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**Why No Nuclear Domino?
The Case of North Korea and its Neighbours**

Alexandre Léger

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Institut de la Conférence des associations
de la défense

151 rue Slater, bureau 412A
Ottawa (Ontario)
K1P 5H3

613 236 9903
www.cdainstitute.ca
cda@cda-cdai.ca

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151 Slater Street, suite 412A
Ottawa, Ontario
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Why No Nuclear Domino? The Case of North Korea and its Neighbours

Alexandre Léger

May/mai 2014

Alexandre Léger is a student in the Masters in Public Policy and Public Administration at Concordia University. He holds a Bachelor of Arts in Political Science with a Minor in Human Rights, also from Concordia. He was a recipient of the 2012-2013 and the 2013-2014 Graduate Research Awards for Disarmament, Arms Control and Non-Proliferation offered by the Simons Foundation and the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development Canada. Alexandre is currently completing the internship phase of his MA program at Employment and Social Development Canada. Master Corporal Léger is also a bagpiper in the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) of Canada, in Montreal.

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Why No Nuclear Domino? The Case of North Korea and its Neighbours

By Alexandre Léger

Introduction

In 1963, US President John F. Kennedy predicted that during the 1970s alone, up to 25 new nuclear weapons states would come into existence. This was based on the notion of a domino effect, which would lead regions into nuclear proliferation spirals.¹ As one state gained nuclear weapons, its neighbours would follow suit, creating a chain reaction. However, Kennedy's prediction did not come true, and the nuclear club did not extend beyond the big five nuclear powers: the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain, France and China. Even with India testing its first nuclear weapon and Pakistan responding, there is no evidence of a regional domino of proliferation.

Decades later, there remain significantly fewer nuclear weapon states than the 25 predicted by Kennedy. There are presently a total of nine nuclear weapons states: the United States, Russia, Great Britain, France, China, India, Pakistan, North Korea and Israel. This is a far cry away from the 1963 prediction. The purpose of this research is to examine why states have refrained from engaging in a regional-level chain reaction of proliferation, to counter new neighbouring nuclear weapon states as they come into existence.

While nuclear proliferation is often a topic associated with the Cold War, nuclear weapons security remains a relevant and contemporary topic. For example, the danger of regional proliferation is a hot topic in Middle Eastern politics. It is feared that a nuclear-armed Iran would shift the security balance in the region leading states such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Turkey and Egypt to gain their own nuclear weapons capability. The 2013 nuclear deal with Iran demonstrates how the nuclear issue remains highly relevant in global politics today.

The issue of nuclear proliferation is also very relevant to Canada. Iran's nuclear ambitions have been a barrier to normalized relations with that country. Moreover, Iran's history of nuclear weapons development continues to inform Canada's foreign policy, as demonstrated by the "deeply sceptical" response by the Canadian government to Iran's new non-proliferation deal.² In more general terms, the Department of Foreign Affairs, Trade and Development has a "policy objective of non-proliferation, reduction and elimination of nuclear weapons."³ Moreover, the Canadian government clearly has an eye towards the risk of a nuclear domino effect as its non-proliferation policy highlights areas of proliferation concern by region, in particular the Middle East, South Asia and the Korean peninsula.⁴

There has been continued fear of regional proliferation. And yet there is no historical evidence of this happening. It is, therefore, important to examine why states choose not to acquire nuclear weapons capability in response to new nuclear threats. Why do states refrain from achieving the capability to balance and deter a new nuclear weapon state (N-State) which threatens their immediate sphere of security?



My hypothesis is that the primary response to a new nuclear weapon state is to promote its disarmament, returning to the previous conventional security environment. Obtaining nuclear weapons in response would only legitimize the new N-State, and indicate that it was accepted as a new and permanent part of the nuclear club. I have labelled my hypothesis as the *status quo ante* since the objective is to return to the previous non-nuclear security environment. The alternative explanation is that states refrain from obtaining nuclear weapons in response to new nuclear weapon states because their security is assured by the nuclear umbrella of a larger nuclear power. This extension of deterrence by one state to another eliminates the need for each regional player to assure its nuclear security by developing its own independent nuclear arsenal.

In the first section of this paper, I will examine literature relating to the domino theory and the theories of nuclear weapon acquisition. The models outlined in the literature review will help define the second section which outlines the methodology I will apply to my case study. The third section will provide a case study of the decision made by South Korea and Japan not to develop nuclear weapon capability in response to North Korea's nuclear threat. Finally, the fourth section will relate the findings of my case study.

