

THE CONSOLIDATION OF NORTH KOREA AS A NUCLEAR POWER THROUGH THE LEADERSHIP OF KIM JONG UN¹

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Introduction

With the death of Kim Jong-il, on December 17, 2011, there has been a significant increase in the debate about the future of North Korea, specially related to its political system and the future of its nuclear program. The process of replacing the leader was fast and, his son Kim Jong Un immediately took over the power. The sudden death of Kim Jong Il wasn't expected, since it was caused by a myocardial infarction and there was no process of leadership succession consolidated. Therefore, Kim Jong Un, considered young for the position (28 years), rose in December 30 to the position of Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army (KPA) and was officially installed as the supreme leader of the regime in April of 2012 (Kim 2012).

During the Fourth Conference of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), on April 11, 2012, Kim Jong Un was nominated First Secretary, therefore controlling all the hierarchical apparatus of the WPK. Two days later he was announced as the president of the National Defence Commission (NDC), supreme organ in North Korea, becoming the official successor of his father and leading the main positions in the party (Kim 2012).

This article aims to approach the implications of Kim Jong-Un consolidation of power for North Korea nuclear question, running through the

¹ This research had the support of CAPES/CNPq

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North Korean internal politics based on the Juche philosophy and the governance of the current leader. The North Korean foreign policy will be analyzed from the standpoint of its nuclear program, which has acquired relevance in the studies of international relations focused on this country. The motivations for this program will be analyzed through the isolation of North Korea in the international system and through the approach of Jacques Hymans (2006; 2008), Pinacho (2014), Brites (2016) about the nationalist identity of the opposition till the motivations exercised by the internal and external environments or levels.

***Juche* philosophy and *Songun* politics**

The *Juche* philosophy, characterized as a monolithic ideological system, was created by Kim Il Sung, leader of North Korea from its foundation (1948) until his death (1994) when his son, Kim Jong Il, took on the leadership after he passed away. The Juche philosophy became the official political foundation of the country by the end of 1960 and rose to the level of “guiding principle of the national policy” in 1972 (Lee 2003; Person 2013; Armstrong 2008).

In this sense, the Juche philosophy encompasses a complex ideological system which forms the political foundation of North Korea, being, therefore, a guiding principle of the domestic and foreign policy of the country. This philosophy was crafted through the concepts of self-reliance and independence, especially amid the *modus operandi* of three state actors rivals of North Korea: the renaissance of the Japanese imperialism, the establishment of the South Korean regime and, the economical recovery of US imperialism in the post war period (Armstrong 2008).

After the Meiji Revolution, the Japanese imperialism has consolidated itself in the Asian region through a significant industrial modernization which allowed to establish a expansionist political model and to strengthen its regional hegemony. During Japan militarization and imperialism, North Korea existed as a Japanese colony, between 1910 and 1945, after the victory in the war against Russia.

It's worth remembering that South Korea has been strongly supported, politically and militarily, by the USA, which realized the need to defend its geopolitical interests in the region through a generous economic aid by means of financial policies aiming to raise the growth and to develop the industry in South Korea.

In this sense, the Juche philosophy acted as a mean or answer to la-

tent threats, in order to ensure security in North Korea. On the other hand, the Juche philosophy was a way to guarantee loyalty to the only leader, using ten points of the ideological system that made the sovereign's word absolute (Person 2013 (a); Person 2013 (b)).

We emphasize three points that represent clearly the power granted to the leader of North Korea:

[...] 1. We shall give our best in the quest to unify all the society with the revolutionary ideology of the great leader Kim Il-Sung; [...] 3. We shall make absolute the authority of the great leader Kim Il-Sung; [...] 5. We shall strictly join the principle of unconditional obedience in the compliance of the instructions of the great leader Kim Il-Sung.”

Therefore, we can show that the North Korean regime that was being established, during all the 20th century and specially during the Cold War, always looked for ways to guarantee its autonomy and safety against explicit threats of external nature, what meant strengthening the local power and establishing a mechanism of internal loyalty to the regime.

The philosophical principle of Juche is the fact that men have control over the world and his own destiny, since he has consciousness. This philosophy was established by Kim Il Sung as a pillar of the country's revolution and reconstruction, which means rejecting the dependence of others and using their own strength to determine the revolutionary spirit of self-sufficiency in the regime (Lee 2003).

Kim Il-Sung worked the Juche philosophy through three principles of independence:

- Political (Chaju), with the idea of mutual equality between the nations, in which each state would have the right to self determination in order to guarantee happiness and prosperity to its people;
- Economical (Charip), in which the economic dependency of external help would make the State a political satellite of other countries, it's worth noticing that, for the leader, the economic self-sufficiency wouldn't be the same as building an isolate economy;
- Militar (Chawi), regarded as essential to the philosophy of a independent and sovereign state, contrarily to any “imperialists movements of aggression and war” with violence, making this the best way to defend the national independency and the revolutionary cause (Lee 2003, 106-107).

