



Parahyangan Catholic University
Faculty of Social and Political Sciences
Department of International Relations

Accredited A

SK BAN-PT NO: 451/SK/BAN-PT/Akred/S/XI/2014

2016 DPRK Nuclear Weapon Tests: The Dilemmas of the Giants

Thesis

By
Ali Syariati
2014330159

Bandung

2017



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Thesis Validation

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Bandung, December 2017



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Abstract

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The stability in Northeast Asia seems to be constantly in turmoil because many actors in the region are pursuing their own agendas to increase their security. After the first nuclear test by the DPRK in 2016, the United States came to an agreement with Republic of Korea to deploy THAAD in July 2016. Rather than receiving a warm welcome, the deployment caused a hostility between China and the US. Therefore, this research seeks to analyze how the DPRK nuclear test in 2016 causes an increase in great power politics in the Northeast Asia.

To address the issue, the author utilizes a theory and a number of concepts. Based on the theory of security dilemma and the concept of security paradox, the author found that THAAD deployment actually worsens the stability of the region. Then, dilemma of interpretation and dilemma of response helps the author in analyzing China's response after the announcement of THAAD deployment plan. Lastly, the concept of great power politics explains how the dilemma develops into a situation where the US and China, are filled with a sense of anxiety against each other. The author also applies qualitative research method coupled with two separate methods to analyze the data; secondary analysis on qualitative data and narrative analysis. In the end, the author conclude that the US attempts to improve the security of its country and its allies after DPRK nuclear tests in 2016 precipitate a hostile reaction from China which leads to an increase of power politics between China and the US in Northeast Asia.

Keywords: Democratic People Republic of Korea, nuclear tests, THAAD, United States, China, threat perception, security dilemma, security paradox, great power politics.

ABSTRAK

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Stabilitas di kawasan Asia Timur laut nampaknya selalu mengalami pergolakan melihat banyaknya aktor di kawasan yang kerap mengejar agendanya masing-masing untuk meningkatkan keamanan negaranya. Pasca uji coba nuklir pertama oleh Korea Utara di tahun 2016, Amerika Serikat dan Korea Selatan telah mencapai kesepakatan dengan Korea Selatan untuk memasang *Terminal High Altitude Area Defense* pada bulan Juli 2016. Alih-alih mendapat sambutan hangat, pemasangan tersebut justru menyebabkan perseteruan antara China dan Amerika Serikat. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini berupaya untuk menganalisis bagaimana tes nuklir Korea Utara pada tahun 2016 berakhir dengan meningkatnya *great power politics* di Asia Timur laut.

Untuk membahas isu ini, penulis menggunakan teori dan sejumlah konsep. Berdasarkan teori *security dilemma* dan konsep *security paradox*, penulis menemukan bahwa pemasangan THAAD justru memperburuk stabilitas kawasan. Kemudian, *dilemma of interpretation and dilemma of response* membantu penulis dalam menganalisa respon China pasca pengumuman rencana pemasangan THAAD. Terakhir, konsep *great power politics*, menjelaskan bagaimana dilema berkembang menjadi situasi dimana Amerika Serikat dan China, dipenuhi rasa cemas satu sama lain. Penulis juga menerapkan metode penelitian kualitatif ditambah dengan dua metode terpisah untuk menganalisa data; *secondary analysis on qualitative data* dan *narrative analysis*. Pada akhirnya, penulis menyimpulkan bahwa upaya Amerika Serikat untuk meningkatkan keamanan negara serta negara sekutunya pasca tes nuklir Korea Utara pada tahun 2016 justru memicu reaksi permusuhan dari China, yang pada akhirnya menyebabkan peningkatan *power politics* antara China dan Amerika Serikat di Asia Timur Laut.

Kata Kunci: Korea Utara, tes nuklir, THAAD, Amerika Serikat, China, persepsi ancaman, *security dilemma*, *security paradox*, *great power politics*.

Preface

First of all, the author would like to express his gratitude to the Almighty God, Allah SWT, for His grace in helping the author through all the processes in finishing this thesis. This thesis, entitled “**2016 DPRK Nuclear Tests 2016: The Dilemmas of the Giants**,” was finally completed after being continuously criticized. With this thesis, the author hopes that it will give a better understanding about the dynamics of the relations between the US and China in the region, especially regarding the power politics between great powers after DPRK nuclear tests. This dynamics is also a unique case where after the 2016 nuclear tests, the US and China are having a feud rather than increasing the prospect of cooperation between great powers. In addition, this research is also serve as a prerequisite for the author to obtain Bachelor degree.

The author is very grateful for every actors involved in the completion of this thesis. It is to him, the Almighty God for the gratitude and Mr. Idil Syawfi, S.Ip., M.Si, as the supervisor for his guidance, insights, and other supports that has been given. His knowledge in regards with the theory related to the thesis has helped the author to finish the thesis. The author would also give his utmost gratitude for every actors which are not mentioned. Without their involvement, this thesis would not be completed as expected by the author.

Lastly, the author acknowledges that this thesis is far from perfection. Every suggestions and feedback related to this thesis will be greatly appreciated for the completion of this research.

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First of all, I would like to give my highest gratitude upon the Almighty God—for only Him who always listening to all of my prayers and hope, and who have been there through the ups and downs, especially when I decided to steer my life to International Relations department. It is only He who made all of this possible.

