current days, going from the most extreme situations endured to a situation in which there is more 'accessible'²⁷ information and views of the outside world, working as a trigger to defection itself.

Spreading information can be the instrument to solve the nuclear issue, from the "old exercise" of estimations on a future military intervention, to threatening with an uncontrolled flux of contents that can sabotage the propagandistic machine, which can be defined as a 'spinal cord' of the DPRK. Thus, in the current situation, as long as the Supreme Leader maintains a strong tie with his ruling class, whether this is favourable or contrary to his choices, the regime will remain cohesive as long as this elitism would last (Napoleoni, 2018). Dif-

²⁷ The censorship of the country is endemic, however, it has been noticed that the rising of black markets where radios other than the ones controlled by the regime, South Korean and Western movies and series, and USB.

ferent NGOs operating in South Korea, such as Fighters for Free North Korea or Flash Drives for Freedom, focus on the smuggling of pen drives to raise consciousness among the people, with the hope that in the future people would overthrow the regime. Alongside this attempt by activists, Bechtol (2018a) proposes the participation of governments in cyberspace as an effective tool to employ, as the diplomatic efforts failed in stopping the military proliferation and nuclear development. The campaign started under the Administration of Trump in attacking the North Korean intelligence institution, the Reconnaissance General Bureau, if performed as a tool to pressure the DPRK, can be a successful option to overcome the stalemate. However, this approach can be problematic: on the one hand, a collapse comprises risks that would be an economic burden for China and South Korea; on the other, it can be interpreted as a bellicose posture, and, it can also be an act of war (Libicki, 2009, p.180), that can comprise possibility of retaliation. Ongoing discussions concerning the legitimacy of this option, also in the case of a self-defence framework, find limits in accessing the details of such action that can be or cannot be compared to a military confrontation. Simultaneously, this discourse entails another challenge that can be considered a symptom of the failed attempts for the resolution of the nuclear issue.

Further problems: cyber-threats

A nuclear war can be considered a concrete threat, and it has been discussed as a major topic in the negotiations happening during the last three decades. As directly linked to the nuclear issue it is possible to see further problems, such as the proliferation fuelling the nuclear threat around the world, and so forth. The bellicose posture of the DPRK originated another sensitive problematic discussion that can also be related to the security and stability at the international level, about cyberattacks, an issue that is often defined as

“unaddressed” (Kleine-Ahlbrandt, 2020, p. 2). Among the last cases, following Al Jazeera the South Korean intelligence found that North Korean hackers were collecting data and addressing pharmaceuticals involved in the research for a vaccine for COVID-19 (“S Korea foils N Korea attempt to hack COVID-19 vaccine makers”, 2020). Considering the enormous, although necessary, attention devoted to the nuclear threat of the DPRK, cyberspace as well can be considered a future challenge to take and that will arise.

In order to understand this background, a brief introduction is needed when the discussion involves state actors, which according to Bryant (2015), represent the fourth category, alongside ‘cyberspace vandals’, the first, the hacktivists, the second, and the third one composed of professional criminals, who can be also linked to governmental requests. Usually, a country engaging in this activity is interested in the data of a given rival, and it is likely difficult to detect the responsible. The same fact of declaring to be under attack can decrease the credibility of the given target, involving negative public opinion and appearing as weak. It is common for governments to act without damaging the target through interruptions of services, however, considering the past of the North Korean attacks, it is possible to find the country in both the third and fourth category. In this regard, Pinkston (2018) stresses that the nation displayed a range of capabilities such as cyber terrorism, cybercrime, CNE (computer network exploitation), CNA (computer network attack) and CNP (computer network defence). Several incidents during the past five years can signify a potential rise of the cyber issue related to the DPRK, as well as a further issue to deal with. As far as the tensions in the Korean Peninsula remain unsolved, it will be improving its capacities.

The nations that can claim a superiority in this framework are the United States, China, Russia, Israel and the United Kingdom, but the DPRK and Iran are identified as an increasing menace as cyber-warfare holders (Bryant, 2015). The case of the cyber-robbery of

the Bangladesh Bank aroused implications (still ongoing) of a possible North Korean involvement of the major heist of \$81 million in 2016, which was confirmed only after two years of investigations (Kleine-Ahlbrandt, 2020). The UN Security Council has also assessed an overall illicit gain of \$2 billion through cyber activities, granting the DPRK's survival and further funds to be allocated to its nuclear programme , thanks to its “widespread and increasingly sophisticated use²⁸” (2019, p.4) throughout the last decade.

