

Dissertation

zur Erlangung des Grades eines Doktors der Philosophie (Dr. phil.)
an der Fakultät für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften
Universität Hamburg

**Messaging for Deterrence:
North Korea's Nuclear Doctrine
of Assured Asymmetric
Escalation**

Elisabeth I-Mi Suh

서이미 / 徐伊美

Erstbetreuerin: Prof. Dr. Ursula Schröder, Universität Hamburg & IFSH
Zweitbetreuer: Prof. Dr. Erik Gartzke, University of California, San Diego

Datum der Abgabe: 7. Mai 2025

Gutachterin: Prof. Dr. Ursula Schröder, Universität Hamburg & IFSH
Gutachter: Prof. Dr. Erik Gartzke, University of California, San Diego

Datum der Disputation: 3. Dezember 2025

Erklärung entsprechend § 6 Abs. 6 der Promotionsordnung der Fakultät für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften vom 18. Januar 2017

Hiermit erkläre ich, Elisabeth I-Mi Suh, dass für die Dissertation und darin enthaltener Untersuchungen keine professionelle Promotionsbetreuung in Anspruch genommen wurde.

Eidesstattliche Versicherung entsprechend § 6 Abs. 6 der Promotionsordnung der Fakultät für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften vom 18. Januar 2017

Hiermit versichere ich, Elisabeth I-Mi Suh, dass die Dissertation selbständig und ohne fremde Hilfe verfasst wurde. Es wurden nur die angegebenen Quellen und Hilfsmittel benutzt. Wörtliche und nicht wörtliche Zitate aus anderen Werken habe ich als solche kenntlich gemacht.

Die Grundsätze guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis, wie sie in der „Satzung zur Sicherung guter wissenschaftlicher Praxis und zur Vermeidung wissenschaftlichen Fehlverhaltens an der Universität Hamburg vom 15.05.2014“ niedergelegt sind, habe ich in den von mir durchgeführten und in der Dissertation erwähnten Analysen eingehalten.

Kurzfassung

Informationen spielen eine zentrale Rolle in der internationalen Politik – und das Regime in Pjöngjang nutzt dies aktiv aus. Nordkorea wird typischerweise als verschwiegen beschrieben, obwohl es massiv in öffentliche Kommunikation investiert und auf diesem Weg sogar strategisch relevante Informationen über seine nuklearen Fähigkeiten preisgibt. Natürlich enthält diese Kommunikation viele sich wiederholende, bedeutungslose Botschaften und Propaganda, doch gleichzeitig veröffentlicht Pjöngjang so auch regelmäßig eine Vielzahl an direkten, sachlichen Botschaften über sein Nuklearwaffenprogramm. Um dieses Verhalten besser zu verstehen, mit dieser Art von Primärquellen umzugehen und daraus Informationen zu ziehen, wurde im Rahmen dieser Dissertation Nordkoreas öffentliche nukleare Botschaften in vier Untersuchungszeiträumen zwischen 2001 und 2018 eruiert.

Das systematische „Durchsieben“ der umfangreichen staatlichen Kommunikation, die Unterscheidung zwischen „geräuschvollen“ und strategischen Botschaften und dadurch vollzogene Analyse der nuklearen Botschaften Nordkoreas ergeben eine Reihe an Informationen darüber, wie Pjöngjang den Zweck seiner Nuklearstreitkräfte, deren Zusammensetzung, Einsatzbedingungen und Einsatzpläne präsentiert. Diese Präsentation erlaubt wiederum Rückschlüsse darauf, was das Regime in Pjöngjang als seine Nukleardoktrin darstellt – und wie die Kommunikation dieser Doktrin einer garantierten asymmetrischen Eskalation darauf abzielt, Nordkoreas Hauptgegner, die USA, davon zu überzeugen, dass ein Versuch des Regimewechsels in Pjöngjang erwartbar mit nuklearen Schlägen gegen militärische Ziele in der Region beantwortet werden würde – selbst dann, wenn die nordkoreanische Führung ausgeschaltet oder das Nuklearwaffenarsenal getroffen worden sein sollte. Im Gegensatz zur gängigen Wahrnehmung von Nordkorea als verschwiegenen Einsiedlerstaat und im Unterschied zu den meisten anderen nuklear bewaffneten Staaten, die ihre Nukleardoktrin kommunizieren, sind Nordkoreas nukleare Botschaften sehr klar und detailliert – weil das Regime davon überzeugt ist, dass diese Informationen für sein externes Publikum, insbesondere für seine Gegner, von Bedeutung sind und somit Einfluss auf seine Verhandlungsposition gegenüber den USA nehmen können.