I would like to highly appreciate and give my thanks to my parents, Hevinia Rica and Mahmuddin Muhidir, as the motivation to finish my college in the first place. Without their endless prayer, the author would not be able to finish this thesis. I would also like to convey my sincere apologize for my misbehaviour in the past and I hope, my graduation can serve as a prove that I can undo the mistake I did in the past and become better man in the future.

While it does not seem reasonable to give your highest gratitude to a person that not even know your existence, kudos to Hideo Kojima, the mastermind behind the long-standing masterpiece sequel—Metal Gear. His finest works, in my opinion, including Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater©, Metal Gear Peace Walker© , and Metal Gear Solid 5: Phantom Pain©. One must admit that his work greatly helps the author in understanding international issues, particularly the series of events in the Cold War, and influencing the author to study in International Relations department. I look forward to seeing you in the future to express my deep gratitude.

Starting as frenemy (and as joking materials), I now realized that I have no idea what to do without the presence of my special partner, Moudy Alfiana. I would like to convey my sincere gratitude for your utmost sincerity, all the unforgettable memories, our efforts to survive while having an intern life—twice—in the capital city, coaching session on debate (followed by unnecessary debate about beauty and stuffs), the places we visited, and—seriously—the list could go on for dozens, even hundreds, it left no space to say for other people. You know the ‘details’ already. In the end, your existence is also a motivation for me to keep moving forward regardless how perilous the road can be in the future. For all the things already mentioned, as well as those not—since you know it already, I deeply thank for you.

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Dear old friend Rizka Fatiari; I totally lost at word to express my gratitude to you. You might have no idea how good you are as a friend, to the point questioning it back at 2013. Perish the thought, for I will say it with utmost sincerity; you are the best friend I could ever ask. Not just giving me wise advice, you have fully contributed in keeping me sane for all the previous, and unnecessary, dramas—ranging from silly puppy love to real life story in general. Remember the midnight chat that lasts for hours until dawn? Remember how you introduce me to Mark, the Germans you met at AISEC and then we had a chat and walked from Dago to Asia Afrika? Please believe me when I say that its just small proves on how you always there whenever I need a company. Aside from your kindness and sincerity, though, I wonder why there are no single man who are capable to see your kindness nor showing any interest in dating you. Nevertheless, I wish this friendship to be last until we found our own real life partner. Until the time comes, please do stay sane for keeping up with me, aight?

To Kemal Mahmud, my sparring partner, former working partner at URS, thank you for being an extremely good friend of mine. Not only trying to cope up with my obnoxious behavior, you are—indeed—a good friend who always lend an ear and giving wise advices to me, whether in love life or life in general. Cheers for our love life and our friendship for future ahead.

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Last but not least, I would like to convey my deepest gratitude to one of my best friend, Tiara Regina Phasa. Though we have parted ways, it is imperative to remind you how grateful I am to have you back then and introduce me to the Department of International Relations (and also to Mbak Diandra). Wherever you are, whatever you do, I wish you luck for your future endeavor to achieve your ultimate dreams. Thank you for the last five years—it was indeed, a sweet memory.

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Chapter I

Introduction

1.1. Background

International world are once again faced with a challenge to achieve peace. In 2016, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) stirred another controversy by conducting two nuclear weapon tests, both in January 6th and September 9th, respectively. The nuclear weapon test in September is considered as one of the biggest nuclear tests ever conducted by DPRK with the explosive power estimated to be 10 kilotons, nearly equal to the ‘Fat Man’ bomb dropped by the United States (US) in Nagasaki during the Pacific War.¹ The nuclear tests proved Kim Jong-un’s effort to solidify its power within the region and considered to be more aggressive compared with his predecessor, Kim Jong-il and Kim Il-sung. It is clearly reflected on the rapid development of DPRK’s nuclear weapon where the country had demonstrated the technology to create a nuclear warhead that can be fit and installed into a missile warhead.

¹ James Pearson, “North Korea’s Bomb Is More Powerful, but Worry Is Miniaturization,” *Reuters*, September 9, 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-nuclear-science-idUSKCN11F19W>.

Long before DPRK is considered as a revisionist state, DPRK was the part of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and signed a Treaty of the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) in 1985.² DPRK is also agreed and signed upon the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguard agreement in January 1992, which acknowledged the existence of nuclear research facilities and nuclear materials in the country as well as granting IAEA inspectors an access into the country to prove DPRK's credibility in nuclear issues.³ This treaty was aimed to prevent any indications toward the development of nuclear weapon within DPRK. However, DPRK detached themselves from the treaty in January 2003 after being dubbed as the axis of evil by former US President George W. Bush.⁴

Even though DPRK has stated that they have no ill intention to build a nuclear weapon, they chose to opt out from the treaty because their dignity is being violated by US.⁵ Ever since being dubbed as the axis of evil, DPRK was put into a constant anxiety where US has an intention to invade Pyongyang at any time and thus publicly announced to the international society that the regime own nuclear weapons for the first time in history in 2005 to protect their country from US' 'hostile intentions.'—where at the time, nuclear weapons were only utilized as self-defense against Bush's administration..

² NTI, "North Korea," accessed September 13, 2016, <http://www.nti.org/learn/countries/north-korea/nuclear/>.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ The Guardian staff, "North Korea Withdraws from Nuclear Treaty," *The Guardian*, January 10, 2003, sec. World news, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/jan/10/northkorea1>.