Even if the entire picture of these crimes is still missing, some cases have been documented, and in the light of the endemic control exercised by the regime, it is quite safe to say that the operations take place under the governmental supervision of the Korean Workers' Party. The favourite target of the attacks is commonly South Korea, however other attempts were addressed to the United States, with unsuccessful attacks to the Pentagon and the White House in 2009 (Bryant, 2015). Comparing the capabilities of these attacks, developed under the successful training of undercover engineers abroad, it is clear that the DPRK increased its superiority in the cyberspace infringing systems such as SWIFT, a network known as Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication, thought to be one of the safest and protected bank messaging method to transactions, under which \$ billions are exchanged daily. The alarming levels that this issue can assume emerge clearly from the success of some actions, such as gaining the US and ROK military information in 2017, according to Atamanov and Mamaev (2018, p.8-11). Despite the long-time hostile attitude towards the United States, targets have been various throughout time, as Kleine-Ahlbrandt (2020) remarks, and it is possible to draw a sort of chronology concerning different parts of the world: “into Latin America and then Africa (early-to-mid 2016 through 2018) and then Europe and North America (Octo-

²⁸ Additional detailed information can be found on <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N19/243/04/PDF/N1924304.pdf?OpenElement>

ber 2016 to October 2017)” (p.11). However, so far the main focus remains on damaging South Korea (Bryant, 2015).

This would lead to a new concept of deterrence, discussed previously throughout the second chapter, that is hardly applied in its traditional form. The means to counterbalance a threat, how it was displayed for the nuclear one, can be defined as flexible and not necessarily coincide with the military capabilities. As it has been explained, the North Korean military power can be ranked as the first one per capita and it is becoming advanced through the resources invested into nuclear development, although a comparison with the overall US military capability remains farfetched and implausible. Therefore, in the opinion of Kleine-Ahlbrandt (2020), the deterrence within the cyberspace framework neutralises imbalances of power, as damages can be contained and thus limited due to the time required to assess the attacker, and the legal framework hinders the possibilities to carry out an offensive reaction. Challenges such as the one of cyberspace, or the limits of sanctions and the proliferation, find a common root in the stalemate surrounding the nuclear issue. Approaches aimed to solve the ongoing frictions are still yet to be formulated, and the quest to normalisation of relations comprises different layers.

The Necessity of Normalisation and its Interests

A further aspect to be taken into account in the framework of the nuclear issue and the future challenges arising from it concern its necessity for the DPRK and the interests of the actors involved. The violations of the promises at the negotiations table, perpetuating the nuclear development, should be regarded in the context of the regional cooperation for security, rather than focusing on the concerns for the Korean Peninsula alone.

Considering the last events, under the constrained situation of the crisis posed by the pandemic, which widened the economic hardships of North Korea, the country has rejected outside humanitarian help to tackle the crisis and the recent floods, a signal of pejorative inter-Korean relations (T. Kim, 2020), together with the US intentions to maintain them until the next sign of denuclearisation. Despite the offensive or defensive nature of the nuclear arsenal being still unrecognised under the NPT, the necessity of a normalisation of relations contains regional and international challenges and interests (Akaha, 2013). The players to be considered remain the ones of the SPT: North Korea, South Korea, United States, China, Russia, and Japan. If at first their respective security concerns should be satisfied, as Mansourov (2013) observes, however a long path towards neutrality and credibility is necessary to secure the wider spectrum of several interlocked objectives.

It has been already assessed the common concern for a peaceful cohabitation through denuclearisation, but, according to I. Park (2018), also other goals should be considered. China and Russia would be prone to have a strategic value in the regional area, counterbalancing the United States. The latter displays its intention to continue its active role in East Asia cooperating with the ROK and is open to discuss further economic issues only once the major point, the nuclear, would follow the aimed direction. Japan as well participates in the US-ROK line in granting stability in the area. The security concerns can be paired with other aspects, such as prestige, political or economic motivation, thus an effective and definitive resolution should comprise all the basic needs of every actor involved.