The Juche philosophy is going to be enhanced in the institutional scenery of North Korea, especially due to the fact that it is based on the Songun policy. The origins of this policy date to the Kalun Conference, in 1930, when the president Kim Il Sung proclaimed a new strategy of armed struggle to confront the Japanese troops in the process of liberation (Zerpa 2011).

The Songun policy is based in two strands. One, in the priority the State gives to the military apparatus as a way to propel the revolutionary war in the process of socialist construction. The other is based on the relevance of the military system as a primary job of the State in order to defend the homeland, the revolution and socialism, considering the revolutionary army as the main force (Bulling 2009; Zerpa 2011).

It is interesting to observe the Juche philosophy and the Songun policy, existing together as strong mechanisms in the construction of national strategy in great scale, have allowed at least two dimensions of the political action of the State in the international scenery and equally favorable to the national needs. Firstly, North Korea was able to maintain national sovereignty and dignity while confronting and containing the assault of the North American army in the 1950 war. Therefore, according to Vizentini and Pereira (2014, 176) the Songun policy was implemented with the aim to become a military strategy of survival.

Secondly, precisely since the Korean Peninsula War in 1950, the country has showed a strong urge to improve its military forces, making them powerful and ready to repel any external threat. Bulling (2009, 47) states that since the 1970s national defense has been the target of great national investments to the appropriation of heavy weaponry, then becoming one of the biggest armies in the world.

Therefore we are able to verify that the maintenance of the Songun policy and the Juche philosophy have a strong and prevailing justification to North Korea, especially in the implementation of its foreign policy. The Songun was effective during the process of liberation of the Japanese empire and afterwards, along with Juche, has worked as strategic policy of defense against the threats coming from the USA during the Post Cold War period.

Governance and the Consolidation of Kim Jong Un

Kim Jong Un replaced his father amid several doubts about his ability to take the power, in a way where he had to generate his own legitimacy, what included the promotion of his parent image (Frank 2012). So, in the same

way that Kim Il Sung was promoted by the end of his “physical life” due to the eternity of his “political life”, Kim Jong Il was worshiped in such way that North Korea began to have two ex-leaders, each one with “eternal political bodies” (Kwon 2013).

Kim Jong Un assumed his father’s legacy of a government based on “military policy in the first place”, which left some economic issues behind, producing serious crises that were exacerbated by Russia’s post-Cold War recession (Kim 2012; Kwon 2013; Lodgaard 2011). In this way, Kim decides to work with the legacy of the former leaders in parallel, presented as an organic whole, giving new guidelines for the Party and for the economy, maintaining the military legacy of his father (Kwon 2013; Avery e Rinehart 2014).

In 2012 Kim Jong Un brought new economic guidelines, with benefits to workers and peasants as well as more permits for entrepreneurship (Kim 2012), but not joining the Chinese reform, as it could lead to a significant social opening (Magalhães 2012a).

The strengthening of the military and nuclear programs consolidated internal power and showed strong foreign policy momentum through provocations with satellite launches, nuclear tests and missile launches that have occurred most frequently since 2006 (Magalhães 2012b; Avery e Rinehart 2014).

International Insulation and Opposition Government

The country joined the socialist bloc during the Cold War, with the United States, South Korea and Japan as its opposition. In addition, the fall of the former USSR and improved relations between China and South Korea further forced its isolation (Lodgaard 2011). The United States was seen as an enemy by the ideological opposition, which was allied to its participation in the Korean War and its support for the South Korean government. South Korea, since the same war, is constantly embroiled in frequent tensions and threats with the neighbors of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (the official name of North Korea). Japan was considered as one of the greatest enemies of the North Koreans, mainly by the violent colonization suffered until the end of World War II.

The isolation also came from the former Cold War allies, because Russia was based on a Western economic model policy and moved away from the North Korean regime. China, despite maintaining the communist regime and not completely parting with North Korea, entered into a process of economic renewal, which brought it closer to some of the enemies of the

North Korean regime, such as South Korea.

This history merges with its opposition to other countries, which has strong relation with the national identity, the Juche philosophy and the Songun policy. The self-differentiation of the enemy and the need for independence in the face of their isolation and perceived threats, since the Japanese imperialism and the Korean War have helped to form the North Korean identity (Armstrong 2008; Lee 2003).

The concept of opposition nationalism is constructed by Jacques Hymans (2006) through the conception of the national identity of the leader, characterized by the belief that the interests and fundamental values of his nation are naturally opposed to the main countries in comparison. The core values and interests of the North Korean nation would be, in this case, opposed to the values and interests of other comparable nations such as the United States, South Korea, and Japan. In addition, there's also the belief in nationalism as a Duty to keep their heads up in relation to other countries (Hymans 2008).

