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Balancing Identity: The Sino-Soviet Split, Ontological Security, and North Korean Foreign Policy

Abstract

Scholarship on Ontological Security (OS) ‘the security of being’, reveals how national narratives delineate communities within which individuals have OS and how the corresponding self-interest in upholding these narratives influence foreign policy. A heretofore-unexplored implication of these works is how the desire to maintain national narratives influences decisions on balancing and bandwagoning. The article uses Aron’s classical realism to develop an OS theory of balancing, drawing upon what it argues are his ‘early OS intuitions’. Specifically, using Aron’s concept of secular religion, the article shifts the analytical focus of current ideological approaches of balancing towards the ‘secular religion’ of nationalism. It argues decisions on balancing and bandwagoning are made in reference to perceived (in)compatibility between national narratives and the distribution of power. The case of North Korean responses to the Sino-Soviet split demonstrates the utility of an OS perspective of balancing compared to traditional balance of power formulations.

Intro

Scholarship on ontological security (OS), the security of being,¹ reveals how national narratives delineate communities within which individuals have OS and how the corresponding self-interest in upholding these narratives influence foreign policy.² The research program, however, so far has not taken on one of the core theoretical questions in international relations (IR): Why do states balance and bandwagon? This article accordingly shows the power of an OS perspective by addressing the hard case of why small states decide

¹ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991).

² Felix Berenskoetter and Bastian Giegerich, “From NATO to ESDP: A Social Constructivist Analysis of German Strategic Adjustment after the End of the Cold War,” *Security Studies* 19, no. 3 (2010): 407-52 n40; Jennifer Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma,” *European Journal of International Relations* 12, no. 3 (2006): 341-370; Ayse Zarakol, “States and ontological security: A historical rethinking,” *Cooperation and Conflict* 52, no. 1 (2017): 48-68; Michael Skey, “Why do nations matter? The struggle for belonging and security in an uncertain world,” *The British Journal of Sociology* 64, no. 1 (2013): 81-98; Anthony Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 59.

to balance or bandwagon.³ Inspired by the classical realism of Raymond Aron, this article argues small states decide between balancing and bandwagoning given the perceived (in)compatibility between national narratives and the balance of power.⁴ The case of North Korean responses to the Sino-Soviet split demonstrates the utility of an OS perspective of balancing compared to traditional balance of power formulations.

Following increasing work in IR examining the relationship between identity and interests, OS has shed light on why states have a self-interest in upholding national narratives and how this influences foreign policy.⁵ A hereto-unexplored implication of these works is how the desire to maintain national narratives influences decisions on balancing and bandwagoning. This article uses Aron's classical realism to develop an OS theory of balancing, drawing upon what it argues are his early OS intuitions, particularly the way he examines the nature and meaning of security – “What life does not serve a higher goal? What good is security accompanied by mediocrity?”⁶ Specifically, using Aron’s concept of secular religion, the article shifts the analytical focus of current ideological approaches of balancing towards the ‘secular religion’ of nationalism.⁷ Perceptions of threat and attraction thus develop in reference to moral guidelines derived from the national narratives at the center of nationalism, with decisions on balancing and bandwagoning informed by the perceived (in)compatibility

³ Miriam Fendius Elman, “The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard,” *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 2 (1995): 171-217.

⁴ Raymond Aron, *Peace and War* (New York: Routledge, 2003[1962]).

⁵ Brent Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations: Self Identity and the IR State* (New York: Routledge, 2014); Ayse Zarakol “Ontological (In)security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan,” *International Relations* 24, no. 3 (2010): 3-23; Jelena Subotic, “Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 2, no. 4 (2015): 610-627; Filip Ejodus, “Critical Situations, Fundamental Questions and Ontological Insecurity in World Politics,” *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018): 883-908.

⁶ Aron, *Peace and War*, 598.

⁷ David Rousseau, *Identifying threats and threatening identities: The social construction of realism and liberalism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2006); Henry Nau, *At Home Abroad: Identity and Power in American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002); Mark Haas, “Ideological Polarity and Balancing in Great Power Politics” *Security Studies* 23, no. 4 (2014); John Owen, *The Clash of Ideas in World Politics* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010).

between national narratives and the balance of power.⁸ Empirically the article produces important insights into North Korean behavior during the Sino-Soviet split, a systemic shift with tremendous impact for small states throughout the socialist camp and Global South subjected to Moscow and Beijing vying for influence.⁹ Particularly exposed to this competition due to its geopolitical position, North Korea provides an important and hard case of small state balancing.

This article first establishes how Pyongyang should act during the Sino-Soviet split using traditional accounts of balancing. In the second section, it introduces OS's contribution to ideational approaches to foreign policy, elaborating upon why states pursue policies inline with national identity. The third section draws on these insights to re-conceptualize the existing ideological research on balancing and argues that the ideology, or secular religion, of nationalism – codified in national narratives – needs to be a more central part of theories on threat perceptions and alliance formation. Section four uses discourse analysis to demonstrate key components of Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) national narrative to develop alternative behavioral expectations to those derived from traditional balancing accounts. The final section uses archival research to demonstrate how the narrow focus on power and survival in traditional security studies, and the omission of nationalism as it is expressed in national narratives, leads to major deficiencies in explaining DPRK policy.¹⁰ Instead, the conception, or meaning, of power and survival for Pyongyang was guided by a set of moral imperatives derived from its postcolonial national narrative even as it still

⁸ Further establishing the relationship between ontological and physical security. Maysam Behraves, "State revisionism and ontological (in)security in international politics: The complicated case of Iran and its nuclear behavior," *Journal of International Relations and Development* 21, no. 4 (2018): 836-857.

⁹ See the forum "Perspectives on the Sino-Soviet Split," *Journal of Cold War Studies* 12, no. 1 (2010).

¹⁰ The article uses Woodrow Wilson's North Korea International Documentation Project, which houses translated documents from the DPRK's former communist allies. Accessed: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/>

recognized its material constraints, demonstrating the ongoing relevance of classical realism for OS and IR.

Small States in Security Studies

Small states are traditionally defined by their “limited capacity to: (1) influence the security interests of, or directly threaten, a great power; and (2) defend itself against an attack by an equally motivated great power.”¹¹ As such, classical realism focuses predominately on great powers, to whom small states are subservient.¹² Elman meanwhile shows neorealism’s general consensus that systemic factors determine small states’ behavior given their preoccupation with survival and small room for error. Walt writes, small states “are more vulnerable to pressure, and they can do little to determine their own fates” while Rosenau argues their lack of security resigns them to focus almost exclusively on external demands.¹³ Furthermore, Rothstein surmises the distinguishing feature of small states is the “degree to which their behavior is conditioned, even determined, by the nature of the system itself.”¹⁴ Consequently, small states pose “a hard case for domestic level theory while it is easy on alternative systemic/structural explanations.”¹⁵ Accordingly, applying traditional security studies to the international system at the time of the Sino-Soviet split allows us to generate the following four behavioral expectations for North Korea.

¹¹ Elman, “The Foreign Policies of Small States”, n1.

¹² Iver B Neumann and Sieglinde Gstohl, *Lilliputians in Gulliver's World? Small States in International Relations* (Working Paper 1-2004, Institute of International Affairs University of Iceland, May, 2004).

¹³ Stephen Walt, *The Origins of Alliances* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 173; James Rosenau, “Pre-theories and Theories of Foreign Policy” in R.B. Farrell (ed.), *Approaches to Comparative and International Politics* (Evanston, IL: North Western University Press, 1966)

¹⁴ Robert Rothstein, *Alliances and Small Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 182 Cited in Seung-Ho Joo and Tae-Hwan Kwak (eds.) *Korea in the 21st Century*, (Huntington, NY: Nova Biomedical, 20001), 134.

¹⁵ Elman, “The Foreign Policies of Small States”, 173.

First, although non-alignment is ideal, it is often unattainable. During the onset of the Cold War, North Korea had little option but to align with Moscow given its border with the USSR, its occupation by Soviet troops, and the division of the Korean peninsula.¹⁶ The division of Korea and presence of US forces had further implications since local threats “increase the probability that the threatened minor would prefer an alliance with a great power,” or with other regional powers.¹⁷ Accordingly, given the inability to internally balance against the Republic of Korea (ROK) or US, Pyongyang will predominately focus on external balancing, reserving fighting alone as a last (or second to last) resort.¹⁸ The need to maintain a balance of power on the peninsula will factor into Pyongyang’s subsequent calculations around the Sino-Soviet split.

Secondly, the presence of US forces coupled with Pyongyang’s parity with Seoul throughout the 1950s (with Seoul increasingly pulling ahead throughout the 1960s) will engender a DPRK propensity for defensive postures since chain-ganging and buck-passing are non-issues within bipolarity; Great Powers will not intervene on the behalf of a reckless small state.¹⁹ Moreover, the fact Pyongyang lacked “capabilities to be a serious contender to the U.S.-ROK alliance,” or indeed match the strength of South Korean gross national product, precludes attempts to employ preventive war and power transition theory.²⁰

Third, given this security dependency, Pyongyang will avoid chastising or jeopardizing its relationship with Great Power allies, taking their “interests into account, even in [their]

¹⁶ David Kang “International Relations Theory and the Second Korea War” *International Studies Quarterly*, 47 (2003), 312; Robert L. Rothstein, “Alignment, Nonalignment, and Small Powers: 1945-1965” *International Organization*, 20, no.3 (1966), 403.

¹⁷ Dan Reiter, “Learning, Realism, and Alliances: The Weight of the Shadow of the Past” *World Politics*, 46, no.4 (Jul., 1994), 504; Rothstein “Alignment”, 405.

¹⁸ Eric J. Labs, “Do Weak States Bandwagon?” *Security Studies*, 1, no.3 (1992), 385.

¹⁹ Mancur Olson Jr. and Richard Zeckhauser, “An Economic Theory of Alliances” *Review of Economics and Statistics*, 48, no.3 (August 1966): 266-279.

²⁰ Kang, “International Relations Theory and the Second Korea War”, 302-303.

absence”;²¹ conversely a Great Power will not “alter its strategy or chang[e] its military dispositions simply to accommodate associated states.”²² Fears of abandonment will also generate deference to allies or exaggeration of a common threat to solidify security commitments. While states might also hedge and acquire their own private security,²³ Pyongyang’s inability to internally balance US-ROK forces make alliances all the more important, and continued free-riding a practical path given the inability to drastically alter the great power balancing equation.²⁴

Finally, in terms of siding with Moscow or Beijing, traditional security studies remains divided over the propensity of small states to balance or bandwagon. However, there is a seeming consensus that, if possible, small states will remain nonaligned to extract material support, and only bandwagon/balance if pressed to do so for security,²⁵ including the domestic security of the regime, or for resource attainment and/or the spoils of war.²⁶

Thus, for traditional security studies, the DPRK should focus on preserving alliances that maintain the Peninsula’s balance of power, extracting aid from China and Russia, and balancing/bandwagoning in response to subsequent threats/opportunities that arise from Sino-Soviet competition. This assessment builds on a very specific understanding of interests as linked to state physical security – a view challenged by ideational and, more recently, OS approaches to IR.

²¹ Neumann and Gstohl, *Lilliputians in Gulliver's World?*

²² Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979), 170.