The role of China and Russia

China has displayed its concerns about the dangers of North Korean nuclear armament, endorsing the international line with sanctions, despite doubting the efficiency of this

tool to provide a resolution (Hwang, 2018). Despite the limited influence played by other countries, from an economic standpoint China can be defined as the actor having more leverage on the DPRK, considering the volume of trade, entailing a certain dependence. However, it also demonstrates no interest in undermining or threatening the stability of the DPRK. The collapse of the regime or a sudden mass migration would result in a catastrophic economic backlash in its adjacent regions. This implicit ‘soft enforcement’ benefits both sides ensuring their status quo under moderate and peaceful relations between these two actors, also avoiding the higher costs that an unstable situation could bring about. As S. Kim (2013) remarks, the current framework under which the situation is configured is despised by the PRC, but the alternatives are despised as well, and to a certain extent, to a more substantial degree. Following Cha (2018), pursuing its interest, necessary and disliked simultaneously, China reinforces the stalemate:

North Korea needs China to survive. It hates this fact of life and resists all Chinese advice to change its ways. China needs North Korea not to collapse. It hates this fact. And as the only patron supporting the decrepit regime today, it is, ironically, more powerless than it is omnipotent, because the regime’s livelihood is entirely in Chinese hands. It must, therefore, countenance bad DPRK behavior, because any punishment could destabilize the regime. Pyongyang knows this, and deftly leverages its own vulnerability and risk-taking behavior to get sustenance (p.317).

The PRC owns the military means to coerce the DPRK, and, despite the calculations of a potential conflict, the prefigured aftermath can be an appalling scenario of bearing the costs. In the case of another post-conflict reparations, and solely focusing on a fast circumscribed war, rather than a global-scale one (either way likely to happen), just supplying aid and stopping the regime, per se, would entail an enormous cost for China. Moreover, any involvement in

the problems of the DPRK, such as the one related to defectors, has been avoided by the PRC, as North Korean citizens escaping cannot return, and are rejected at the border by Chinese authorities, leaving no room for misinterpretations of implicit help to the traitors of the Fatherland (Y. Park, 2015). Considering the statistics provided in the previous chapter, China is hosting an estimated number of 50.000 workers that cannot be compared to a mass migration flux of a population of 25 million inhabitants. Furthermore, as S. Kim (2013) stresses, China is coping with an increasing ethno-nationalism of its minorities endangering the unity of the centralised system, aiming to ‘autonomous status’.

Russia can be considered aligned with China, as they share common concerns on the security framework of North East Asia, although having a minor influence compared to the role played during the Cold War era. The unanimity of the international condemnation towards North Korean nuclear programs and the endorsement of the sanctions go together with national policies aimed not to exclude in a decisive way Pyongyang. Despite a security concern at the Russian borders, denuclearisation hardly coincides with the focal point of foreign politics by Moscow, notwithstanding the benefit that can follow, namely the prestige in the global context under the framework of negotiations (Westermann, 2018). In this regard, as Rinna (2020) observes, both the Russian Federation and the PRC remain doubtful about the concrete effectiveness of the methods applied to punish the DPRK. They also proposed an interruption of the annual joint US-ROK military drills, which is considered by North Korea as a threatening element, as well as the deployment of the US nuclear weapons in the ROK and Japan. This is considered critical for Beijing and Moscow’s deterrence too. Russia did not dismiss the efforts of the friendship stipulated in the 1961, as well as the general provisions of the United Nations, and its approach, emphasising the national stability and defence under Putin translates into balanced relations with both Koreas (Toloraya, 2013). A minor influence

does not entail a minor interest to revive the Russian position in projects in the North East Asian area, as the latter can represent a window of opportunity in ambitious projects such as connecting the Korean peninsula to the Russian pipelines, as Cha (2018) points out. This would make it possible for Russia to exploit Korean resources and to improve and strengthen its political position in the region, although this possibility could only concretise in the case of a normalisation and lack of condemnation by the international community.

The Republic of Korea and Japan

The major player in terms of direct involvement remains South Korea, as it has demonstrated throughout the last two decades to be the most willing country to overcome the frictions with the DPRK, or more precisely attempting an overture despite negative signals from Pyongyang. The two Koreas project in their constitutions a unification, a step beyond the normalisation of relations. Main progresses, as it has been argued, were performed under the Sunshine Policy of Kim Dae-jun, its continuation under the successor Roh Mu-hyun, and the current president in charge, Moon Jae-in. As illustrated before, a remarkable achievement can be seen through the three inter-Korean meetings held in 2018, through which the reciprocal intention has been displayed to convey for a unification of the peninsula, as well as denuclearisation, and a definitive peace between the two sides. Despite the willingness of South Korea to progress on these plans, the situation in 2020 can be considered a stalemate, as the commitment remained documented, but it hardly translated in practical terms. As Y. Kim (2020) underlines, the deadlock is likely to persist, as long as the DPRK's political stability remains undamaged, since "the cost-benefit calculations for policy alternatives should be made in consideration of the political survival of the Kim Family" (North Korea's nuclearization and underlying motives: the politics of father-to-son succession Section, para. 5): despite

the escalations happening at international level, where the DPRK actively engage in its brinkmanship, the country could refrain from further intimidations, if the internal equilibrium can be destabilised. Therefore, such circumstances can be undertaken through the long-term ally of the ROK, United States, defined as the fundamental actor negotiating the most with the DPRK and having sufficient influence to decrease the North Korean menaces (I. Park, 2018).

