CHINA’S POLICY IN REFUSING NORTH KOREA NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION

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Abstract
This paper explains the main factors underlying China's policy of refusing North Korea's nuclear proliferation, whereas the two countries have established defense alliance relations since the breakup of the Korean War. Geopolitically, North Korea is a strategic country for China in the East Asian region, and both countries view the presence of the US military in the region as a threat. Subsequently, North Korea began to develop its nuclear capability to challenge the continuous US military presence in South Korea. Although China and North Korea see the US influence as a security threat, China maintains its position of refusing North Korea nuclear proliferation. Previous studies regarding the relations between the two countries have explained the factors that underlie China’s refusal of North Korea’s nuclear proliferation. However, there have been no studies that precisely portray how nuclear weapons can influence China's policy-making towards its allies. By using extended deterrence perspective, this paper explains the variables that influence China's rejection of North Korea's nuclear proliferation. The main argument in this study is that China refuses North Korea's nuclear proliferation as a result of the disadvantage if North Korea continues its nuclear proliferation and the impact towards the regional stability that is unfavorable to China.

Keywords:
North Korean Nuclear Proliferation, China, United States of America, Alliance, Extended Deterrence
INTRODUCTION

The proliferation of nuclear weapons is a crucial issue in the international system. Nuclear weapons have the potential to threaten the security of other countries and affect the balance of power, both regionally and globally. The possession of nuclear weapons can trigger other countries to participate in developing nuclear weapons, in order to counter existing threats, and in the long run, can lead to the proliferation and nuclear arms race (Gray, 1999:171). Possession of nuclear weapons creates the deterrence effect, in which the nuclear state resists to attack other nuclear state because the two countries would experience a massive destruction, which is known as the concept of mutual assured destruction (MAD). The possession of nuclear weapons by states has been regulated through the international Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) agreement, which was formalised in 1968. The agreement stipulates that nuclear ownership permits are only given to five superpower countries that had nuclear weapons before 1978, or before the inauguration of the NPT. The five superpower countries are the United States (US), Russia, Britain, France, and China (the Power-5/P-5). NPT prohibits countries other than P-5 from possessing and developing nuclear weapons, or what is referred to as horizontal nuclear proliferation, as well as limits P-5 countries to develop nuclear massively to destroy other’s nuclear weaponry systems, or vertical nuclear proliferation (Gray, 1999:171). However, until the 21st century, the NPT has not been effective in preventing horizontal nuclear proliferation in the international system.

One of the countries that carry out horizontal nuclear proliferation is North Korea, the cause of which can be drawn to the unfinished history of the Korean War. Nuclear power is used by North Korea to respond to the US military presence in South Korea since the end of World War II and during the Korean War in 1950 (Whyte, 2015). To fight the US and South Korea during the war, North Korea and China formed a defence alliance. Geographically, North Korea and China lie at the crossroads between the mainland and maritime countries. Both countries share land borders, and North Korea is said to be the neck of China. In addition to geographical proximity, North Korea and China also have a long historical relationship and shared ideology as a socialist-communist country (Chung & Choi, 2013).

As the nuclear umbrella of South Korea, the US strongly rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation policy. The rejection has been demonstrated through various efforts, ranging from negotiation efforts through bilateral, regional, and multilateral forums to sanctions towards North Korea. The US, South Korea, and North Korea were also
involved in the Six-Party Talk forum, which was formed in 2003 and involved three other countries, namely Russia, China, and Japan, in discussing the issue of North Korea's nuclear proliferation (International Crisis Group, 2015). The failure of diplomatic efforts pushed the US to take a firm stand by imposing sanctions and deploying military power to South Korea and Japan.

The movement of US troops into the East Asian region directly threatens China. As the North Korean alliance state, China has an interest in alienating US military forces in the region. China is also threatened if the US attacked North Korea, and, in the long run, China could not maintain its national interests in the region. Based on security and geopolitical calculations, North Korea has strategic value for China, especially after the rise of China, which increasingly expands China's national interests in the region. North Korea is a buffer state to safeguard the security interests of China from the US’s military presence in the Korean Peninsula and East Asia. China seeks to distance the US’s power from Chinese territory by dominating the first island chain, which stretches from the Korean Peninsula and Japan to the South China Sea and Malacca Strait (Cheng, 2018).

Although the two countries have developed a security alliance, China does not necessarily approve of North Korea's nuclear proliferation policy. China has shown the rejection since North Korea's first nuclear test in 2003, where China became the country that led the Six-Party Talk forum in Beijing (Cheng, 2013:32). China also helped to provide a wide range of economic sanctions on North Korea policy related to nuclear proliferation. China's impartiality can also be seen from the firm statements of China when North Korea conducted a nuclear test. As when North Korea conducted a nuclear test for the second time, the Chinese Foreign Minister strongly rejected the nuclear test, and China would always be in a position to stop nuclear proliferation and maintain peace and stability in North-East Asia (Zhang, 2009:22). China also called on North Korea to carry out its denuclearisation commitments, immobilise all movements that could worsen the situation, and encourage North Korea to rejoin the Six-Party Talks (Zhang, 2009:22).

