

Why North Korea Developed the Deadliest Weapon on Earth

Explaining North Korea's nuclear weapons program through strategic issues in international
crisis bargaining

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Abstract

This paper is a qualitative case study on the interaction between the United States of America and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea). The study examines the difficulties states face when bargaining, and draws conclusions based on theories of how the structural setting affects strategic choices when states seek security on the international arena. The paper examines signaling, commitment, and bargaining difficulties that arise from insecurity and credibility issues. The paper looks at statements made by representatives of the two countries as its primary material for conclusions. The paper further explains the difficulties in reaching international agreements, why nations like North Korea capitalizes on nuclear weapons as a guarantor for legitimacy and security, and why the US and North Korea have failed to reach a settlement. In relating this to the main question of why there has not been an effective agreement in the crisis, the paper concludes that there exists a preferable agreement that both parties might prefer to war, but that they are unable to agree on such a settlement because of the distrust inherent in the anarchic system.

Keywords: North Korea, United States, nuclear weapons, bargaining issues, strategic choice

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1. Introduction - the double-edged sword

The crisis on the Korean peninsula has been on the agenda for almost 60 years. It is now entering its third decade. Ever since the outbreak of the Korean war and the division between the communist North and the West-supported South, the tensions on the peninsula has been of concern for the whole world (Kim 2014:1). The current developments of the North Korean nuclear weapons program are of no less interest to the international community: the unstable authoritarian regime has succeeded in developing the world's deadliest weapon, and is now threatening to attack the United States and its allies (Roy 2016).

Since the fall of the Soviet Union, Pyongyang has had to defend itself from extinction because of its belligerent behavior. It is the country receiving most of US threats since the early 90's, and many recent presidents have made it their number one target of deterrence and pressure (Kim 2014:64). Battling this threat of extinction has made North Korea fight for a way to secure survival, capitalizing on the development of a nuclear arsenal as a means of legitimizing the regime (Kim 2014:2). No country in history has spent such a large share of its wealth on its nuclear artillery, and every six week or so it adds another missile (Economist 2016-05-28).

It is apparent by now that the crisis is further worsening, and Pyongyang is showing little evidence of giving up its sought for nuclear artillery absent a drastic change in circumstances, even writing it into its constitution in 2012 (Roy 2016:131). However, the paradox of North Korea's nuclear weapons program is described by Kim as a 'double-edged sword': it could either enable or endanger the survival of the regime (2014:99). While nuclear weapons are increasing the power of the country's military capability, it is equally isolating the country even more. Kim Jong-Un's "treasured sword of justice" might therefore work both ways: while giving a state with no superpower capability the ability to challenge the arguably only superpower (Economist 2018-08-05:1).

1.1 Problem

*"We had no other option but to develop nuclear deterrence" - Public Statement by North Korea
(Kirk 2003-06-11)*

*"Everyone is deceiving everyone else" - David E. Sanger, National Security Correspondent, NY Times
(NY Times podcast 13.11.2018)*

The paradox of North Korea's nuclear weapons can be seen as an example of an issue of strategic security: while increasing its own security it is automatically destabilizing the status quo, decreasing the overall security of everyone else in the system, further boosting other's need to engage in a nuclear arms race¹. North Korea's quest for legitimacy and security is therefore automatically causing it to be even more threatened. Furthermore has the parties involved in the crisis never been able to reach any long lasting commitment, since both sides have viewed the issue differently (Jervis & Rapp-Hooper 2018:108). North Korea understands the nuclear crisis as a conflict between its rightful pursuit of Jajusong² and America's practice of power politics and bullying. America on the other hand sees an uncooperative rouge state, supported by its two biggest adversaries (Russia and China), on the brink of acquiring the deadliest weapon in the world, while threatening to destroy America with it (Kim 2014:119-120).

The off-and-on diplomatic relationship, together with negative interaction has made it difficult for any side to find any suitable compromise. North Korea feels insecure and threatened, and the United States refuses to adhere to any demand posed by its rouge adversary. Suspicion and uncoordinated responses have created a consistent pattern of contradiction and contention between the two countries, finding even the smallest things hard to agree on (Kim 2014:132-141). This has created a 'one step forward, two steps back'-kind of relationship, with little progress being made since the beginning of the crisis.

The overall strategy previously used by the international community has been to convince North Korea to not acquire nuclear weapons. Now that Pyongyang has made the nuclear club - maybe its most tangible accomplishment as a country so far - it has stated that its membership is permanent (Roy 2016:131). This means that every previous strategy in trying to convince North

¹ This security dilemma and the case of North Korea will be further discussed in chapter 3.

² Self-reliance, described in Kim (2014).

Korea not to acquire nuclear weapons have been from a vantage ground: persuading them now means negotiating from a completely different position: forcing them to reverse course and give up capabilities they have developed and spent a fortune on, a much bigger concession (Jervis & Rapp-Hooper 2018:105). It is easy to see that difficulties in bargaining and problems to commit to any mutual understanding has been intensified by empty threats and promises that no party has committed to in the long run. The question that remains is: why? After 30 years of North Korean nuclear weapons development and insecurity, it is of great importance to seek to understand and explain why the international community has failed to effectively deal with the crisis.

1.2 Purpose

In this essay I will attempt to examine how the security setting affects strategic choices and therefore outcomes in international politics. This is to understand and explain which difficulties states face when bargaining in international crisis situations, and furthermore why parties sometimes fail to find agreements that both prefer over war. I have chosen to perform a case study on North Korea and its nuclear weapons development. My purpose is to understand and explain why reaching a fruitful agreement on the Korean Peninsula is so hard, what sort of mechanisms lies behind difficulties in bargaining and committing to agreements in international politics, and how this explains the case of why North Korea feels it has been "driven" to develop nuclear weapons (KCNA 2003-01-10). I have chosen the case of North Korea because it is astounding how a country with very little superpower capabilities has succeeded in creating a big threat against the arguably only superpower. North Korea, a small (sometimes deemed irrational) rouge state with little power, has created huge leverage on the international arena relative to its power. Creating nuclear weapons has made North Korea being able to negotiate from a completely new perspective, and with this new leverage, threatened to attack US soil (Roy 2016:134).