Japan, due to its proximity to the DPRK, displays high concerns of security as threats related to the nuclear issue still persist. With regard to the nuclear capabilities acquired by Pyongyang under Kim Jong-il and developed even further under Kim Jong-un, as Cha (2018) observes, the operability of the Nodong missiles and Scud missiles, alongside the North Korean biological and chemical arsenal, pose worrisome threats of instability for the region. As long as the resolution can be seen as an uncertainty, other factors destabilise Tokyo, such as the on-and-off attitude towards the problem of people abducted by the DPRK, which is a motivation for a tougher line, although excuses have been exchanged by both leaders, Kim Jong-il and Koizumi (concerning the atrocities under colonialism) throughout the SPT, before the change of the Japanese administration under the conservative Abe that worsened again the relations. Japan has small leverage in influencing the nuclear issue, and thus in order to satisfy its foreign policy goals towards North Korea, it relies on the presence and endorsement of the United States: as Akaha (2013) stresses, the country increased its military resources due to the rising stability concerns. As the bilateral dialogues result limited, thus the prospects for normalisation depend also on Washington's attitude, as well as the KEDO (Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation), representing an attractive element in economic terms, if successful. However, any economic engagement can be feasible as sanctions are removed, and in order to achieve this objective, a definitive resolution of the nuclear issue is needed,

through the US indispensable intervention (I. Park, 2018). This, following DiFilippo (2013), represents the necessary condition to neutral relations between the DPRK and Japan.

Responsibility of the United States

From the 1990s, every administration in the US found itself to tackle the nuclear issue, from a modest to a wider extent, and so far, the aimed denuclearisation seems far from being concrete. Therefore, several interpretations have emerged from analysts and researchers reflecting the decision-making process, as partially covered throughout the second chapter of this thesis, ranging from a hard-line approach, in the case of Bush with the second nuclear crisis and the SPT, to the strategic patience of Obama, and the unconventionally friendly facade of Trump. Firstly, it has been noticed the relevance of the perspective following Putnam's logic (1988) of the two-level game in the framework of negotiations: where the international and national spheres overlap, the politician must maximise the effects in order to satisfy the domestic pressures while engaging at international level. Domestic public opinion has then been relevant for every US leader while addressing this point in the agenda of foreign policy, as well as reverberating on the global prestige.

The problem remains relevant and it is necessary to manage it: this is a reason why the strategic patience of Obama appeared more counterproductive than other Presidents' lines. Waiting for the DPRK to display a minimal interest of good will, and then opening the possibility of a dialogue aroused the skepticism of several scholars, as expressed in critical terms by Cumings (2015), who stressed the importance of embracing talks, without distorted or biased preconceptions. This aspect, when endorsed with an efficient attitude, can be defined as a core strategic element, as it serves for de-escalation and to keep a sort of monitoring on the development of the nuclear programme. As Cha (2018) observes, negotiating per se represents

an occasion to create the necessary dose of pressure on North Korea to understand its progress and its intention towards the nuclear issue, otherwise facing the risk of avoiding the problem and being completely unprepared. Simple patience, de facto, is also highlighted as a skill in this diplomatic effort, namely a readiness to undergo a long process of bargaining and the use of concessions (in this framework: sanctions) when progress by the DPRK can be detected. This is the reason why Obama's line has been defined detrimental and interpreted as avoidance by Washington (Pardo, 2019). Despite the continuous nuclear tests (four) performed under its presidency, the response was a hostile line, paired with increases of sanctions and condemnation.

The approach of president Trump can be defined as an unusual novelty: in an interview, *What Americans Get Wrong About North Korea*, Cumings explains that Trump, unlike his predecessors, was convinced that his own emotional attitude was instrumental in creating an opportunity of talks with Pyongyang in record time, through aggressive tweets, speaking of “ignorance” and “being a tabula rasa” (Hautzinger, 2019).