Based on the background above, North Korea is clearly a very strategic country for China, particularly to maintain its national interests and security interests in the East Asian region. Moreover, both countries also see the US as a threat that can harm the two countries in achieving their respective national interests. In addition to strategic security considerations, the two countries are also close ideologically, politically, economically, and geographically. China is also the most significant trading partner and foreign aid partner to North Korea. However, on the other hand, China is also the most resistant
country to North Korea’s nuclear proliferation policy, whereas it is aimed at countering the US as a country that has been a threat both to China and North Korea since the Korean War. Therefore, this study questions why China rejects North Korea’s nuclear proliferation. By using extended deterrence perspective, this study argues that China rejects North Korea’s nuclear proliferation as a result of the disadvantage if North Korea continue its nuclear proliferation and the impact towards the regional stability that is unfavorable to China.

Many studies have been conducted on China’s position on North Korea’s nuclear proliferation. In general, previous studies can be categorised into at least four main perspectives, namely: (1) neorealism; (2) foreign policy; (3) constructivism, and; (4) China and North Korea history. Academic studies that see from the viewpoint of the interests of neorealism in international relations generally discuss the national interests and Chinese strategy in defending the interests of national security. China has an interest in alienating US military power from Chinese territory, allowing North Korea as a buffer state for China due to its strategic position (Cheng, 2018:26). China wants stability on the Korean Peninsula, so it can support China’s long-term national interests (Park, 2010).

On the other hand, China opposes the unification of Korea because it can threaten China's security interests (Cheng, 2018; Jiyong, 2015; Moore, 2008). Meanwhile, Zheng (2018) argued that North Korea needs China for balancing purposes against the US, but also North Korea regards China as a threat. Song (2011:1138), using the concept of dual threats model argued that China's strict attitude toward North Korea's nuclear proliferation is only conducted when North Korean’s behavior triggers the U.S. military presence in the region, which can increase the perception of Chinese threats.

The second category of studies that use a foreign policy perspective broadly looks at the factors that influence the formulation of Chinese foreign policy towards North Korea. The external environment is one crucial factor that is considered by China in the foreign policy-making process towards North Korea because North Korea's isolation from the international world has caused economic and security problems for China (Savage, 2003). Another study also looked at the leadership factor in the formulation of foreign policy, namely changes in the direction of policies or priorities of Chinese foreign policy that have changed since President Xi Jin Ping's leadership. Whereas previously China's foreign policy priority was denuclearisation of North Korea, President Xi Jin Ping prioritises maintaining peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula region (Kim, 2013).
The third category of studies uses constructivism thoughts in analysing China's foreign policy towards North Korea. Wang (2014) argued that as a small country, North Korea can ignore the influence and impact of its foreign policy on the international world. On the other hand, China, as a regional power, is very concerned and calculates the global impact of its foreign policy on North Korea. Other constructivism studies also argued that China's rise in the international world forms a new role or identity, so that China's foreign policy towards North Korea requires adjustments (Noesselt, 2014). Some studies also tried to portray the forms of diplomacy carried out by China against North Korea. Reily (2014) argued that foreign trade and aid are one form of Chinese diplomacy to maintain the continuity of the regime and the stability of diplomatic relations with North Korea.

The fourth category emphasizes the existing dynamics of the relationship between North Korea and China and its connection to their historical relations. Ji (2001) argued that China and North Korea have different views in terms of historical relations, ideology, diplomatic programs, and economic and political priorities. This has become an obstacle to the strategic interests and sustainability of the security alliance between the two countries. Chung (2013) believed that China cannot necessarily make North Korea an enemy, even though China rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation. On the other hand, North Korea has a suspicion of Chinese behavior and regards China as a perceived threat since 1956. Therefore, this study questions why China rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation, even though the two countries have established alliance relations, and China has an interest in making North Korea as a buffer zone.

Based on the above explanation, previous studies have provided an understanding of the factors that underlie China's rejection of North Korea's nuclear proliferation. However, there has not been a comprehensive study explaining the main factors that influence China's policy-making to not support its allies. Also, there are no studies that precisely portray how the possession of nuclear weapons could influence the policies taken towards its alliance. Therefore, the question raised in this study is why does China rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation even though the two countries have forged security alliances and have ideological similarities, as well as economic and political proximity. To answer this question, the next section presents the main factors influencing China's rejection of North Korea's nuclear proliferation. By using the extended deterrence perspective, this paper captures the connection between the possession of nuclear weapons and China’s decision making. Although the extended deterrence is realist in nature, this perspective also consider other factors, such as China’s diplomatic history.
with the US, as well as its reputation in international fora. Those are the important contributing factors which also underlie China’s rejection towards North Korea’s nuclear proliferation.

**ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK**

Extended deterrence is used to see what variables influence a country, especially for nuclear powers, in supporting or rejecting its national defense policy. Deterrence is an effect produced by a country's nuclear weapons technology to other countries, which also possess nuclear power. The deterrence effect will undermine the opponent's intention to carry out the first attack because the attacker believes that the country attacked can counterattack to cause significant damage to both parties (Mutual Assured Destruction). Freedman states that although the threatening actor (coercer) shows his threat to the enemy, the coercer will not execute the threat until the enemy makes the first attack, so deterrence does not have a period (Freedman and Raghavan, 2008:218). Meanwhile, extended deterrence is the effect of deterrence by using a third party, where a nuclear state can deter attacks from enemies both against themselves and against the client state and its allies (Russett, 1988:30).

Bruce Russett (1988) divided the parties involved in the extended deterrence, namely the state that will attack (the attacker), the country that is threatened (protégé), and the state whose role is to defend the protégé (defender). The defender can create a deterrence effect on the attacker, so that war between the attacker and the protégé can be avoided. Russet assumes a defender will take some considerations before protecting the protégé from the threat of an attacker. The considerations will determine the defender's response to their protégé, whether in the form of military intervention, preventing a war between the attackers, or compromising the protégé’s main interests. There are two primary considerations used by a defender before deciding on their decision: (i) the prospect of success in protecting the protégé, and the cost that will be gained if they defeat the attacker; (ii) the consequences of allowing protégé to attack or surrender to the attacker (Russett, 1988:33).

There are four factors used to answer the two considerations mentioned above. First, the relative balance of military power between defenders and attackers. This variable is separated into three dimensions of equilibrium, namely in the short term, the mid-term and the long term. Short-term military balance of power includes land defence forces that have been mobilised and are in a position to be able to attack directly and
compare them with land defence forces that are already in a position to withstand attacks. The mid-term looks at all the activities and forces that are ready to be mobilised to deal with the attackers in unfavorable circumstances and defeat the defender without creating a protracted war. Long-term balance is determined by all military forces and all state capabilities that include economic, industrial, and demographic capabilities (Russett, 1988:33-34). In the condition of the attacker and the defender have nuclear power, and both can carry out a counterattack, Russett (1988) argued the two countries would avoid a war that could escalate to the use of nuclear weapons. Short and mid-term power balances will be more considered, as long as the two countries can end the war quickly.

Second, national interests which are at stake when maintaining protégé. According to Russett, this variable is strongly influenced by the geographical closeness between the defender and the protégé. Defenders will tend to maintain protégé that have geographical proximity by using military force to fight attackers. Geographical proximity is vital for defenders because it determines the prestige, strategic value of the protégé as a buffer state, or an alliance in the balance of power in the region. Third, the position of the defender during the crisis. If a defender is assertive and does not want to negotiate with an attacker, his reputation will decline. Meanwhile, if the defender is in a position to negotiate, his reputation will increase.

Finally, look at the results of past confrontations between attackers and defenders. This variable is divided into three groups, namely: (i) diplomatic victory, when a defender has made an attacker make the same decision on an issue; (ii) when diplomacy between the two countries has failed, and; (iii) when defender diplomacy has experienced diplomatic defeat on an issue. In the third condition, the defender tends to take aggressive steps to maintain his reputation (Russett, 1988:37).

This study uses an extended deterrence perspective for two main reasons. First, this concept can comprehensively portray the relationship between the three main actors in the issue of North Korea's nuclear proliferation. Second, the concept of extended deterrence can analyse how nuclear weapons can influence a country's foreign policy-making towards its allies.

**RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is a qualitative study due to its interpretive process. In qualitative research, researchers interpret what they see, hear, and understand without putting aside their background, history, context, and previous understandings (Cresswell, 2009:164). This
study uses data collection techniques, both primary and secondary data. Primary data obtained by researchers through interviews with relevant speakers, as well as from official reports from the Chinese Government. Meanwhile, secondary data is obtained through a literature study, which refers to text or written sources, both visually and spoken in communication media. Secondary data were obtained from written sources, such as books, literature, academic journals, news, and online media that are relevant to this study. The process of data processing and analysis involves reviewing and interpreting the data collected, organising and categorising these data, and examining their relationship with variables from predetermined theories (Cresswell, 2009:164).

The data analysis in this study uses the illustrative-case clarification method, which is an illustration of theoretical concepts with empirical evidence. This method applies theory to concrete historical situations or social conditions and organizes data based on theory (Newman, 2014:490). The empirical evidence will then fill the empty boxes in theory, either by confirmation, modification, or rejection of the theory. Meanwhile, case clarification is a theoretical model that is used to illuminate or clarify a specific case, so that the case is easier to understand using theory.

This research is conducted because of the opposite attitude or position from China towards North Korea. This study uses a qualitative approach because it will attempt to describe a situation or phenomenon that occurs at this time by using scientific procedures based on qualitative data to answer the problem in actual. The illustrative-case clarification method is used to gain a deeper understanding of China's rejection of North Korea's nuclear proliferation based on the perspective of the extended deterrence theory.