The decision to acquire nuclear weapons is seen in this case as a choice, not as a result (Busch 2008), which reflects deep national conceptions of national identity (Hymans 2008), serving as a product of the country's nationalism and of its opposition to others. In this case, the opposition nationalism of the Kim dynasty is at the heart of the Juche ideology (Hymans 2008). Jacques Hymans describes the relationship between fear, pride, and opposition nationalism and how they interact to build the decision to be a nuclear country:

The leader who reaches for the bomb, as for any protective amulet, is doing so at least as much to control fears as to decrease actual dangers. Second, pride produces a desire for markers of autonomy and power—and of these, nuclear weapons are the gold standard. The bomb is a symbol of the nation's unlimited potential, of its scientific, technical, and organizational prowess, and also of its tenacity in the face of strong international condemnation. (Hymans 2008, 263).

We see, therefore, that the decision to become a nuclear country on the part of North Korea is directly related to its nationalism and its opposition to other countries, providing security to deal, on the one hand, with fears and threats, and on the other, with pride in its representation of strength and technological capacity.

The Development of the North Korean Nuclear Program

This analysis contemplates the North Korean nuclear program as a result of domestic and external factors. The desire to have nuclear weapons has been present in North Korea since the 1960s (Hymans 2008), while the Juche doctrine and the Songun policy were being implemented. Alongside this will, there was also the consolidation of the political system of the party, and the gradual recognition of countries that are still seen as a threat.

During the Cold War, the Soviet Union facilitated the development of the North Korean nuclear program (Hymans 2008; Lodgaard 2011), to the point of making it a self-sustaining short-term program (Lodgaard 2011). In foreign policy, the Cold War concomitantly ended with the declaration of the United States, South Korea, and Japan as official enemies of the North Korean regime (Lodgaard 2011).

Thus, the historical development of North Korea's nuclear program is linked to internal and external factors, followed by the military's first policy in the 1990s, with the departure of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) on 10/01/2003 and with the beginning of its nuclear tests in 2006. North Korea's exit from the NPT gains importance when we look at its nuclear program and its foreign policy. We have such action as a response to the threat brought by the United States, which included it in the Axis of Evil in 2002, so that North Korea goes on to demonstrate its concrete claims to become a warlike nuclear country. Subsequently in a period of 10 years, since the first in 2006, North Korea has performed 5 nuclear tests, the last in 2016 being the most powerful so far.

In Brites' analysis (2016, 17) we find three structural and historical factors that, since Kim Jong Un's rise to power, that can be considered central in the analysis of the current situation of the country and that motivated the development of a nuclear program for military purposes : 1 - the unresolved issues of the Korean War; 2. The Juche doctrine and the development of the nuclear program; and 3. The current characteristic features of North Korea's modernization process and the doctrine of "strategic patience" implemented by the US government during Barack Obama's presidency.

First, we have the consequences that the Korean War (1950-1953) brought to the current political and strategic developments in the Peninsula. Korea has traditionally been a connecting corridor linking China with Japan, which historically has always been regarded as a geopolitical space of enormous interest to both empires. The Japanese colonization and division of the peninsula into two parts due to occupations by the Soviet and North American troops represented, what we understand as a historical defect, a rupture

with the ethnic and cultural reality of the region, in which the Cold War still exerts a dissuasive and restraining force.

The Korean War has brought about a deepening of the split between the two States. From the economic point of view, there was already a distinction between the north and the south, and from the Japanese colonization onwards, an industrial infrastructure apparatus was established in the north and there was a predominance of agriculture in the south (Vizentini and Pereira 2014; Brites 2016).

This war has made the peninsula essential, acquiring geopolitical relevance in northeastern Asia with enormous impacts to the world. According to Brites (2016: 17):

“With the outbreak of the conflagration, one of the bloodiest of the Cold War, Korea became the geopolitical epicenter of East Asia. The US invasion, the Chinese reaction and the Soviet support left deep marks for inter-Korean relations and, to a large extent, still condition the insertion of both countries to date.”

The impact of the war was not limited to the countries that were initially involved. The advance of US troops over Kim Il-Sung's army extrapolated the UN mandate and ended up encouraging China's entry into the conflict and the US withdrawal to the south, specifically to Seoul. China's entry came with the purpose of alienating the US from its currency. However, in the withdrawal exercise, troops destroyed much of the country's industrial infrastructure, as well as any undertaking that could aid in the reorganization of North Korean forces. Hydropower plants, military and civilian logistical support facilities were bombed. In this destructive step of the American troops, more explosives were used than those used against Japan during the Second World War (Cumings 2016, Brites 2016).

In this process of advancement, setbacks and destruction of the country by the invading troops, North Korea was constantly threatened with nuclear weapons. In the development of this troubled litigation that caught a war of extermination against the North Korean population, in addition to humiliation, a feeling of extreme vulnerability was generated in relation to their own security. Therefore, perhaps this is the crucial element in understanding the country's most recent developments concerning the option for the development of nuclear weapons for war purposes (Cumings 2010; Vizentini and Pereira 2014; Brites 2016).