²³ Avery Goldstein, “Discounting the free ride: alliances and security in the postwar world” *International Organization*, 49, no.1 (1995): 39-71.

²⁴ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, 169, 184-185; Sara Beth Hower, *Do Small States Make Bad Allies* (School of Arts and Science of the Catholic University of America, 2008), 31-32.

²⁵ Reiter, “Learning, Realism, and Alliances”, 500; Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, 114; Labs “Do Weak States Bandwagon?”, 385.

²⁶ On regime security see Steven David, “Explaining Third World Alignment” *World Politics*, 43, no.2 (1991): 233-256; on spoils of war see Randall Schweller, “Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In” *International Security*, 19, no.1 (1994): 72-107.

Ontological Security & The Interest in Affirming Self-Identity

OS, following the constructivist turn and research on the relationship between identity and interests,²⁷ examines further why policy options are constrained by their discursive fit with national identity and why “states want to affirm self-identity, or even pursue a foreign policy that reflects their identities.”²⁸ Placing individuals as the subject of security,²⁹ it argues one of the most basic principles behind feeling secure is the maintenance of OS, the security of Self. For Giddens, “to be ontologically secure is to possess, on the level of the unconscious and practical consciousness, ‘answers’ to fundamental existential questions.”³⁰ The question of most importance is that of self-identity, which requires “the development of a consistent feeling of biographical continuity.”³¹ Because one’s community plays a vital role in stabilizing the sense of self, with individual identity “always a matter of social and spiritual location,” individuals become attached to group identities.³² In modern society this is best understood in terms of nations, with national narratives “meaningfully situating individuals in a community” and “underpin[ing] complex social systems that large numbers can rely on” for OS.³³

²⁷ Peter Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996); Erik Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action: A Cultural Explanation of Sweden’s Intervention in the Thirty Year War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Ted Hopf, *Social Construction of Foreign Policy: Identities and Foreign Policies, Moscow, 1955 and 1999* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2002). For how OS expands upon existing literature see Felix Berenskoetter, “Identity in International Relations” in R. Denemark (ed.) *The International Studies Encyclopedia* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3598-3600.

²⁸ Brent Steele, “Ontological Security and the Power of Self-identity: British Neutrality and the American Civil War” *Review of International Studies*, 31, no.3 (2005), 524-525. On discursive fit see Srdjan Vucic and Ted Hopf, “Everyday Nationalism and Making Identity Count” *Nationalities Papers* (May, 2020), 9.

²⁹ Bill McSweeney, *Security, Identity and Interests: A Sociology of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999)

³⁰ Giddens, *Modernity and Self-identity*, 36-37, 47.

³¹ Catarina Kinnvall “Globalization and Religious Nationalism: Self, Identity, and the Search for Ontological Security” *Political Psychology*, 25, no.5 (2004), 746-747.

³² Mitzen, “Ontological Security in World Politic”, 352.

³³ Felix Berenskoetter, “Parameters of a National Biography” *European Journal of International Relations*, 20, no.1 (2014), 269-270. Skey, “Why do nations matter?”, 414; see also Zarakol, “States and ontological security”

Such narratives define the spatial and temporal components of national identity. The temporal allows a community to both create a present and “mak[e] sense of it by inserting it into [a] plot.”³⁴ This usually entails an account of the nation’s founding myth and “subsequent momentous events and heroic figures,”³⁵ generating feelings of commonality and shared stories to live by - often through reference to a heroic age.³⁶ National narratives also establish spatial demarcations of a home, “embodying the tophobic power of a ‘here-feeling’” and establishing “*our* places.”³⁷ This creates a center, which the Self most strongly associates with on an emotional level. Place also links to identification with an order comprised of values. Places are therefore embedded within visions of utopia/dystopia, setting a horizon for what is possible.³⁸ While subject to internal debates, national narratives possess “shared meanings and ideals” upon which a dominant account usually takes hold,³⁹ even in liberal democracies debates occur in reference to, and respect for, national values.⁴⁰ Contestation amongst derivative narratives thus often occurs without jeopardizing the metanarrative.⁴¹ States thus behave as if they have OS needs since policymakers seek to ensure state behavior aligns with national narrative.⁴² If large deviations occur, states experience shame, which “bites at the roots of self-esteem” meaning insecurity relates to instances when states feel “uncomfortable with their identity as social (inter)actors.”⁴³

³⁴ Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action*, 76-77 (emphasis in original).

³⁵ Duncan Bell, “Mythscape: memory, mythology, and national identity” *British Journal of Sociology*, 54, no.1 (March 2003), 75-76.

³⁶ Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 65.

³⁷ Bell, “Mythscape”, 76; Ringmar, *Identity, Interest and Action*, 77-78.

³⁸ Berenskoetter, “Parameters of a National Biography”, 275.

³⁹ Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 56; Erik Ringmar “The international Politics of Recognition” in Lindemann T., and Ringmar, E. *International Politics of Recognition* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 7.

⁴⁰ Aron, *Peace and War*, 378.

⁴¹ Berenskoetter, “Parameters of a National Biography”, 279.

⁴² Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*, 18.

⁴³ Steele, “Ontological Security and the Power of Self-identity”, 526.

Recently, OS scholars have demonstrated how this approach can help explain specific foreign policy decisions, but few have specifically examined how OS advances core theoretical components of traditional security studies.⁴⁴ Mitzen, Guzzini, and Behravesch prove the exception, and have examined the security dilemma, the return of geopolitics, and the concept of revisionist states.⁴⁵ However, OS scholars have yet to directly engage with balancing and bandwagoning. The closest engagement is Berenskoetter and Giegerich's argument that Germany's strategic adjustment from NATO towards European Security and Defense Policy cannot be explained as an effort to balance the United States or because of fears over abandonment or entrapment.⁴⁶ Instead, as states pursue OS they seek to forge and maintain institutional arrangements with "friends" who share "domestic and international ideas of order."⁴⁷ As German and US views diverged, Germany increasingly turned toward European Security and Defense Policy with whom it held greater affinity. This article uses Aron's classical realism, drawing out what it argues are his "early OS intuitions," to take a similar position towards balancing/bandwagoning, with alliance formation linked to perceptions of ideational threat/affiliation towards/with national narratives.

Classical Realism, Ideological Balancing & Ontological Security

While some classical realists, such as Arnold Wolfers, qualify the role of power by accepting "ideological or revolutionary goals" and idealistic states, it is Aron who most forcefully

⁴⁴ Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations*; Zarakol "Ontological (In)security and State Denial of Historical Crimes"; Ejodus, "Critical Situations, Fundamental Questions and Ontological Insecurity".

⁴⁵ Mitzen, "Ontological Security in World Politics"; Stefano Guzzini "Introduction" in Stefano Guzzini (ed.) *The Return of Geopolitics in Europe?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Behravesch, "State revisionism and ontological (in)security".

⁴⁶ Christopher Browning and Pertti Joenniemi argue over-similarity can generate ontological *insecurity*, thereby eroding security communities, but do not deal with balancing/bandwagoning per se. "From fratricide to security community: re-theorising difference in the constitution of Nordic peace" *Journal of International Relations and Development*, 16, no.4 (2013): 483-513.

⁴⁷ Berenskoetter and Giegerich, "From NATO to ESDP", 451.

argues the focus on power in other realist scholarship is equivalent to Marxist reductionism.⁴⁸ Unfortunately, despite scholars like Kaufman flagging Aron's relevance, he remains an underutilized figure.⁴⁹ Returning to Aron, we find an early OS intuition in the way he problematizes the nature and meaning of the national interest (including for small states) and security/survival - with beliefs and moral values as key to understanding reality as conventional force postures.⁵⁰ Accordingly, what is "at stake" cannot be designated by a single concept, valid for all civilizations at all periods,⁵¹ with ideologies determining the system's stability and influencing the end goal of states - for "What is a life that does not serve a higher purpose?"⁵² However, the "full implications of this connection" requires further development.⁵³ This section uses OS to elaborate on Aron's insights as part of a revised theory of balancing - shifting the analytical focus of current ideological approaches of balancing towards the ideology, or secular religion, of nationalism.

Recent re-conceptualizations of balancing focus on how ideological similarity leads to "complementary" interests,⁵⁴ while shared identity decreases threat perceptions.⁵⁵ These works nuance balancing, linking relative power and relative identity/ideology, but are limited by the way they restrict conceptualizations of identity and ideology. Haas, for example, defines ideologies as the "leaders' preferences for ordering the domestic-political world - or

⁴⁸ Arnold Wolfers, *Discord and Collaboration: Essays on International Politics* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1962), 79; Edward Kolodziej, "Raymond Aron: A Critical Retrospective and Prospective" *International Studies Quarterly*, 29, no.1 (March,1985): 5-11

⁴⁹ Robert Kaufman "To Balance or To Bandwagon?" Alignment Decisions in 1930s Europe" *Security Studies*, 1, no.3 (1992): 417-47; and Murielle Cozette, "Realistic Realism? American Political Realism, Clausewitz and Raymond Aron on the Problem of Means and Ends in International Politics" *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 27, no.3 (2004), 429.

⁵⁰ Aron, *Peace and War*, 284, 598-599; Tony Judt "Introduction" in Raymond Aron, *The Dawn of Universal History: Selected Essays From a Witness to the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 2015)

⁵¹ Aron, *Peace and War*, 91.

⁵² Aron cited in Cozette, "Realistic Realism?", 443.

⁵³ Kolodziej, "Raymond Aron", 8; Bryan-Paul Frost, "Raymond Aron's Peace and War, Thirty Years Later" *International Journal*, 51, no.2 (1996), 359.

⁵⁴ Mark Haas, "Ideology and Alliances: British and French External Balancing Decisions in the 1930s" *Security Studies*, 12, no.4 (2003), 36.

⁵⁵ David Rousseau and Rocio Garcia-Retamero, "Identity, Power, and Threat Perception" *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 51, no.5, (2007), 749; Nau, *At Home Abroad*

‘the goals, preferred rules, and preferred arrangements among political institutions’.⁵⁶

Despite referring to identity, Nau also focuses on regime type and “the principal idea on which a nation accumulates and legitimates the use of lethal force,” with similarity amongst nineteenth century European monarchies or between modern democracies reducing potential military competition.⁵⁷ Rousseau, by contrast, provides a somewhat broader account, focusing on levels of difference between the characteristics of Self-Other. Which issues become salient vary depending on the relationship; for example, if Self or Other emphasize being secular/religious, then religion will be salient in determining degree of difference. However, Rousseau maintains the proposition that difference itself is associated with threat.⁵⁸ By contrast, returning to Aron’s concept of secular religion in conjunction with OS challenges these works’ focus on regime type and difference.

For Aron, Fascism and Marxism exhibit religious qualities given their doctrines situate “in a social order to be created, the salvation of humanity,” displaying the “unifying power of ancient religion.” Unfortunately, Aron does not engage the concept of religion in his writing. However, taking his view Marxism derives power from its ability to elicit faith, and that “[a]ction always rests on a set of values” and on an “imaginary and undetermined concept of the future,” a similar position can be taken regarding all ideologies, including nationalism.⁵⁹ Aron certainly recognizes nationalism’s influence,⁶⁰ but given its power resides on faith, nationalism, codified in national narratives, should be seen as a secular religion.⁶¹ By establishing heroes to imitate and warnings derived from myths of decline,⁶² national

⁵⁶ Haas, “Ideological Polarity and Balancing in Great Power Politics”, 718.