⁵ *Ibid.*

Since then, scholars believe that the regime's primary motivation to pursue the development of WMD, which seem to continue until today, is always linked to their greater cause to 'ensure the survival of the regime.'⁶

Hence, to ensure that the nuclear deterrence works as expected, the regime had conducted several nuclear tests—which are certainly responded by mass condemnations from the international community. However, despite several economy sanctions and international condemnations, Pyongyang had shown no interest of backing down and always replied with a brash response that the country will accelerate the nuclear and missile programs.⁷ While many left with confusion with DPRK's adamant decision, Siegfried Hecker, a nuclear security expert who has examined DPRK's nuclear complex in Yongbyon several times, claimed that the reason for 'DPRK's continued nuclear testing' is to measure and reduce the size of the nuclear warhead so it can be mounted on the ballistic missiles.⁸ Hecker also added that tests intended to show the maturation process of DPRK's nuclear weapon development to the international community—all in order to step the up the DPRK's game in nuclear deterrence.⁹

⁶ Il Hyun Cho, "North Korea's Nuclear Test: Deja Vu on the Peninsula," *The Diplomat*, accessed September 20, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2016/09/north-koreas-nuclear-test-deja-vu-on-the-peninsula/>.

⁷ Stephanie Nebehay, "Exclusive: North Korea Has No Fear of U.S. Sanctions Move, Will Pursue Nuclear Arms - Envoy," *Reuters*, March 22, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-northkorea-usa-sanctions/exclusive-north-korea-has-no-fear-of-u-s-sanctions-move-will-pursue-nuclear-arms-envoy-idUSKBN16S2KY>.

⁸ Uri Friedman, "The Meaning of North Korea's Nuclear Test," *The Atlantic*, September 3, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/09/north-korea-nuclear-test-trump/523083/>.

⁹ *Ibid.*

There are six nuclear weapon tests conducted by DPRK until recently. The first test was conducted in October 8, 2006, the second test is at May 24, 2009, the third is at February 12, 2013, and, the fourth and the fifth test—which are the main focus of this thesis—was conducted twice on the same year of 2016, which was in 5 January and 8 September 2016.¹⁰ The sixth—the latest—test was conducted on September 5th 2017, which according to the new US intelligence assessment, the explosion have a yield of up to 140 kilotons of TNT equivalent—making it the biggest nuclear tests ever conducted by DPRK.¹¹ Nonetheless, the two tests conducted in 2016 is considered not only as an advance in DPRK’s nuclear technology, but also as a new, emerging threat to regional stability—especially since DPRK’s nuclear tests were commonly years apart from the previous test.

In January 2016, DPRK is conducted their first underground nuclear weapon test, creating an earthquake with the magnitude scale of 5.1.¹² The explosion from the test was estimated to have a yield of up to 6 to 7 kilotons of TNT. Pyongyang claimed that the device they used for the test is hydrogen bomb, a fusion-type weapons capable of creating powerful explosion that surpassed the infamous atomic bomb ‘Fat Man’—though many analysts doubted the claim as DPRK is still having a hard time in perfecting even the fission bomb.¹³ Seemingly

¹⁰ NTI, *Op.Cit.*

¹¹ Ankit Panda, “US Intelligence: North Korea’s Sixth Test Was a 140 Kiloton ‘Advanced Nuclear’ Device,” *The Diplomat*, accessed September 20, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/09/us-intelligence-north-koreas-sixth-test-was-a-140-kiloton-advanced-nuclear-device/>.

¹² Euan McKirdy, “North Korea Says It Has Conducted Hydrogen Bomb Test,” *CNN*, accessed February 8, 2017, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/01/05/asia/north-korea-seismic-event/index.html>.

¹³ *Ibid.*

dissatisfied with the previous test, the country conducted another test in September at the same year with the additional capability to install the nuclear bomb on a missile warhead by reducing its capacity from 1,158 kilograms to 600 kilograms.¹⁴ The explosion on the second test was estimated to have the explosive power of 10 to 12 kilotons—nearly twice of the previous nuclear power—and creating a seismic event with the magnitude level of 5.3.¹⁵ Therefore, the international community, especially the Northeast Asia countries, feared that the tests in 2016 could put the Northeast Asia's stability and security into greater risk as Pyongyang is considered to be capable to 'mass-produced nuclear weapons' for conducting a nuclear test whenever the hermit state wanted to.¹⁶

Since the nuclear weapon tests in 2016 mark the increasing threat of DPRK's nuclear weapon capabilities, it is imperative for Northeast Asian countries to cast out their differences and start working together in curbing DPRK's intentions to develop nuclear weapons and restoring the stability of the region. Thus the author consider that cooperation is essential in restoring the stability in Northeast Asia instead of pursuing the interest of each country in bolstering their security—which is certainly capable of exacerbating the situation in the region. There are several reasons why the author feel the urgent need for cooperation in curbing DPRK's nuclear weapon program

¹⁴ Charles P. Vick, "Warhead Miniaturization," GlobalSecurity.org, accessed September 20, 2017, <https://www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/dprk/nuke-miniature.htm>.

¹⁵ Katie Hunt CNN K. J. Kwon and Jason Hanna, "North Korea Claims Successful Test of Nuclear Warhead," CNN, accessed September 13, 2016, <http://www.cnn.com/2016/09/08/asia/north-korea-seismic-activity/index.html>.

¹⁶ Jong Kun Choi and Jong-Yun Bae, "Security Implications of a Nuclear North Korea: Crisis Stability and Imperatives for Engagement," *Institute of Korean Studies*, Korea Observer, Vol. 4 (Winter 2016), p. 808.