After having done some research on the subject, looking to see why the crisis on the Korean peninsula has gotten so far, it is apparent that it seems not only hard to reach agreements, but furthermore to implement them. Moreover does it look like the complex, distraught process of implementation has rather brought with it new friction to the crisis (Borger 2018). From this base of interest, I have chosen to attempt to answer the question:

Why is it so difficult to reach an effective³ agreement on the North Korean nuclear weapons crisis?

1.3 Earlier Research & Demarcations

The current arguments of explanation of the crisis are scattered. There is most often a debate between 'optimists' and 'pessimists', or 'doves' and 'hawks' in the arguments of why a belligerent North Korea has pursued its nuclear weapons program. Either policy or personality has often been the major contenders for explaining the situation (Anderson 2017). The 'doves' arguments contend that North Korea's nuclear weapons program is due to it being threatened militarily (Cha & Kang 2004; Park 2010; Sigal 2008), isolated politically (Barry 2017; Carlin & Lewis 2007; Cumings 2010; Han 2009; Michishita 2006 & 2009a), and ailing economically (Huntley 2007; Michishita 2009b). In short, the problem is policy. The 'hawks' however disagree and find themselves on the other side of the spectrum: they argue that the nuclear weapons program is due to the psychological proclivities of its leaders (Hymans 2008), its desire and ability to 'extort aid' from the global community (Eberstadt 2004; Lankov 2013), its deep-rooted revisionist intentions (Cha 2002a), and its domestic political constraints and incentives (Byman and Lind 2010). In short, the problem lies in North Korea's regime's revisionist nature.

A lot of these findings has as a mission to result in strategy suggestions. I will of course draw important empirical findings and implications from both sides' arguments, but will attempt to examine the case from a different perspective. My focus is on structural causes and their effect. These perspective are rarely, if ever, taken (Anderson 2017:631). Using theory to understand a case only attempts to helps us understand the issue at from one perspective, like a map helps us understand its territory, and therefore this essay does not in any way claim to fully disclose all of the important aspects of relationship between North Korea and the United States, or between North Korea and the outside world. It solely attempts to theoretically view the crisis on the Korean peninsula from a different, and what I deem very relevant, perspective, shedding light on what has been quite an unexplainable issue.

³ With effective, I mean a more long-lasting, secured, preferable agreement which both sides prefer to adhere to than no agreement.

Unfortunately, I do not have the time to thoroughly paint an overarching historical background picture of North Korea's nuclear ambition and history as a country. My scope of interest will as mentioned primarily focus on the relationship between North Korea and the US. This is mainly because of what I mentioned in the 'problem' section. The US is the principal threat to North Korea and its strive for legitimacy. It views America as its greatest adversary and is therefore mostly both receiving and sending threats to the US (Jervis & Rapp-Hooper 2018:105). Furthermore is America probably the only state that has any real possibility of carrying out a threat, and therefore a lot of the responsibility to deal with Pyongyang has fallen on Washington. Moreover has Pyongyang often tended to bypass Seoul and dismiss its initiatives, preferring to deal directly with Washington (Roy 2016:133). South Korea was also not a direct signatory of the armistice in 1953, which means that technically, South Korea cannot end the war on its own without the US (NBC 2017-04-18). Other than that, it is often argued that Russia lacks heavy influence with North Korea and is not directly threatened by its belligerent behavior. China fears regime collapse more than its nuclear weapons and even though it possesses some sway in dealing with North Korea, it prefers to stay out of the question. Furthermore does both Japan and South Korea prefer to stay under the American sphere of security and protection⁴ (Roy 2016:133).

1.4 Disposition

The study will now introduce the methodological standpoint and framework that will be used to analyze my subject. I disclose the research design, the material of choice, important considerations of researching actors' motives, and the demarcations of my work. Thereafter I will present the theory that is the basis for my research to convey why states act like they do, present the issues of crisis bargaining, to then apply it to the empirical data in the following chapter. The theory highlights three main strategic difficulties, which I will analyze separately to determine both why they are important per se, but also what they lead to. I will end my study with presenting my findings, some conclusions, and reasoning around what the future might entail.

⁴ These arguments are further based on solely security needs. The analysis in chapter 5 will shed more light on exactly how much North Korea views it security based on solely the American threat.

2. Method of Research and Material

This section presents an overview of how my research will be conducted, including choices I have made regarding methodological analysis techniques, overall considerations, and what material I have chosen to use. I will cover the basis for the reasons of my choices and especially the importance of the delimitations I have had to make. The choices presented here are all based on the formulation of my research question, the amount of time I have had at my disposal, and the limited amount of resources for conducting research.

2.1 Case Study

My appeal for the subject at hand came from an interest of understanding how and why states can and cannot cooperate in international relations. Questions concerning the difficulties of cooperation, security, and trust was the fuse to this essay. Why cannot states trust each other? What has given rise to tensions between two so geographically separated countries? Why is North Korea's relation with the outside world so rooted with distrust and disengagement? To explain the situation on the Korean Peninsula, a qualitative case study is the most accurate methodological way of research, since it goes deep into what is being examined. Thus the researcher can reach conclusions and results that are deeper rather than broad, and qualitative rather than quantitative (Teorell & Svensson 2007:236).