⁵⁷ Nau, *At Home Abroad*, 5-6.

⁵⁸ Rousseau, *Identifying threats and threatening identities*, Ch.4.

⁵⁹ Daniel Gordon, “In Search of Limits: Raymond Aron on ‘secular religion’ and communism” *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 11, no.2 (2011), 141-143.

⁶⁰ Judt “Introduction”

⁶¹ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*

⁶² Smith, *Myths and Memories of the Nation*, 67.

narratives delineate a moral community – what Durkheim terms “a Church”⁶³ – outlining dos and don’ts, a sense of what is legitimate, and views of dystopia/utopia.⁶⁴ They establish the life worth living and defending. Policymakers are thus socially embedded within a community where they feel ontologically secure and emotionally attached to. Analogous to Augustine’s realism, statecraft then serves a “moral purpose” and is endowed with “moral obligations,” although in this more secular formulation of political religion morality is not linked to the city of God but to the community itself, to the earthly city.⁶⁵ For nationalism, the sacred is that which is “authentic” to the nation – its social traditions, heroes, and Golden Ages.⁶⁶ Therefore, while principles of government might be a key component of national narrative, it is the narrative itself that is relevant, delineating a moral community within which individuals have OS. This is why nationalism enjoys an appeal “other ideologies have great difficulty in matching,”⁶⁷ and why, as Mearsheimer argues, nationalism is often prioritized over universal ideologies (e.g., liberalism).⁶⁸ Yet, Mearsheimer remains silent on nationalism’s role in the construction of threat.

Certainty nations wish to control their fates, and emphasize their distinctiveness, making efforts at social engineering and intervention difficult.⁶⁹ However, we should not follow Rousseau’s proposition, building from Social Identity Theory (SIT), regarding a correlation between difference and threat. For Tajfel, SIT is not an explanation for social or political

⁶³ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Translated by Karen Fields (1995[1912] New York: The Free Press), 44.

⁶⁴ James Liu and Denis Hilton, “How the past weighs on the present: Social representations of history and their role in identity politics” *The British Journal of Social Psychology*, 44 (2005): 537-56; On legitimacy see Nau, *At Home Abroad*, Ch.1; on utopia/dystopia see Berenskoetter, “Parameters of a National Biography”, 275-276.

⁶⁵ Michael Loriaux, “The Realists and Saint Augustine: Skepticism, Psychology, and Moral Action in International Relations Thought” *International Studies Quarterly*, 36 no.4 (1992), 415.

⁶⁶ Smith, *Chosen Peoples*, 40-41.

⁶⁷ Kratochwil, “The politics of place and origin”, 158.

⁶⁸ John Mearsheimer, *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2018)

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 208.

conflict.⁷⁰ The human inclination towards group membership and positive identification does “not systemically correlate with degrees of bias or negativity toward outgroups,” and while we may regard the alien as “somehow inferior...there is not necessarily hostility against it.”⁷¹ To better conceptualize threat we must instead focus upon that which challenges the OS interest in maintaining the national community – of acting in accordance with and protecting “the good” as interpreted in the national narrative.⁷² Consequently, perceived *(in)compatibility* and *(non)recognition* between national narratives and the rhetoric and behavior they espouse structure perceptions of threat and attraction. When others propagate narratives antithetical to, undertake action that challenges, or pressure for the adoption of policies that would undermine the national narrative (whether the values derived from Golden Ages, or sense of home, or distinctiveness), they generate anxiety. This has important implications for the images policymakers’ form, and subsequent postures they adopt,⁷³ as they seek out ways to avoid shame, with larger policy debates linked to the (de)activation of derivative narratives.⁷⁴ Therefore, the compatibility or fit between national narratives, and how well the rhetoric and behavior they espouse reinforce/undermine each other’s conception of the good, influences perceived threat and attraction – with diplomacy alleviating (or enflaming) tensions.⁷⁵ This establishes important differences from current ideological views of balancing regarding threat and attraction.

⁷⁰ Henri Tajfel, *Human Groups and Social Categories* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 225

⁷¹ Marilyn B. Brewer, “The Psychology of Prejudice: Ingroup Love or Outgroup Hate?” *Journal of Social Issues*, 55, no.3 (1999), 432; Gordon Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Basic Books, 1979), 42.

⁷² Loriaux, “The Realists and Saint Augustine”, 412; Nukhet Sandal and Patrick James, “Religion and International Relations theory” *European Journal of International Relations*, 17, no.3 (2011), 11.

⁷³ Ole R. Holsti “The Belief System and National Images: A Case Study.” *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 6, no. 2 (1962): 244-52; John Hurwitz “How are Foreign Policy Attitudes Structured? A Hierarchical Model” *The American Political Science Review*, 18, no.4 (Dec.1987): 1099-1120

⁷⁴ Subotic “Narrative, Ontological Security, and Foreign Policy Change”

⁷⁵ Derek Bolton, “Targeting Ontological Security: Information Warfare in the Modern Age” *Political Psychology*, 41, no.1 (2021): 127-142.

First, difference is merely conducive to a more threatening environment, providing space for potential challenges to, or incompatibility between, national narratives to arise. The prospect for misunderstanding, incompatibility, or non/misrecognition subsequently increases as the international system becomes more heterogeneous – as the relative differences between national narratives and corresponding sets of values they inspire expands.⁷⁶ Such threats are then compounded, and propensity for buck-passing reduced, when they emanate from powerful states.⁷⁷ However, this also holds open the potential for threat amongst similar states. While ideological affiliation (e.g., espousing democracy and neoliberalism) can certainly help foster cooperation (or support for a similar ideologically-inspired hegemonic order⁷⁸), national narratives can simultaneously embrace incongruent elements perceived as vital to the nation, superseding ideological affinities⁷⁹ – hence the prevalence of tombs to the Unknown Soldier and not the unknown Marxist.⁸⁰ For example, “legacies of Russian imperialism and Chinese reactions to perceived ‘great-power chauvinism’” engendered tensions within the ideologically aligned socialist camp even before de-Stalinization.⁸¹ Moreover, overly similar states can become threatening by blurring the distinction between Self-Other.⁸² Second, attraction plays an expanded role, since dissimilar states can reinforce each other’s national narratives. For example, the Non-Aligned Movement’s resiliency in the face of members’ “diverse national characters” and lack of a shared threat is derived from supporting and reinforcing members’ post-colonial national narratives.⁸³

⁷⁶ Aron, *Peace and War*, 99-104.

⁷⁷ Haas, “Ideological Polarity and Balancing in Great Power Politics”, 750.

⁷⁸ Bentley Allan, Srdjan Vucetic, and Ted Hopf, “The Distribution of Identity and the Future of International Order: China’s Hegemonic Prospects” *International Organization* 72, no.4 (Fall 2018): 839-69

⁷⁹ Which itself can become a source of conflict. Aron, *Peace and War*, 284.

⁸⁰ Friedrich Kratochwil, “The politics of place and origin: an enquiry into the changing boundaries of representation, citizenship and legitimacy” *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific*, 1, no. 1 (2001), 158.

⁸¹ Daniel Leese “Identity Discourses and the Sino-Soviet Split” *Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History*, 16, no.4, (2015), 993.

⁸² Browning and Joenniemi “From fratricide to security community ”

⁸³ Marco Vieira, “Understanding Resilience in International Relations: The Non-Aligned Movement and Ontological Security” *International Studies Review*, 18, no. 2 (2016), 291-292.

Dissatisfaction and the inclination towards revisionism subsequently occurs in reference to national narratives; states will seek to maintain the current order because it complements and recognizes the national Self, or overthrow it in line with those revolutionary forces that do. A similar picture emerges regarding potential struggles over status.⁸⁴ When a nation's narrative, and the traits it prioritizes, is adequately recognized by dominant actors, it is more apt to cooperate with or emulate them. Conversely, non-recognition can spawn resentment and a desire to replace or construct a rival order. Narrative incompatibility/non-recognition can thus leave states dissatisfied with and anxious over their position, in a perceived "domain of losses," and more amenable to high costs/risks.⁸⁵ Similarly, ideological movements espousing innovative and new (and for some narratives perhaps better) sources of recognition can challenge the status quo, leading to possible conflict.⁸⁶

From this analysis we can make four general conclusions:

1. Balancing/bandwagoning is informed by the level of threat/attractiveness policymakers attach to other states;
2. Threat and attractiveness are the result of perceived (in)compatibility and (non)recognition between national narratives (and the rhetoric and behavior they espouse) *and* the distribution of power – with power influencing perceptions only after the congruency between national narratives is established;⁸⁷
3. States, operating within a system divided along power and ideational fault lines, will seek out those who reinforce the national narrative and balance against those who undermine

⁸⁴ Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to U.S. Primacy" *International Security*, 34, no. 4 (spring 2010), 69.

⁸⁵ Rose McDermott, "Prospect Theory in Political Science: Gains and Losses from the First Decade" *Political Psychology* 25, no. 2 (Apr. 2004)

⁸⁶ John Hall "The Nature of Sophisticated Realism: Raymond Aron and International Relations" *Journal of Classical Sociology*, 11, no.2 (2011), 198-199.

⁸⁷ Rousseau and Garcia-Retamero, "Identity, Power, and Threat Perception", 749.

it, and;

4. Will support/oppose the status quo and current order, or revolutionary forces and revisionism, to the extent they complement/recognize the national Self.

Therefore, to develop specific behavioral expectations, we must first discern the pertinent state's national narrative - in this case by employing discourse analysis of primary source material.

DPRK National Narrative

This article uses discourse analysis to extract the central stories of the DPRK and “explicit discursive articulations” regarding conceptions of the North Korean Self (both contemporary and temporal) and Other (both positive and negative) – locating the larger system of linking and differentiation within which multiple symbols operate.⁸⁸ Analysis examines texts from the formation of the DPRK through the start of the 1970s (when the Sino-Soviet split ended), revealing key components of, and degrees of change in, the spatial, temporal, and ethical components of DPRK narrative. Analysis also employs White's work on value-analysis, which involves coding and tabulating each goal and value judgment found in speeches. It then becomes possible to find those values “mentioned most often and with most emphasis, the most frequent evaluative descriptions of a given person or group, the groups which are most often mentioned as ‘objects of concern’, etc.”⁸⁹

Take for example the following excerpt from a speech by Kim Il Sung:

⁸⁸ Lene Hansen, *Security as Practice: Discourse Analysis and the Bosnian War* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 29.

⁸⁹ Ralph K. White, "Hitler, Roosevelt, and the Nature of War Propaganda," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 44 (1949), 159-162.

With the foundation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, our people who had been deprived of their country by foreign imperialists and suffered every kind of humiliation and insult, became a mighty and dignified nation whom no one dares to flout, a sagacious people of a sovereign independent state who builds their country with their own efforts, firmly holding power in their own hands.⁹⁰

From the passage, analysis records persecution and independence/self-reliance as main values.

Regarding Self-Other, analysis records: Self, “mighty and dignified,” “independent,”

“sagacious,” respected (“no one dares to flout”), and “power in own hands”; Temporal-Self, suffered “humiliation” and “insults,” “deprived”; and Negative Other, “foreign imperialists.”