Literature Review: Nuclear Proliferation

Many people see the idea of a nuclear domino theory as reflecting a serious risk to international security. The discussion of this topic takes place primarily outside the realm of peer reviewed journals or university press publications. Instead, it underlies the public debate on the risks of emerging nuclear weapon programs. In this literature review, I will highlight a discussion amongst leading academics on the risks of the domino effect.

As domino theory is premised on a state's decision to go nuclear, it is crucial to establish what factors motivate the decision to acquire nuclear weapons or not. Therefore, this literature review will survey works on the causes of nuclear proliferation. First, William Epstein offers an explanation in "Why States Go and Don't Go Nuclear."⁵ Second, Scott Sagan articulates three levels of analysis, in "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?: Three Models in Search of a Bomb."⁶ Third, Etel Solingen offers additional reasons for nuclear weapon development, in *Nuclear Logics*.⁷

To define the concept of cascade proliferation or domino theory, we can turn to Graham Allison. According to Allison, this theory can be defined as a chain reaction of proliferation as one state creates instability by acquiring nuclear weapon capability, resulting in another state making the decision to go nuclear, and another and yet another, and so on.⁸ As it currently stands, falling nuclear dominoes on a regional basis has not happened and therefore we cannot benefit from a retrospective analysis of causal factors. The conditions necessary for a domino effect to occur have not been established; however the concept remains influential when discussing the foreign policy and security implications of states gaining new nuclear weapon capabilities.

An example of this discussion begins with Kenneth Waltz's article published in *Foreign Affairs* in 2012, which launched a debate on the security value of nuclear weapons and their deterrence



power.⁹ Boldly entitled “Why Iran Should Get the Bomb,” Waltz argued that a nuclear-armed Iran would balance Israel and normalize relations in the Middle East. He continued his commentary in an article written with Colin Kahl entitled “Iran and the Bomb.”¹⁰

In direct response to this discussion occurring in *Foreign Affairs* magazine, the PBS News Hour hosted a debate between Don Zakov and John Mearsheimer on the potential security risks and benefits of a nuclear-armed Iran.¹¹ While their positions on the security implications were different, their positions on the potential for further proliferation in the region were roughly aligned. Zakov predicted a possible cascade of nuclear weapons across the region in response to an Iranian nuclear weapon including such states as “probably Saudi Arabia, probably the United Arab Emirates, possibly Turkey, possibly Egypt.” Mearsheimer did not see a cascade in the same terms, although he did accept the possibility of some proliferation, saying he “wouldn’t bet against the fact that maybe Turkey or Saudi Arabia would acquire nuclear weapons.”¹²

As the debate on the security implications persists, so does the underlying assumption of nuclear domino theory, whereby a new N-State would lead to further proliferation amongst regional competitors. Whether one believes in the deterrence benefits of nuclear weapons or the increased risk of inadvertent nuclear war, the notion of a domino effect underlies the rhetoric on both sides. It permeates the debate. However, as Mearsheimer noted in the PBS interview, “people have been predicting widespread proliferation for decades now, and it’s never happened.”¹³ In his contribution to the debate in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Nuclear Domino Myth,” Johan Bergenas argues that there is no historical record in support the idea that states will obtain nuclear weapons in a chain reaction.¹⁴

Turning to formal academic work on proliferation, Epstein’s “Why States Go – And Don’t Go – Nuclear,” presents the rationale for nuclear weapons acquisition. According to Epstein, their sole purpose is to increase a state’s military and economic power. Moreover, they represent a tool for states to increase their independence by assuring their ultimate security through deterrence. Epstein presents a threefold explanation for nuclear proliferation, including military security, political prestige and economic benefits.¹⁵ First, the security argument provides both incentives and disincentives for states to acquire the bomb. It allows the achievement of military superiority over an enemy and coerces states to refrain from even attempting to achieve superiority. This can loosely be translated to immediate and strategic deterrence. However, nuclear weapons increase the risk and the cost of a potential miscalculation due to their destructive power. With regard to prestige, nuclear weapons are associated with achieving great power status, providing leverage at the negotiating table and demonstrating self-reliance. However, they also open the state to international pressure and criticism. In economic terms, nuclear weapon programs can be associated with the benefits of a civilian nuclear program. This model offered by Epstein presents a calculus purely in terms of state power in relation to competing states and the international system as a whole. The calculus illustrates the motivation for states to acquire nuclear weapons in cascade as the stability or instability of the environment is reshaped by every new nuclear state. However, since the historic record shows few states attempting to gain the benefits put forth in this model, other factors must be included in the equation.