First, Countries like Japan and Republic of Korea (ROK) are currently unable to manufacture nuclear weapon as both countries are fully dependent on the nuclear umbrella protection of the US. Thus, they will be unable to manufacture nuclear weapons. Even if countries like Japan insist on manufacturing nuclear weapons, such efforts will only be met with strong opposition from other Northeast Asian countries due to their historical aggression during the wartime.¹⁷ Therefore, the author asserts that countries in Northeast Asia would be better off if they did not take individual actions to increase their security during the volatile times as it could worsen the situation in the region. For example, there has been a plan brewing within ROK to pursue nuclear weapon as deterrence to their neighbor state—even though it remains as a discourse.¹⁸

Second, with the US still maintaining good relations with ROK and Japan, the country can support its allied countries through various means in balancing against DPRK's nuclear threat instead of allowing each country to deal with DPRK head-on. The consequence of such action is the possibility of increased tensions in the region. For example, the US can act as a mediator by encouraging China, the great power country in the region and a sole partner country of DPRK, to help in quelling DPRK's ambition in conducting another nuclear test. The author believes that cooperation among Northeast Asian countries, with the help of US, are able to contain and quell the seemingly-hostile DPRK's intention of

¹⁷ Liu Lin, "The North Korean Nuclear Test and Its Implications," *Central Asia-Caucasus Institute Silk Road Studies Program*, Silk Road Paper, August 2006, http://isdpc.eu/content/uploads/publications/2006_lin_the-north-korean-nuclear-test-and-its-implications.pdf.

¹⁸ Julian Ryall, "Calls Grow for South Korea to Consider Deploying Nuclear Weapons," DW.com, September 13, 2016, <http://www.dw.com/en/calls-grow-for-south-korea-to-consider-deploying-nuclear-weapons/a-19547289>.

nuclear weapon development—a desired result from the now-defunct Six Party Talks.

1.2. Problem Identification

Knowing that cooperation is essential in achieving stability in the region, every actor in the region, or other actor such as the US, is required be very careful before making a decision and take a prudent action in order to avoid the unexpected results, such as nuclear arms race. Therefore, every decision-maker of each country are strongly encouraged to consider every available factor before making a decision to avoid regional repercussions.

However, what happened after the tests in 2016 proved otherwise. Shortly after the first nuclear test in January 2016, US and ROK discussed a plan of cooperation in countering the DPRK's nuclear threat by utilizing cutting-edge technology to undermine DPRK's nuclear capability called Terminal High Attitude Area Defense (THAAD). Unfortunately, the plan does not seem to take account of the impact that could result from the discourse. Therefore, there are two significant impacts caused by the plan. First, US and ROK efforts to counter the DPRK nuclear threat have met with strong criticism from the hermit country instead of deterring them. Pyongyang said that such decision is provocative and considered as an act of aggression—which forced them to test Submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) Pukkuksong-1 (KN-11) followed by several short-range missiles shortly after the announcement US-ROK cooperation to face DPRK

nuclear threat as a show of power.¹⁹ The impact is the opposite of the expected result—which is to deter the hermit country—and definitely exacerbating the stability of the region even further.

Second, who also serves as the main topic in this paper, shortly after the THAAD deployment plan was announced, it sparked a negative response from China. Beijing considers that THAAD deployment is a threat to their national security. By taking into account the two impacts of the US-ROK cooperation plan, it can be concluded that both China and the US-ROK alliance have been dragged into a condition known as security dilemma—even though neither side were intended to pose security threats against each other, but the DPRK nuclear threat, as demonstrated in two nuclear tests in 2016, forced the alliance to go forward with the deployment of missile defense system that China strongly opposed.

China's fear thus continues to be a condition called great power politics, where big countries fear each other and will compete with each other for power. Therefore, this thesis aimed to explain the reasons why China and US were actually plunged in a security dilemma and lead to the great power politics after DPRK's nuclear weapon tests in 2016 rather than of engaged in a security cooperation.

¹⁹ ISDP Staff, "THAAD on the Korean Peninsula," *Institute for Security & Development Policy*, October 2017, isdpeu.org/content/uploads/2016/11/THAAD-Backgrounder-ISDP-2.pdf, p. 5.

1.3. Research Scope

In conducting research on how DPRK's 2016 nuclear weapon tests created the security dilemma and spiral of mutual hostility between China and the US, the research is limited only on the 2016's nuclear test as a sole trigger factor for the great power politics between the two countries. Thus, the other nuclear weapon tests will not become the focus of this writing. It is also clear that, as the topic suggest, the hostility between China and US are analyzed within the scope of military and political context. In addition, it should be noted that the tests referred to in this thesis are the nuclear tests and not missile tests. The missile tests, along with other nuclear tests, will only be discussed to enrich the descriptive in this thesis. Also, despite the presidential transition from Barrack Obama to Donald Trump in January 2017, the author will utilize the National Security Strategy that was issued during Obama's administration in 2015 to verify the objective of US involvement in East Asia. This is primarily because Donald Trump has yet to release the latest National Security Strategy since he took office in the White House.

1.4. Research Question

Referring to the previous explanation, the research question proposed for this thesis is; ‘how DPRK’s nuclear weapon tests in 2016 create a security dilemma and lead to the strengthening of power politics between China and US in Northeast Asia?’

1.5. Purpose and Practical use of the Research

1.5.1 Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to analyze and describe how DPRK’s nuclear weapon tests in 2016 contribute to the increase of great power politics between China and US in Northeast Asia.