Abstract

Information matters in international politics, and the regime in Pyongyang actively exploits this. North Korea is typically described as secretive, although it engages heavily in public communication and even shares strategically relevant information about its nuclear capabilities this way. Of course, there are plenty repetitive, meaningless messages and propaganda, but Pyongyang also consistently issues many straight-forward messages about its nuclear weapons development program. In an effort to better understand this kind of behavior and to deal with this sort of materials for analysis, this thesis research set out to explore the DPRK's public nuclear messaging over the course of four subcases spanning from 2001 to 2018 and to see what we can learn from this.

Crafting a systematic way to parse abundant state media communication, distinguishing between "noisy" and strategic messages, and thereby analyzing the DPRK's nuclear messages allowed to gather information about what Pyongyang communicates as the purpose of its nuclear forces, their composition, their employment conditions and plans. This trove of information provides for inferences about what the regime in Pyongyang presents as its nuclear doctrine – and how communicating this doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation seeks to convince North Korea's main adversary, the United States, that attempts at regime change in Pyongyang will be predictably met with nuclear strikes against counter-force targets in the region, even if North Korea's leadership is incapacitated or its nuclear arsenal struck. In contrast to common perceptions of the DPRK as a secretive hermit kingdom as well as to most other nuclear-armed states that communicate their nuclear doctrine, Pyongyang's nuclear messaging is very clear and detailed as it believes that this information matters to outside audiences, particularly its adversaries, and can thereby influence its bargaining with the United States.

Acknowledgements

My dissertation project has been a journey – not only did it provide me with the best excuse to participate in conferences and visit diverse places, present my ideas and exchange with scholars and practitioners; it also pushed me to grow (up) and travel intellectually. It started with the simple wish of wanting to indulge into my very own project and to contribute “just another book about North Korea and nuclear weapons”.

I am deeply indebted to a range of individuals that have guided, inspired, and supported me along this journey.

First and foremost, I am immensely grateful to my PhD supervisors: Prof. Dr. Ursula Schröder for providing my dissertation project with a new institutional home and supporting me with valuable advice throughout, as well as Prof. Dr. Erik Gartzke for his thorough feedback and insightful comments.

I would also like to express my appreciation to all those that provided comments on presentations and excerpts from my draft thesis. This includes the lovely and supportive PhD cohort at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), self-organized PhD groups at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) and the German Council on Foreign Relations (DGAP), as well as numerous colleagues and leading experts that I cannot all mention here – but I need to explicitly call out and thank Dr. Liviu Horovitz and Rachel Minyoung Lee who provided helpful pointers on the most nerve-racking chapters.

Lastly, this endeavor would not have been possible without the enduring encouragement, support, and love from my family and friends. Each one of you has played their own particular role throughout my journey. Words cannot express my gratitude. In the end, my partner helped with the final nudge to submit.