Analysis replicates this process for each paragraph of the document. Results are then

compared across documents, as are the main stories told in each document – for example

overcoming colonial oppression, as seen in the above passage.

Drawing from works on DPRK culture and literature, the following DPRK texts are selected, the majority of which North Korea translated into English throughout the 1960s-1970s.⁹¹

From 1946-1971 two speeches per year are selected from Kim Il Sung’s *Selected Works*

Volumes I-V.⁹² Analysis also examines *Kim Il Sung Short Biography* Volumes I and II,

published in 1972, extracting how Kim and DPRK history is portrayed.⁹³ Finally, analysis

⁹⁰ Kim Il Sung “The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the Banner of Freedom and Independence for Our People and a Powerful Weapon For Building Socialism and Communism (September 7, 1968) in *Kim Il Sung Selected Works Vol.V* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang, 1975), 141-142

⁹¹ Sonia Ryang, *Reading North Korea: An Ethnological Inquiry* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Asia Center, 2012)

⁹² 1947, 1949, 1952, 1956 were unrepresented and only one speech was found for 1953, 1954 and 1971. Where possible, extra speeches were taken from the year immediately predating or preceding these gaps and as close to the beginning/ending of the year as possible. *Kim Il Sung Selected Works Vol. I* (Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang, 1965); *Kim Il Sung Selected Works Vol.II* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang, 1975); *Kim Il Sung Selected Works Vol.III* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang, 1975); *Kim Il Sung Selected Works Vol. IV* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang, 1968); *Kim Il Sung Selected Works Vol.V* (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang, 1975)

⁹³ *Kim Il Sung Short Biography*, Vol.I, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House, Pyongyang, 1973); *Kim Il Sung Short Biography*, Vol. II, (Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House Pyongyang, 1973)

examines the 1948 and 1972 constitutions as well as the *Ten Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System*,⁹⁴ which high-ranking defector Hwang Jang-yop stresses as “key to understanding North Korean society.”⁹⁵

Table 1 shows, in order of frequency, images of Self-Other found in the *Selected Works*.

Table 2, which comprises two columns, shows value analysis of the same documents. The first, “Frequency,” simply ranks values (e.g., self-reliance) by the overall percentage of texts in which they are cited at least once. The second column, “Weighted,” ranks the values by their weighted frequency. Here, values were scored depending on what percentage of the text discusses them, placing values into one of six categories with an assigned score:

Category 1: 0-9% of text (0)

Category 2: 10-19% of text (10)

Category 3: 20-29% of text (20)

Category 4: 30-39% of text (30)

Category 5: 40-49% of text (40)

Category 6: 50+% of text (50)

Column two ranks these values by their total score. Analysis then discusses the stories told in the various texts and changes that occurred over the years under review before going on to further contextualize these findings.

⁹⁴ “Ten Great Principles of the Establishment of the Unitary Ideology System” translation by Joanna Hosaniak, Kyung Eun Ha, Markus Simpson Bell at the Citizens’ Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, translated June 29, 2012. Accessed From: https://eng.nkhumanrights.or.kr:444/board/bbs_view.php?no=3&board_table=bbs_literature&page=1&word=&searchItem=&cate_id=

⁹⁵ John H. Cha, *Exit Emperor Kim Jong-Il: Notes from His Former Mentor* (Bloomington, IN: AbbottPress, 2012). 45.

[Table 1]

[Table 2]

Overall, analysis finds a narrative of redemption – of guerillas fighting for independence and rectifying past transgressions by instilling the virtues of *Juche* – lest the nation return to its humiliated state. For Kim, *Juche* means:

holding fast to an independent position, rejecting dependence on others, using one's own brains, believing in one's own strength, displaying the revolutionary spirit of self-reliance, and thus solving one's own problems for oneself⁹⁶

In the “the last days of the feudal society of the Li dynasty” the situation in Korea was “particularly appalling,” thanks to people being unconcerned “with saving the country by their own efforts” and factions soliciting foreign assistance “to achieve their partisan ends,”⁹⁷ setting the stage for colonization, “persecution and suppression.”⁹⁸ The guerillas strove to reverse this trend. Of particular importance (one stressed in greater detail over time⁹⁹) was the Kim family, who, since the 1860s, fought “against foreign invaders for the independence of the country.” Kim’s father, championing self-reliance, repudiated “futile attempt of the bourgeois nationalists to achieve national independence by ‘petitioning’ the Japanese imperialists or with the ‘help’ of other imperialist powers.” During the “great national suffering” of Japanese imperialism, a young Kim, while drawing from socialism, similarly advocated the necessity of “independent development” and so in the 1930s, in accordance

⁹⁶ Grace Lee, “The Political Philosophy of Juche, *Stanford Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 3, no.1 (Spring 2003), 105.

⁹⁷ Kim Il Sung, “Our People’s Army is an Army of the Working Class, An Army of the Revolution; Class And Political Education Should Be Continuously Strengthened (February 8, 1963) in *Kim Il Sung Vol. III*

⁹⁸ Kim Il Sung “On the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Workers Party of Korea (October 10, 1965)” in *Kim Il Sung Vol. IV*, 58

⁹⁹ Ryang, *Reading North Korea*

with *Juche*, “put forward an independent line” of fighting “imperialists by our own strength.”¹⁰⁰ Numerous “Korean patriots, headed by the Communists, waged a long, bloody struggle” for the “liberation” and “restoration” of the nation, allowing the people who “lived through age old oppression, humiliation, darkness and suffering” to guide “their own destiny as masters of their country.”¹⁰¹ Kim also educated and strengthened Chinese and other anti-imperialist forces, while making sure “opportunists’ attempts to set up a Soviet form of government were smashed and a people’s revolutionary government established.”¹⁰²

Drawing from these experiences to correct the transgressions of colonization,¹⁰³ the guerillas rebuilt the country. With the DPRK’s founding, “the embodiment of the unanimous desire...[to attain] freedom and independence,” there was now a “mighty and dignified nation whom no one dares to flout” comprised of “a sagacious people...who built their country with their own efforts, firmly holding power in their own hands,” entering the “international arena on par with all large and small countries.”¹⁰⁴ By forging a “full-fledged army capable of defending the country and nation,” all Koreans were able to “take pride before the whole world.” However, the army’s goal of promoting “complete independence of all Korea” was retarded by “the vicious maneuvering by the U.S. imperialists and their lackeys.” The Koreans could not “wait for anyone to give” independence but must “build a democratic, independent state entirely by their own efforts.”¹⁰⁵ To this end North Korean’s made progress in overcoming their “backward economy and culture”.¹⁰⁶ However these efforts were “interrupted by the piratic armed invasion of U.S. imperialism and its lackeys,” sparking a

¹⁰⁰ Kim Il Sung, *Kim Il Sung Short Biography*, Vol. I, 1-5, 21, 48, 53, 55, 58.

¹⁰¹ Kim Il Sung “Report at the Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Founding of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (September 8, 1958)” in *Kim Il Sung Vol. II*, 194-195.

¹⁰² Kim Il Sung, *Kim Il Sung*, Vol. I, 94, 105.

¹⁰³ For example Articles 5,12,85 of the 1948 constitution. “Constitution of the Democratic people’s Republic of Korea” (1948)

¹⁰⁴ Kim Il Sung “The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is the Banner of Freedom”, 141-142

¹⁰⁵ Kim Il Sung “On the Occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the Workers Party of Korea”, 58-60

¹⁰⁶ Kim Il Sung “Report at the Tenth Anniversary Celebration”, 197

“righteous struggle” in which the Korean people “rose as one,” supported “materially and morally” by socialist countries and Chinese “volunteers who shed their blood.” Since then the “international prestige” of the DPRK grew “constantly thanks to the resolute anti-imperialist, anti-US position and the principled, independent foreign-policy,”¹⁰⁷ allowing “an independent national economy and self-defense capability” to develop.¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, only through endless loyalty and becoming a single unified body under the Great Leader could the revolution persist. Kim gave the Korean people their political will and their life, which they must never compromise, learning from the Great Leader to become “juche communist warrior[s]” and assure the “victory of [the] revolutionary struggle.”¹⁰⁹

This narrative resonates with the results in Table 1. The DPRK is independent, with an independent economy, and is a unified, dignified, honorable, socialist, modern, and advanced state capable of self-defense - the embodiment of the anti-colonial struggle. It is allied with the anti-imperialists, those seeking world peace, and non-aligned and “world progressive peoples.”¹¹⁰ It heroically overcame the exploitation and backwardness that defined Korea of the past and continues to define the colonialism and stooges of imperialism in South Korea. It opposes imperialism (generally) and U.S. imperialism (specifically) and those who are aggressive, exploitative, or colonial. Value analysis similarly finds consistent reference to, and emphasis on: political unity/work of the party, self-reliance, persecution, heavy industry (a nationalist economy), light industry/living standards, unification, modernization, and beating back aggression.

¹⁰⁷ Kim Il Sung “The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is the Banner of Freedom and Independence”, 143-144.

¹⁰⁸ Kim Il Sung, *Kim Il Sung Short Biography*, Vol. II, 123.

¹⁰⁹ “Ten Great Principles”, 2.

¹¹⁰ USSR/PRC and socialist states are the most referenced positive Other until dropping significantly in 1960; “Anti-imperialists” and “those seeking World Peace” maintained their rhetorical position, while “Third World Countries”, “Non-Aligned States” and the “World Progressive People” became increasingly referenced.

These continuities support claims by high-level DPRK defectors such as Hwang Jang Yop, *Juche's* creator, regarding its genuine postcolonial nationalism.¹¹¹ Of course *Juche* draws from a range of sources,¹¹² particularly Maoism,¹¹³ with Kim well versed and “immersed in China’s culture.”¹¹⁴ And, like all ideologies, *Juche* holds legitimating characteristics¹¹⁵ that have only increased over time.¹¹⁶ Its success, however, derives from the wider populations’ extant nationalism, one strengthened by their resentment of the Yi Dynasty submission to China.¹¹⁷ Indeed, there is relative harmony between the DPRK narrative and Koreans’ traditional view of the nation – one derived from a “sense of external threats as well as specific Korean historical experiences,”¹¹⁸ allowing Pyongyang to juxtapose its self-determination against Seoul’s “sadaejuii’...being a slave or servant to another big power.”¹¹⁹ Works by, or on, defectors are subsequently full of analogies showcasing regime support even at the height of the 1990s famine,¹²⁰ while statistical analysis highlights that historically, economic conditions, not political freedom or fear, are the main impetus for leaving.¹²¹ Qualitative in-depth interviews similarly demonstrate the population’s embrace of nationalism, prior to regime control over information, given experiences of colonization and

¹¹¹ Hwang Hang Yop, “Theoretical Birth of the Juche Ideology, *Hwang Jang Yop’s Memoirs* -31” (June, 2010) Accessed: <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk02400&num=6515>

¹¹² Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea Past and Future* (New York: Vintage, 2013), 37.

¹¹³ Lee, “The Political Philosophy of Juche”, 109-110.

¹¹⁴ Sonia Ryang, “Reading Kim Il Sung” *Transnational Asia* 1, no.2 (Sep. 2017), 13.

¹¹⁵ Han S. Park, *North Korea: The Politics of Unconventional Wisdom* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publications, 2002), 10.