1.5.2 Practical Use of the Research

There are two practical purposes of this research. The author sees that this research can be used as:

- a. A prerequisite for the author to obtain a bachelor degree;
- b. A reference for academics, scholars, students or researchers who desire to understand the relationship between the DPRK nuclear test in 2016 with an increase of power politics in Northeast Asia.

- c. A reference for policymakers to consider all the existing variables and factors before making a decision when similar events occur in the future, especially when all actors involved face a security dilemma.

1.6. Literature Review

After the fifth nuclear weapon test was conducted in September, 9th 2016, all countries in Northeast Asia become more vigilant towards DPRK and gradually increasing their power to balance Pyongyang's hostile nuclear weapon developments. Hence, in order to conduct a comprehensive research regarding how DPRK's nuclear weapon tests in 2016 create security dilemma and lead to the strengthening of power politics between China and US in Northeast Asia, the author will utilize various sources of literatures since the explanation will be described in sequence. First of all, the grouping of journals is required to distinguish the major topics of each group. It helps the author to analyze research gaps of each group of journals so that later, this thesis will be capable to fill the void left by each group.

The first group is a series of journals that focus on the explanation regarding the underlying causes of China's concerns regarding the THAAD deployment plan in the ROK—which caused a security dilemma and fueled the power politics in the region. In defining their concerns, the author will use three primary sources; “Trilemma of Strategic Stability in East Asia: How Do We Escape the Coercion Loop?” by Joeun Kim, ‘THAAD on the Korean Peninsula’ by Institute for Security & Development Policy (ISDP), and ‘The Security

Dilemma and THAAD Deployment in the ROK' by Li Bin. Kim and Li Bin's writings are more focused on the practical side. Their writings are capable to explain the underlying causes of China's fear regarding THAAD deployment thoroughly. While Kim's writing attempted to correlate the root causes using Jervis's concept, Li Bin's writing was able to provide the underlying causes of China's fear based on a number of variables, such as the THAAD radar capabilities.

Another important thing to note is how THAAD poses a credible threat to China. Therefore, in order to describe how THAAD possess an actual threat to Chinese' national security, an explanation of the THAAD specification is required. Therefore, the journal wrote by ISDP entitled 'THAAD on the Korean Peninsula' provides comprehensive information regarding the THAAD specifications, along with its launch sequence, and how it has a detrimental effect on China's national security. The journal also provided a number of sub-chapters describing regional repercussions as a result of THAAD deployment in the ROK which certainly helped the author to analyze the root causes of security dilemma and lead to the increase of power politics in the region.

However, of all the journals mentioned earlier, there is no single journal that discussed the great power politics between US and China in post-DPRK nuclear tests in 2016, let alone linking the DPRK nuclear tests in 2016 with the emergence of great power politics in the region. Therefore, to draw the conclusion that there is great power politics in the post-DPRK nuclear test in 2016, the author

will utilize a book and other relevant sources to explain the increase of power politics between the US and China after DPRK nuclear tests in 2016.

This second group is a series of journals that focus on the discussion regarding the power competition in Northeast Asia. For that purpose, the author will use the book 'The Tragedy of Power Politics' written by John J. Mearsheimer, a journal wrote by Evan J. R. Revere entitled '2017: The Year of Decision on the Korean Peninsula' and other journal written by Scott A. Snyder, Darcie Draudt, and Sungtae Park entitled 'The Korea Pivot: Seoul's Strategic Choices and Rising Rivalries in Northeast Asia.' Mearsheimer's writing will be utilized to reinforce the argument regarding the existence of power politics in Northeast Asia, while Evan's writings will be used as a reference in proving the existence of power politics in post-2016 DPRK nuclear tests. Furthermore, in addition to explaining the definition of great power politics, Mearsheimer's writing also helps the author in understanding the patterns that led to the emergence of power politics as well as providing an example of power politics that existed in the past—which may still continue until today. On the other hand, Evan's writing will also serve as a reference in analyzing the reasons why China is likely to refuse to coalesce with the US alliance in dealing against the DPRK nuclear threat as one of the factors that cause great power politics.

The final journal on the second group that will be utilized in this group is written by Scott A. Snyder, Darcie Draudt, and Sungtae Park under the title 'The Korea Pivot: Seoul's Strategic Choices and Rising Rivalries in Northeast Asia.' Compared to Evan's writing which takes into account all the variables in the

region so that China can choose between dealing with DPRK nuclear threat and other threats that US possess, their core work is mostly focused on how Seoul should behave amidst the a power competition between the big countries in the region. Nevertheless, since their writing is still touching on power competition, their writing will also serve as a reference to confirm the existence of power competition between big countries in the region, namely US and China, after DPRK nuclear tests in 2016 as one of the factors that shaped power politics in the region. The author believe that both journals would enrich the descriptive, especially in analyzing the patterns that led to an increase in power politics between the US and China in Northeast Asia.

In general, each group of journals has its own perspective regarding the DPRK nuclear tests in 2016. However, as stated earlier, none of the journals attempted to link the nuclear tests with increased power politics in the region. Therefore, this thesis seeks to fill the void left by the two journal groups; this thesis will analyze how the DPRK nuclear tests in 2016 resulting in the security dilemma and culminated into the increased power politics in Northeast Asia. Hence, the author personally believes that this research would enrich insights and augment the previous argument on how DPRK's nuclear weapon tests creates a security dilemma and fueled a great power politics between the US and China within Northeast Asia.