Currently the problem is even greater because the Korean War has not officially ended yet, as in 1953 only an armistice was established in which

the parties agreed to stop fighting without officially declaring the end of the war. It was only a cease-fire which lasted for several decades without a peace treaty being drafted. The absence of a commitment made through the formalization of diplomatic normality through a peace treaty with binding effect in the light of international law is one of the determining factors in the insertion of North Korea to this day.

For Brites (2016, 18), the normalization of the country with the international community passes by the end embargoes promoted by the United States, the United Nations and the West as a bloc. In this sense, the search for deterrence capacity is linked to the goal of establishing direct negotiations with the US.

Continuing with the analysis of the structural and historical factors that led the country to the development of a nuclear program, we have in the second place the successful implementation of the Juche doctrine. As discussed earlier, in the immediate aftermath of the beginning of the armistice, North Korea adopted the Juche philosophy as the official doctrine of the state, which sought to establish a mechanism for social cohesion in the country based on the idea of self-confidence and self-reliance.

In Brites' view (2016, 18), the Juche doctrine made the North Korean people lord of their own destiny by laying the foundations for North Korean nationalism and the prospect of non-submission to external interests as it was subjected to during the long period of Japanese and Chinese colonization and during the war in the peninsula. Thus it was the Juche doctrine that brought the perception of economic self-sufficiency and the ability to guarantee its external security in an autonomous way.

In the context of post-war on the peninsula, North Korea begins its intentions to carry out a nuclear program autonomously and for military purposes to ensure its stability and security in the region. The US indirectly encouraged this intention since it established in South Korea nuclear artifacts under the claim that they would be to maintain regional stability in a balance of power.

The establishment of an autonomous nuclear program by North Korea addressed, in addition to strategic objectives, an unresolved security issue, as well as the satisfaction of an energy demand in which the country would be in a position to supply the uranium mines of high quality it possessed. The implementation of the North Korean nuclear program is only able as long as an approximation is established between the country and the former Soviet Union. Through a cooperation agreement, in 1965 the first reactor was installed in the city of Yongyon and would later start the missile program in partnership (Brites 2016, 18).

Here it is necessary to discuss a little the influence that the former Soviet Union and China had on the initial development of the North Korean nuclear program. The scientific and technological assistance provided by these countries has materialized in the adoption of double-use infrastructure needed to process plutonium and uranium in the Yongyon reactor (Petrovic 2010). This encouraged the country to develop a small arsenal of atomic bombs for its missiles, but perceived some technical and political obstacles to carry out its policy of autonomy based on the Juche philosophy.

In this sense, King Il Sung had to make practical decisions in order to materialize the intentions that led him to the decision to undertake a nuclear war program. Thus, Pinacho (2014, 3) argues that:

At that time, the small group of physicists and nuclear engineers in North Korea was aware that the uranium bombs were bulkier than the plutonium ones and that, while the fabrication of uranium bombs was available to any country that detained a medium level technology, the plutonium ones required a significant number of high qualified physicists and nuclear engineers, and that the technology of these bombs was extremely complex. Nevertheless, the North Korea government had decided that its atomic bombs were small enough that they could fit the warhead of its missiles. It considered as its first option the development of plutonium atomic bombs and, as a second option, the uranium ones.

Once the option for plutonium bombs was decided, it was necessary to maintain technological cooperation with its partners and to find new sources of technological support for its purposes to be materialized. The question that remained on the air was, of course, the extent to which the support given by the ex-Soviet Socialist regime would go so that North Korea would be able to follow up its nuclear research for purposes other than the peaceful ones. In 1985 Pyongyang adhered to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which enabled it to continue acquiring nuclear technology on the international stage. The signature of the NPT was a demonstration that the country renounced the development of nuclear weapons. Subsequently, hundreds of physicists and engineers were sent to study nuclear technology in the specialized centers of the former USSR, China and Europe (Pinacho 2014, 3).

However, the country had to develop strategies to deal with its population while meeting the basic needs and, at the same time, to invest heavily in high-performance nuclear technology as a State policy, and in this way guarantee a place in the international scenario by prioritizing its Military and strategic objectives. Therefore,

Since the beginning the North Korean government faced serious problems. The first one was that due to the deficient agricultural development and the shortage of electrical energy, famines were produced periodically and the North American aid was needed to for oil supply and agricultural surplus. On the other hand, they had to develop an ingenious policy of confusion and fatigue, mainly towards the US, signing and denouncing agreements in order to make the necessary time to build their nuclear weapons. All of this, without reaching extreme situations that could lead to definitive ruptures in the talks with the North American government. (Pinacho 2014, 4).

The end of the Cold War and the decline of the USSR in the late 1980s meant for North Korea the loss or alienation of its main ally and partner. This represented a drastic reduction in the supply of food and fuel subsidized by the former USSR (Brites 2016, 19). In its quest to ensure its survival in the new international context, the Government decided to move closer to the sister republic, South Korea, in order to normalize relations with the United States. The result was the establishment of the "Accord for Reconciliation, Non-aggression, Cooperation and Exchange between North and South" signed in 1992 and focused on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula (Brites 2016). That same year the Supreme People's Assembly ratified the NPT which had been signed 7 years ago and the inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) began.