¹¹⁶ Alzo David-West, “Between Confucianism and Marxism-Leninism: Juche and the Case of Chong Tasan”, *Korean Studies*, 35, no.1 (2011), 105-106; Christopher Hale, “Multifunctional Juche: A Study of the Changing Dynamic between Juche and the State Constitution in North Korea” *Korean Journal*, 42, no.3 (2002), 296.

¹¹⁷ Mitchell Lerner, “Mostly Propaganda in Nature: Kim Il Sung, the Juche Ideology and the Second Korean War”, (Working Paper No.3, NKIDP, December 2010), 14; Hongkoo Han, “Colonial Origins of Juche” and Gwang-Oon Kim “The Making of the *Juche* State in Postcolonial North Korea” in Jae-Jung Suh (ed.), *Origins of North Korea’s Juche: Colonialism, War and Development* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2014)

¹¹⁸ Gi-Wook Shin, *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006) 8-9, 79; Han S. Park (ed.) *North Korea: Ideology, Politics, Economy* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996), 20.

¹¹⁹ Cha, *The Impossible State*, 39.

¹²⁰ Jang Jin-Sung *Dear Leader: Poet, Spy, Escapee - A Look Inside North Korea* (New York: Atria, 2014), 50; Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Real Lives in North Korea* (London: Granta, 2010), 39.

¹²¹ Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Witness to Transformation: Refugee insights into North Korea* (Washington, DC: Peterson Institute for International Economics, 2011), 30.

the Korean War.¹²² We can therefore conclude *Juche*'s evolution and legitimization of the Supreme Leader was grafted onto a genuine, widespread, post-colonial nationalism.¹²³

From this analysis a second set of behavioral expectations emerges inline with the OS theory. Pyongyang is expected to: Push back against foreign influence (including economic), exploitation, and Great Power chauvinism to uphold dignity and pride; Where possible, 'go it alone' and rely on its own forces; Assert independence and anti-imperialism while also working to become a modern and advanced state; and Forge an independent unified Korea, though the emphasis on independent indicates these efforts will not sacrifice sovereignty to achieve such aims.

Rather than utilitarian calculations around power and security, Pyongyang is thus expected to pursue objectives in line with, and respond to perceived threats to, its national narrative, impacting its strategic calculus regarding balancing/bandwagoning.

The Sino-Soviet Split & DPRK Foreign Policy

In the midst of the Sino-Soviet split Kim privately remarked that, contrary to perceptions "he would fall between two stools, Korea actually had its own stool, on which it sat firmly."¹²⁴

The quote encapsulates Pyongyang's fiercely independent position. However, it is more accurate to describe the stool as wobbly. Far from exemplifying traditional views of balancing – remaining neutral, extracting aid from the great powers and only

¹²² Jin Woong Kang, North Korea's Militant Nationalism and People's Everyday Lives: Past and Present" *Journal of Historical Sociology*, 25, no.1 (March, 2012), 2-5.

¹²³ Han S. Park, "The Nature and Evolution of Juche Ideology" in Park, *North Korea*, 11.

¹²⁴ "Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," October 20, 1966, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1966, 74.doboz, IV-250, 005007/1966, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive (here after HPPDA)

balancing/bandwagoning to maintain physical/regime security or acquire resources/spoils of war – Pyongyang countered ideational threats while simultaneously pursuing offensive strategies linked to national narrative despite high-risk consequences and an inhospitable security environment.

The Crisis of Coexistence:

DPRK behavior at the start of the 1960s aligns with traditional accounts of balancing; by striking a neutral position in the growing Sino-Soviet rift and soliciting concessions from both sides, Pyongyang maintained parity with Seoul and ensured the Peninsula's balance of power. While relations with Moscow did strain following Pyongyang's aggressive unification policy towards Syngman Rhee and after Park Chung-hee's 1961 coup,¹²⁵ there was no real Soviet threat requiring balancing. Meanwhile Beijing's inability to match Soviet aid made a shift towards China unappealing.¹²⁶ This all changed following Pyongyang's visceral reaction to the October 1961 Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Congress (CPSU) and Khrushchev's accelerated attacks on Mao, reemphasis of peaceful coexistence, and escalated condemnation of Albanian insubordination.

For traditional balancing frameworks, the 1961 CPSU Congress did not introduce new threats to alter Pyongyang's strategic calculus. While certainly uneasy over de-Stalinization, and despite some public dissent,¹²⁷ it posed little threat to Kim's rule – Kim having successfully

¹²⁵ "Some Problems of North Korea," August 11, 1961, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV 2/20/136, HPPDA

¹²⁶ Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 16 March 1961 MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 5. doboz, 5/bc, 0030/ RT/1961 in Csaba Bekes, "Inside North Korea: Selected Documents from Hungarian and Polish Archives" (Issue 14/15 CWIHP Bulletin, 2004)

¹²⁷ Bernd Schäfer, "Weathering the Sino-Soviet Conflict: The GDR and North Korea, 1949-1989" Cold War International History Project Bulletin No.14/15 (2003/2004), 29; Balázs Szalontai, "You Have No Political Line of Your Own", Kim Il Sung and the Soviets, 1953-1964" Cold War International History Project Bulletin No.14/15 (2003/2004), 97.

maneuvered the onset of de-Stalinization in 1956 and Soviet attacks on cults of personality, securing his position without alienating Moscow. Beijing and Moscow's decision to tolerate Kim's purge of rival factions throughout the end of the 1950s, against their express wishes,¹²⁸ also demonstrated their commitment to non-interference in DPRK domestic affairs. Second, the conference did not alter Moscow's security commitment to Pyongyang, ensuring continued balance of power on the Peninsula, while China's material position was still wanting, limiting rewards of a closer alliance. However, instead of remaining neutral, exploiting the growing Sino-Soviet rift to its own advantage, in December 1961 Pyongyang suspended Soviet radio and newspapers and provided tacit support for Albania's assertion of independence.¹²⁹ Moreover, Khrushchev's efforts to mend relations, proposing to visit Pyongyang, were ultimately rebuffed – with a second proposition again denied in July 1964.¹³⁰ By October 1963, Pyongyang sharpened its attacks, condemning Soviet interference into others domestic affairs and labeling The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance a threat to economic independence,¹³¹ further souring relations.¹³² DPRK rhetoric and behavior forced the East Germans to conclude in 1961 that Pyongyang had shifted from a neutral position to one markedly closer to China, and by 1964 it was commonly held Pyongyang had “taken sides” with the Chinese.¹³³

¹²⁸ James Person, “North Korea in 1956: reconsidering the August Plenum and the Sino-Soviet joint intervention” *Cold War History*, 19, no.2 (2019): 253-75.

¹²⁹ “Note about a Conversation with Comrade Kohousek, Ambassador of Czechoslovakia,” December 21, 1961, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV 2/20/136; “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea” 5 April 1962, HPPDDA; Szalontai, “You Have No Political Line”, 97.

¹³⁰ “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” August 27, 1962, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 5.doboz, 5/bc, 0066/1962, HPPDDA; Schäfer, “Weathering the Sino-Soviet Conflict”, 30.

¹³¹ Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 29 June 1964 MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 5.doboz, 5/bc, 004558/RT/1964; Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 2 October 1963 MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 13.doboz, 30/b, 005273/1/1963 in Szalontai, “You Have No Political Line”

¹³² Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 11 January 1964 MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 5.doboz, 5/bc, 0015/ RT/1964 in *ibid*

¹³³ “The Influence of the Chinese Communist Party on the Policy of the Korean Workers Party,” April 08, 1963, SAPMO-BA, Berlin, DY 30, IV A 2/30/253, HPPDDA; “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” January 11, 1964, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 5.doboz, 5/bc, 0015/RT/1964, HPPDDA

Historians, who only recently started to research Soviet-DPRK relations during the Khrushchev era,¹³⁴ stress how friction between DPRK unification policy and peaceful coexistence played a vital role in Pyongyang's behavior.¹³⁵ OS, by accounting for the ideational threat of peaceful coexistence, better explains this friction than traditional balancing theories.

Throughout the 1950s, Pyongyang feuded with Moscow over nationalist economic policies. While not as prominent, Pyongyang also opposed Khrushchev's introduction of peaceful coexistence. As the Hungarians noted, it meant "peaceful coexistence with US imperialism, which for any Chinese, Korean or Vietnamese is at least difficult to understand, given that for them the US represents their fiercest national enemy."¹³⁶ Therefore, peaceful coexistence with imperialists was already distasteful. Further compounding this already negative perception was the fact peaceful coexistence's reintroduction corresponded with Pyongyang's renewed militarized unification policy; militaristic rhetoric was matched by a campaign to "drastically militarize the state" in May 1961, with the economic Seven-Year-Plan delayed to "concentrate forces on strengthening national defense."¹³⁷ In April 1961, militarization was accelerated under the new concept "arming the whole people," with a new policy of "equal emphasis" (on agriculture and defense) developed in June.¹³⁸ From a traditional balancing framework, this divergence in strategic interests might account for Pyongyang's shift.

¹³⁴ Szalontai, "You Have No Political Line", 87.

¹³⁵ Szalontai, "You Have No Political Line"; Bradely Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader* (Thomas Dunne, 2006), 123; Schäfer, "Weathering the Sino-Soviet Conflict"

¹³⁶ Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, 2 July 1960, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 8.doboz, 5/f, 0029/RT/1960 in Szalontai, "You Have No Political Line"

¹³⁷ Cited in James Person, "The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Origins of North Korea's Policy of Self-reliance in National Defense" (e-Dossier no.12, NKIDP, Oct. 2012), 1-2; On Pyongyang's increasing militaristic rhetoric see Report, First Extra-European Department, 3 May 1962, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV 2/20/136 in *ibid*; "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," March 29, 1962, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 8. doboz, 5/f, 004108/1962, HPPDA

¹³⁸ "Embassy of Hungary", August 1962

However, this assessment becomes untenable when compared with other expectations of a traditional perspective.