As political scientists, we try to interpret human behavior and why humans act like they do depending on how they interpret their surroundings. The sole action or several individuals gets repercussions: even foreign policy and international politics can outmost be connected to human perceptions, motives, and actions (Teorell & Svensson 2007:250). My ambition is to examine the case of bargaining difficulties between North Korea and the US, above all because it is shown that this relationship seems to be accountable for the North Korean weapons program. To reach

conclusions on this, I will in some respect have to examine the motives, actions and circumstantial evidence that points towards explaining why actors behave as they do (Teorell & Svensson 2007:65). The case of North Korea is a so called critical case, because of its relevance to the understanding of why states behave as they do, but also because understanding North Korea's actions can help us explain the current situation of international politics both in South East Asia, but also globally (Teorell & Svensson 2008:27, 222).

2.2 Material and Demarcations

There are many important considerations when interpreting material to make the exact judgement of what the correct reasoning really is. If the action is not directly motivated by the actor, I will have to look for other evidence of motivation. In this case it is important to take precaution in the treatment of statements to avoid systematic distortions in the inference. The validity of the research therefore lies in drawing the correct conclusions from statements (Teorell & Svensson 2007:252). I will consider first-hand material as my prime base for conducting research. This is because they are as little processed as possible, and therefore does not include any intentions of retelling the story from any perspective. It is of importance to not rely on the judgement that actors acted like they did only because they wished to, but sometimes because of other important reasons, either not known at first, or hidden because of strategic motives (Teorell & Svensson 2007:252).

I have limited my study to create a focused case that consists of only relevant aspects and findings to the posed question. Many of the theoretical approaches I have used in this essay either fully or partly relies on game theoretical models. I have chosen not to incorporate any of these models in this essay simply because the lack of space⁵. I have further neither the space nor the time to present a thorough historical perspective to my study. This means that I will mostly focus on what has led up to the current situation from a bargaining-perspective, with only small bits and pieces of historical implications in the text. After many thoughtful considerations, I have chosen the theory that seems most natural to the study. My study might have been more thoroughly researched if the crisis would not still be ongoing: it is often easier to declare motivations and reasons for

⁵ If the reader wishes to interpret these models, they are available in either Morrow 1999, Fearon 1995, or Jervis 1976.

actions after crisis has ended, but the relevance of my work would have proven less essential if the case was not pressing at the current time.

3. Explaining Diplomatic and Un-diplomatic Relationships on the International Arena

This chapter presents some background to the theory of choice and will hopefully explain to the reader why I have chosen to look at the case from a structural perspective. To understand the conditions for why states behave as they do when they bargain, one must first look at the bigger perspective. Are there any rules that states abide by when they interact and seek security in the international arena? Can states trust each other? Why do states sometimes choose arming instead of cooperation or allies? The case of North Korea is unusual since they do not adhere to any specific international agreements and therefore seems to attempt to play by its own rules. This chapter will hopefully explain why this is, and the uniqueness of North Korea's quest for security to the reader.

3.1 Cooperation or Anarchy? Disclaiming the terms of states' actions on the international arena.

Since there is no unmistakable way of knowing other's security motives, states must rely on themselves for protection. The self-help attempts of states to look after their own security needs tend, regardless of intention, to lead to rising insecurity for others. This is because states interpret their own measures as defensive and measures of others as potentially threatening (Jervis 1978). As states attempt to maximize their own security (say by militarizing, building weapons, acquiring nuclear capability, etc.), they are automatically sending signals that they are mobilizing. This automatically destabilizes the status quo and decreases the overall security of everyone else in the system, causing other's to militarize as well (Waltz 1979). This is also referred to as the spiral model since it indicates that there will be no end to this dilemma of self-armament (Jervis 1978).

The reason for this paradoxical behavior of states arises because of the fact that the world does not have a common police and therefore, the state's own survival is its main motivation in the anarchic world (Waltz 1979). This perspective highlights difficulties in interaction between states internationally: in the absence of a hegemonic power, there is no real punishment for states if they do not keep their promises. This is the reasoning behind the arguments of why cooperation and trust is difficult among states in this thesis. However, I do not argue that cooperation is impossible. Rather, it is shown that states *can* overcome difficulties of distrust through multiple premises of international forums, mutual agreements, and alliances. Furthermore are most states in the world a part of this system of some kind of trust among them. However, I argue that in the case of North Korea, the situation is quite unique. I will explain why in the next chapter.

3.2 The Last Man Standing

While multiple attempts have been made by the outside world to establish this above mentioned type of cooperation with North Korea, there have been many difficulties establishing diplomatic or friendly connections. The North Korean regime has multiple times shown that it is unwilling to join the international community (Wired 2018-12-06; Davenport 2018). This makes the case of North Korea special. Pyongyang still lives with the assumption of an anarchic world, state vs state, with little or no ability to trust each other. In Pyongyang's world, survival remains the main motive of every nation, and especially for North Korea itself, since it has fought for its sovereignty and legitimacy on the international arena since the separation of the two Koreas (Kim 2014). This is furthermore the reason why the notion of the security dilemma remains significant in the aspect of explaining the North Korean nuclear weapons development, and how and why North Korea has acted as it has. The theory of the anarchic system still remains ideal in examining the state, since Pyongyang's view of the world matches that of neorealists. What is even more unique in this case is that the other states surrounding North Korea has given up (at least part of) their distrust with the outside world and joined the international community (even though the degree varies). Moreover has this proven to be effective, with prosperous economies, growing populations, and overall heightened conditions for the population in these countries (Human Rights Watch 2018). Still, North Korea remains in the old-fashioned world of self-reliance approaching autarky.

3.3 Arms versus Allies

Why then, has North Korea remained in this anarchic setting of self-reliance? Morrow (1993) argues that nations pursue the means that they believe present the most fruitful path to security. To do this, they balance the political benefits of additional capabilities against the political costs acquiring them. Most often when they do this, they choose between allies or arming (Morrow 1993:207). Arming can improve a nation's ability to defend itself, or it can induce other nations to view the arming as a threat (Morrow 1993:213). While alliances provide a substantial increase in capabilities immediately, their worth lies in their credibility, i.e. they are only worth pursuing if it is in their interest to come to one another's rescue. Militarizing or arming is costlier, but more reliable (Morrow 1993:215-216). What then, can we learn about North Korea? It is evident that Kim Jong-Un and his predecessors have chosen arms instead of allies, even though they might have tried the latter at some point. The reason for this then should be that the North claims arming is less costly than allying with the US. Why? I will attempt to develop a framework for examining the difficulties North Korea faces when choosing to trust the outside world in the next chapter.