**DISCUSSION**

This section aims to answer the question of why China rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation using the concept of extended deterrence. The analysis in this study is divided into four main sections, namely describing the balance of power between China and the US. Then, it explains about China's national interests at stake when it maintains North Korea's nuclear proliferation policy. Furthermore, it explains the position of China in conducting negotiations related to the issue of North Korea's nuclear proliferation, which could affect its reputation internationally. In the last section, it presents the results of past confrontations between China and the US.
The Relative Balance of Power Between China and the US

China is an emerging power with very rapid economic growth and is followed by the development of its military power. Undoubtedly, China’s economic growth leads to its expansion of national interest. China needs to keep its growth steady and secure access to resources, energy in particular (Arif, 2016: 123). The rise of China also creates the security dilemmas and uncertainty in the Asia Pacific region. There is also ongoing conflicts in the Asia Pacific region that also contribute to the increasing tension and sentiment towards China's position in the region, such as the Korean peninsula conflict, China-Taiwan Conflict, the East China Sea (ECS) conflict and the Shenkaku Island dispute between China-Japan, and the construction of military facilities by China in the South China Sea conflict area (SCS) (Veronica, 2014: 20). Until 2019, China has succeeded in becoming a superpower country in Asia by ranking first in terms of economic strength, diplomatic influence, economic resources, and future resources that have been projected by China (Lowy Institute, 2019). China's GDP also shows that the country is increasingly independent of exports and is shifting towards domestic consumption. It also increases China's resilience so that China is not vulnerable to tension or confrontation in terms of foreign trade (Lowy Institute, 2019:7).

To stem the dominance of China, the US has established its foreign policy towards the Asia Pacific region through "Pivot to Asia" or "Rebalance to Asia" since the end of 2011. The policy gives a new dimension to the Asia Pacific region, which is experiencing uncertainty due to the tensions in the region. The SCS conflict and the diminished US presence in the region were due to the world economic crisis in 2007-2008 and the Global War on Terror policy. The US then strengthens defence cooperation with allied countries in the East Asian region, such as South Korea and Japan. Then, the US also increasingly shows its presence in the Asia Pacific region through the deployment of military forces and troops to Australia, the Philippines, India, and Singapore. The distribution of US power in the Asian region can be seen in the figure below:
Figure 1. Map of US Strength in the Asia Pacific region for Block China  
Source: The Economist (2017)

From the picture above, it can be seen that the Asia Pacific region has been surrounded by the US and Chinese security interests, both economically, politically, and militarily. In the calculation of China's strategic defense interests, it can be seen that North Korea is surrounded by US military bases, both in South Korea, Japan, and in other regional countries that are close to China, such as Thailand and the Philippines. Therefore, China must continue to maintain a balance of power with US military forces in the full Korean Peninsula and Asia Pacific region.

US foreign policy is still carried out during Donald J. Trump's leadership but with a different approach. *America First* is the hallmark of US foreign policy since President Trump's leadership. *America First* makes US foreign policy built on four pillars, namely: first, protecting national security; second, promoting prosperity; third, guaranteeing peace through strength, and; fourth, increasing US influence. The slogan is considered to reflect US policy that is self-centered and uses a stricter approach than before. *America First* is a budget priority policy proposed by the President Trump administration to improve the safety and security of US society. The core of this policy is to prioritise military spending by reducing budget allocations for other departments and trimming foreign aid. In the blueprint for the America First program, it was proposed that the military budget for the US Department would increase by $52 billion from 2017, which
was $639 billion, from $587 billion previously (Office of Management and Budget, 2018:15). The budget allocation is for defense budget of $574 billion, an overseas operating budget of $65 billion, and $2 billion for defense programs outside the Department of Defense (Office of Management and Budget, 2018:15). *America First*’s policy is not only tied to the defense aspect but also has economic aspects, mastery of space, and cyberspace.

Since his tenure, President Trump has often made strong statements against China and North Korea, which then led to instability in the East Asian region. The withdrawal of the US from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), which is a plan for economic cooperation in the Asia Pacific region without involving China, is also feared by many parties leading to the adoption of a more militaristic approach than using diplomacy instruments in the region (Townshend, 2017:2). Strong statements from President Trump on China, both bilaterally and concerning North Korea, are feared would increase tension in the region and make diplomatic methods challenging to contain the conflict. The statements also reflect the principle of competition between countries established by the US, especially with Russia and China.

Research conducted by RAND has shown comprehensively the balance of military power between the US and China. For attacking military bases, China over the past few decades has developed ballistic missiles and cruise missiles that can threaten US air space in East Asia. Until 2017, China was estimated to have 1,400 ballistic missiles and hundreds of cruise missiles, including short and medium-range missiles (1,000-3,000 KM) that can attack US airbases in Japan. The ballistic missiles also have excellent accuracy with the possibility of an error as far as five to ten meters (Heginbotham & et al., 2015). The development of Chinese ballistic missile weapons has succeeded in challenging US forces to gain air superiority on the battlefield with China in the East Asian region.