The first issue with Pyongyang's militarized unification policy is that jeopardizing relations with Moscow, Pyongyang's primary security benefactor, was tantamount to risking the peninsula's balance of power. Indeed Albania's recent excommunication provided a tacit example of the associated dangers – one not lost on Kim who, in Spring 1962, instructed the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) to prepare for a similar outcome.¹³⁹ Second, US-ROK deterrence remained robust – only to increase following Washington's renewed commitment to Seoul in 1963. Congruently, US-ROK posturing was defensive; while Seoul was stabilizing politically, its level of threat had not increased. However, DPRK officials forcefully rebuffed calls for caution from allies who saw mobilization as “not based on any military need whatsoever” and a “rather unusual measure in peacetime,” especially given Pyongyang's “difficult” economic position.¹⁴⁰ Of course, scholarship reveals Pyongyang had some legitimate motives for militarization; regardless of its defensive orientation, Pyongyang had to safeguard against potential US and ROK subversion, especially after Moscow's capitulation over Cuba in October 1962.¹⁴¹ However, not only did DPRK departure from free-riding predate Cuba, inline with its re-militarized unification policy,¹⁴² Pyongyang also sabotaged its ability to extract deterrence capabilities by ramping up criticism of Moscow's Cuba policy and taking a more pro-Beijing stance. Moscow subsequently “deferred” its

¹³⁹ Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry, August 1962 MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 11. doboz, 24/b, 002304/1/RT/1962 in Szalontai, “You Have No Political Line”

¹⁴⁰ “Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry,” February 15, 1963, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 6. doboz, 5/d,0011/RT/1963, HPPDA; “Chinese Communist Party”, April 08, 1963

¹⁴¹ Martin, *the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 125-126; Person, “The Cuban Missile Crisis”

¹⁴² Szalontai, “You Have No Political Line”, 98; “Cable from the Chinese Embassy in Czechoslovakia, 'The North Korean Charge d'Affaires in Czechoslovakia Discussed the Sino-Indian Border Issue and the Situation in Cuba',” November 19, 1962, PRC FMA 111-00439-04, 1-2, HPPDA; “Record of a Conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK Comrade V.P. Moskovsky,” February 16, 1965, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Fund 02/1, folder 96/101, pgs.1-26, HPPDA

decision on DPRK requests for military equipment,¹⁴³ with Khrushchev cutting aid in 1962.¹⁴⁴ Furthermore, Pyongyang's militarism was not purely defensive, as a traditional framework would expect. Instead, realizing only a militarized approach would dislodge Park, Kim was establishing the defenses necessary to absorb potential retaliation to his new offensive.¹⁴⁵ Unfortunately for Pyongyang, while China's anti-imperialism made it the perfect ideational ally, its ability to provide support was wanting,¹⁴⁶ with reports in 1967 indicating the deteriorated condition of DPRK forces as a result of having sided with China.¹⁴⁷ Pyongyang's insistence on maintaining some semblance of, albeit questionable, neutrality,¹⁴⁸ coupled with its desire to stem dependency on China also precluded a further shift to compensate for lost Soviet aid.¹⁴⁹

Pyongyang thus faced Soviet blowback and limited Chinese compensation,¹⁵⁰ while simultaneously increasing military spending,¹⁵¹ setting the stage for its economic demise. The willingness to undertake such sacrifice can be understood as alleviating anxiety generated by peaceful coexistence. Pyongyang's desire to "struggle against imperialism" combined with the "fascist regime" in Seoul precluded a "policy of peaceful coexistence," with only a

¹⁴³ "Memorandum of Conversation between Soviet Ambassador to North Korea Vasily Moskovsky and Kim Il Sung," November 01, 1962, AVPRF, fond 0102, opis 18, papka 93, delo 5, listy 135-138, HPPDA

¹⁴⁴ "Memorandum of Conversation between Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Hanfu and Chargé d'Affaires Counselor from the Embassy of North Korea in China Jeong Pung-gye," October 24, 1962, PRC FMA 106-00642-02, 2-6, HPPDA

¹⁴⁵ Martin, *the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 124-125; Szalontai, "You Have No Political Line", 97; Balázs Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam: A New Look at North Korea's Militant Strategy, 1962-1970" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 14, no.4 (Fall, 2010), 127.

¹⁴⁶ "Development of Politics", 1967

¹⁴⁷ "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," May 08, 1967, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 60.doboz, 40, 002128/1/1967, HPPDA

¹⁴⁸ "Embassy of Hungary", August 1962; "Information on the Korean Workers' Party," October, 1966, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, D 10, V. 1966, HPPDA

¹⁴⁹ "Embassy of Hungary," October 20, 1966

¹⁵⁰ Zhihua Shen and Yafeng Xia, "China and the Post-War Reconstruction of North Korea, 1953-1961" (Working Paper 4, NKIDP, May, 2012), 36; "Record of Conversation between Zhou Enlai and North Korean Government Trade Delegation," November 04, 1962, PRC FMA 106-01381-02, 41-47, HPPDA

¹⁵¹ "Memorandum on a Meeting with a Delegation from the Supreme People's Assembly of the DPRK on 3 July 1967," July 18, 1967, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV 2/2.035, HPPDA

militarized approach capable of engendering unification.¹⁵² This, in turn, seems to have made the above risks more tolerable, aligning with Pyongyang's sense of Self. As the Hungarian's reported:

there is an undeniable identity of Korean and Chinese views...which manifests itself primarily in that both regard the anti-imperialist struggle and the colonial-national [sic] liberation movement as the most important task of our time.¹⁵³

Therefore, Pyongyang's ideational commitment and criticism of Khrushchev's "revisionist point of view regarding peaceful coexistence" remained unwavering in the face of threats and material consequences- which, if anything, solidified the DPRK position.¹⁵⁴ As officials exclaimed in 1962 "The Soviet Union is pressuring, but...we will never go down on our knees and beg...no matter how they shout, we will still march down our own path."¹⁵⁵ Pyongyang thus sacrificed aid and economic development for greater self-reliance and the latitude to unilaterally pursue unification,¹⁵⁶ publicly rejecting peaceful coexistence's capitulation to imperialism and rejecting subservience to Moscow, reaffirming its sense of Self.

The Crisis of the Cultural Revolution:

¹⁵² Report, First Extra-European Department, 3 May 1962 SAPMO-BA, DY 30, IV 2/20/136 in Schafer, "Weathering the Sino-Soviet split"

¹⁵³ "Embassy of Hungary", August 1962; "Chinese Communist Party" April 08, 1963

¹⁵⁴ "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," April 05, 1962, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 13.doboz, 27/a, 0025/RT/1962, HPPDA; Schafer, "Weathering", 31.

¹⁵⁵ "Cable from Hao Deqing, 'On The Talks between Pak Geum-cheol and Ambassador Hao'," December 08, 1962, PRC FMA 106-00645-04, 118-119, HPPDA

¹⁵⁶ "Record of a Conversation with the Soviet Ambassador in the DPRK Comrade V.P. Moskovsky," February 16, 1965, Central Committee of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Fund 02/1, folder 96/101, pgs. 1-26, HPPDA

Preparations for Pyongyang's offensive were completed towards the end of 1965,¹⁵⁷ and in October 1966 Kim "defined the 'liberation of South Korea' as a 'national duty'."¹⁵⁸ Military engagements followed shortly after. Literature on Pyongyang's rationale for the "second" Korean War is limited.¹⁵⁹ Proposed incentives include supporting the Vietnam War, fracturing the ROK-US alliance, securing Kim's domestic position, and engendering unification.¹⁶⁰ Pyongyang's supposed support for Vietnam is discredited by archival research.¹⁶¹ Meanwhile, the other proposed factors are not mutually exclusive of each other, nor an OS theory of balancing. Seoul's growing economic and political stability following a period of unrest in the early 1960s certainly provoked Pyongyang to try and foster dissent in ROK-US relations and instigate an uprising before unification on DPRK terms became unfeasible,¹⁶² with Vietnam providing a strategic opening in 1966¹⁶³ - all of which helped legitimate growing economic struggles. However, these factors require further development to explain Pyongyang's decision to escalate operations in 1967 despite drastically increased risks.¹⁶⁴

First, Pyongyang's initial strategic opening was limited by increasing economic woes – the result of only thawing relations with Moscow after Khrushchev's ouster in October 1964 and

¹⁵⁷ "Cable from the Chinese Embassy in North Korea to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Foreign Trade," December 26, 1965, PRC FMA 106-01477-04, 21-25, HPPDDA

¹⁵⁸ Bernd Schaefer "North Korean "Adventurism" and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972" (Working Paper, No.4 CWIHP, Oct., 2004), 19.

¹⁵⁹ Lerner, "Mostly Propaganda in Nature", 4.

¹⁶⁰ On Vietnam's influence see Frank Baldwin, "Patrolling the Empire," *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars*, 4 (1972): 54-75; Narushige Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008* (New York: Routledge, 2011), Ch.2-3; Balázs Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam: A New Look at North Korea's Militant Strategy, 1962-1970" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 14, no.4 (Fall, 2010), 122; regarding the US-ROK alliance see Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns*, ch.2-3; on domestic factors see Lerner, "Mostly Propaganda in Nature", 25; regarding unification see Nicholas Sarantakes "The Quiet War: Combat Operations along the Korean Demilitarized Zone, 1966-1969" *Journal of Military History*, 64, no.2 (2000): 439-457; Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 122-123.

¹⁶¹ Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam", 135; Lerner, "Mostly Propaganda in Nature"

¹⁶² Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam", 137

¹⁶³ Ibid, 129,139; Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 122-123,127.

¹⁶⁴ Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns*, appendix A, B.

renewed “signs of a very correct...anti-imperialist course.”¹⁶⁵ Unusually, Pyongyang maintained heightened military spending, something allies viewed as “partly unnecessary,” and “one of the major causes” behind Pyongyang’s “economic difficulties.”¹⁶⁶ Overall, even with renewed Soviet aid, allies questioned the feasibility of raids.¹⁶⁷ Second, Seoul, enjoying a strengthened position following lucrative US military packages in 1965 and 1966 and signing of a Status of Forces Agreement,¹⁶⁸ launched increasingly successful raids into the North, leading Washington to fear being forced into a war sparked by either DPRK or ROK aggression.¹⁶⁹ This was not lost on DRRK officials who, while certainly trying to exploit the Vietnam War,¹⁷⁰ also admitted US retaliation to intensification was still possible – a concern shared by allies.¹⁷¹ Worse still was questionable allied support in the event of conflict;¹⁷² Soviet refusal to intervene in the Korean War was surely in Pyongyang’s memory, with Beijing forecasting a similar outcome should war erupt.¹⁷³ Short of war, escalation also risked undermining Pyongyang’s renewed relations with Moscow; despite efforts to masquerade the conflict as driven by ROK-US aggression, Pyongyang’s role as instigator was quickly revealed, much to Moscow’s ire.¹⁷⁴ Intensified raids thus risked encouraging ROK-US retaliation and diminished Soviet support.¹⁷⁵ The largest challenge to escalation, however,

¹⁶⁵ "Information on the Korean Workers' Party," October, 1966, AQPPSH, MPP Korese, D 10, V.1966, HPPPPDA; "Record of a Conversation with the Soviet Ambassador" February 16, 1965

¹⁶⁶ "Embassy of Hungary" October 20, 1966; Joseph C. Kun, "North Korea: Between Moscow and Peking" *The China Quarterly*, 31 (July 1967): 48-58 n.4.

¹⁶⁷ "Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," November 25, 1967, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 61.doboz, 5, 002126/3/1967, HPPPPDA

¹⁶⁸ Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam", 136.

¹⁶⁹ Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns*, 21.

¹⁷⁰ Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam", 140-149.

¹⁷¹ "Record of a Conversation Between A.A. Gromyko and Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet of Ministers, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the DPRK Comrade Pak Song-ch'ol "20 November 1967, AVPRF: fond 0102, opis 23, papka 110, delo 3, pp. 93-96 in Schafer, "Weathering the Sino-Soviet Split"; Vandon Jenerette, "The Forgotten DMZ" *Military Review*, 68, no.5 (May 1988); on allied concerns see Schaefer, "North Korean "Adventurism"", 20.

¹⁷² Person, "The Cuban Missile Crisis"; Martin, *Under the Loving Care of the Fatherly Leader*, 124.

¹⁷³ Lorenz Lüthi, "The Vietnam War and China's Third-Line Defense Planning before the Cultural Revolution, 1964-1966" *Journal of Cold War Studies*, 10, no.1 (Winter, 2008), 39.

¹⁷⁴ "Embassy of Hungary" November 25, 1967; see also ""Information about the Situation in Korea", " February 04, 1968, Czech Foreign Ministry Archives, HPPPPDA

¹⁷⁵ Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam", 161.

stemmed from Pyongyang's simultaneous policies towards China, leading to a volatile situation on the Sino-DPRK border.