1.7. Theoretical Framework

To understand the implication of DPRK's nuclear weapon tests in 2016 towards the great power politics between China and US, the author will mix the theory of Security Dilemma along with relevant concept in international relations realm such as offense-defense theory, threat perception, security paradox, and great power politics itself. These theories will be later used as a main ground to explain and analyze the main topic of this thesis.

1.7.1. Security Dilemma

In the international world, security dilemma is generally known as a condition to portray the anxiety of a group of states due to the course of actions done by other states that potentially igniting a conflict. Theoretically, it is coined for the first time by German scholar John H. Herz from his writing 'Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma' in 1951. On his writing, he stated that any course of action done by one state aimed to increase their security—regardless of their intention—will contribute to the growing sense of insecurity towards other states. The effort was seen as potentially threatening for their national security because none can feel completely secure in the world where power competition emerges continuously.²⁰ This is mainly because he emphasized that the dilemma rooted from a fundamental social constellation—a plurality of an interconnected groups that created an ultimate units of political life—where the

²⁰ John H. Herz, "Idealist Internationalism and the Security Dilemma," in *World Politics*, vol. 2, No.2 (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1950), p. 157.

groups are living in parallel with each other without any higher authority sits above them.²¹ Living in such anarchic society, a term that describes the world without any higher authority stands above all, the people will be continuously concerned of their security from being attacked, dominated, or even annihilated by other groups.²²

Without international authorities, Herz then argue that it makes eminently good sense for the states—in the international relations realm, to be powerful enough to survive at the moment it is attacked or being subjected by other states.²³ However, as mentioned before, he asserted that such action will render other states to increase their security by accumulating more power, creating a sustainable cycle of power-seeking because everyone living in the ‘world of competing units’ realize that they can never feel completely sure about their survival.²⁴ In the end, Herz added that the dilemma does not mean that ‘social cooperation’ is impossible. It is just the nature of cooperation that could become the element in conflict; ‘part of their function’ to cooperate and consolidate with one another could be misinterpreted as a competition by a group or other state.²⁵

However, Jervis later added that the first variable is the major cause of the security dilemma since the variable determines how much security dilemma operates in the international order.²⁶ His statement is plausible, given that if a defensive weapon does not possess the capability to attack, a state can improve its

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 199

security without risking other state's security.²⁷ Therefore, it can be concluded the difficulty in differentiating the weapons' capability will surely exacerbate the security dilemma.

As a complement to Herz's security dilemma, the author will also using two derivative concepts of security dilemma put forward by Ken Booth and Nicholas Wheeler in their writing; the two level of predicament, the dilemma of interpretation and dilemma of response as well as the security paradox.

Booth and Wheeler asserted that since security dilemma is a 'foundational concept' in the interactions between relevant actors, they explained that all leaders of the major powers have faced a dilemma of interpretation and a dilemma of response since the dawn of time.²⁸ Thus, Booth and Wheeler provide an underlying example to their argument by explaining the war during the ancient Greece between Athens and Sparta that occurred due to the growing power of Athenian, causing the Spartans to fear their military capabilities.²⁹ The explanation shed a light that such dilemma was caused by fear due to a degree of uncertainty regarding the military plans of the counterparts, since states are unable to accurately pinpoint their actual motives behind certain acts or policy implementation.³⁰

Based on their example, Booth and Wheeler explained that the security dilemma is actually consists of two strategic predicament The first level is a

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Ken Booth and Nicholas J. Wheeler, "Uncertainty," in *Security Studies: An Introduction* (Madison Avenue, NY: Routledge, 2008), p.133-137.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p.137

³⁰ *Ibid.*

dilemma of interpretation, a predicament faced by every decision-makers when they met with a two significant, at often times, undesirable alternatives about the military policies and political postures of other entities.³¹ The predicament often happened when decision-makers have to make a decision amidst the ‘unresolvable uncertainty’ of its counterparts regarding its motives, intentions and capabilities.³² Then the second level, the dilemma of response, happened when the dilemma of interpretation has been settled; the decision-makers need to decide how they would react.³³ Booth and Wheeler then added that if the decision-makers react in a rather confrontational manner, such as by the deploying military forces, they risk of creating a significant level of hostility among states where none of the parties actually desire it.³⁴ In addition, they argue that such confrontational response will make the relations between the ‘conflicting’ states become a strategic challenge.³⁵ Because of this, both Booth and Wheeler argue that such situation will eventually develop into which they called as security paradox.³⁶

As the ultimate consequence of the security dilemma, Booth and Wheeler explained that security paradox is a condition where the security of a certain state actually gets eroded even though they keep improving its security. It is mainly because the state’s effort will forces other state to compensate the effort done by a certain state by also improving its security, plunging both countries into a perpetual cycle of power competition where none state will eventually feel secure

³¹ *Ibid*, p. 135.

³² *Ibid*.

³³ *Ibid*.

³⁴ *Ibid*.

³⁵ *Ibid*, p. 137.

³⁶ *Ibid*.

even though they keep improving their security. Thus the theory and its derivative concepts will help the author in defining and analyzing the issue that occurred in the region.