As we can see, the steps taken showed that the North Korean nuclear program was moving toward a peaceful resolution. In the international context characteristic of the early 1990s, nuclear disarmament became a priority, as the classic Cold War rivalries between the major hegemonic blocs were being disbanded and overcome. In this sense, a process of greater control of nuclear weapons was initiated, which focused on regional powers that had advanced nuclear technology. North Korea is at the heart of this new reality because it has demonstrated the technological capacity to enrich uranium since the cooperation agreements with the former USSR and China were implemented.

Efforts to make the Korean peninsula a nuclear-weapon-free region were shaken for at least two facts that history still had to hold for the nuclear movement to become even stronger. On the one hand, Kim Il-Sung's death in July 1994 and the delayed fuel delivery promised by the US through President Bill Clinton's administration led to discouragement in negotiations (Brites 2016, 19).

Kim Jong-Il's rise to power was interpreted as a sign of transformation in North Korean politics and in the midst of an uncertain landscape, the new leader implemented the Songun doctrine. As explained earlier, this new

policy leaves behind the foundation-based government of the institutions and the preponderant role of the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) to focus on the politics of military primacy and to establish a state of war bases.

The Iranian nuclear program enters an upward spiral phase under Kim Jong-il's rule based on Songun policy. However, there is a fact that gave a new political direction for the North Korean nuclear program. In 2002, the United States accused North Korea of developing a clandestine nuclear uranium enrichment program for the purpose of obtaining fissile material for bomb making. The charges were substantiated by statements by Pakistani scientist Abdul Khan who acknowledged having provided Libya, Iran and North Korea with technology for the enrichment of uranium and other nuclear secrets. Khan made at least 13 trips to North Korea during the 1990s, having the opportunity to visit underground facilities containing nuclear warheads (Petrovich 2011).

In fact, relations with the United States had become much more difficult since the United States pronounced the Bush "Axis of Evil" doctrine in which Korea was included and which brought much instability to the peninsula and widened the perception of threats and of extreme insecurity on the part of the North Koreans. In this context, negotiations to continue the nuclear disarmament of the peninsula began to falter as the proposed freeze reward program was not materialized while the US stated that they would not negotiate again until the dismantling of the nuclear program actually took place (Brites 2016, 19).

In this sense, since there were no significant advances in terms of appeasement and approximation, but rather a profound paralysis of the negotiations, North Korea adopted a strategy of an offensive nature withdrawing from the NPT in 2013 and, as of 2005, the country started to use all its nuclear policy as an element of deterrence giving free way to the development of war-like artifacts.

It was in this context that the first nuclear tests took place in 2006, which continued with the unfolding of a new policy based on the rise of Kim Jong-Un, focusing on the process of modernization through the Juche doctrine which was explained earlier. In Brites' view (2016 20):

The arrival of Kim Jong-Un to power brought a series of questions about the regime's resilience to the process of political transition. In general terms, the Western perspective has been centered, since the end of the Cold War, on the belief of the imminent collapse. However, the new leader took over the country reaffirming the speech of autonomy and sought to demonstrate strength. In this context, the country has begun a new round of threats and provocations.

As we can see the development of the North Korean nuclear program was always marked by external influence as well as the extreme perception of insecurity on all sides (West, regional neighbors and South Korea). More than that, the incessant government investment to improve technology, even though the country is practically isolated from the world, what in principle would hamper such technological development, surprised even more the international community because the country is increasingly sophisticated in terms of nuclear technology for war purposes.

Within all these events, the internal characteristics defined by the Juche philosophy were strongly linked to external factors, such as international isolation, combined with the composition of a nationalist opposition government. In addition, given the centralization of power, the choice to be a nuclear country is defined mainly by its government, which in turn is characterized by opposition nationalism, Juche philosophy and its conflictive isolation in foreign policy.

To the extent that the ten points of the Juche system have been updated by Kim Jong Un, his government consolidates and he continues to be the supreme leader in the country. They maintained the militarized politics, the hostility against their enemies and against demonstrations of force. In the same sense, North Korea remains like a nuclear country.

In this way, it is not possible to see changes in the results of this connection between the internal (Philosophy Juche) and the external (Isolation and Opposition before the international community), as it is not possible to have perspectives of a denuclearization in the country through the 2005 Joint Declaration (US-Department of State 2005), raising doubts about the errors of the international approach to this problem and how best to approach it.

The Joint Declaration made it possible to establish an agreement reached during the fourth round of the Six-Party Talks (Hexapartite) in which, among other points, North Korea accepted to abandon its nuclear program and both the United States and South Korea were committed not to implement Weapons in the region. The document was considered one of the most important of the Six-Party Talks, held between the United States, Russia, China, South Korea, North Korea and Japan, which since 2003 has been aiming for peace and stability in the Korean peninsula through its denuclearization .