4. Theoretical Framework - Strategic Issues in Crisis Bargaining

As mentioned does academic articles or research most often cover deterrence techniques, 'hawk' vs 'dove' strategies, invasion strategies, effective sanctions, and others alike (Anderson 2017). I have decided to aim at explaining the crisis from a different point of view, using structural theory. This focus finds the difficulties faced by the actors in the crisis and why they prohibit the parties to find an effective solution. Structural theory takes a step back and examines the conditions to which states abide by when acting. The reason for this choice is because I believe that no strategy (in this case for either North Korea or the United States) is sufficient or complete without an understanding of the bigger picture. Furthermore do I wish to remain as neutral as possible. Structural theory cannot unquestionably explain everything, but it clearly has value in the analysis of global security dynamics. Since the variety of actors and their actions are not matched by a variety in outcomes (as particularly shown in the case of North Korea), we know that systemic causes are in play (Waltz 2010:69).

The former chapter presented some more general issues states face when acting on the international arena. I will now go deeper into the area of bargaining and persuasion in the interaction between states. I will then convey more precisely what issues arise when bargaining, to then summarize what they might lead to. My main theory of usage is "The strategic setting of choices: signaling, commitment, and negotiation in international politics" by James D. Morrow, which I deem possesses good qualities for explaining the above mentioned purpose. I have decided to complement the theory with different claims from other likeminded political scientists such as Fearon, Schelling, and Jervis, to fully disclose what I deem the most important parts of the explanations of states' behavior.

4.1 The Three Important Strategic Difficulties in Bargaining

Uncertainty about the motivations of others raises at least three strategic issues in international politics. First and foremost, can parties signal one another their true motivations? Is it in an actor's interest to reveal to another what its true goals are, and for the other to believe that disclosure? Can actors commit themselves in ways that are credible to others who do not know their exact and true motives? What mechanisms make such commitment possible and not possible? These are some of the credibility and uncertainty issues that arise when states face each other in international crisis bargaining (Morrow 1999:80). I will in this essay assume that under broad conditions is the fact that fighting is costly and risky an implication that there should exist negotiated settlements that rationally led states in dispute would prefer to war (Fearon 1995). I will assume that such a preferable agreement exists, but that states are sometimes unable to agree on such a settlement because of mutual distrust inherent in the anarchic system. I assume that actors select actions to obtain preferred outcomes. However, the strategic setting determines what outcomes can result.

The three strategic issues that I will explore in the interaction between North Korea and the US are signaling, commitment, and bargaining problems. The first two has important implications for explaining the third, however, they all overlap. Bargaining is therefore given extra attention because it sums up the issues faced in the two first difficulties. I have attempted to create an overall understanding of what all three dimensions incorporates, and what importance they have in relation to interaction.

4.2 Signaling

One of the most important parts of diplomacy is for states to signal motives, interests, and its resolve to other countries. This can be done by both verbal and non-verbal behavior (Jönsson & Hall 2005:75). Signals can include everything from a small gesture, to relocate military forces or building alliances, and can be defined as "a kind of sign which is used to generate a response of

some kind” (Berger 1984:20). This means that whatever leaders or diplomats do, or do not do, is duly noted and interpreted by their colleagues in other countries (Jönsson & Aggestam 1999:152). By engaging politically, leaders of states can send signals with implications of intentions to show themselves energetic or influential on the international arena. There are many aspects of signaling and its value in international politics. For example can vagueness give the sender the possibility to construct motivations of their true intentions in retrospect. Furthermore has non-verbal messages and tacit bargaining become increasingly important, to signal a state’s motives with more resolve (Jönsson & Hall 2005:76; Jönsson & Aggestam 1999:151).

Interpreting signals is crucial because knowing other actors’ motivations can help states judge what its best responses and actions are (Morrow 1999:86). Actors cannot unquestionably know one another’s motivations or its type: they can only attempt to infer them from the other’s actions (Morrow 1999:84). Because of this uncertainty, states have incentives to bluff: if they appear stronger than they are, perhaps they can bargain from a better perspective, or an opponent might not attack. Since states have private information about their own capabilities, motives, and dedication, other states sometimes have to rely on interpreting other cues than simply what is said. Other times, communication is neither possible nor desirable because there is no feasible way to convey one’s true will. This means that states cannot always use quiet diplomatic conversations to discover mutually preferable settlements or persuade one another (Morrow 1999:84).

To disclose one’s true will, a state can attempt to send *costly* signals to infer one’s real incentives. The actions an actor is willing to take to achieve its goal sets it apart from other, weaker, actors. Stronger actors take more costly actions because it is willing to bear costs which other types would not. This could be mobilizing troops or acquiring nuclear weapons, which both are costly, and therefore signals strength more credibly than uttering threats or promises which any state can do (Morrow 1999:88). Costly signals will not however in general completely eliminate the risk of war by miscalculation. It might even do the opposite. The reason lies in the nature of signals: militarizing or engaging in an arms race to signal strength and deter from an attack might instead end up increasing the others’ will to either perform a preemptive attack (before you militarize enough to beat the other), or give incentives for the other to militarize even more since backing down would be too costly (Fearon 1995:397).