Sagan offers three levels of analysis, which include and build upon Epstein’s rationale.¹⁶ The clear objective of his piece is to demonstrate how the above security model is insufficient and



that the security-driven explanation cannot explain every single case of states acquiring or refraining from acquiring nuclear weapons. In addition to the traditional security model, Sagan introduces the domestic politics model and the norms model.

According to Sagan's conceptualization of a security model, states are rational unitary actors in an anarchical international system. The development of nuclear weapons appeals to the aim of maintaining security and sovereignty in a self-help system. Strong states can assure their own deterrent capability but weak states must join a balancing alliance, gaining the protection of the extended deterrence of a nuclear power. By differentiating between strong and weak states, Sagan provides a security model that does not perpetuate the domino theory, setting a threshold for adopting nuclear weapons and providing an alternative to how non-nuclear weapon states assure their security interests. While the model is parsimonious, Sagan finds a flaw in the level of analysis of realist case studies. As explanations of the security calculus are analysed by key actors in the decision-making process, their justification of the model relies on the accounts of individuals motivated to present their decision-making as rational and sound. This flaw brings Sagan to examine the two other levels of analysis in order to gain further insight into internal decision-making mechanisms.

The domestic politics model focuses on the role of internal players in advocating for or against the development of nuclear weapons, according to their self-interested motivations. Sagan identifies three key groups of actors: "the state's nuclear establishment," "important units within the professional military," and "politicians." According to the model, the interests of these three groups must come together to advocate obtaining nuclear weapons, as it is possible for security interests to be undermined by a collective action problem. It must be noted that the third group, politicians, may only truly become part of such a coalition with either party support or popular support. This model does not negate the security model but illustrates how the perception of external threats may influence decision-making or development of a nuclear program. Sagan suggests that the number and type of weapons produced can be influenced by the parochial goals of these internal actors. Nonetheless, Sagan acknowledges that a coalition can advocate in favour of or against the bomb.

The norms model introduces analysis of the symbolic value of the nuclear weapons. Here a state's norms of international interaction may shape the legitimization of a nuclear project, and the weapons themselves may serve to remould the state's identity. From a sociological standpoint, nuclear weapons provide something akin to Epstein's political prestige. However the analysis delves further into the construction of a modern state or a great power's policy objectives, not relying on a rational calculus but on underlying norms. Here, the quest for nuclear capability is compared to the rationale for having an Olympic team or a national airline. While this may indicate that norms drive proliferation, the values of ethics and law drive non-proliferation.

Sagan suggests that each model must be examined in every case to explain why states get or do not get nuclear weapons. Each model may provide insight into the calculus as it is possible for one to have a disproportionate importance over the others.¹⁷

Solingen mirrors Sagan's models when outlining his logics.¹⁸ Discussing neoliberal institutionalism, Solingen looks towards international institutions as the reason for non-proliferation, but



only where there are benefits for states to take part in a regime. Here, Solingen points to multiple agreements on the development and transfer of nuclear technology as promoters of increased global security, the most prominent being the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).¹⁹

Solingen also discusses democratic peace theory in relation to nuclear weapon proliferation. He does not argue that democracies do not seek nuclear weapons, since most N-States are democracies. However, he does argue that nuclear weapons were developed by democratic states in order to counter autocratic states. Moreover, he argues that democracies with nuclear weapon capabilities provide extended deterrence in order to protect other allied democracies.²⁰

Hypothesis: Non-Proliferation to Maintain Status Quo Ante

My hypothesis is that states refrain from obtaining nuclear weapons in response to the emergence of a new nuclear weapon state because the primary objective in the response is for the adversary to disarm. Balancing against a state's new nuclear arsenal by creating a weapons program in response would provide an independent deterrent assuring stability. However, in the long term, this process creates two new N-States: the original new state and the responding state. As a second new nuclear state emerges, this could trigger a third state to re-examine its security calculus and go nuclear as well. This is the reasoning behind the domino effect.

