North Korea’s Growing Nuclear Program

Importance:

The tensions with North Korea over their growing nuclear program has been a world topic for years, but recently has grasped national attention because of the amount of missiles that have been tested and their capacity to reach the United States of America. The magnitude of the nuclear program has the potential to kill hundreds of thousands if not millions of people. According to estimates, it is expected that at least 500,000 people will be killed and at least 900,000 people will be injured if a bomb would detonate (Kazianis, Harry J). However, in major cities the casualty rates could be much higher, for example if a Hydrogen bomb were to detonate in New York City around 1.7 million people could be killed (Kazianis, Harry J). In addition, tensions are rising between the different allies on how to handle the problem, especially with China who has close ties with North Korea economically and rely on them as a major importer of Chinese goods (Albert, Eleanor). If the situation continues to escalate many people worry about having to potentially invoke Article 5 in the NATO alliance. This is the collective defense clause that states an attack on one country is an attack on all of the nations. This has been invoked only once, and it was after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (NATO / OTAN). Tensions with North Korea are at an all time high so immediate action by the United States is necessary for the greater good of the world.

Background:

Following World War II the USSR occupied North Korea, while South Korea was occupied by US troops. This different political dynamic sparked the Korean war when South Korea declared their independence from the North (“North Korea Profile - Timeline.”). The United States has always been a
very strong supporter of South Korea and wants to protect their independence. This is a major factor into why the US still has strong military forces around Korea (Holmes, Oliver). North Korea’s alliance with China and South Korea’s alliance with the US causes problems because China is hesitant to enforce sanctions or other restrictions on North Korea (Albert, Eleanor). This complex relationship between North and South Korea is challenging because it brings the different allies into the conflict as well.

In recent years attempts to get North Korea to the negotiating table have not been successful and all treaties have failed so far. The two major treaties currently place to stop nuclear programs is the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) this treaty is signed by 191 counties and limits use of nuclear energy and nuclear weapon building (“Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) – UNODA.”). This program is sponsored by the UN in hopes that all countries will ratify the treaty and eliminate weapons of mass destruction. Another group of multinational peace talk are the Six Party Talks which overtime have failed to be adopted by North Korea.

The Six Party talks include the US, China, Japan, North Korea, South Korea, and also Russia. Negotiations for this talked went from 2003 to 2009 because of terms constantly changing in the agreement (Davenport, Kelsey). The United States wanted all nuclear energy production in North Korea to stop because of concerns that it was a front for nuclear weapons. In return for stopping energy production, the US and other countries agreed to give oil to the North Koreans. The International Atomic Energy Agency confirmed in 2007 that North Korea shut down nuclear facilities, however, by 2009 North Korea claimed that they never formally agreed on any deal and that any agreement was void and restarted their nuclear program (Davenport, Kelsey). Since then many countries, including China, have tried to get North Korea to consider the Six Party talks, but none have been successful.

Underlying Causes

The North Korean’s growing nuclear problem has many underlying causes that could be escalating the problem. The first issue is that North Korea refuses to consider negotiating a deal to limit
arms. The last time that they attempted to negotiate was in 2009, since then many nations have tried to bring them back to the table but have failed (Albert, Eleanor). This could be occurring because of the leaders in North Korea and The United States who are both very vocal and not afraid to make threats. President Trump has been quoted saying “If China is not going to solve North Korea, we will (Albert, Eleanor).” Another reason that North Korea is testing missiles and showing it’s military capacity is because of the amount of US military presence in the Korean Peninsula. American troops and sailors are currently stationed mainly in Japan and South Korea, but also many other areas. There are over 73,000 ground troops in these two countries in addition to 200,000 sailors (Holmes, Oliver) The United State’s goal is to make sure that South Korea is protected from North Korea’s aggression. Due to this the US has the Seventh fleet stationed in Japan, this the largest US naval fleet. The US has also put in a Terminal High Altitude Area Defense System (THAAD) to destroy missiles as a last line of defense (Holmes, Oliver). These issues could contribute to the reason why North Korea’s nuclear program is continuing to grow.

**Policy Options:**

There are three main possible policy options given the current situation with North Korea. The first situation would be to bring North Korea to the negotiation table and get them to agree to a deal similar to the Iranian Nuclear Treaty. The sanctions would be placed on coal, North Korea’s main export, along with other major exports. By doing this the North Korean economy would be crippled by these sanctions and isolation from the world. They also would not be able to build more nuclear capable buildings and the nuclear waste they have has to be moved to a NATO country much like in the Iran deal (“Iran Nuclear Deal: Key Details”). This cash flow will hopefully cut off any funds that would go into the nuclear program.

Another policy option would be to push China to isolate themselves from North Korea by cutting ties financially and not supporting North Korea’s businesses that keep their finances in China.
Also this policy would stop China from exporting to North Korea. While this will hurt the Chinese economy, the US and other allies who want to stop North Korea’s program will subsidize this trade. By taking away a lot of North Korea’s financial support, the economy should crumble. This would stop any spending towards Nuclear Programs because money would be short in other majors areas. Lastly, another option would be to continue to send military forces to the Korean Peninsula. These forces could either be more troops, sailers, or even ballistic missiles. This continued stockpiling of weapons near North Korea is similar to the actions completed by President Reagan during the Cold War.

Solution:

The best solution would be to push China to cut ties with North Korea. Since North Korea keeps a significant amount of money in Chinese banks, these accounts would need to be frozen and made inaccessible. By doing this North Korea would not only lose financial support from businesses and other investment, but they would also lose much of their major imports. This will force North Korea to stop investing in their nuclear program and focus on keeping their economy and nation afloat. The Chinese economy would suffer since 90% of their exports go to North Korea (Albert, Eleanor). In order to make up for the loss of GDP the other countries in the six party talks (US, China, South Korea, and Russia) will continue to import more from China to make up the 90% of exports no longer being bought by North Korea. NATO countries will also get involved and help subsidize China’s trade. This stance would help them avoid Article 5 of the NATO alliance because potential war with North Korea would drop(NATO / OTAN). The tensions with North Korea are escalating, due to this the best way to eliminate conflict would be isolating them from their biggest allie, the Chinese.
Works Cited