4.3 Commitment

Uncertainty about other states' motivations is also a fuse for problems of commitment between states. The critical issue in problems of commitment is that during anarchy, states are unable to credibly commit themselves to following through on agreement, and furthermore may have incentives to renege on their agreements (Powell 2006:170). Commitment is a problem because actors often *want* to make promises that others doubt the actor will be willing to carry out later (Morrow 1999:91). Communication of commitment is often neither fully reliable or fully plausible in many situations of crisis because the above mentioned incentives to fool or bluff (Schelling 1960:39). Therefore, committing is a dynamic issue because even if actors know one another's motivations, they have reasons to doubt that their own and their opponent's motivations won't change over time (Morrow 1999:91). This change in incentives can be anticipated and is the source of other's doubt about the promise. Because of the structural uncertainty faced by states on the international arena, without a global government or police, there is no punishment if an actor renege on its promise (Morrow 1999:96).

Since, as mentioned, states view their own actions as defensive and other states' actions as offensive (Jervis 1978). This inability to credibly commit to cooperative behavior creates incentives for the first party to take an uncooperative action because it knows the second party probably will take an uncooperative action later. This uncooperative behavior leads to outcomes that are worse for both parties, since both might want to commit, but feel obliged not to get fooled. This means that states might find themselves in a situation where at least one of them prefers war to peace, because of the fear of being fooled (Powell 2006).

4.4 Bargaining

Actors bargain when several solutions to a problem are available but they do not agree on the ranking of those solutions. Even if actors prefer a number of possible agreements to the absence of one, they might not be able to reach an agreement that they both unite on because they differ on the division of the perceived situation. This could be the respective divide of power between the actors, who is to blame for the issue, or the overall potential of a solution. The question is not only *if* any

agreement should be reached, but in addition *which* agreement should be reached (Morrow 1999:96).

Offers and responses signals actors' reservation level and resolve. Reservation levels are the agreement a side sees as equivalent to its outside option which also reflect the power which the actor hold in negotiations. Because a state can always choose its outside option rather than negotiate, it can use that power to secure a deal at least as attractive as its outside option. The game in negotiations is that neither state knows the other's reservation level due to private information and attempts to figure it out (Morrow 1999:97). A side's resolve depend on both observable factors, such as the size of its military power, but also unobservable factors, such as its willingness to accept the costs of war or its precise value for the stakes in the crisis (Morrow 1999:110).

While states have incentives to avoid the costs of war, they simultaneously attempt to obtain a favorable resolution in negotiations. The latter desire also gives them an incentive to exaggerate their true willingness or capability to fight in a war, if by doing so they could possibly persuade the other party to make concessions or back down (Fearon 1995:395). Spilling too much information about one's reservation level reveals your strength and position in bargaining. If you are strong, you have incentives to reveal your strength, but if you are weak, you have incentives to bluff and appear strong to intimidate your opponent. Therefore, all states often want to signal strength (Morrow 1999:98). However, states also have reasons to conceal or underestimate their capabilities or resolve, if revealing them could make them militarily and politically vulnerable, if it would reduce their chances of conducting a first strike, or to hide their willingness to engage in war in order to avoid giving the appearance of being the aggressor (Fearon 1995:396). Because of these motives to bluff, rational miscalculations due to lack of information or disagreement of relative power, often leads to either one or both parties expecting the benefits of war seeming greater than the expected costs (Fearon 1995).

Persuasion is possible when actors are uncertain about their own reservation levels. The alternative to an agreed deal is often unclear. This can be either because one does not know the implications of the future without a deal, or because they do not know if they have disclosed too much information and is now in a more vulnerable position. Bargaining therefore occurs when reservation levels, the existing zone of agreement, or private information is not common knowledge (Morrow 1999:102). A state bargains tacitly with another state when it attempts to manipulate the other's policy choices through its active behavior rather than communicating verbally. It signals

strength through behavior. Tacit bargain is used to influence the other's behavior and preferences by some measure of joint, voluntary behavior (Downs & Rocke 1987:297).

When negotiating, there should be some range of alternative outcomes in which any point is better for both sides than to reach no agreement at all. If there was not, there would be no point in bargaining. Bargaining strength suggests that the advantages goes to the most powerful or skillful in persuading the other (Schelling 1960:22). A state's power on the international arena can generally be described as "the ability to affect others to get the outcomes one wants" (Nye 2009:61). The power states possess in bargaining are most often valuable when tangible and represents the amount of sway a state has to bargain with at the table. Instruments of persuasion or coercion like threats, promises, punishment, inducement, compulsion, etc, are therefore all dependent on how strong of a tool they can utilize when they bargain (Wilson 2008:114).

Others describe bargaining strength as the power to bluff. What counts then is the ability to strategically mislead and misrepresent ones own bargaining power (Schelling 1960:23). This means that the most powerful does not always win in bargaining. Fearon (1994) describes how smaller, or weaker powers can challenge bigger powers in certain ways to gain leverage by "fooling" the bigger in bargaining. If the weaker power challenges the stronger on interests that are only peripheral to the bigger state, the bigger state will not see it necessary to go to war on issues which are not of great importance to it. Therefore the smaller state can test the bigger and as so gain leverage bit by bit, since the smaller state has good reason to doubt the resolve of the bigger in such situations (Fearon 1994). But, misinterpretation and misinformation are central to the received view of the challenger. War can occur when a state misjudges what the other side will do. When there can never be complete knowledge of the other actor's type, and both sides have incentives to misrepresent their private information, misperception must be epidemic (Morrow 1999; Jervis 1976).

Both signaling and commitment issues hence make bargaining difficult in the anarchic setting because of the above mentioned complications. It is all connected to the uncertainty of the state in the international system. Actors choose their moves to produce their preferred outcome, but systemic factors causes them to distrust each other. These structural issues are the reason states take actions that sometimes might reflect as 'irrational'. This uncertainty and this game of signals is why states want to anticipate other players' future moves before it acts itself. Often, this uncertainty results in that neither side feels that they can achieve any agreement on security which they cannot better provide themselves (Powell 2006).