In refraining from developing nuclear capability in response to new N-States, states cut the chain reaction which leads to instability. However, the security dilemma created by the new N-State remains. The objective thus becomes to force that state to denuclearize and return to the previous balance. Responding by adopting nuclear weapons would also indicate acceptance of and legitimize the new N-State as part of the nuclear club, creating a new status quo.

In order to ascertain if the objective of non-proliferation is to return to the *status quo ante*, the nature of diplomatic actions with the new N-State must be examined. In addition to the security model, the domestic politics model and the norms model, a country's foreign policy towards the N-State must be examined for pressures forcing and providing incentive to denuclearize.

Alternative: Extended Deterrence

The alternative explanation for the absence of cascading regional proliferation is the reliance on extended deterrence. Because of this, states are not required to provide their own independent nuclear capability to counter the new N-State. Instead, another existing member of the nuclear club overtly extends a guarantee of deterrence, thus bringing the threatened states under a nuclear umbrella.

While this refers closely to Solingen's idea of democracies with nuclear weapon capabilities providing extended deterrence to other democracies, non-democratic nuclear powers may also extend their nuclear umbrella to allies. Therefore, the notion of extended deterrence is not exclusive to democratic states. However, there is a propensity to associate the notion of a nuclear umbrella with democracy



because the largest and widest guarantee of extended deterrence is provided by the United States.

Methodology

A case study of the absence of a nuclear domino effect in northeast Asia in response to North Korea's nuclear weapons program will allow for the evaluation of the strength of my hypothesis to explain why states do not develop nuclear weapons in a cascading pattern of response.

The case study will examine why South Korea and Japan have not obtained their own nuclear weapons to balance the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). In addition, it will examine the involvement of the United States and the People's Republic of China in the region. The case study will be limited to two nuclear crises on the Korean Peninsula. Indicators will be identified starting from the 1992 nuclear crisis through to the 2003 nuclear crisis and the Six-Party Talks. I use 1992 as the starting point because it was in that year that North Korea admitted to having developed a secret highly enriched uranium (HEU) program, which provides a real and overt threat and a starting point to examine the reaction to the regime.

This represents a prime case to examine nuclear domino theory as it features so prominently in the rhetoric behind the risk assessment. The case also fulfils the requirements to test the cascade theory. First, North Korea actually possesses a nuclear program, nuclear warheads and delivery systems, and has proceeded to test nuclear devices, nuclear warheads and regional and intercontinental ballistic missiles (IRBMs/ICBMs). Therefore, the DPRK represents a tangible threat to the security of the region, which affects the security calculus of surrounding states. In addition, North Korea demonstrates an aggressive and belligerent stance against its neighbours. Second, both South Korea and Japan possess civil nuclear programs and the ability to develop nuclear weapon capability. They have the technical expertise, resources and infrastructure to produce viable nuclear weapons. Third, South Korea and Japan are both allies to the United States, which extends its nuclear umbrella over the region. In addition to the extended deterrence provided by the US strategic nuclear arsenal and its submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) in the area, the US military is heavily invested in the region in conventional military terms as well. Notably, US troops are on the ground along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in South Korea, US assets are deployed across Japan and the United States has a large military installation in Guam.

It should be noted that this heavy US political and military involvement in the region makes this a hard case to test for the impact of the disarmament policy objective on non-proliferation. In particular, the express extension of the US deterrent umbrella makes this case better for my alternative explanation. The case will be examined through the lens of Sagan's three models, plus a fourth level of analysis. The models are: security model, bureaucratic politics model, the norms model, and the policy objective model.

The posture of rejection of the N-state and the policy objective of disarmament are mainly indicated by engaging in dialogue with the N-State with the precise objective of returning to the *status quo ante*. More than looking for diplomacy on the surface, serious commitment to such a policy will be indicated by an escalation of the crisis as demands are not met, resulting in declarations, appeals to



the international community and the application of sanctions. The offer of aid and preferential agreements if North Korea engages in disarmament will also serve to indicate the presence of the policy objective. Overall, the policy objective should be placed at the top of a state's foreign policy goals and substantiated by action. To break it down, Table 1 illustrates what should become apparent in the case, if the hypothesis is correct.