Criticism Against Counter-Proliferation

We know that North Korea is already a country with nuclear capability, and this stems from the fact that the international community has not been

able to prevent this nuclear proliferation of horizontal feature, adding that the policies adopted by countries to prevent the nuclear program, such as the Six-Party Talks in 2005 and the application of sanctions in 2006 and 2009 were flawed (US Department of State 2005, Kimball 2014).

First of all, we have the NPT as a regime of nuclear control and non-proliferation that has been controversially grounded from the start. Its creation, through the nuclear powers legitimized by the same treaty (USA, former USSR, United Kingdom, France and China), had as its initial focus the maintenance of the hierarchy generated by the possession of nuclear weapons under the veil of the ideal of pacifying relations and avoiding a global collapse arising from nuclear proliferation. Consisting of multilateral and bilateral initiatives, the NPT is based on three parts: non-proliferation, disarmament and the peaceful use of nuclear energy (Lodgaard 2011; Willis 2013). What troubled the vast majority of countries was the way in which the pose of nuclear weapons by countries that had conducted successful tests until 1964 became legal. Many claimed that the select club of countries that could develop nuclear warfare technology was legitimized while most countries would undergo periodic revisions to control the advancement of technology.

Abstinance and deterrence systems emerged during the Cold War, so that, even if antagonistic, they would work together to form a global nuclear order. The abstinence system would be related to non-nuclear countries, who make a choice to see nuclear weapons as a source of insecurity. On the other hand, the deterrent system corresponds to countries that choose to be nuclearized because they see such possession as a source of security through containment, this system is considered as defensive and used through deterrence rules (Walker 2000). In these two systems, for example, we can frame the NPT, as an abstinence system, through nuclear non-proliferation, and we can frame North Korea in a deterrent system, but taking into account that the country is not aligned to any rules related to the possession of nuclear weapons.

Related to the deterrent system, we have Waltz's (1981) analysis of "optimistic proliferation," which suggests the possibility of pacifying the system in the sense that equilibrium would create stability and prevent conflicts. With this reasoning, we can reinforce Willis's (2013) idea that nonproliferation actually seeks to maintain domination while proliferation is not threatening, but rather the intentions behind this proliferation along with perceptions of threat.

The way in which the countries involved in the Korean case intend to contain their program end up reinforcing the motivations for pursuing it. The sanctions applied often increase the isolation of the country and do not have

a positive effect, as the country does not change its policy of self-sufficiency. In addition to this, we see North Korea demonstrating that it will not relinquish its autonomy in security and economy, finding escape from sanctions through its relationship with China, which does not intend to create tensions with the country for the costs that they would bring to stability in the region (Bishop 2005). Alongside this, sanctions diminish the very scope of China's diplomatic power over Korea.

On the other hand, we consider important to understand the process by which the country has become nuclear in view of the political and economic developments both internally and externally. The economic sanctions that the United States and the UN have implemented to stop North Korea's nuclear program since the 1980s have not yielded effective results. The interesting thing about this game established among the different actors is that the same policy implemented had two totally different directions and with divergent strategic utility for each side. In this way:

[...] the United States imposed to North Korea a series of economic and commercial sanctions. Since then, both the North Korean and the North American governments established a policy of *squeezing but not choking*, with different goals. North Korea gained time to build its first plutonium bomb. The United States to undermine the communist regime. (Pinacho 2014, 8-9).

We can define the beginning of North Korea's last and current proliferation momentum when the Jan Network in 2003 was dismantled, a network that provided the country with sensitive materials on the black market. The Jan Network started in 1976 when Abd al-Qadir Jan and several Pakistani engineers who worked for the Dutch FDO company on ultracentrifuges to the URENCO, which supplied 3 and 4% enriched uranium to European nuclear reactors returned to Pakistan with a huge amount of technical documentation and sophisticated plans. The key issue is that President Ali Bhutto has named Abd Qadir Jan as director and coordinator of the enriched uranium procurement subprogram of the Pakistani nuclear program (Pinacho 2014, 5).

For more than two decades Jan has used this experience to his advantage by establishing an extensive network for the supply of ultracentrifuge plants. For this, he built a clandestine factory in Malaysia for the development of high-level nuclear technology, which would later be exported and marketed through Dubai. However, in 2003, the BBC China ship which transported ultracentrifuges from Malaysia to Libya was intercepted at the time it crossed the Suez Canal. This was possible thanks to the Proliferation Security Initia-

tive's policy that had been proposed by the United States and aimed at intercepting materials related to the manufacture of illegally transported nuclear, radiological, chemical or biological weapons, as well as the launching systems for such weapons (Pinacho 2014, 5).