본 논문을 제 인생에서 가장 큰 영감 주신 아버지께 바칩니다.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| List of abbreviations..... | i |
| List of tables..... | i |
| 1. Setting the Scene | 1 |
| 1.1 Messages That Matter..... | 3 |
| 1.2 A Secretive Theater State | 4 |
| 1.3 Five Takeaways..... | 7 |
| 1.4 Thesis Structure | 10 |
| 2. Understanding Public Messaging..... | 12 |
| 2.1 Informative Potential..... | 13 |
| 2.1.1 Content and credibility | 15 |
| 2.1.2 Influence and leverage | 19 |
| 2.2 Nuclear Messaging..... | 21 |
| 2.2.1 Inherent credibility issues | 24 |
| 2.2.2 Communicating nuclear risks..... | 31 |
| 2.3 Authoritarian Signaling..... | 34 |
| 2.3.1 Language and propaganda..... | 37 |
| 2.3.2 Messaging as a means of coercion..... | 40 |
| 3. Analyzing Public Nuclear Messages..... | 43 |
| 3.1 Exploration over Generalization | 44 |
| 3.1.1 Within an extreme case..... | 46 |
| 3.2 Empirical Approach | 49 |
| 3.2.1 Materials for analysis | 50 |
| 3.2.2 Coding public messages | 54 |
| 3.2.3 Defining strategic messages | 56 |
| 4. North Korea’s Stage-Setting | 60 |
| 4.1 Stage-managers and Protagonists for Consistent Public Messaging..... | 61 |
| 4.2 Conflict Definition: Victim Nation, Hero Regime, Nuclear-armed Antagonist..... | 64 |
| 4.3 “Greater Nation” Project: Nuclear proliferation..... | 70 |
| 4.4 Bargaining Options: The Dream of Denuclearization | 75 |
| 5. North Korea’s Strategic Nuclear Messaging..... | 81 |
| 5.1 Strategic Messages of Nuclear Resolve | 82 |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 5.1.1 Automatic escalation..... | 92 |
| 5.1.2 Nuclear martyrdom..... | 100 |
| 5.2 Strategic Messages of Operational Clarity | 106 |
| 5.2.1 Nuclear escalation | 110 |
| 5.2.2 Regional escalation..... | 117 |
| 5.3 Adjustments Over Time..... | 126 |
| 5.3.1 Corpus critique | 127 |
| 5.3.2 Consistent strategic nuclear messaging | 132 |
| 6. Messaging for Deterrence..... | 138 |
| 6.1 Predictable Escalation for Risk Manipulation | 139 |
| 6.2 Messaging for Deterrence and Beyond | 144 |
| 6.3 Messages for Doctrine | 149 |
| 7. Closing the Curtain | 158 |
| 7.1 Five Takeaways and Policy Recommendations..... | 159 |
| 7.2 Three Fields for Future Research | 162 |
| 8. List of References | 166 |
| 8.1 List of Secondary Literature..... | 166 |
| 8.2 List of Primary Materials..... | 180 |
| 9. Appendices..... | 210 |
| 9.1 Coding Scheme | 210 |
| 9.2 List of Related Publications..... | 212 |

List of abbreviations

| | |
|------|--|
| DPRK | Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, North Korea |
| ICBM | Intermediate-range ballistic missile |
| IR | International Relations |
| MRBM | Medium-range ballistic missile |
| NATO | North-Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| ROK | Republic of Korea, ROK |
| SRBM | Short-range ballistic missile |
| US | United States of America |

List of tables

| | |
|---|-----|
| Table 1 Overview of Subcases..... | 49 |
| Table 2 Overview of Corpus per Levels of Authority | 54 |
| Table 3 Overview of Categories for Assessing Messages' Levels of Noisiness..... | 58 |
| Table 4 Overview of the DPRK's Two Sets of Strategic Nuclear Messages..... | 82 |
| Table 5 Overview of the DPRK's Messages of Nuclear Resolve | 84 |
| Table 6 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Nuclear Resolve | 91 |
| Table 7 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Automatic Escalation..... | 99 |
| Table 8 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Nuclear Martyrdom | 105 |
| Table 9 Overview of the DPRK's Strategic Messages of Operational Clarity | 107 |
| Table 10 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Operational Clarity..... | 109 |
| Table 11 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Nuclear Escalation | 117 |
| Table 12 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Regional Escalation | 125 |
| Table 13 Overview of Corpus per Subcase..... | 128 |
| Table 14 Overview of Corpus per Subcase and Level of Authority | 128 |
| Table 15 Overview of Levels of Authority per Subcase | 130 |
| Table 16 Overview of Subcases and Authoritativeness of Strategic Messages..... | 134 |
| Table 17 Overview of Subcases and Frequency of Strategic Messages | 135 |
| Table 18 Overview of Subcases and Content Specificity of Strategic Messages | 135 |
| Table 19 Overview of Subcases and Packaging Specificity of Strategic Messages | 135 |
| Table 20 Overview of Subcases and Context Specificity of Strategic Messages | 137 |