Table 1

Models	Indicators
Security	Proliferation of nuclear weapons viewed as a disadvantage to security
Domestic Politics	Coalition to disarm threat Collective action to mobilize on the issue
Norms	Belief that the region that it should be nuclear weapons free
Policy	Diplomatic actions for dialogue Sanctions, aid, trade

The extension of the nuclear umbrella by the US to does mean that it is the most important and only motivating factor for South Korea and Japan to refrain from proliferating. The strength of the alternative explanation will not be indicated by its mere presence, but will be demonstrated by being the cornerstone of the two countries' policy in reaction to the DPRK. Considering the global reach of the US extended deterrent, this is a given. Instead, the guarantee must not only be expressly indicated by the United States to its ally, but the ally must also include a reliance on this security guarantee in making its security calculus. The protected state must believe that it will be protected in time of war. This is illustrated in Table 2.

Table 2

Models	Indicators
Security	Nuclear umbrella part of security calculus
Domestic Politics	Coalition to rely on umbrella Or collective action problem
Norms	Reliance on the umbrella accepted and internalized
Policy	Respond to demands of protecting state Align foreign policy objective relating to the N-State with protector

Case Study: North Korea and its Neighbours

Before embarking on an analysis of the factors pushing or restraining nuclear weapons proliferation in response to North Korea, it is important to present a quick history of the country's nuclear program. North Korea's nuclear ambitions date back to the 1950s, but on 12 December 1985 the DPRK signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This was an important milestone towards cooling tensions at the time. Signing the NPT was done under pressure from the USSR, in turn under pressure from the United States. Under the provisions of the treaty, North Korea was required to open its nuclear facilities to International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspection to ensure that nuclear development was for civilian and peaceful purposes. However, instead of allowing all facilities to be inspected, this only meant that the Yongbyon nuclear site was parcelled into open and covert sectors.²¹ North Korea thus



pursued the development of a plutonium processing plant and nuclear weapon detonator testing. This was confirmed by US spy satellites in 1989.²²

To respond to the mistrust, North Korea signed the Joint Declaration for the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula in 1991, and signed and ratified the Nuclear Safeguard Measures Agreement in 1992. In reaction, the 1992 joint US/South Korean 'Team Spirit' military exercise, a source of tension between the North and South, was cancelled. Suspicions about continuing nuclear development by the North resurfaced in 1992 when two Yongbyon sectors were not open to IAEA inspections. This was confirmed by the CIA and Russian FIA, and resulted in a stalemate in talks between the North and South. The IAEA issued an ultimatum demanding full open inspection of Yongbyon. The ultimatum was rejected by the DPRK, and led to North Korea announcing that it would withdraw from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. This singular event was the catalyst for future crises and the starting point for the case study.²³

In 1994, the DPRK faced a regime change with the death of Kim Il-sung and the succession to power of his son Kim Jong-il. In that same year, the new leader announced that North Korea would produce plutonium weapons. This announcement led to a visit to the country by former US President Jimmy Carter, which diffused the situation until the late 1990s. In 1998, tension rose again in northeast Asia when North Korea tested a Taepodong missile.

The early 2000s were marked by failed diplomacy and were driven by a new doctrine under the presidency of George W. Bush. The crisis truly escalated when North Korea expelled IAEA inspectors in 2002, re-affirmed its withdrawal from the NPT and announced the reactivation of its nuclear program. To open dialogue, China hosted initial talks and then later Six-Party Talks bringing together North Korea, South Korea, Japan, the United States, China and Russia. Rounds of the Six-Party Talks continued into 2007 amidst individual incidents. These multilateral talks broke down as each set of demands was met with conditions that could not be accepted by the other party, preventing any real plan from going forward. Therefore, a climate of instability marked by periodic crisis – the latest in 2013 – became the norm.²⁴

South Korea

The case of South Korea typifies how a country should act when protected by another power. What is important here is to differentiate between the extended nuclear deterrent provided by the United States and the immediate conventional deterrent provided by the US military presence in South Korea. The security calculus for the South is primarily conventional. A nuclear bomb would be devastating, but the immediate threat to security comes from the DPRK's large military and artillery force concentrated just north of Seoul. While the security model accounts for inclusion of the US extended nuclear umbrella, it is complicated by another level of security commitment.