The main issue in this matter is that, with the dismantling of the Jan Network, it became evident that in 2000 the network was able to supply North Korea with centrifuges of the most diverse models, as well as the technology developed by URENCO. Therefore, evidence that North Korea had built an underground plant to enrich uranium at high levels in order to obtain sufficient plutonium to build military armaments was proven once again.

Thus, in view of the new international reality of the war against terrorism, the Evil Axis doctrine, the dismantling of the Jan Network, the exit from the NPT, and the scarcity of food, electricity and oil, imminent financial and the commercial punishments led the government to develop an intimidating policy using the discreet nuclear technology that until then the country possessed. Thus, on October 6 2006, the country carried out its first nuclear test at the Hwaderi test site, being strongly condemned by the international community.

In 2009, the country performed launch tests on *Taepo Dong II* missiles and then did the second nuclear test on May 25. Although considered a test of limited force, the energy of the explosion was estimated at 4.7 kilotons by the US Geological Survey (Pinacho 2014, 10). This raised the level of concern as the punitive measures imposed were not working to curb North Korea's technological development. On the other hand, the country was gradually profiting from the manifestation of strength projected on the international scene, which gave it even more obstacles in obtaining materials essential for the accelerated development of this technology.

Such counter-proliferation measures adopted after the second nuclear test were not enough since on February 12, 2013, North Korea had its third nuclear test. This time, according to data provided by the same agency, the test reached 12 kilotons of force. The message was that the technical problems caused by the shortage of barred materials as a result of the punitive sanctions imposed had been internally overcome and the program continued in an accelerated fashion (Pinacho 2014, 10).

Kim Jong Un, in fact, has been the leader who gave more impetus to the North Korean nuclear program. The project to develop nuclear weapons has been accelerating in recent years. The fundamental question is that, in an exponential way, the most recent developments show that there is in fact an interest that is not only to demonstrate dissuasive nuclear capacity, but rather to position itself as a relevant actor at the regional level to demand the satis-

faction of its strategic interests more immediately

In that sense, in January 2016, North Korea held its fourth nuclear test, being considered the strangest of all performed. It was no coincidence that it was held two days before the birthday of the national leader. The government of Kim Jong Un assured that it had successfully detonated a hydrogen bomb, which many scientists in the international community doubted, but in the official communiqué of the State it was evident that the country already had the capacity to arm nuclear warheads in ballistic missiles. Thus, the hydrogen bomb ends up being 50 times more powerful than the nuclear bomb. However, the doubts remained because to a certain extent, the possession of a hydrogen weapon requires much more logistic sophistication which meant that North Korea still did not have all the infrastructure for handling and displacing such weapons. What the analysts point out is that even if there is doubt, North Korea may have tested a miniature unconventional hydrogen artefact and another technology that does not correspond to what traditionally refers to hydrogen bombs.

Also in 2016, on September 10, the country held the fifth nuclear test in 10 years. This latest test was considered the most powerful of all it has done in the history of North Korea's nuclear program. The explosion had a force of 10 kilotons and caused an earthquake to the north, in the border with China being perceived by the international scientific agencies. One of the most relevant purposes the country has sought with this test was to demonstrate to the world that it already has enough power to implement preemptive attacks if external threats are imminently materialized. The test was one in response to tensions experienced on the Korean peninsula since the US and South Korea agreed to implement the advanced THAAD anti-missile system to confront the challenges imposed by the North Korean nuclear program on the whole region (Fontdegloria 2016).

This new scenario establishes a gradual shift in the balance of power and threats among state actors. Another point that we cannot rule out is that there is a need to highlight North Korea's ability to intimidate not only South Korea but also Japan and thus challenge the alliances established between these countries and the western powers. North Korea's position is to make clear that there are defense strategies and mechanisms in the face of aggression against the country and the political regime. The fundamental question is that there is still disbelief and lack of international respectability, and the country would thus be seeking to strengthen its position to face future scenarios in which it may find itself much weaker towards the identified enemies (Azambuja 2016).

In this process of expressive and ostensible increase of the North Ko-

rean nuclear program with warlike aims during the last 10 years, it is interesting to note that in parallel with the emergence of Kim Jong Un, we have on the other side the implementation of a very particular US foreign policy led by the president Obama. Diplomatic and trade relations between the two countries are not straightforward and have remained at a distance since the Armistice was proclaimed to halt the Korean War. But what is worth noticing is the intention that Kim Jong Un has manifested in several opportunities to participate inside the APEC - Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation; Of the Asian Investment and Infrastructure Bank (AIIB); and to approach the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), but in order to participate in all these variable-geometry coalitions of economic orientation it is necessary to normalize relations with the US (Brites 2016, 21).

In Brites view (2016), in this geopolitical scenario, the Obama administration has adopted the so-called strategic patience policy based on the perception that the North Korean regime would tend to collapse sooner or later, and in that sense, it would be extremely useful to implement non-military measures to promote and encourage regime change in the country and thus lay the foundations for solid negotiations:

[...] the US strategic definitions for the peninsula remain focused on damage control in the event of regime collapse. And from a political standpoint, the Obama administration takes the position of only accepting negotiations in the event of more evident demonstrations by North Korea that it intends to abandon its nuclear program (Brites 2016, 21).