1. Setting the Scene

Most nuclear-armed **states talk about their nuclear weapons**, but North Korea (formally the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK) takes it to an **extreme level** while still being seen as a secretive state. Its state media outlets convey something akin to “nuclear theater”, abundant and detailed public communication involving many domestic stakeholders to present the DPRK's nuclear weapons program. In principle, states have an interest in publicly communicating about their nuclear forces, for example, if that allows them to influence their target audiences. For North Korea, public communication might be one of the few systematic ways it has to influence its main bargaining counterpart, the United States, but also a very ineffective and risky way. Nevertheless, the regime in Pyongyang has consistently engaged in public nuclear theater over the past decades, raising two questions for analysts and observers: How can we deal with this abundant state media communication from the DPRK? What can we really learn from what North Korea tells us about its nuclear weapons program? This thesis provides an example of how to systematically analyze the DPRK's nuclear performances, filtering the noise in order to carve out its messages about its nuclear weapons program. These messages carry enough information to outline the DPRK's nuclear doctrine – a relevant takeaway for scholars and policymakers alike.

International relations are full of states bargaining with one another, in direct negotiations or through public communication. Publicly communicating about nuclear weapons **risks sharing information that adversaries can exploit**, that can “backfire” and limit present or future bargaining options – but states can also be interested to convey public messages with information about their nuclear weapons program if they can thereby influence their adversaries' knowledge levels, their next moves and ideally the bargaining outcome. Yet, the strategic purpose of such communication – the conscious information strategy by the sending state – also shapes how the receiving state treats received information. Generally, it is beyond the sending state's control whether the target audience receives, understands and believes the message. But messaged information that the sending state likely didn't intend to share then have particular relevance for the target state. North Korea and its state media communication about nuclear weapons are a prime example of these dilemmas – wanting information about the DPRK's nuclear forces, knowing that available public information is shared for reasons to influence, and being on the lookout for signals as in unintended relevant information about the regime in Pyongyang.

For analysts, the DPRK presents a captivating and puzzling—but also an inherently frustrating—research subject. It **massively controls information flows** into and out of its country, and it pays particular attention to portray a certain image of itself through its state media and social media channels. All of this might be interesting, but raises questions of what it really means if one assumes intentions behind such frequent public communication. What

some downplay as meaningless propaganda, others find clues about North Korea's regime type and foreign policy behavior. This thesis analyzes the DPRK's public communication about its nuclear weapons program as a form of nuclear theater, as performances of strategic communication that seek to convey certain messages towards the United States in order to influence their bargaining context. Doing so mixes wording from different schools of thought and acknowledges the epistemological dilemma that analysts cannot verify what North Korea communicates about its nuclear weapons program. We can only analyze **what the regime in Pyongyang intentionally presents as its reality**, limiting what research questions can be answered.¹ This thesis asks and answers what we can learn from Pyongyang's nuclear messaging and concludes that the DPRK thereby presents its nuclear doctrine. Some nuclear-armed states communicate their nuclear doctrines in order to set certain expectations in peace time about the purpose and conditions of nuclear employment. Even though, the present or the future might still look different than stated before, nuclear doctrines are valuable sources of clues about states' strategic calculus and of information how respective states seek to deter their adversaries.

In contrast to most nuclear-armed states, **North Korea communicates a lot about its nuclear weapons program** – it admits that it has limited strategic depth and would be vulnerable to targeted strikes, but still shares a significant amount of information about its nuclear forces. In fact, it details the advancements of its nuclear weapons program, the diversity and qualities of its missile systems for nuclear warheads. This choice of public communication can pertain to multiple different factors; given the conflict context for the regime in Pyongyang, clear nuclear messages could fulfill bargaining purposes vis-à-vis the United States (Panda 2020). It could also relate to the DPRK's domestic characteristics as a "theater state" since the regime seeks to involve its population through constant public communication and propaganda performances (Kwon and Chung 2012). Anecdotally compared to other nuclear-armed states, North Korea stands out with the frequency and detail of how it presents its nuclear weapons program. Instead of hiding its nuclear forces like Israel or leaving only vague clues like Pakistan or China, the DPRK conducts nuclear theater more akin Russia's bombastic presentations of its nuclear capabilities.