According to the domestic politics model and the norms model, South Korea is not strongly in favour of or against nuclear weapons. Again the nuclear issue is sidetracked by a more ominous conventional threat. There is no push or norm to denuclearize the peninsula, as the DPRK's program represents success of Korean ingenuity. In addition, South Korea does not demonstrate the normative



belief that gaining indigenous nuclear weapons would undermine its security. In the 1970s President Jung-hee Park mentioned the possibility of South Korea developing nuclear weapons (and the extent of the secret program to develop nuclear research was revealed in 2004). It was US diplomatic pressure in the 1970s which halted the program.

The key indicator that the South is an active shareholder in gaining the protection of the US umbrella comes from the alignment of policy with the purveyor of its security. A demonstration of this is the South Korea's commitment to the US war in Iraq, providing several thousand troops.²⁵

Japan

In the case of Japan, there are strong indicators of both the importance of the American nuclear umbrella and the objective of making North Korea disarm. Moreover, an examination of the relations between Japan and North Korea tell the story of a very complicated relationship, rooted in a history of violent conflict.

When we examine the security model, we can see that Japan definitely relies upon the US umbrella for deterrence.²⁶ However, there has been a push for self-reliance in conventional terms in the country's military calculations. Part of Japan's plan of response to an increased North Korean threat is not to rely on the deterrence provided by the United States but to take pre-emptive action against the DPRK and destroy its nuclear capabilities, based on the model of Israel's military interventions in Iraq and Syria. This demonstrates that Japan does not solely rely upon the extended deterrent to ensure national security and advocates military intervention independent from the United States. This does not, however, take into account the feasibility of such an intervention into North Korea air space by Japanese forces.²⁷

If we look at the domestic politics model, we can see that Japan is faced with a collective action problem. There are conservative factions within the government which are open to obtaining nuclear weapons if need be. While Japan's constitution only permits the development of defensive military assets, nuclear weapons could be legally developed under the constitution.²⁸

The most relevant model in analysing Japan is the norms model in relation to non-proliferation and accepting the US umbrella. This is the most relevant model for several reasons. First, as the only country against which nuclear weapons have been used, there is a strong normative push to maintain the country as a nuclear weapons free zone. Japan, however, is not known for exporting its views against nuclear weapons on the international stage and instead provides a venue for discussion of non-proliferation and disarmament issues. Second, acceptance of the US nuclear umbrella is a very strong policy norm in Japan. It is even seen as the foundation for the Japan-US alliance. Japan was alarmed when, under the direction of Paul Wolfowitz, the US introduced nuclear domino theory as a pressure tactic to force China to act more forcefully against North Korea. This was angrily denounced by Yukio Takeuchi, Japan's Vice Foreign Minister, who viewed this tactic to be contrary to underlying basis of the alliance they have with the US – the nuclear umbrella.²⁹



In terms of the primary policy objective, North Korean disarmament is not at the top of the list. As noted, Japan does not export its non-proliferation views. As well, this illustrates that Japan is aligning its policy with the United States because of the extended deterrence offered. As Japan depends on the US nuclear arsenal, the state does not actively engage in promoting regional or global disarmament. An alternate policy objective drives the attempt to normalize relations between North Korea and Japan rather than a fear of military escalation. Japan offers aid and threatens sanctions as part of the interplay, but this is not based on the issue of the nuclear threat. Surprisingly, the nuclear threat is not the most important issue on the policy agenda. The most important issue is the safe return of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korean agents.³⁰

United States

In this case, the United States demonstrates the strongest push to disarm North Korea. While the United States possesses a strong deterrent, its principal policy towards the DPRK is to return to the status quo ante. This appears to be out of fear that further escalation may lead to a new security balance under which South Korea and Japan may decide to develop nuclear weapons.³¹

Unexpectedly, the United States is the one state which demonstrates the objective of disarmament in halting proliferation. The United States includes North Korea as part of its security calculus and under the Bush administration came very close to proliferating nuclear weapon technology in direct response to the North Korean nuclear threat. Here, since the United States is the most prominent N-State, the issue would not be horizontal proliferation from country to country, but vertical proliferation from old weapon systems to new weapon systems. In the 2001 Nuclear Posture review, the Bush administration advocated reinstating nuclear weapons testing in order to build a nuclear version of the bunker buster. It was expressly stated that this weapon would target strategic enemy assets located underground, such as North Korea's military complex and nuclear sites.³²

In terms of domestic politics, there is a consensus amongst all actors in the United States that North Korea should not be permitted to have nuclear weapons and that it should be part of the US foreign policy agenda to achieve this. There was no consensus among the key actors to develop the new weapon. The push came from the Bush administration and portions of the US Air Force; however, the allocation of funds was blocked by Congress.