In the air dimension, it cannot be denied that the US still holds the advantage of Chinese airpower. The ongoing development of the US fighter industry has brought the US the superiority of fighter aircraft that has reached the fifth generation by developing F-35 and F-22 aircraft. Meanwhile, in the capacity of air combat, China is still at the stage of developing fourth-generation fighter aircraft. Nearly half of China's fighter planes have been replaced by fourth-generation warplanes, from those previously dominated by second generation warplanes (Heginbotham & et al., 2015, pp. 1-4). Therefore, in air combat using fighter aircraft, the US still has the advantage over China.
To surpass the US, China has developed Over-the-Horizon (OTH) intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities that can detect target locations as far as 2,000km outside the Chinese coastline (Heginbotham & et al., 2015, pp. 1-3). Then, China also develops anti-ship ballistic missiles, which becomes the only one in the world, as well as a threat to the US Navy. It has also been noted by many experts that China has acquired and built new submarines to fill its ambitions to have sea power or power projection capability (Prajuli, 2013 :13)

Regarding nuclear weapons, the US and China are countries that develop nuclear weapons and are bound by international norms related to nuclear development. The two countries also maintain the stability of bilateral nuclear relations to maintain the deterrence effect and the second-strike capability doctrine. The stability of the second-strike capability by sea, land and air is one of the determining factors for each nuclear state to refrain from carrying out the first attack. China has modernised and improved the quality of its nuclear weapons. China developed DF-31(CSS-9) and DF-31A Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICM) and Type 094 Jin-class Submarine Ballistic Missile (SSBN) nuclear weapons capable of carrying twelve JL-2 Sea launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) with estimated range of 7,400 km (RAND Corporation, nd). China also maintains the concept of minimum deterrence, in which China only developing a small number of missiles to deter stronger powers, but China would still be able to inflict unacceptable damage on its opponent (Supriyanto, 2015: 38). Even though China has modernised its nuclear weapons, the US still has a bigger nuclear posture than China. However, the US initiative to deploy a Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) that aims to increase its national security towards the rogue states like North Korea and Iran poses a risk to China’s deterrence against US nuclear use (Supriyanto, 2015: 39). In response to that, China could shift its nuclear policy from minimum deterrence to achieving numerical parity with US nuclear arsenals and BMD interceptors (Supriyanto, 2015: 43)

Military modernisation carried out by China has succeeded in making China a superpower in the Asian region. Based on studies conducted by the Lowy Institute, in 2019, China ranks second, right after the US, in terms of military capability. China’s military capability is supported by its policy of concentrating military power in the Asia Pacific region, in contrast to the US’s policy of global military posture and global security commitments. China’s defence budget itself is 56% higher than the combined economy of the ASEAN countries, Japan, and India (Lowy Institute, 2019: 7).
Besides the balance of power possessed by China and the US, both parties’ alliance with countries in the East Asian region also affects their balance of power. Research conducted by Goo and Lee (2014: pp. 335-338) showed that the US spends a significant defence expenditure to substitute South Korea’s and Japan’s defence spending, especially in dealing with the threat from China and North Korea’s alliances. Although the direct conflict is only occurring between South Korea and North Korea, Japan and the US have a more active response to the North Korean and Chinese alliance. The US and Japan had responded to the threat from China and North Korea since the end of the Cold War when the balance of power in Asia shifted from the Soviet Union to China (Goo and Kim, 2012). Meanwhile, South Korea sees North Korea as a more significant threat to its security than North Korea’s alliance with China, so that the South Korean and US alliances do not show any intention to race against China and North Korea (Goo and Lee, 2014: 337). The impact of China and North Korea alliance is also more threatening to Japan because Japan has more geographical proximity to China and North Korea. The US also support the Japanese effort to modernise its military force, that would lead to the integration in the use of force by both countries. Thus, Japan and the US could strengthen its join operation, join command and other needs in the future (Alghifari, 2016: 27).

Projected US defence forces remain the largest in the Asia Pacific region. The dominance of US military power in the region is reflected in the military capabilities and the depth of its defence network in the region. The US culture is also considered to have the biggest influence in the Asia Pacific, the US is the most popular study destination, and the US is the number one source of media in the Asia Pacific region. However, since the leadership of President Donald Trump, the US has experienced a decline in diplomatic influence in the region, due to President Trump's revisionist policies towards the economy and leadership in Asia.