This thesis outlines a systematic approach to analyze North Korea's frequent messaging about its nuclear weapons program and what we can draw from it as its nuclear doctrine. This research design applies a rationalist view on states' behavior, acknowledges the importance of information, and focuses on one aspect of strategic communication for

¹ For those without access to classified information, informative contacts, or first-hand knowledge, the analytical resources on the country are limited to materials provided by the regime itself, from first-hand accounts by former diplomats, journalists, other travelers, and escaped North Korean individuals, as well as secondary literature. Members of the community of "North Korea watchers" have found ways to support one another, including by uploading statements issued by the DPRK's state media outlets onto dedicated websites (i.e. KCNA Watch) and finding new primary materials, for example in former Soviet and Eastern bloc archives (Szalontai and Radchenko 2006). While having such limited access to materials raises unique challenges for the analyst, perhaps affecting his or her (original) research interests, it does not impede empirical analysis per se, but nudges the analyst to deal with what's available in what quantity and quality, and to assess what research question can be posed and answered.

bargaining purposes. This one aspect pertains to what messages the DPRK intentionally shares about its nuclear weapons program. It is only one piece to the broader phenomenon of messaging that includes conscious sharing of information as will be discussed in the next chapter. The following section outlines why the choice of wording such as “theater”, “performance”, “presentation” shall not distract from the strategic communication and bargaining focus of this thesis as it relates to how the regime in Pyongyang organizes its state media communication.

1.1 Messages That Matter

State communication has the potential to carry relevant information and thus plays a particular role in international politics. In the **rationalist paradigm** of International Relations (IR), **states are relentlessly concerned with information**, searching for reliable information about their environment, as well as sharing (knowingly or unknowingly) information about themselves to their environment. Both information pathways can shape states’ position relative to others, for example having knowledge about my adversaries’ capabilities while they know little about mine can improve my bargaining position vis-à-vis my adversaries. But rationalist assumptions about state interactions and their environment explain the relevance of information as well as the pitfalls of information search and information strategies in IR: Relevant information can reduce states’ uncertainty about their adversaries, but states also know that available information can present manipulated **versions of reality** to shape their perceptions in light of their adversaries’ preferences – the second chapter of this thesis details these inherent intricacies. In this context, many pundits and scholars seem to advertise “signaling” as a practical approach to deal with the necessity and limitations of available information from state communication.

Public media reports and commentaries increasingly use the noun and verb of “signal” to describe **what states mean or propose without explicitly saying it**. Yet, this risks to distort the meaning of **signaling** to emphasize one particular, but minor aspect: The academic literature clarifies that signaling is less about the sending state’s conscious “messaging” to influence its target audience, but rather about outside interpretations of what the sending state has (not) communicated and why it has (not) done so. All forms of non-verbal and verbal communication, including state interactions and unilateral behavior, can provide the receiving state(s) with clues of information about the sending state – information that the sending state shared knowingly or not knowingly. In fact, it is these unintended clues for inferences that are the more valuable pieces of information and “real” signals (Gartzke et al 2017). Bayesian and defensive realists even argue that analyzing such signals allows to draw conclusions about the sending state’s motives and “type”, to thereby make assumptions about its present and future behavior (Glaser 2010). Nevertheless, as

Chapter 2.1.2 outlines, the sending state has an interest to influence what information its target audience infers and attempts to do so by attaching self-inflicted costs to certain signals. **Messaging** is only one aspect of signaling, the share of strategic communication by the sending state in order to shape what information the target audience receives and what context the receiving audience has to interpret the sending state's overall signaling. Messaging might be the most obvious part of signaling as it assumes **conscious provision of relevant information in order to shape the target audience's level of knowledge**. Messages are thus purposeful and, depending on the purpose of each message, can be rather noisy – as in repetitive or non-authoritative to foster a certain image or to confuse the audience – or more strategic in sharing new and seemingly credible information. Chapter 3 highlights an empirical scheme to distinguish between noisy and strategic messages, illustrating that this thesis research is narrow and tailored, but feasible and applicable to other cases.