As the tension increased, ideas surrounding a meeting between the two nations concretised, and the attitude of this administration proved a more efficient possibility for an overture (Lankov, 2020), despite the lack of feasible results concerning the main issue, and two short-range missile tests that hardly bothered the US and the PRC (Nah, 2020). As a consequence, sanctions persisted, while maintaining a window of dialogue. Under Kim Jong-un, despite promises concerning the denuclearisation, inspections or freezing of implants never occurred, remaining the ‘last bargaining chip’, while the techniques to address the nuclear question would depend on and be created strictly according to the circumstances (Cha, 2018).

As the new election in the US took place, different analyses on the next moves of Biden presidency soared. To a certain extent, the prospects concerning the future position of

Biden entail a different approach, considering the one of his predecessors: returning to an Obama-like attitude, the DPRK is expected to act and fulfil the expectations first, and then the table of negotiations would be considered (Frank, 2019). Furthermore, considering Biden's statements in the final presidential debate with Trump, a possible inversion of diplomatic line can be predicted, aiming to "control them" and "denuclearise them" (CNBC Television, 2020, 1:48-1:52), paired with criticisms towards his adversary, blamed of "legitimising a thug" (CNBC Television, 2020, 2:00), and towards the lack of preconditions that led the DPRK to become a serious threat. Trump in fact stated the "importance of good relations with other countries", providing what Cumings emphasised as the "real possibility" and a rather fast unprecedented engagement with Pyongyang, in comparison with previous administrations (Hautzinger, 2019)²⁹. The common mistake that has been stressed is imposing widely recognised American values of freedom and democracy to a country that remains socially solid even under an authoritarian regime, as displayed in the first chapter, through its ideology. Moreover, as North Korean strength is based on an anomalous interpretation of the Marxist-Leninist paradigm and Confucian values, reasoning about and handling the country as a replica of the USSR or an Eastern bloc's one can be defined as a further mistake (Cumings, 2015). Indeed, the approach of Trump went a step further through reciprocal symbolic attempts to create a bond between the two countries, although, despite few demonstrations from both parties and promises, the nuclear programme remains untouched. As Lankov (2020) comments, "Joe Biden's election appears to mean that we will lose another four or eight years of precious time" (para. 27).

²⁹ As Cumings adds, president Clinton had to wait six years to start talks with North Korea, Bush damaged the accomplishments of his predecessor, while Obama never interfaced the country, stressing the "pre-conditions" clause (Hautzinger, 2019).

And the Main Actor: Democratic People's Republic of Korea

Throughout the second chapter, it has been provided the motivation of North Korean nuclear arsenal, the deterrent need to satisfy its security concern and to make profits from it. The security necessity started from the historical trauma of the Korean War and what it brought about, even if this paranoia can be defined as exaggerated in the current days (Cumings, 2010). Moreover, the intricate network of illicit activities deriving from the nuclear issue, such as proliferation (simultaneously a cause and a consequence of sanctions), arms market trade, or the rising cyberthreats, reinforced the issue because of the conspicuous revenues it can produce to the country (Bechtol, 2018a). Then, the brinkmanship proved to be successful: as Y. Kim (2020) remarks, the escalations produced by the DPRK served to obtain benefits once negotiating with other countries, thus they can be described as balanced, rather than extreme, since Pyongyang managed to avoid lack of interest and a direct conflict from its target. The decision of changing the North Korean behaviour can be taken not by the majority of the population, but rather by the leadership, which despite the ramping economic difficulties of the people, aims to the survival of the regime, as it is. Aware of other regimes that renounce to the nuclear programme, the DPRK exploits internally for propagandistic purposes cases such as the ones of Iraq with Saddam Hussein, or Libya with Qaddafi, to justify nuclearisation, and manifests its skepticism towards fulfilling a nuclear-free future and overall diplomatic efforts (Cha, 2018; Napoleoni, 2018), which are generally mistrusted from the North Korean side. To a certain extent, it can be affirmed that the nuclear issue represents the pillar of the regime, not only as a matter of national policies and pride, but also as an instrumental tool that secures the structure of the DPRK. The difficulty also lies in the North Korean capability to secure a certain extent of support from Moscow and Beijing, thanks to the strategic value it possesses (Buszynski, 2020). Furthermore, the isolation represents a great obstacle in

the decision-making of overcoming the nuclear issue in transparency of policy application, as well as a strength for the country itself to maintain its structure (Hecker, 2011, p.454) and its distance. The window of possibility for a systematic change through economic reforms to guarantee its sustainment remains narrow: despite propositions to create trade policies to engage the country and start a gradual economic integration, the mistrust of both the DPRK and other countries dominate the discussion, as well as its lack of membership in the WTO (Rhee & Messerlin, 2020)³⁰. All things being equal, as long as the DPRK protects its nuclear programme, massive sanctions will persist, therefore such discussion should be included afterwards. The removal of US troops would be a security guarantee from the ROK and Japan that North Korea could be aiming for, although the US-ROK-Japan line emphasises its core importance to secure their stability (Clemens, 2016).