Relations frayed following Beijing's efforts in 1965 to cajole Vietnam and Cuba into rejecting Soviet aid, something Pyongyang interpreted as undermining the unified battle against imperialism.¹⁷⁶ Beijing's subsequent attempts to "pressure the Korean leadership" into adopting the Cultural Revolution led Pyongyang "to make changes to relations with China" given the perceived effort to establish a 'feudalistic' relationship.¹⁷⁷ This had two major implications. First, Pyongyang had originally hoped, given Moscow's questionable commitments, for Chinese support in the event of war,¹⁷⁸ a prospect at odds with Beijing's own aims and one greatly diminished by the time of escalation in 1967.¹⁷⁹ Second, it led to an acute threat on the Sino-DPRK border.¹⁸⁰ While Kim tried to manage the situation, fearing Beijing would foster domestic unrest,¹⁸¹ the situation quickly deteriorated throughout 1967; border skirmishes erupted (Kim missed Moscow's 50th anniversary of the October Revolution partially due to events on the border¹⁸²), loud speakers blasted anti-Korean propaganda, and, as Kim would later admit, the two countries came close to war in 1969.¹⁸³

¹⁷⁶ "On the Development of Situation in the DPRK in May 1965," May, 1965, Czech Foreign Ministry Archives, HPPDA

¹⁷⁷ "Memorandum on Sino-Korean Relations in 1966", AVPRF, f. 0102, op.22, p.109, d. 22, pp. 38-49 in James Person "New Evidence on North Korea" (Document Reader, NKIDP, June, 2010); "Report, Embassy of Hungary in China to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," April 11, 1967, MOL, XIX-J-1-j China, 1967, 59. doboz, 1, 001136/6/1967, HPPDA; see also "Embassy of Hungary" October 20, 1966; and Szalontai, "In the Shadow of Vietnam", 132.

¹⁷⁸ "Record of Conversation between Kim Il Sung and the Chinese Delegation," October 29, 1965, PRC FMA 106-01479-08, 85-88, HPPDA

¹⁷⁹ Lüthi, "The Vietnam War and China's Third-Line Defense Planning", 39.

¹⁸⁰ "Note on a Conversation with the Acting Ambassador of the People's Republic of Poland, Comrade Pudisz, on 9 October 1967 between 1000 and 1130 hours in the Polish Embassy" October 20, 1967, PoLA AA, MfAA, C 149/75, HPPDA

¹⁸¹ "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," March 09, 1967, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1967, 61.doboz, 1, 002130/1967, HPPDA; "The DPRK Attitude Toward the So-called 'Cultural Revolution' in China," March 07, 1967, AVPRF f. 0102, op. 23, p.112, d.24, pp.13-23, HPPDA

¹⁸² Schaefer, "North Korean "Adventurism"", 10.

¹⁸³ "Memorandum of Conversation between Erich Honecker and Kim Il Sung," May 31, 1984, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, 2460, HPPDA; "Report on the official friendship visit to the DPRK by the Party and state delegation of the GDR, led by Com. Erich Honecker, 8-11 December 1977" 13 December 1977, SAPMO-BA, DY 30, J IV 2/2A/2123 in Schafer, "Weathering the Sino-Soviet Split"

Accordingly, Pyongyang had to walk a fine line, with Kim stressing the need to not give “cause for complications” but also not “bow [our] head and be brought to [our] knees before Beijing.”¹⁸⁴ Congruently, Pyongyang refused to balance against these threats with the socialist camp - indeed Moscow complained of DPRK public advocacy against Soviet policies throughout 1967.¹⁸⁵

While these events seem puzzling for traditional balancing frameworks – Pyongyang should curtail military operations and balance with Moscow against a tangible Chinese threat – OS provides an alternative explanation. Allowing Beijing to reinstall ‘feudalistic’ relations would trigger immense feelings of shame; North Korea was no longer “a weak man, [who] if slapped by a strong one, was required to turn the other cheek.”¹⁸⁶ Part of Beijing’s response – openly challenging Pyongyang’s anti-imperialist credentials and growing leadership role as the only “party that follows a right Marxist-Leninist road” – only compounded DPRK anxiety.¹⁸⁷ Subsequent efforts to internationally spread the teachings of *Juche*, provide aid to developing states (further straining the economy), and position Kim as the “strongest personality of the revolutionary movement in Asia” can therefore be seen as concerted efforts to offset this counter-narrative and alleviate anxiety.¹⁸⁸ As Soviet officials noted, DPRK actions were “of a retaliatory nature” and they “will act that way in the future when it is a matter of DPRK prestige in the international arena.”¹⁸⁹ Similarly, Pyongyang expanded upon inroads with the Third World and Non-Aligned Movement, pledging to strengthen and

¹⁸⁴ "Record of a Conversation with Kim Il Sung, General Secretary of the KWP CC and Chairman of the DPRK Cabinet of Ministers," April 14, 1969, RGANI, Fond 5, Opis 61, Delo.462, Listi 95-101, HPPDA

¹⁸⁵ "Information about Development of Politics" 1967; "Letter from GDR Embassy in the DPRK to State Secretary Hegen" December 12, 1966; "Letter from GDR Embassy in the DPRK to Secretary of State Hegen" December 8, 1967 MfAA, GA 320 in Lerner, "Mostly Propaganda in Nature"; "Embassy of Hungary" November 25, 1967

¹⁸⁶ Embassy of Hungary" April 11, 1967

¹⁸⁷ "Embassy of Hungary" October 20, 1966; Schaefer, "North Korean "Adventurism"" 6, 11.

¹⁸⁸ Schaefer, "North Korean "Adventurism"" 11.

¹⁸⁹ "The DPRK Attitude Toward the So-called 'Cultural Revolution' in China," March 07, 1967, AVPRF f.0102, op.23, p.112, d.24, pp.13-23, HPPDA

autonomously lead an anti-imperialist bloc of independent states – colliding with Moscow’s own efforts to exert influence.¹⁹⁰

The desire to counteract Beijing’s ideational threats, coupled with Vietnam’s overshadowing of DPRK diplomatic efforts, helps explain Pyongyang’s willingness to expand military operations despite the above risks. This was most likely compounded by the sense time for unification was running out, with domestic opposition to Park eroding throughout 1967 and Democratic Republic of Vietnam efforts to end the Vietnam War.¹⁹¹ Therefore, the decision not to balance against China – instead unilaterally expanding military operations in the face of Moscow’s opposition (and displeasure over its Third World policy) and risk of wider conflict – can be understood as an attempt to reassert the national narrative. By engaging in “adventurist variations,”¹⁹² Pyongyang hoped to facilitate US withdrawal, “creating the main prerequisite for unification,”¹⁹³ and demonstrate (contrary to China’s assertions) its revolutionary credentials. Accordingly, while conflict helped reassert *Juche*, this was not driven by domestic legitimacy concerns around economic stagnation and deteriorated relations with allies.¹⁹⁴ Economic decline was the result of Pyongyang’s return to a militarized unification policy following Park’s coup and erosion of peaceful unification options, making the second Korean war the culmination of these efforts. However, Beijing’s ideational challenge, North Vietnamese Army victories, and ROK solidification, by generating anxiety, did compel riskier behavior to showcase, and ascertain recognition of, the national narrative. And while this certainly provided useful propaganda to offset domestic unrest, these concerns were primarily (and successfully) dealt with by establishing the

¹⁹⁰ "Information about Development of Politics" 1967; "Embassy of Hungary" November 25, 1967

¹⁹¹ Szalontai, “In the Shadow of Vietnam”, 149.

¹⁹² Schaefer, “North Korean “Adventurism””, 21.

¹⁹³ "Development of Politics" 1967; “Soviet Ambassador" February 16, 1965

¹⁹⁴ Lerner, “Mostly Propaganda in Nature”, 25, 10.

monolithic ideological system.¹⁹⁵ Therefore, we see a genuine commitment to *Juche*,¹⁹⁶ to working towards unification and establishing the North as a revolutionary leader. This is best highlighted by Pyongyang's attempted assassination of Park, capturing of the *USS Pueblo*, and downing of a U.S. EC-121.

Regaining Recognition: President Park, USS Pueblo and EC-121:

The January 1968 commando raid intended to kill Park was an attempt to remove the glue holding South Korea together. Pyongyang also likely knew the upcoming Tet offensive would distract Washington. Despite this, success would have surely “triggered a South Korean reprisal of unprecedented magnitude (and possibly even U.S. retaliation),”¹⁹⁷ with Soviet officials continuing to stress Washington's ability “to prevent the victory of a potential military action against South Korea.”¹⁹⁸ This prospect was increased after a new US rotation system in 1967 “placed four maneuver battalions on the DMZ and a fifth in reserve as a quick reaction force.”¹⁹⁹ Recognizing this risk, the DPRK put in place contingency plans for a larger conflict prior to the raid (and again before capturing the *USS Pueblo*).²⁰⁰ Moreover, China had already demonstrated a propensity for “particularly virulent manifestations” of hostility in response to Pyongyang's more provocative acts,²⁰¹ with tensions almost spilling into war in 1969.

Rather than a strategic opening, Tet might instead be viewed as compounding DPRK anxiety

¹⁹⁵ James Person, “The 1967 Purge of the Gapsan Faction and Establishment of the Monolithic Ideological System” (e-Dossier no.15, NKIDP, Dec. 2013)

¹⁹⁶ One Lerner acknowledges. “Mostly Propaganda in Nature”, 46.

¹⁹⁷ Szalontai, “In the Shadow of Vietnam”, 142, 144.

¹⁹⁸ Cited in Ibid, 159.

¹⁹⁹ Daniel Bolger, *Scenes From a Unfinished War: Low-Intensity Conflict in Korea, 1966-1969* (LeavonshamePapers No.19, Fort Leavonworth Combat Studies Institute, June 1991)

²⁰⁰ Schaefer, “North Korean “Adventurism””, 18, 26.

²⁰¹ Balázs Szalontai “Whose War Plan Was It? Sino-DPRK Relations and Kim Il Sung's Militant Strategy, 1965-1967” (e-Dossier no.20, NKIDP, April, 2016)

by further sensationalizing Vietnam. Indeed, DPRK efforts to take more of a leadership role amongst the Third World was understood “as a broadside in the ongoing nationalistic contest,” with Vietnamese diplomats complaining how Pyongyang “borrowed from Vietnam’s prestige...[defining] North Korea as another ‘real fighter’ against U.S. imperialism” despite repeated shortcomings.²⁰² The expansion of operations in 1967 and effort to assassinate Park in 1968 can be seen in a similar light – reasserting national narrative in the face of increasing challenges from China and growing North Vietnamese Army victories and as a desperate attempt to unite Korea. The subsequent failure of the high-profile raid had important bearing on the decision to capture the *USS Pueblo* two days later on January 23.