Notably, the DPRK shares a lot of messages – noisy and strategic – about its nuclear weapons program. This might relate to the original IR argument that **information matters** to reduce uncertainty and that Pyongyang believes Washington to search for (reliable) information about North Korea's nuclear weapons development program. It might also relate to Pyongyang's thinking that **nuclear weapons matter**, particularly in bargaining with the United States, and that sharing selective but relevant information about its nuclear capabilities can shape Washington's strategic calculus and thereby the bargaining process and outcome overall.

With this research design, this thesis builds a basis for understanding the DPRK's public messaging that can be complemented with future research on other aspects of messaging as Chapter 7 suggests. Narrowing down on messages not only makes the best out of the epistemological limits of analyzing North Korea's state media communication without options for verification, but acknowledges the nature of how the regime in Pyongyang communicates publicly: It represents a theater state that invests heavily in public messaging about its nuclear weapons program while maintaining a significant degree of secrecy.

1.2 A Secretive Theater State

North Korea is often referred to as a hermit kingdom² – and maybe this description helps to draw attention and entice outside observers to take every word and action that the regime communicates serious. On closer observation, however, **the DPRK is a theater state** – a descriptor that Kwon and Chung (2012) originally developed in light of how the regime massively controls information flows and engages its general public in collective performances for propaganda: Pyongyang's state media outlets issue plenty statements on a

² Anglophone public media outlets frequently use the term “hermit kingdom” to describe the country, depicting the DPRK as preferring to isolate itself from the rest of the world, not seeking the limelight but isolation.

daily basis, which makes the DPRK's communication channel rather noisy and characterized by a lot of white noise such as repetitive and meaningless phrases. Nevertheless, Pyongyang's public communication can be informative and serve as sources for information about the regime and, here, its nuclear weapons policies. Notably, the regime in Pyongyang seeks to limit information about its inner workings and other sensitive information, but it shares information about nuclear command and control in contingencies, including scenarios where the supreme leader is incapacitated to launch nuclear strikes himself, in its public nuclear messaging.

The DPRK has brought **authoritarian control of information** flows almost to perfection when it comes to its own population, through state repression, mutual surveillance, limited sources for state-approved information. When it comes to external audiences, the regime in Pyongyang indeed tries to **limit all clues about internal politics**, following the long-standing order from its previous supreme leader, Kim Jong Il: "Externally, we must not reveal ourselves to the outside, but conceal ourselves as if Joseon is inside [a] fog."³ This paucity of reliable information on the DPRK might have created this sense of mystery, perception of a hermit kingdom, and frustration with intelligence gathering.⁴ Having completely walled off the country since 2020 in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and only selectively opened to foreigners since 2023, the DPRK indeed comes close to be the perfect example of a black box (Zwetsloot 2021).

Being walled off and limiting information about itself does not exclude engaging in public communication, however. In fact, the regime in Pyongyang has always conducted collective performances for propaganda and social cohesion as a theater state which have also included its own nuclear weapons program over the years.⁵ As Chapters 4 and 6 discuss, **talking publicly about nuclear weapons** fulfills internal purposes, i.e. mobilizing the general public for this nuclear proliferation project to safeguard and build a greater nation, but also external purposes. In fact, the regime in Pyongyang has stated on multiple occasions that it's ready to "open its nuclear deterrent to the public as a physical force" (2003-10-17 MFA), that it does not hide "what's next" (2013-01-24 NDC), and that "there is no need for the DPRK to keep secret about its military capabilities, for which it has exerted all efforts to fight decisive

³ Kim Jong Il reportedly said this to a group of his regime's officials in the mid-1990s, when the DPRK was negotiating with the United States and descending into a famine, a vulnerability they sought to hide at the time (Cha and Sohn 2012, 74; Abrahamian 2020, 41). "Joseon" (Joseon, Choson) is the name of the last dynastic kingdom of Korea (1392–1897); the DPRK uses the term 조선 to refer to "Korea," including the DPRK. It uses different official and unofficial names for the South.