5. Analysis - the Case of North Korea

In this chapter I apply the three main strategic issues of crisis bargaining to the case of North Korea. The purpose of this is to see if the choices made in the interaction between North Korea and the United States have been affected by the structural strategic setting correspondingly to what I have stated above. The three dimensions (signaling, commitment, and bargaining) will be analyzed one by one to create a more clear analysis, even though they overlap. It is further important to mention that I realize that the empirical evidence portrayed here does not cover every dimension of the whole crisis, but rather focuses on just the structural setting's effect on choices. The analysis is supposed to answer my main question: why is it so difficult to reach an effective agreement on the North Korean nuclear weapons crisis?

5.1 Signaling

"If provoked again, the military will launch merciless, annihilating and more powerful strikes to blow up the island without any trace" - the North's Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea referring to a South Korean island (CBS News 2011-11-24)

This statement came from the North's official Korean Central News Agency after South Korea conducted large scale military drills near the North Korean boarder. Both the North and the South has spent millions of dollars on militarizing and building up its weapons arsenal, and both states have several times made threats to attack the other if need be. These are clear examples of costly signals, which are used to differ a more resolved actor from a weaker one. This shows that both sides have credibly signaled great resolve in the conflict: no one wants to back down and are willing to risk war to show strength.

The day this statement came out, North Korea also threatened to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire" (CBS news 2011-11-24). The North has issued many similar threats over the years at times of tension with its southern neighbor. However, threats are often mixed with non-verbal behavior. For instance, on November 27th 2017, North Korea test-fired a ballistic missile that they claimed could deliver a nuclear warhead to any city in the US. Later, Kim Jong-Un claimed that the missile launch "finally realized" the nation's ambition "of completing the state nuclear force" (Economist 2017-11-29). Verifiable nuclear missile tests from North Korea are one of the only possible ways that the outer world can deduce if North Korea can credibly threaten them or not. The many test that Pyongyang has conducted shows they that they now can, even if they have tended to exaggerate the rate their missile have been developed (Washington Post 2017-11-29). At the same time, US officials has restated that "the United States does not accept a nuclear North Korea" (US DoD 2017-10-27), but has stated the same thing several times without any real action.

"North Korea best not make any more threats to the United States.... They will be met with fire, fury, and frankly, power, the likes of which the world has never seen before" - Donald Trump (The White House 2017-08-08)

"You talk about your nuclear capabilities, but ours are so massive and powerful that I pray to God they will never have to be used" - Donald Trump in his letter to Kim Jong-Un canceling the summit in June 2018 (The White House 2018-05-24)

"The enemy to be destroyed is in our sights" - North Korean propaganda outlet Mearir (Echo) (The Independent 2017-04-27)

To signal strength is one of the most important ways for showing one's resolve according to Morrow. This gives incentives to bluff, since if one appears more resolved then one actually is, one can bargain from a better perspective. Donald Trump's threat of fire and fury might have been to show off strength of character when it comes to attempting to persuade Kim Jong-Un to not challenge him. Most likely he does not want to go to war with a nuclear powered North Korea, but he is willing to make the appearance that he will, to not loose face in negotiations. The third statement came from a North Korean propaganda outlet, while playing a film displaying a fictional attack on the US navy and the White House. This is one of many, not so subtle signals that the North Korean regime has created to appear threatening. It has also intentionally leaked videos depicting attacks on New York in 2013, and Washington DC in 2016, which instead reveals just how anxious it has been of America to view North Korea as a threat.

Even though it is apparent that the United States is the bigger power in this two-player-game, it has shown itself reluctant to engage in any real threatening actions against North Korea. Trump still threatens North Korea that their "very strong sanctions, by far the strongest in history, and maximum pressure campaign will continue" (NY Times 2018-05-24). In response, one top North Korean official warned that the United States must choose between encountering North Korea in a meeting room or in a "nuclear-to-nuclear showdown" (NY Times 2018-05-23). Even though US sanctions have been called an "act of war" on several occasions by Pyongyang, most statements prove that both every US President and North Korean leader have been bluffing when they have threatened to meet each other with their "massive" and "powerful" nuclear capabilities (Goldman 2017-12-24). Even so, the threatening still continues as an attempt to decrease the other's willingness to pursue action against the other, even though so far, it does not seem as they have made any real change in attitude from either side. It is clear however, that both sides engage in explicit signals that attempt to convey their intentions of using nuclear weapons against the other if it does not comply with its own demands. Both states indicate strength and resolve far beyond what their true resolves seems to be. However, North Korea *has* had the time to gain leverage, and its signaling has therefore gotten much more credible than it used to.

5.2 Commitment

The central issue to commitment problems is as mentioned that the inability to credibly commit to one another creates incentives for both parties to take uncooperative action instead. This means that the outcome is often worse for both, because there exists a mutual preferred zone of agreement, but both feel obliged to not get fooled. It is clearly shown that in the case of the relationship between North Korea and the United States, commitment issues has been central. Both sides have many times stated its willingness to cooperate, but ended up either wanting its counterpart to give something up before even considering stepping into negotiations, or has not even agreed on the terms for cooperation in the first place (Hankyoreh 1999-11-13; NY Times 2018-03-06). This has meant that both parties has come out of the situation feeling cheated on, which has made the tensions even worse.

"The North Korean side clearly stated its willingness to denuclearize... It made it clear that it would have no reason to keep nuclear weapons if the military threat to the North was eliminated and its security guaranteed" - Japanese President Moon Jae-In after his meeting with Kim Jong-Un (NY Times 2018-03-06)

"Unless there is trust in the United States, North Korea will not unilaterally disarm itself first" - Minister for Foreign Affairs of North Korea Ri Yong Ho (EBL News 2018-09-29)

"A sustained cessation of North Korea's threatening behavior must occur before talks can begin. North Korea must earn its way back to the table" - Rex Tillerson US Secretary of State (DoS 2017-12-15)

Every time a deal has been proposed, the same bargain has been on the table: North Korea must relinquish its nuclear arsenal. In return, the US (sometimes together with the international community) would grant a mixture of security and economic incentives. For North Korea however, the bargain has always been the reverse: the US first eliminates all security threats and sanctions to North Korea before it then can consider to denuclearize (EBL News 2018-12-20). The few times an agreement actually has come through, it was either so vague that neither side had agreed to anything in particular, or there came a time further on when both sides realized they did *not* actually agree on the terms. The Joint declaration of the Denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, the Agreed Framework, and the Six-Party talks were all of those sorts (Borger 2018; Davenport 2018). The agreement between current leaders Donald Trump and Kim Jong-Un on June 12th 2018 was also similar to the previous agreements in the sense that both sides took entirely different understandings from the document and meeting. The agreement was poorly written because both sides knew that the more specific it was, the more difficult it would be to agree on (Sanger 2018-11-13).