The Next Moves

The future challenges of the nuclear issue remain similar to the implications analysed throughout the four chapters, as a major change has still to be concretised since its notoriety after the 1990s. Considering the next move of the US, the Biden administration partially represents a renewal of the several persisting aspects that the nuclear issue contains. However, so far, despite a few declarations, a clearer understanding of Biden's vision could be formulated only in the future. In addition, the president should revive the lost role of the US in the United Nations framework, de-escalating tensions with China, as a key actor in respect of North Korea, and aiming to resolutions targeting the specific circumstances with surgical precision (Ha, 2020). On the other hand, another prediction is the intensifying of tensions be-

³⁰ See Chapter 6: the lack of basic requirements of the country, as not recognised as market-economy, and another problem behind such procedure, which is considered beneficial to the country, risks to be highly politicised by other nations (Rhee & Messerlin, 2020).

tween the US and the DPRK: the latter, disliking preconditions and hostile approaches, as assessed by previous examples, can create the conditions to further destabilise the region. Concerning the provocations, as Nah (2020) observes, a seventh nuclear test comprises different risks, as the main assigned nuclear site, Punggye-ri, is in precarious state after several detonations and its collapse could bring about radiations affecting also its neighbours, China and South Korea. However, the DPRK recently announced the latest gem of its nuclear arsenal, a nuclear submarine, displaying continuous technological progress (“Kim Jong-un calls US 'biggest enemy' and says nuclear submarine plans 'complete'”, 2021).

The ultimate goal, denuclearisation, could be achieved in a long-term perspective, whether the ruling Kim dynasty would decide such an option as more convenient merely in regards of other beneficial concessions, although as the most immediate step remains starting (again) an engagement with the DPRK (Westermann, 2018). Another key element to be taken into account is the verification, indifferently from a complete denuclearisation or a partial one, i.e. permitting IAEA to carry out investigations of nuclear sites: as Shelton (2009, p.20) remarks, when analysing the context of SPT, the overall focus was merely on plutonium enrichment, instead of including uranium as well, thus leading Pyongyang to abandon the first and still having the possibility to build their arsenal. Furthermore, the basic component to build on energy supply and nuclear weapons is uranium, and just the possibility of being capable of enrichment creates concerns (Hecker, 2015, 05:35), as going nuclear represents a matter of time, if accompanied with the proper technical skills. Therefore, without a targeted control of the interested reactors, it can be difficult to assess a more precise policy. Despite remarks such as “thinking out of the box”, by Foster-Carter (2015, para. 22), the method to engage should be measured according to the specific circumstances that will be present in the moment of negotiating with the DPRK. Therefore, an approach without the bias of the “be-

liefs that we hold dear” should be central, as well as the geopolitical arrangement of that given time frame, as Cumings (Hautzinger, 2019) proposes. Furthermore, as Clemens (2016) stresses, every actor involved relies extensively on its own reputation to save, blaming the other, meaning that “if each side maintains a rigid hard line, then serious negotiation might never begin” (Could North Korea Reform and Join the World? Section, para. 2). An example can be the case of Japan: when the line has been guided by Abe under the role of Prime Minister, frictions and preconceptions were likely to emerge due to his conservative line and family ties, as Cumings suggests (2015, p.73). The latter also remarks that the same is true for the US and the ROK: an alignment in the same period of time can result in a collaboration between the respective administrations or in disagreements about how to perform an engagement with the DPRK (Hautzinger, 2019).

The alignment of all the interests of the actors mentioned in this process could be optimal, but, because of the minor likelihood of six countries converging harmonically in their affairs nationally and internationally, it remains a challenging factor (I. Park, 2018), as much for the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue as for its management of the costs and benefits. Moreover, the nuclear issue, as it has been displayed under historical, ideological, geopolitical and economic implications, following the structuring of this thesis should be considered as a whole. Furthermore, recalling the SPT negotiations, the necessity to create a credible trust remains a core factor to formulate a suitable achievement for each side (Clemens, 2016). The operation behind policy making should acknowledge the large spectrum of implications, while taking into account even the smallest factors resulting from it (Hecker, 2011) and, indeed a favourable and lasting outcome comprises a long quest (Cha, 2018).