The US and China have their respective advantages in terms of military power, both on the air, sea, and land dimensions. China has also been modernising, improving quality and adding to its quantity of nuclear weapons. The modernisation has brought the Chinese military posture from a low confidence (1996-2010), to a medium confidence in 2017 (RAND Corporation). However, threat perceptions by South Korea and Japan play a significant role in maintaining the US military presence in both countries, either to deter the North Korea nuclear posture or to challenge North Korea and China security alliance. Undeniably, this condition could increase tensions between the US and North Korea, as
well as undermine the US-China military balance in the region. Thus, China continuously insists North Korea to stop its nuclear weapons program and promoting peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula. Meanwhile, the US nuclear weapons posture from 1996 to 2017 continues to be at the High Confidence stage. Even though the US has a more massive nuclear arsenal than China. In the North Korea nuclear proliferation issue, the US has never provoked China with the threat of firing nuclear weapons, and vice versa. This is because both countries are bound by the norms and principles of no-strike first and a second-strike capability. Nuclear countries also realise that nuclear war would destroy both sides so that no political goals are achieved.

**China's National Interest which is at Stake if Defending North Korea**

Geographically, North Korea is a country that has land borders and is a country that is located at the neck of China. The proximity makes North Korea as a country that has a strategic value for China, primarily related to the security calculation as a buffer state against the US military presence in the Korea Peninsula and East Asia region. The industrial estate in Northeast China is directly adjacent to the Korean peninsula, which is also adjacent to Russia and Japan. Historically, the area of the Korean Peninsula is also a region with many conflicts of interest from four major countries, namely China, Russia, the US, and Japan. China has an interest in reducing US influence and preventing Japanese leadership in the Korean Peninsula. To achieve these interests, China strive to maintain the sustainability of the North Korean regime. On the Korean peninsula itself, China pursues three fundamental objectives, namely the absence of war, the absence of chaos, and the absence of nuclear weapons (Boc and Wacker, 2018: 28).

The defence alliance between China and North Korea is also crucial for China, especially in maintaining the balance of power with the US in the Asian region. The US and South Korea security alliance also threatens China, where all US policies in the region are trying to surround China. For these reasons, China continues to maintain North Korea’s stability by not imposing sanctions that are too heavy. The direction of China’s foreign policy towards North Korea began to change since 2013 or after North Korea conducted its third nuclear test, in which China became more assertive towards North Korea. This also happened along with the announcement of China's national interests or dreams by Chinese President Xi Jinping.

In addition to national security interests, China also has national interests in the economic field. Since the end of the Cold War, China has succeeded in developing its
country's economy and becoming a new powerhouse in the Asia Pacific region that can streamline its foreign policy to achieve its national interests. China's national interests and ideals are summarised in the nomenclature of the Chinese Dream launched by President Xi Jinping in 2013 to control the world economy and become a significant country in 2020, coinciding with the 100th anniversary of the Chinese Communist Party and becoming a developed country in 2049, coinciding with China's 100th anniversary (Kuhn, 2013). The Chinese Dream has four objectives, namely: first, to make China a stable country both economically, politically, diplomatically, scientifically, and militarily; secondly, being a civilised country in terms of equality and justice, rich in culture, and having high morals; third, the harmony of China through unity among all people, as well as; fourth, beautiful China with a healthy environment and low pollution (Kuhn, 2013).

When President Xi Jinping visited Central and Southeast Asia in 2013, President Xi also announced China's strategic initiatives to build maritime trade routes or Silk Roads, and land trade routes, or economic belts. This strategic initiative is included in the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), a global cooperation project to develop land and maritime trade routes that will connect China with countries in Asia, Europe, and Africa in the long term (The State Council, The People's Republic of China, 2015). BRI indirectly reflects the desire to control and secure strategic trade routes that can connect China with the regions of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. BRI is an initiative to build an Economic Belt, through Central Asia, and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, through the Indian Ocean, which can connect China with Asia, Europe, and Africa. The BRI development plan can be seen in the figure below:

![Figure 2. Development Plan for the 21st Century Economic Belt and Silk Road](Source: Bruce-Lockhart (2016))
The Chinese maritime silk route development plan is stated to be oriented towards ASEAN, which can then be a trigger for development in the backward interior areas. Sea transportation routes are planned to start from the city of Quanzhou, China, to Rotterdam, the Netherlands. Meanwhile, the Land Route starts from Luoyang, China, to Hamburg, Germany. There are five main channels in BRI planning, namely: first, connecting China with Europe through the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean; second, connecting China to the South Pacific region via South China Sea; third, connecting China to Europe through Central Asia and Russia; fourth, connecting China with the Middle East through Central Asia; fifth, connecting China with Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the Indian Ocean (Ministry of Trade of the Republic of Indonesia, 2016). If realised, the silk route will pass through at least 65 countries with different economic backgrounds. Thus, the construction of the silk road is formed as a joint project between China and the passing countries, which would be adapted to each country's needs and economic interests. So, it is hoped that this massive project can bring economic prosperity to other countries, as well as strengthen regional economic cooperation, increase community exchange, and encourage world peace and development (The State Council, The People's Republic of China, 2015).