1.7.2. **Offense-Defense theory**

The concept was first coined by Robert Jervis in his book ‘Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma in 1997.’ Because there are many factors that underlie the emergence of security dilemma, he stated that the concept serves as an ‘another approach’ to analyze the central point of security dilemma—that ‘an increase in one state’s security decreases the security of others’—and examine under which conditions this main point is still relevant.³⁷ Therefore, Jervis argued that there are two crucial variables involved to determine the ‘central point’ that caused the security dilemma. The two variables are;

- Whether defensive weapons and/or policies can be distinguished with the offensive one, and
- Whether defense or offense possess a greater advantage.³⁸

Given with the two variables, Jervis take two conclusions. The former proves that it is possible for state to increase their security without risking other state’s security if defensive weapons is distinguishable with the offensive ones—which will eliminate the notion of security dilemma, while the latter proves that

³⁷ Robert Jervis, “Cooperation Under the Security Dilemma,” in *World Politics*, vol. 30 (Maryland, United States: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978), p. 186.

³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 186-187.

the state can maximize their security without greatly undermining other state's security if defensive weapon as an advantage over offense.³⁹ Based on Jervis's statement, the author conclude that the security dilemma will cease to exist mainly because defensive weapons will be rendered useless when converted to function for offensive purposes due to functional differences, making other states less insecure when certain state tried to bolster their security—again, if such distinction is possible. Since Jervis asserted that security dilemma will no longer exist due to the distinctions, he added that it would allow all countries to procure defensive weapons without worrying to cause a reaction from other countries whose national security is disrupted.⁴⁰

In addition, he also explained that if such distinction is possible, beneficial consequences will follow, namely:

1. Status-quo powers will be able to identify each other in terms of military capabilities. Thus, this will reduce the likelihood of conflicts and/or tension that arise from misperception.
2. Since identifying other state's military capabilities is possible, that is, to distinguish between defensive weapons and offensive weapons, status-quo states will be able to get an early warning when other state plans an aggression. This is mainly because the revisionist state will take amount of time to procure the offensive weapons as they will be unable to conceal their procurement due to the possible distinction.

³⁹ *Ibid*, p. 187 & 199.

⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 199.

3. If all states support the status quo, where most states aimed to increase their security without provoking other states by procuring defensive weapons, an arms control treaty postulating the ban for offensive weapon will be in effect.⁴¹

However, Jervis argue that the fact such treaties on the third point are extremely rare and it proves that countries do not always want to guarantee other state's security or it is just plain difficult to distinguish between defensive and offensive weapons.⁴² The former proves that since state does not always want to guarantee other state's security and will focusing on their own instead, as Booth and Wheeler put it, security dilemma will force states to plunge into a vicious cycle of power competition. The latter, however, requires a detailed explanation before taking the conclusion. In his concluding remarks regarding the offense-defense differentiation, Jervis stated:

*"...when such distinction is possible, the central characteristic of the security dilemma no longer holds, and one of the most troublesome consequences of anarchy is removed."*⁴³

Based on his argument, it can be concluded that security dilemma will cease to exist if the weapons can be technically differentiated. This is mainly because states cannot be ascertained of other states' intention if the state possesses certain weapons since weapon has a capability, to certain extent, to inflict harm toward others and such differentiation between offense and defense weapon is near impossible. The author's earlier statement also refers to Jervis' opinion that the

⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 199-201.

⁴² *Ibid*, p. 201.

⁴³ *Ibid*, p. 206.

‘differentiation between offensive and defensive stances comes close to abolishing it.’⁴⁴

1.7.3. Threat Perception

Another concept that will be utilized for this thesis is threat perception, which was also coined by Robert Jervis. In his book, ‘Perception and Misperception in International Politics,’ Jervis argue that psychological pressures experienced by the decision-makers during certain events opens the possibility of prolonging the arms race and tension between states, especially when a state possessed a bad image towards a particular country.⁴⁵ Because if states has already developed a negative image towards its counterparts, any behaviour or action that other states deem to be neutral and benign will be ‘distorted’ or seen as a deliberate duplicity.⁴⁶

As a result, the state will be engulfed in fear due to the uncertainty posed by its counterparts. Jervis further argue that it is mainly because a state often assume that an increase of its counterparts’ military might, regardless of their intentions, signify aggressive intentions due to two reasons; first, to certain extent, their military might has the capability to inflict harm and second, the military might seen as a potential threat to one’s national security.⁴⁷ Not to mention that at

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 199.

⁴⁵ Robert Jervis, *Perception and Misperception in International Politics* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1976), p. 68.

⁴⁶ *Ibid*.

⁴⁷ *Ibid*, p. 70.

often times, Jervis stated that its counterparts always interpret their behavior as they intended in the first place—mostly as a benign instead of the aggressive one since they rarely think that the state will misinterpret their behavior.⁴⁸ This will lead the counterparts to deploy or increase their military might nonetheless. Due to this, however, state's perception against its counterparts will be prone to faulty since the message send by the counterparts has the opposite meaning of what other countries think and, undoubtedly, was misinterpreted. For example, when states A trying to increase its capability for peaceful purpose, state B—which already has a negative view against state A—perceives the effort as a threat to its national security. Therefore, it can concluded from Jervis' explanation that threat perception is a perception that indicates other country's efforts as a threat to its national security, although it has not been proven to be true.