Despite advice from the scientific and academic community, as Buszynski (2020) suggests, the willingness to provide a complete elucidation of the denuclearisation project deriv-

ing from the administration in charge should be necessary, in order to evolve from vain objectives to concrete actions. Considering the intricate nature of the nuclear issue, it can be defined well-advised to engage simultaneously the prevention of the “three noes: no export, no more bombs, and no better bombs” (Hecker, 2011, p.454), and economic policies and benefits (Väyrynen & Cortright, 2013; Cha, 2018). Finally, calculations can be assessed to address more wisely the DPRK in the next future, while being aware that “rational planning has its limits [...] We cannot anticipate the novel variables that will become relevant”, in order to produce a desirable approach (Clemens, 2016, Limits to Rational Policymaking Section, para. 5). Challenges are enormous in this regard, whether a collapse or a survival of the regime, attention and awareness concerning the nuclear issue and its consequences are needed.

Conclusion

This thesis aimed to discuss the wide range of implications concerning the nuclear issue in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, with regard to history and ideology in Chapter 1, diplomacy and negotiations in Chapter 2, economy in Chapter 3, and finally considering the interests and future prospects concerning the country in Chapter 4. The formulation investigates the dimensions of the engagement surrounding the North Korean nuclear programme, which hardly can be considered a separate and narrow topic in the realm of negotiations. In Chapter 1, the historical background of the DPRK has been analysed, starting from its independence from the Japanese empire, and its Marxist-Leninist orientation inside the Soviet bloc. The traumatic experience of the Korean War exacerbated tensions in the Korean Peninsula, whose temporary division was officially consolidated and marked the starting point of its ideology, the Juche. In particular, the analysis of the Juche presented core interpretations about the North Korean position transcending the common assumption of a mere communist replica: in the beginning, even before the formulation of this specific term, the inclusion of Neo-Confucian values created a difference with the socialist doctrine, contributing to its peculiar, however solid identity (Cumings, 2015). As long as the ideology remains stable, the attempts to shake the regime remain vane, as the cohesion within an unequal society challenges common provisions of collapse and notions from other case studies from the Cold War era throughout history. On one hand, the ideology has been a useful tool to grasp the reaction of the DPRK: according to the historical circumstances, Juche has been modified to counter the challenges posed by internal and external factors of instability. On the other, the interpretation should be considered as the product of a filtered process, due to the secrecy and limitations in data of the country.

Chapter 2 is the main one, containing and focusing on the evolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. The enquiry focused on the three decades of negotiations aiming at eradicating the nuclear programme in the DPRK, which started to be relevant globally: from the first nuclear crisis to the last US-DPRK summits (2018-19) the problem worsened, as the DPRK improved steadily its nuclear capacities, and it consolidated under Kim Jong-il and Kim Jong-un. From menacing the withdrawal from NPT, during the first nuclear crisis, to a concrete exit from the agreement during the second one, North Korea has been asked to denuclearise and to guarantee inspections by the personnel of IAEA, with concessions of energy supply and humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, international help hardly solved the problematic nature of the country (Napoleoni, 2018), following the North Korean model illustrated in Chapter 3. Food related funds under WFP and the money granted at the negotiations do not fulfil the requests of Pyongyang, namely the removal of sanctions and of the US military from the Korean Peninsula. The inability to achieve the main demands of both sides showed how the deadlock reinforced, and how a position of reciprocal mistrust hindered the process. Furthermore, a discussion on deterrence and the necessity of negotiations provided the profile of DPRK as a rationally motivated nation to engage with.

Chapter 3 illustrates the economic implications of the nuclear issue, and how it is connected with the North Korean economic fabric. The socialist model focusing on heavy industries created room for a rigid performance of the country, whose endemic governmental centralisation contributes to deficiency and corruption (Cavanaugh, 2017). Moreover, the connection with the nuclear issue can be seen in the application of sanctions, its effects and limits, and the lively international activity of proliferation, from which a further network of illicit businesses can be identified (Bechtol, 2018a). On one hand, sanctions remain the only tool of the international community to contrast the country, while, on the other, illegal activities are

both a cause and a consequence of their application. However, these factors should be also connected to the problematic economic choices of the DPRK, whose lack of internal reforms and over expenditures in the defence sector worsen its precarious performance.