BRI is considered to bring the interests of China to make it the only dominant power in the Asia Pacific region. Besides that, this initiative also aims to challenge the foreign policy and influence of the US in the region. Apart from the Asia Pacific region, China also plays a vital role in the economic growth of countries in other regions. China became the largest exporter country with a total export value of $2.2 trillion in 2017, and China also contributed 3.9% to world economic growth. China also continues to encourage trade and infrastructure development in countries in the African region. North Korea also has a crucial role in achieving China's national interests. North Korea can contribute to China in carrying out economic revitalisation in the Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang provinces located in the northeastern part of China (Boc and Wacker, 2018: 28). Development projects taking place in the region also involve neighboring countries, such as Mongolia, Russia, and countries in the Korean Peninsula.

To actualise its national interests and foreign policy goals, China naturally needs a stable and peaceful North Korean Peninsula and East Asia region, so as not to disrupt trade routes and China's foreign policy agenda. North Korea's confrontation with the US and its nuclear proliferation indirectly contradicts China's national interests and can be a significant obstacle for China to realise its national interests. Based on national security
interests, if North Korea and the US faced an open conflict, it would have a spillover effect on China in terms of the vast asylum seekers from North Korea, which might lead to instability in the Chinese border. Although China and North Korea are bound to their security alliance, China has a greater national interest to become a great power country. Thus, China will always pursue a denuclearization in Korean Peninsula through a peaceful mechanism, so that China would not put any of its national interests at stake and North Korea could become a more stable alliance for China.

**China’s Diplomatic Effort to Ease the North Korean Nuclear Proliferation Issue**

China has made various diplomatic efforts to stop North Korea's nuclear proliferation, both through bilateral diplomacy in North Korea, as well as multilateral involvement by involving other countries. China negotiates multilaterally through its leadership in the Six-Party Talk forum. The forum was a response to the first nuclear test conducted by North Korea in 2003 and involved six countries, namely North Korea, South Korea, China, the US, Japan, and Russia. In addition to its crucial role in leading this forum, it was China who succeeded in convincing North Korea to be involved in the multilateral forum.

The multilateral forum then produced an agreement at the 4th negotiation on September 19th, 2005. The results of the agreement are: (1) North Korea will stop all nuclear weapons and its nuclear program. Then North Korea will again join the NPT and the IAEA will escort North Korea; (2) The six countries will comply with UN Charter principles and objectives and international standards; (3) The Six countries encourage energy, trade, and investment economic cooperation, both bilateral and unilateral; (4) Commitment to joint efforts for peace and stability in North-East Asia; (5) Take coordinated steps to implement consensus, and; (6) Postpone the schedule for the 5th negotiation until the time limit determined through consultation (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 2005).

Although it has reached an agreement, North Korea resumed testing nuclear devices on October 9th, 2006. The Six-Party Talk then suspended in 2008, and North Korea conducted a nuclear test both in 2009. From the second North Korean nuclear test, it is estimated that North Korea has nuclear weapons similar to the US atomic bomb, which destroyed the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945 (Whyte, 2015). The Chinese Foreign Minister then stated that his Government firmly rejected the nuclear test and that China would always take a position to stop nuclear proliferation and maintain
peace and stability in the Northeast Asia (Zhang, 2009: 22). China also called on North Korea to carry out its denuclearisation commitments, stop all movements that could worsen the situation, and encourage North Korea to rejoin the Six-Party Talks (Zhang, 2009: 22). China then continued its efforts to revive the Six-Party Talk multilateral forum and encouraged other countries to refrain from using military forces against North Korea. Efforts made by China also continue to be carried out after the case of the sinking of a South Korean warship in March 2010 (BBC News, 2010), which was followed by shootings to South Korea's Yeonpyong Island (BBC News, 2010).

North Korea conducted the third nuclear test in 2013 after the death of North Korean leader Kim Jong-il, who was succeeded by his son Kim Jong-un. The 3rd nuclear test made clear the position of North Korea to maintain its nuclear proliferation; besides that, Kim Jong-un also called on the United States to withdraw its troops from the Korean Peninsula. North Korea has also succeeded in building mass destroyers with internal control from North Korea (Choi, 2013: 107). Since the 3rd nuclear test conducted by North Korea, China has become more cooperative to stop North Korea's nuclear proliferation immediately. Chinese President Xi Jinping is increasingly showing his firm attitude towards North Korea. On several occasions, China pressured and forced North Korea to obey its denuclearisation commitments (Ru, 2016: 297). President Xi also presented his position before US President Barrack Obama and asked the United Nations (UN) to implement the full resolution on North Korea (Ru, 2016: 297). China is actively beginning to adopt a UN Security Council resolution 2094 to punish North Korea for its nuclear test. China has also tightened security at the border with North Korea and restricted commodity exchanges with North Korea (Choi, 2013: 100).

China’s assertiveness is also increasingly demonstrated after the fourth North Korean nuclear test in 2016. The Chinese Foreign Minister reiterated that the Korean Peninsula could not be nuclearised, both with nuclear weapons produced alone and imported from other countries (Ru, 2016: 297). Then, to show China's impartiality towards North Korea's nuclear proliferation, China has also imposed various economic sanctions on North Korea (Zhang, 2018: 2).