The issue that has unfolded in recent years is that the hegemonic powers' practice of implementing mechanisms to initiate transitions of political regimes in countries that were considered alien to Western values has not been peaceful, let alone the results successful. The cases of Iraq, Libya and Syria reinforce North Korea's understanding that the fall of the political regime and the renunciation of the nuclear program would make the country extremely vulnerable to the interests of Western countries that would step in to change the geopolitical landscape of northeastern Asia.

This scenario, in fact, is already changing with the alliance between the US and South Korea in the installation of the THAAD-Terminal High Altitude Area Defense missile system near the border of North Korea. Both Russia and China expressed concern, considering the presence of US troops and armament in the area very risky and provocative which, in fact, would alter the regional balance of power. Both regional powers (China and Russia) in a possible geopolitical transformation of the Korean peninsula, would have much to lose with a collapse of the Kim Jong Un regime as this would mean

a greater presence of the US and Western powers in the region.

In this sense, it is understandable the interest of maintaining this regional establishment on the part of the great neighbors of North Korea, since it is more likely to initiate dialogues of greater economic cooperation between China, Russia, including with Japan and South Korea, than a drastic Western intervention that would convulse the region to the heights of the 1950 war, which has not yet been resolved. For these reasons, the policy adopted by Kim Jong Un demonstrates that the West still has to deal with the unpredictable in what concerns the nuclear program while looking for ways to reduce war deterrence through trade contacts and keep the region away from the armed conflict.

Final considerations

This analysis sought to analyze the motivations for the development of the North Korean nuclear program, through the leadership of Kim Jong Un. For that, the nuclear program was justified by the country's internal and external policies, in which the consolidation of its regime takes place through the Juche philosophy and the Songun policy in the context of a scenario of international isolation and the perception of constant threats. In this way, North Korea would also fit as a nationalist opposition government, a condition exposed by Hymans (2006) to justify the decision of some countries to be nuclear.

To develop the country's economy, Kim Jong-Un found an outlet to demonstrate its strength by consolidating the nuclear program, which brings a sense of security through its consolidation as the sole leader of the North Korean regime (reinforcing the Juche philosophy and acting according to the Songun policy), demonstrated through the death of Jang ThaeK, and giving continuity to the revolution instituted by his grandfather. In other words, North Korea's nuclear program is consolidated through the leadership of Kim Jong Un, as the leadership of Kim Jong Un uses the strengthening of its nuclear program to consolidate itself.

Another relevant issue is related to the debate that urges as international crises emerge from the country's nuclear program. Both the fact that the implementation of sanctions in North Korea does not contain the advances of its nuclear program and the maintenance of the hierarchy established by the nuclear powers through the NPT are factors that gain importance in discussions that seek stability in the country, in northeast Asia and in the international system.

It is important to emphasize that the development of North Korean nuclear war technology means the materialization of two strategic dimensions. At first, we realize that through the nuclear program the country has developed a greater deterrence capacity vis-à-vis its closest enemies, mainly South Korea and Japan. On the other hand, the program is designed as a synonym for modernization of the country and patriotic grandeur, which gives the government greater popular legitimacy and a positive return of measures adopted for the development of technology at advanced levels.

Thus, North Korea's implementation of the Juche philosophy and Songun policy increasingly challenges the major powers as the threats of using nuclear weapons by the Pyongyang regime may be no longer customary to become gradually war rhetoric, which leaves a scenario of complete uncertainty as to whether Kim Jong Un could lead the country to a peaceful and harmonious transition with the West, or on the contrary, will lead the country to a war against the powers that defend interests in the Korean Peninsula and the Northeast Asian.

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ABSTRACT

With the death of Kim Jong Il 2011, the uncertainty regarding North Korea future increased in its internal political system and in relation to its insertion in the international system. This article aims to approach the implications of Kim Jong Un's power by the *Juche* philosophy and *Songun* policy as guiding principles of the nuclear foreign policy of this country. The main focus of this paper is the emergence of the accelerated nuclear program that, in recent years, Kim Jong Un has used as a bargaining strategy and as a demonstration of regional and technological power that modify the regional geopolitical scenario. The motivations for the implementation of this program will be analyzed through the approaches of Hymans (2006-2008), Pinacho (2014) and Brites (2016) about the nationalist identity of the opposition as well as about the motivations exerted by the internal and external levels. This analysis points out that the confluence of interests and strategies implemented by the various actors about North Korea's nuclear program has favored North Korea huge bargaining power that defies the punishments imposed by the West overcoming obstacles and testing more sophisticated artifacts every time.

KEYWORDS

North Korea; Nuclear Proliferation; Kim Jong Un.

Received on December 6, 2015.

Accepted on August 1, 2016.

Translated by Gabriela Freitas