Ultimately, chapter 4 sought to provide further reflections on what has been examined, including a focus on the main interests of the major players affected by the nuclear issue. An alignment of common objectives can hardly concretise, although sharing the same concern for regional stability. Therefore, the DPRK can be also regarded as a proxy to guarantee a degree of influence the region, thus reinforcing disagreements, since the main actors diverge in terms of policy-making to address the North Korean nuclear capability. Alongside the discussion, a recent threat is arising, namely cyberattacks, which again can be considered a consequence of a problem deriving from the stalemate of the nuclear issue. Significant progress surrounding the central problem of the thesis is yet to be detected: a few recommendations and points to acknowledge are indicated, as well as the final intention of the work to contribute further in the research field, in order to underline the complexities surrounding this matter. Considering the latest changes surrounding the nuclear issue, a constant engagement with the country is needed, throughout a multilateral cooperation of the nations involved and an assessment of the circumstances on a daily basis (Cha, 2018).

Based on these conclusions, the denuclearisation of North Korea remains difficult to concretise, nearly impossible in the short-term (Lankov, 2020), due to the articulation of the problem and further issues emerging. Therefore, the nuclear issue has to be interpreted in a broader spectrum in order to better address the related policymaking. Other implications can emerge and be formulated, and this thesis could focus on a few. Furthermore, despite its complexities and the failures of the overall attempts to deal with the DPRK, negotiations remain the only viable channel to interact and to contain the downsides of the nuclear issue,

since it has been proved its growing complexity throughout these years. To conclude, future and additional studies are needed, based on the eventual developments of the geopolitical assets concerning the region, the next administrations, as well as new data and changes of directions from the DPRK or collected by other actors.

Appendix

Translation of the frame at “1:23” (Red Tomato, 2017).

The image is taken from an elementary school textbook of Korean language.

The kid tank is going out, our tank is going out <꼬마땅크 나간다 우리 땅크 나간다>

On the right: the first row in the top part displays syllables of the double consonant ㄸ

The kid tank is going out and defeats the American bastards <미국놈 쳐부시며 꼬마땅크 나간다>

Translation of first Image (Credits: Asia Press) contained in the article of Radio Free Asia (Noh, 2017).

On the left: Socialist morality <사회주의도덕>

Grammar school 1 <초급중학교 1>

Publishing company of Education <교육도서출판사>

On the right: The Ten Articles to Observe for a Moral Life of Young Students

<학생소년들이 도덕생활에서 지켜야 할 10가지 사항>

1. The young students must revere with praise in their inmost heart the beloved Generalissimo Kim Jong-un and worship with praise the great Generalissimo Kim Il-sung and Generalissimo Kim Jong-il as eternal sun of the Juche.

<1.소년당원들은 위대한 김일성대원수님과 김정일대원수님을 주체의 영원한 해님으로 높이 모시고 경애하는 김정은원수님을 충정으로 높이 우러러모셔야 한다.>

2. The young students learn diligently for the prosperous Choson, and thus they must learn and participate faithfully in the community life.

<2. 소년단원들은 강성조선을 위하여 열심히 배우고 또 배우며 조직생활에 성실히 참가하여야 한다.>

3. The young students must love and take care of their companions, considering the group and the community in a valuable way.

<3. 소년단원들은 조직과 집단은 귀중히 여겨야 하며 동무들을 아끼고 사랑하여야 한다.>

4. The young students must behave dutifully to the principles anywhere and anytime.

<4. 소년단원들은 언제어디서나 레절바르게 행동하여야 한다.>

5. The young students must use our beautiful and noble words everywhere and anytime.

<5. 소년단원들은 언제나 고상하고 아름다운 우리 말을 써야 한다.>

6. The young students must observe the public morality and the traffic order on one's own account

<6. 소년단원들은 공중도덕과 교통질서를 자적으로 지켜야 한다.>

7. The young students must observe discipline and morality in the school on one's own account

<7. 소년단원들은 학교안에서 도덕과 질서를 자적으로 지켜야 한다.>

8. The young students must take care neatly of the body and dress tidily.

<8. 소년단원들은 옷차림을 단정히 하고 몸을 깨끗이 거두어야 한다.>

9. The young students actively support the People's Army, forge strongly their body and the mind, and, and must pursue more good actions in unison with patriotism.

<9. 소년단원들은 인민군대를 적극 원호하고 몸과 마음은 튼튼히 단련하며 애국의 한마음으로 좋은 일을 더 많이 찾아하여야 한다.>

10. The young students must live in the new generational way of the prosperous Chosen.

<10.소년단원들은 강성조선의 새 세대답게 생활하여야 한다.>

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