Capturing the *USS Pueblo* held a number of perils. Not only did it risk engendering a US response, empowering those within Washington pushing for expanded action in Asia, it directly contradicted Soviet naval interests by setting a precedent for Washington to reciprocate, resulting in limited diplomatic support from Moscow.²⁰³ The seizure also had negative implications for Tet.²⁰⁴ It seems doubtful Pyongyang risked these threats for domestic propaganda given it had already fabricated stories of combatting US intrusions.²⁰⁵ Similarly, it is unlikely Pyongyang’s aim was to sell Moscow a story of US aggression to garner support,²⁰⁶ the Soviets quickly placed the capture in relation to the Blue House raid.²⁰⁷ Conversely, the *USS Pueblo* afforded Pyongyang an opportunity to divert attention from the failed raid and reassert its narrative by directly challenging Washington. The decision may

²⁰² Schaefer, “North Korean “Adventurism””, 11-12.

²⁰³ Mitchell B. Lerner, “A Dangerous Miscalculation: New Evidence from Communist-Bloc Archives about North Korea and the Crisis of 1968” *Journal of Cold War Studies*, Vol.6, No.1 (Winter 2004), 7-8.

²⁰⁴ Mitchell B. Lerner “A Failure of Perception: Lyndon Johnson, North Korean Ideology, and the Pueblo Incident” *Diplomatic History*, 25, no.4 (2001); 651-654.

²⁰⁵ Szalontai, “In the Shadow of Vietnam”, 156.

²⁰⁶ Ibid, 160-161.

²⁰⁷ Excerpt from a Letter of the Acting Ambassador of East Germany to North Korea, Comrade Jarck,” February 23, 1968 MfAA C1093/70, HPPDA

also have been compounded by Washington's failure to heed multiple warnings regarding naval incursions generally, and particularly against the *USS Pueblo*.²⁰⁸ Therefore, in need of diverting attention from its failed raid and larger international questioning of its national narrative, Pyongyang took action. The US public along with various lawmakers called for an immediate response, with President Johnson deploying B-52 bombers and calling up 15,000 reservists.²⁰⁹ Kim believed himself to be on the precipice of war or at least a serious conflict,²¹⁰ a position seconded by allies who also noted DPRK difficulties resulting from Soviet hesitancy to again provide military assistance.²¹¹ However Johnson refrained from taking action and after a year of negotiations an agreement was reached. Pyongyang claimed it forced Washington to capitulate and apologize for its transgressions.²¹² Even though Washington publicly repudiated the apology, the ordeal showcased Pyongyang's independence and revolutionary credentials.²¹³

The ideational motivations around *USS Pueblo* can be further gleaned in subsequent conversations regarding the 1969 downing of a U.S. EC-121 (killing all 31 servicemen). Like the *USS Pueblo*, the incident sparked grave concerns over retaliation - with documents showcasing the United States developed a nuclear option during this time.²¹⁴ Just two days after the downing, U.S. Task Force 71 arrived in the Sea of Japan, prompting Moscow to

²⁰⁸ Lerner "A Failure of Perception", 652; Michishita, *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns*, 34-35.

²⁰⁹ "Report, Embassy of Hungary in the Soviet Union to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry" January 30, 1968, MOL, XIXJ1j Korea, 1968, 58.doboz, 3, 00894/8/1968, HPPDA

²¹⁰ Embassy of the GDR in the DPRK. Information of the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK on 24 January 1968, 9.00 p.m. to 9.40 p.m., for the Ambassadors and Acting Ambassadors of all Socialist Countries accredited to the DPRK. PolA AA, MfAA, C 1023/73 in Schaefer, "North Korean "Adventurism""

²¹¹ "Note on a Conversation with the Polish Ambassador, Comrade Naperei, on 26 January 1968 in the Polish Embassy," January 27, 1968, SAPMO, HPPDA; "Report, Embassy of Hungary in North Korea to the Hungarian Foreign Ministry," June 03, 1968, MOL, XIX-J-1-j Korea, 1968, 57.doboz, 1, 002815/1968, HPPDA

²¹² "Record of Conversation between N.G. Sudarikov and Ri In-gyu, the Head of the Department of the Foreign Ministry of the DPRK," December 21, 1968, RGANI, fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, listy 57-59, HPPDA

²¹³ Washington subsequently reevaluated views of Pyongyang as Moscow's puppet.

²¹⁴ Robert Wampler, "How do you solve a problem like Korea?" (Electronic Briefing Book No.32, National Security Archive, Jun.23, 2010)

express concerns to Washington and placing its own fleet on alert, helping calm the situation.²¹⁵ Still, Kissinger's memoirs are "bitingly critical of President Nixon's decision not to respond forcefully" showcasing how events might have unfolded differently had his position won out.²¹⁶

While originally perceived an accident, recent evidence indicates it was a deliberate act.²¹⁷ DPRK officials privately noted, "It's good for them to know that we won't sit with folded arms...this will diminish the danger of an outbreak of war"; that Pyongyang is in "constant readiness to rebuff any aggressor who intrudes across the boundaries of our territory," and that with situations like *USS Pueblo* and E.C. 121, "we are entitled to capturing them or to shooting them down."²¹⁸ Officials also acknowledged their willingness to face potential retaliations, stating, "[the] incident is somewhat reminiscent of the *Pueblo*. If the Americans had decided to fight then, we would have fought."²¹⁹ When Moscow urged Pyongyang to refrain from further hostility, warning "the Americans might launch a strike," DPRK official Pak Seong responded "such a strike would mean the start of a war."²²⁰ Perhaps even more insightful, however, is the fact that when pressed on possible consequences, Pak declared:

our pilots...were not thinking of the further course of events. We also have not been thinking about it. [Translator's note: "?!" was written in the left margin next to the underlined portion]. If we had started to think then we would have to ask, the aircraft would have flown away further.²²¹

²¹⁵ Scheefer "North Korean "Adventurism"", 26-27.

²¹⁶ Wampler, "How do you solve a problem like Korea?"

²¹⁷ Van Jackson, "The EC-121 Shoot Down and North Korea's Coercive Theory of Victory" (Wilson Center, Apr.13, 2017)

²¹⁸ "Record of Conversation between N.G. Sudarikov and Pak Seong-cheol, a Member of the Political Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea ," April 16, 1969, RGANI: fond 5, opis 61, delo 466, listy 119-127, HPPDA; "Minutes of Conversation on the Occasion of the Party and Government Delegation on behalf of the Romanian Socialist Republic to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," June 10, 1971, Archives of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, 43/1971, HPPDA

²¹⁹ "N.G. Sudarikov and Pak Seong-cheol"

²²⁰ Ibid

²²¹ Ibid

The *USS Pueblo* and EC-121 thus represent a concerted effort to reassert national narrative with full acceptance of the possible consequences. As Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Heo Dam told the Soviets, they repeatedly warned Washington “aggressors who dare to infringe on our sovereignty will be vigorously halted” and that, as Kim stated, we are “ready to respond to retaliation with retaliation, and to total war with total war.”²²² This would not be tested, however, as Pyongyang’s strategic calculus began to change following the reemergence of possible diplomatic avenues for unification, culminating into the 1972 Joint Communiqué.²²³ Meanwhile relations with China also improved after the April 1969 Party Congress tamed the CR’s rhetoric, allowing Pyongyang to reestablish a middle line between Moscow and Beijing (whose rivalry cooled following their 1969 border conflict), a position it maintained until the end of the Cold War.

Conclusions

Traditional security studies fails to account for DPRK behavior during the Sino-Soviet split using its standard framework of balancing/bandwagoning – be it the decision to sacrifice Soviet aid to pursue militarized unification or enter into conflict with Beijing while simultaneously risking war with Washington. Instead, upholding national narrative and sense of Self -- its reason for being -- played a crucial role in framing DPRK perceptions and interests. The 1961 Communist Party of the Soviet Union Congress, the onset of the Cultural Revolution, and Pyongyang’s growing juxtaposition against Vietnam all generated anxiety by challenging its sense of Self and potentially forcing it towards shameful behavior – such as succumbing to feudalistic relations. Breaking with Moscow and continuing militarization and

²²² "Record of Conversation between N.G. Sudarikov and Heo Dam, the leader of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of DPRK," April 16, 1969, RGANI: fond 5, opis 61, delo 462, listy 71-74, HPPDA

²²³ "Minutes of Conversation on the Occasion of the Party and Government Delegation on behalf of the Romanian Socialist Republic to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea," June 10, 1971, Archives of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party, 43/1971, HPPDA

forceful unification, opening hostilities with Beijing, increasing Third World aid despite economic hardship, escalating the Second Korean War, and confronting American forces were all policies aimed at reducing this anxiety and reinforcing the DPRK Self.

Therefore, decisions around balancing/bandwagoning cannot be understood strictly in regards to physical security. Of vital importance are the national narratives that both delineate a moral community and ways of being, within which individuals are ontologically secure, and the stories and values that encapsulate the national Self. Critical to Pyongyang’s behavior was the level of perceived (in)compatibility between DPRK national narrative and the narratives and policies of external actors. Perceived incompatibility and threats to Self were subsequently addressed through a range of mechanisms including diplomatic posturing, provision of foreign aid, and military engagement. In employing these tools, Pyongyang also recognized material restraints. When classical realism and ideological approaches to balancing are brought together with insights from OS, they better accounts for this complexity – revealing the value of pushing IR back towards “its neglected core,” and the potential bridge building that can be achieved from such inquiries.²²⁴ In this way alliance formation is linked to both levels of (in)compatibility across national narratives and the distribution of power, meaning states balance both power and identity.

Table 1

Self	Temporal Self	Positive Other	Negative Other	South Korea Other
Independent .8860%	Exploited and Oppressed	Socialist States .522%	Imperialists General	Fascist Dictatorship .704%

²²⁴ Hall “The Nature of Sophisticated Realism”, 195.

	.863%		.818%	
Independent Economy .818%	Backward .636%	PRC/USSR .522%	US Imperialists .818%	Colony .613%
Socialist .75%	Feudalistic Confucianism .272%	Anti-Imperialists .472%	US Imperialists in SK .704%	Culture and beautiful manners trampled .25%
Patriotic .704%	Passivism .25%	Those Seeking World Peace .409%	Exploitative/ Colonial .59%	Immorality and Depravity .204%
Unified .704%	No Faith In Own Strength .136%	Asian People .409%	Aggressive .568%	National Insult .113%
Self Defense .659%	Parochialism and Nepotism .04%	Third World .295%	Anti-communist .227%	
Mighty .659%		Communist .227%	Modern War Equipment .136%	
Modern .636%		Progressive Peoples .149%		
Anti-Japanese Guerilla .613%		Capitalist States .159%		
Heroic Struggle .568%		Non-Aligned .02%		
Communism .5%				
Brilliant National Culture/Wise/Civilized .454%				
Equal/Equality .386%				

Masters/Destiny in Own Hands .272%				
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Table 2

Frequency	Weighted
Persecuted	Political Unity (610)
Self-Reliance	Persecuted (600)
Heavy Industry/Ideological Driven Econ.	Self-Reliance (460)
Political Unity	Light Industry/advance living standards (380)
Light Industry/ living standards	Heavy Industry (320)
Beat Back Aggression	Beat Back Aggression (180)
Unification	Unification (150)
Modern/modernization	Beat Back Aggression (170)
Cultural Revolution	Cultural Revolution (90)
Third World	Modernization (80)
Rising International Position	Third World (50)
Soviet Union Praise	Democratic Confederation of Korea (10)
Foreign Trade	Rising International Position (10)
Democratic Confederation of Korea	Soviet Union Praise (10)
US To Sign Peace Agreement	