The domestic coalition to disarm North Korea is not based on an ideal of zero nuclear weapons but rather on the belief in keeping the N-State club from growing, and is thus a partial norm of non-proliferation. In addition, the United States views its role within the international system as the policeman or enforcer of non-proliferation, even while it maintains its own nuclear arsenal.

US foreign policy toward North Korea presents the whole gambit of indicators by dangling a carrot and, at the same time, holding a big stick. The US policy has ranged from offering a light water reactor to North Korea to punitively freezing financial assets in Macau.³³



China

As for China, a continuous limbo of insecurity appears to be its preferred outcome. On the one hand China aids in brokering talks between North Korea and other regional actors. On the other, as the primary lifeline of the Kim regime in North Korea, China occasionally attempts to withhold resources to gain control of the regime's erratic policies. The continual fear for China is the collapse of North Korea because the state provides a buffer with the West, and because China does not want its border areas destabilized in the event of a collapse. However, China has incentive to aid in the normalization of relations out of fear of the domino effect. If Japan and South Korea were to get nuclear weapons, China fears that it would have to deal with Taiwan developing nuclear weapons, in turn.³⁴

Findings

There are a number of interesting findings that come from this case study. First, enforcing the denuclearization of North Korea is not the primary reason behind non-proliferation on the part of South Korea and Japan. While this means that my hypothesis failed fully to explain the outcome for these two countries, the objective to return to the *status quo ante* appeared to be a key factor in US policy. The aim of returning to the previous balance thus can be associated with a foreign policy objective of an established nuclear state attempting to restrain the growth of the nuclear club.

Second, this case study illustrates that the America nuclear umbrella extended over the Pacific is an inherent part of both South Korea and Japan's security calculus. While both states rely heavily on the security provided by it, their views of their reliance on the United States differ. In South Korea, the extended deterrence is sought. However, the United States proactively extends its protection to Japan, fearing that Japan may otherwise decide to undertake its own nuclear weapon program.

Third, the nuclear threat was surprisingly not the most important issue for South Korea and Japan in their relations with North Korea. Issues of repatriation of citizens ranked higher. While having this policy at the top may in part be possible thanks to the US umbrella assuring continual deterrence, it indicates an attempt by the two states to normalize their relations with North Korea, despite its possession of nuclear weapons.

Conclusion

This paper aimed to examine the absence of regional cascades of nuclear proliferation. The research question asked why states refrain from acquiring nuclear weapons to deter a new N-State threatening their immediate sphere of security. I offered the objective of returning to the *status quo ante* as a hypothesis. The primary policy objective would be to force a new N-State to denuclearize, rather than create a new status quo by creating a weapons program in response. The alternative explanation offered was that of extended deterrence.

After an examination of the responses of South Korea and Japan to North Korea's nuclear weapons program from 1992 to 2003 and the Six-Party Talks during this period, and a study of the position of the United States and China within this framework, it is clear that extended deterrence



holds strong explanatory power. It is the key factor which assures the immediate security of South Korea and Japan, allowing these countries to reflect upon other policy issues. For both South Korea and Japan, the nuclear issue is not the highest ranking topic in their foreign relations with North Korea. Moreover, the objective of returning to the *status quo ante* and seeing North Korea denuclearize can be associated with the United States but not South Korea or Japan. In sum, the alternative explanation was successful in this case. But it is worth noting the importance of the policy ranking for the neighbouring states and the importance of the *status quo ante* for the superpower.

As more information becomes available, it will be possible to expand this case study to include the 2013 nuclear crisis in North Korea. Adding this crisis to the case may illustrate a substantive trend or demonstrate variation in the region's proliferation dynamics. Future research on regional proliferation in the Middle East would offer new perspective on the issue. Examining Israel as an N-State and its military enforcement of non-proliferation upon its neighbours would add a new lens to domino theory discussions.



NOTES

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- ¹⁶ Sagan, “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?” 54-86.
- ¹⁷ Sagan, “Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons?”



- ¹⁸ Solingen, *Nuclear Logics*, especially “Structural Power,” 24, “Domestic Politics,” 40, and “Norms and Constructivism,” 32. He supplements these themes with “Neoliberal Institutionalism,” 28 and “Democracy,” 37.
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