1.7.4. Great Power Politics

Serving as the core concept of this thesis, great power politics was first coined by John J. Mearsheimer in his book 'The Tragedy of Great Power Politics.' In his book, Mearsheimer argue that great power 'fear each other' and always struggle in a power competition with each other.⁴⁹ Their ultimate goal of this is 'to maximize its share of world power'—which can be translated that their share of power are often obtained at the expense of other states.⁵⁰ This is mainly

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ John J. Mearsheimer, *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (500 Fifth Avenue, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2001), p. 2.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

because great powers will be less likely to attain their maximum power share if they do not put other state's interests into harm. He further argue that even though they are very eager to alter the status quo, great powers cannot take risk by engaging in a war with each other as the result could be very devastating.⁵¹ Especially in this era when every great powers possess nuclear weapons, engaging in war could risks the emergence of nuclear holocaust. As a result, great powers are engaged in a perpetual power competition, seeking to change the 'balance of power' to their favor whenever the opportunities arise.⁵² Therefore, one question arises from this notion; why great powers are often faced with unquenchable thirst for power? For this question, Mearsheimer provided three answers;

1. The 'absence' of supreme authority that stands over the states to protect them, resulted in the emergence of countries with an aggressive tendency;
2. State will always possess offensive military capability;
3. States cannot, and will never, be certain of other' states intentions.⁵³

Given with the uncertainties, states realize that it is imperative for them to accumulate power since it will increase their chances of survival. The statement applies not only to small-to-medium countries; it also applies on the great powers. Not to mention that these countries has a tendency to shift the status quo. Therefore, the only best option for them to ensure their survival is to accumulate more power by bend other countries in the system to its knees.⁵⁴ In general, this

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 2-3.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 3.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

theory helps the author in analyzing the causes of China's fear in the context of region, especially in interpreting US' hidden agenda underlying THAAD deployment based on China's point of view.

1.8 Research Methodology

For the purpose of this research, the author would apply qualitative research method. It is research method that emphasizes words in the collection as well as the analysis of data, for the research is broadly inductivist, constructionist and interpretivist.⁵⁵

This research uses the methods that have been included in Alan Bryman's book 'Social Research Method.' For this research, however, the research method sequence elaborated in his book has been gone several modification.⁵⁶ The qualitative research begins with a research question that derived from the proposed topic. The research then continued by searching for some relevant data from a number of sources such as sites and literature sources, which then followed with the data collection. After collecting and sorting the data, the research will proceed with the effort to interpret the data to find the key findings that related with the topic. However, the interpretation of data needs to be corroborated with theoretical and conceptual approach to sharpen the analysis. This is mainly because theories and concepts are the results of the continuous investigation over

⁵⁵ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods*, Fourth Edition (United States: Oxford University Press Inc., 2012), p. 380.

⁵⁶ The aforementioned sequence is what listed in Figure 17.1 regarding the 'An outline of the main steps of qualitative research' p. 384.

the similar events and creates a pattern that become the basis of a theory, rather than ‘something that precedes it’ or coming out of nowhere.⁵⁷

Since the primary data for the purpose of this thesis is very difficult to obtain, given that the primary data required for research comes from the countries outside where the author is originated, all the sources and data for this research will focus on the document as secondary data.⁵⁸ The documents mentioned before is not a document at the request of the author, but the data is ‘scattered’ and waiting to be assembled and analyzed.⁵⁹ Once the data has been obtained and collected, all the materials are needed to be interpreted by the author—by using relevant theories—to draw conclusions according to the topic taken by the author. Therefore, the author will utilize relevant and credible sources such as printed—or online—books and journals to become the main empirical and theoretical basis for this research as it will help the author to figure out the central phenomena of this issue.⁶⁰ Other credible information such as official statements and news will become the additional data to support the analysis on various part of this research.

Lastly, to analyze the data that has been obtained in order to draw conclusions, the author will use to separate methods; secondary analysis on qualitative data and narrative analysis. Secondary analysis emphasized the analysis of data by researcher who have not been involved in the collection of the

⁵⁷ *Ibid*, p. 384

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 543.

⁵⁹ *Ibid*.

⁶⁰ John W. Creswell, *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*, Fourth Edition (Boston, MA: Pearson Education Inc., 2012).

primary data.⁶¹ While the latter, the narrative analysis, emphasizes the approach to change the focus of the reader from ‘what actually happened’ to ‘how do people make sense of what happened?’⁶² Referring to Alan Bryman’s book, the sentence can be interpreted that the narrative analysis is a method of data processing so that the output can provide an overview of a certain event. By combining the data, the author can obtain the data despite limitations in data acquisition [unable to mine primary data], analyze the data, and eventually draw conclusions regarding an event using secondary data.

1.9 Thesis Organization

The structure of this thesis will be organized through several sections and will be ordered on different substantial matters.

Chapter I is an introduction which will provide a background of the main issue that will be concluded in a research question.

Chapter II will be divided into three parts. First, the author will discuss about a series of events conducted by the DPRK that triggered the security dilemma of both US and China in the past—which then led to the power politics between the two great powers, albeit relatively mild. Then, the author will explain the chronology of the DPRK nuclear test in 2016 which the author considers as a trigger for an increase in power politics in the region. Lastly, the author will describe the responses taken by each great power—either the response taken by

⁶¹ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods, Op. Cit.*, p. 312.

⁶² *Ibid*, p. 582.

the US-ROK alliance over the DPRK's nuclear threat or the response taken by China to the actions taken by the US-ROK alliance.

Chapter III will focus on analyzing how the DPRK nuclear test in 2016 caused great power politics between the US and China. However, the explanation will be described in sequence according to the theories and concepts that the author uses—which will ultimately arrive at a conclusion that there is an increase in power politics between US and China in the region due to the DPRK nuclear test in 2016.

Lastly, in Chapter IV, the author will conclude the research of how DPRK's nuclear weapon tests in 2016 create a security dilemma and lead to the strengthening of power politics between China and US in East Asia.