The insecurity and inability to commit to any action by any side therefore seem to have furthered the tensions between the countries, instead of both parties realizing their insecurities and weaknesses. Instead, they both have taken uncooperative actions or issued threats to not look weak. 2017 included many such statements by each side. For example did Donald Trump's call Kim Jong-Un the leader of "a band of criminals", a "madman", and a "sick puppy", and Mr Kim thereafter called his colleague a "mentally deranged US dotard", and "a rouge and a gangster fond of playing with fire, rather than a politician" (NY Times 2018-01-11).

Although no single threat or bluff completely erodes a state's credibility, habitual empty threats degrade it over time. When asked about his aggressive exchange of threats with Kim, Trump replied "you see that a lot with me, and then all of a sudden somebody's my best friend. I could give you 20 examples." (NY Times 2018-06-11). Although Trump might have characterized this as a good trait, there is doubt that his North Korean counterpart will not see it the same way. It is more probable that he will interpret it as the American president priding himself in promising something that he then has no intention of fulfilling, changing his strategy according to his current preferences as he goes along.

Furthermore, Secretary of State Rex Tillerson's statement (which became the fuse for both parties to cancel the summit of June 2018) threatened Kim Jong-Un in a way that definitely fused him to rather sought for war than for decapitation, as Tillerson asserted that if the US wanted, Kim "could end up like his Libyan colleague" (NY Times 2018-05-23). While Tillerson might have thought that he signaled that North Korea's only option was to denuclearize and begin negotiations with the US, he instead added another level of insecurity to North Korea's anxiety for safety. With negotiation tactics like this, Kim Jong-Un will more likely conclude that nuclear weapons are a stronger guarantor for survival than any US promise.

5.3 Bargaining

"Our nuclear weapons capability is the treasure of a unified Korea... that we would never barter at any price" - Kim Yong-nam Head of State North Korea (Russia Today 2013-04-14)

It seems evidently clear, when looking at the exchange between North Korea and the US, that there are several solutions available, but none which they have agreed on. For example, both countries seek peace and safety: neither would build nuclear weapons or threaten to use them if they did not feel like it was a necessity. But for each side, their outside option has seemed more attractive than negotiating, if it meant giving up some of their power. What also seems evident is that it would probably be less costly. But both actors have tended to choose either attempting to persuade the other, or gain leverage in some other way. They differ on the divide of power between

the two, who is to blame for the tensions to start with, and who is responsible for creating a viable solution. Both countries consider the other one responsible for hindering a solution.

Not only has North Korea succeeded in building more reactors, more delivery systems, and had the time to develop nuclear warheads to put on top of ballistic missiles, it has furthermore succeeded in calculating the international community's response so well by now that it has fully adapted to its punishments. North Korea knows, because of reasons like the UN being vetoed by Russia, or that it can challenge the US on peripheral issues to the United States without risking an actual military conflict, that the only way the US or the international community can inflict punishment is by economic sanctions. Pyongyang has been able to predict new sanctions before it makes a move, and can therefore both calculate the benefits, as well as gain some control over when it will get hit by a new round of sanctions. This means that North Korea has deemed the pain from developing nuclear weapons tolerable, and even encourages them to complete the program faster so that it can gain leverage and negotiate from a more powerful position (Jervis & Rapp-Hooper 2018:110-112).

But while it might seem as though economic sanctions has little to no effect, it also seems as though it is one of the actual drivers to North Korea's nuclear weapons program, or in its own words, "[North Korea's nuclear weapons is] entirely attributable to the US nuclear threat, sanctions, and pressure" (KCNA 2006-10-11), and it has several times stated that the US drove North Korea "into a corner" (Kookmin Ilbo 2005-14-11; KCNA 2003-01-10). Further evidence of North Korea's reason for armament came in 2003, when North Korea argued that they "had no other options but to develop nuclear deterrence" (Kirk 2003-06-11).

Washington on the other hand has viewed the bargaining as the US unwillingly having to "pay" a so-called rouge state not to acquire nuclear weapons (Gross 2002), with the attitude of "no respect and no reward to induce better behavior on Pyongyang's part" (Allison 2006-07-16). It seems as though the US fears that it hurts its honor for the world to see how a belligerent dictatorship with little power or leverage, coerce the most powerful country in the world to give up its authority, whereas North Korea has seemed to made no steps towards bettering its behavior. The bargaining between the countries has therefore continued at a far distance, remaining tacit, and characterized by threats rather than by diplomatic binding agreements. This with both sides agreeing to lessen their coerciveness, while then turning around completely. It seems as though both sides are aiming to persuade the other before it gets persuaded itself.

The duplicity does not end there. North Korea has a repetitive pattern of conducting missile tests and then claiming it has the "sovereign right" to have a "peaceful" missile program (Davenport 2018). In December 2012, Pyongyang reasoned that toughening UN sanctions to prevent them from developing missile-related activities infringed on its own self-autonomy again, and then called the following missile test a launch of a "peaceful earth satellite" (Rodong Shinmun 2012-12-29). It is easy to say that North Korea's rhetoric has delivered many contradictory messages, warning to go nuclear and drawing attention to resolve the crisis, often claiming all development of nuclear weapons is due to the need for "self-defense" and nothing more (Washington Post 2005-02-10). In other words, this repetitive pattern of claiming it wants to denuclearize and then conducting another unlawful but "peaceful" nuclear test, was perceived as very deceitful according to American officials, or as former Defense Secretary Gates put it, he was "tired of buying the same horse twice" (NY Times 2018-03-06).