China has taken a firmer position since 2017 after North Korea re-launched its nuclear test. In May 2017, North Korea launched its ballistic missile just before the opening of the BRI meeting in Beijing in China (Perlez, 2017). Then, in early September, North Korea resumed its sixth nuclear test at the same time as the start of a meeting of BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) in the city of Xiamen,
China (The Guardian, 2017). Previously China was still implementing partial sanctions against North Korea. However, after the incident, China began to support several UN sanctions against North Korea, some of which were quite burdensome to North Korea, such as a ban on oil supplies to reduce North Korean imports by 30% (Boc and Wacker, 2018: 29). This position shows Chinese dissatisfaction with North Korea's attitude (Hastings, 2018) and, at the same time, also provides a signal to cooperate with the US to prevent unilateral action by the US (Osnos, 2017).

North Korea’s refusal to comply with its denuclearisation commitment and attempts increase the regional tension by its several nuclear tests could put China’s reputation at risks in the international community, since China is North Korea’s ally and the only country supporting North Korea economy. On the other side, China's strong condemnation towards North Korea since 2013 has made its reputation even higher in the international community because it has contributed to the international efforts in denuclearising North Korea's, promoting peace and stabilisation of the Korean Peninsula, and preventing North Korea from further provoking the US. China's position towards North Korea can also indirectly reduce the tension and uncertain conditions in the Southeast Asian region over China's position, especially during the SCS and ECS conflicts. Because of China's active role in stopping North Korea's nuclear proliferation, China's reputation internationally has also increased. From the US’s perspective, China is an actor with a very crucial role in resolving the issue of North Korea's nuclear proliferation (Boc and Wacker, 2018: 27). President Trump also recognised China's reputation, and he called on China to support its North Korean policy and announced that China could resolve North Korea's nuclear proliferation issue quickly and easily (Boc and Wacker, 2018: 27).

**Results of Past Confrontations between China and the US**

In resolving the issue of North Korea's nuclear proliferation, China and the US are in the same position to stop all North Korea's nuclear weapons programs. Therefore, China has never been confronted directly by the US in the issue of North Korea's nuclear proliferation. There are indeed differences in the objectives of the US and China in imposing sanctions on North Korea. If the US wants severe sanctions so that North Korea stops nuclear proliferation, Chinese efforts are made to bring North Korea back to the negotiating table (Boc and Wacker, 2018: 27). The difference in objectives does not have a significant impact on the confrontation between China and the US.
On several occasions, China and the US also reached an agreement to resolve the issue of North Korea's nuclear proliferation. Some of the agreements reached: (1) Joint Statement of member countries of the Six-Party Talk; (2) Taking the same position as the US to start adopting UN Security Council resolution 2094, and; (3) Stopping oil supplies to North Korea. Because China has not experienced a diplomatic defeat with the US in dealing with the North Korean issue, it is unlikely that China will take military steps or coercive ways against the US to defend its interests in North Korea.

**CONCLUSION**

Based on the data and analysis described above, and by using the variables in the concept of extended deterrence as the analytical framework, this study found two main factors causing China not to support North Korea's nuclear proliferation policy. First, based on the calculation of the relative strength between China and the US, the two countries have nuclear postures. Even though the US has more nuclear weapons than China, however, the US has never provoked China and vice versa. China then rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation because it has challenged and provoked the US. The rejection also aims to prevent the increasing tension between the US and North Korea, which could lead to nuclear attacks. Unlike North Korea, P-5 countries such as the US and China are nuclear countries that are bound to the norms of no-strike first and second-strike capability, so they will not start nuclear confrontations with other countries.

Second, China rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation due to considerations of national interests at stake when supporting North Korea. Some considerations are that North Korea is a buffer state for China against the US's military strength so that China prevents any confrontation that could threaten the existence of North Korea. China also avoid an open conflict between the US and North Korea that could lead to the unification of Korea because it can threaten China's security interests. China naturally needs a stable and peaceful North Korean Peninsula and East Asia region, so as not to disrupt trade routes and China's foreign policy agenda. North Korea's confrontation with the US and its nuclear proliferation indirectly contradicts China's national interests and can be a significant obstacle for China to realise its national interests. In addition, China also has national goals and interests to realise BRI, which will further strengthen China's influence in the region. Therefore, China needs stability in Korean Peninsula and East Asia, which will not interfere with China's trade routes. For that reason, China became a country that has the same position as the US to refuse North Korea's nuclear development. North
Korea also became an actor who made China lose its face with North Korea attitudes, which often ignores warnings and sanctions from China regarding its nuclear proliferation policy.

Therefore, it can be concluded that China rejects North Korea's nuclear proliferation because the calculation of the benefits to be gained by China becomes more significant in comparison to China supporting North Korea. First, by calculating strength, China is bound to the norm of no-strike first and second-strike capability, so that China would not take an attitude that can raise nuclear tension and confrontation with the US. Secondly, China has a national interest in realising BRI and maintaining North Korea's existence as a buffer state for China, so stability in North Korea is significant for China.

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