Though neither side has gone beyond rhetorical threats, the Trump administration has made it clear that "all options are on the table" with respect to North Korea (referring to the possibility of a first strike) (Trump 2017-08-29), and then stating talking to North Korea "is not the answer" (Sevastopulo 2017-08-30). More generally, the current administration has gone from saying "we are getting along" (Nakamura 2018-06-01), to articulating a policy of "strategic accountability" aimed at "the complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" (Mattis & Tillerson 2017-08-13). He then later said in a UN speech:

"The United States has great strength and patience, but if it is forced to defend itself or its allies, we will have no choice but to totally destroy North Korea. Rocket Man is on a suicide mission for himself and for his regime... It is time for North Korea to realize that the denuclearization is its only acceptable future." - Donald Trump to the UN General Assembly (2017-09-19)

While the latter half of 2018 has been rather calm in comparison to Donald Trump's first 3 semesters, there seems to be little change. Trump boasts about their "good relationship" to convince everyone that he "won", while the North Koreans are dismantling some old irrelevant nuclear test sites to the naked eye, while secretly developing around 16 facilities, some housing missiles deliverable to all of the US mainland (Sanger 2018-11-13).

While this behavior might appear irrational, the overall picture seems to point towards the opposite. The statements clearly show that both actors attempts to not give away their reservation levels, so as to not loose in bargaining with the other. This corresponds with my earlier claims, that

both sides exaggerate their willingness or capability to fight in a war, if by doing so they could possibly persuade the other party to make concessions or back down. The fact that North Korea has continuously leaked information about its development stages of its nuclear weapons program, shows that the weapons have rather been a *means* to pressure the US into taking some sort of action, rather than seeing the weapons as an end in themselves. It has used it as a bargaining tool. North Korea knows that it cannot engage in a nuclear showdown because it will most surely lose. However, the US has, and will most likely not in the near future acknowledge North Korea as a legitimate discussion partner, even though it seems as that would be the first step towards actual cooperation taking place. North Korea will probably continue to use its irrationality and belligerent behavior as an instrument of persuasion, while the US uses its hard power to induce fear.

6. Conclusion - a Look Into the Future

The main purpose of this essay has been to answer why it has been so difficult to reach an effective agreement on the North Korean nuclear weapons crisis. I want to argue that this question has been answered in an adequate way, pointing towards the systemic causes that can in some ways prohibit reaching an effective agreement. I realize that it has been difficult to state any assertive conclusions as to explain the exact motives behind every action, both since I obviously do not know what the actors are thinking, and furthermore since the crisis is still ongoing. However, this essay attempted to point more to what exactly has made agreement difficult. It has shown that the most reliable path to security for an insecure North Korea has been to develop nuclear deterrence, and explained why it has seen it as its only way to legitimacy. It explained the difficulties in commitment between two nuclear powers on the international arena, even though they both seem to want to commit. It has furthermore shown why the attempt to implement agreements has brought with it new friction to the crisis, and why the current situation has seemed more attractive than negotiating, because it has meant giving up some of their power and security without anything reliable in return.

I hope that I have conveyed that the ultimate security threat to North Korea is the US, and that therefore, if this essay were to recommend any sort of action, it would be for the US to realize that if they want the crisis on the Korean Peninsula to end, their strategy needs to change. Both states have shown themselves willing to create costly signals to show that they are not willing to back down in this conflict, therefore, the risk of war has increased. However, since neither side has chosen to actually attempt an attack against the other, and because neither side has been willing to go to war, the current estate of the crisis has come to both sides militarizing and increasing their nuclear arsenal to feel more secure. This unfortunately fuses miscalculations. Instead of deterring the other side from an attack it might look like you are preparing for an attack yourself, which gives the other the incentive to preform a preemptive attack. Due to the insecurity inherent in the international system, misperception is as said, epidemic. What happens if both sides further intensify their nuclear weapons program, and continuously arm to deter the other? Even if neither side wants to go to war because of the huge risk nuclear weapons bring with them, how will we

know that each side will always interpret the other correctly, and never miscalculate the other's intention? Will there come a time when at least one side will consider war a better option? The tendency to view one's own actions as defensive and the other's as offensive proves that this might happen.

Both United States and North Korea consider the other responsible for ruining the few diplomatic ties between the countries. While North Korea sees the American president change every 4 or 8 years, with promises that only benefit their own ballot, it will be hard to gain trust. With no record of agreement in the past, and with the complicated and complex history of US-North Korean relations, there is little that points towards a more sustainable future. Realizing both one's own and the other's insecurities and disabilities might make the situation easier. The United States still sees North Korea as irrational, having backed out of countless commitments in the past, leaving the US with less and less patience. North Korea still sees a bully that refuses to arbitrate, who still threatens North Korea with extinction. For any side to believe the other, they must begin with only expressing genuine commitments only. Furthermore must both sides see it through so that the upsides of diplomacy outweigh the costs of not committing. This has not yet happened. The author concludes that the current state of agreement seems to be 'as long as you threaten us we threaten you'.

I hope that this essay has in some ways contributed to the contemporary understanding of the importance of strategic choice theory, but also as to why states behave as they do. Structural theory has not unquestionably explained everything in the interaction between the US and North Korea, but it has clearly had value in showing the tense security dynamics between them. While it has been tempting to attempt to create a viable strategy for the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, I have refrained from taking a stance in the question, avoiding normative conclusions. I hope this has created a research that is more generalizable, and hopefully an understanding of the case from a bigger, objective, perspective. Therefore, the framework that I have developed can be utilized to analyze other case studies as well.

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