⁴ US intelligence services have long declared the DPRK one of its most impenetrable targets for information gathering, identifying it as "one of the hardest, if not the hardest, collection nation that we have to collect against" (Coats 2017), if not "the longest running intelligence failure" (Litwak, 2007, 289).

⁵ Nuclear weapons have played a role in the DPRK's public communication since the Korean War, given the regime's stories of all the threat to the nation, particularly threats of nuclear annihilation by the United States. Correlating with its own nuclear proliferation path and negotiations with the United States, Pyongyang incorporated nuclear messages in its general public messaging. How nuclear messaging has developed from pursuit to acquisition is discussed in Chapter 5.3; how nuclear messaging has developed, also considering phases of nuclear exploration and before the start of nuclear proliferation, can be matter of future research (see Chapter 7).

battles with the United States for more than half a century” (2016-02-23 Supreme Command).⁶

This nuclear theater might just be an extension to its common public theater, but it is also one of the more systematic (and since 2019 few remaining) channels of communication left for bargaining with the United States. Engaging in public nuclear messaging thus provides the DPRK with a **way to influence public, including US, perceptions** about its nuclear weapons (development) program, the purposes of its nuclear forces, and its plans for nuclear employment. Doing so might be ineffective given multiple audiences, considering the fact that the messaging state can never determine whether and how the target state receives and understands its messages, and acknowledging that the target state might not believe the version of reality presented by the messaging state (see Chapter 2.1.2), but it is a self-chosen way to provide input for the United States with a view to shaping its strategic calculus, the bargaining process, and ideally the bargaining outcome.

Among nuclear-armed states, the **DPRK’s nuclear messaging is not unique but peculiar**. Most nuclear-armed states talk to some extent about their nuclear weapons program while applying priority to secrecy and ambiguity.⁷ The regime in Pyongyang, however, takes the notion that “there is no point in a deterrent that nobody knows you have, or if nobody understands how you might use it” (Panda 2020, 77) to the extreme. Of course, there is some remaining ambiguity i.e. about the sequencing of nuclear strikes, but, as Chapters 5 and 6 outline, the **DPRK emphasizes clarity and detail in its nuclear messaging**. Doing so helps to sharpen its nuclear messages with a view to effectively shape US perceptions, to convey a clear image about Pyongyang’s determination to build, maintain, and employ nuclear weapons, and to convince observers that the DPRK’s presented military might is real. Details in nuclear messaging serve here to manipulate perceived risks of nuclear employment while keeping risks predicable and thereby manageable in light of deterring conflict (Chapter 6). Wording such as “theater”, “performance”, “presentation” are usually not rationalists’ vocabulary. For this thesis research, however, it is crucial to **emphasize the context for bargaining and strategic issuing of messages through such wording**. The DPRK is presenting its choice of reality, acting out what it wants its main adversary, the United States, to believe about its nuclear forces. Nuclear theater and nuclear messaging here present a form of strategic foreign policy behavior that seeks to influence the bargaining counterpart, its behavior, and the bargaining outcome. It corresponds also to the DPRK’s domestic context and being as a theater state as well as to the fact that bargaining between Pyongyang and Washington is often limited to “loudspeaker diplomacy” through public communication

⁶ All primary materials referenced and used in this thesis research are listed in Chapter 8.2 by date of publication (year-month-day) and addressor (often abbreviated).

⁷ China, France, Great Britain, Russia, the United States, and India frequently talk about their nuclear forces, their missions, and nuclear doctrine. Pakistan refrains from making clear statements about its doctrine, but engages in vague threats. Israel present the other extreme where its politicians rarely offer any clues about the country’s nuclear forces in public statements.

channels. The regime in Pyongyang sees itself as in a constant state of bargaining whereas direct negotiations or private conversations between officials are rather rare.

Hence, understanding the DPRK as a secretive theater state and taking its nuclear messages as a purposive means to communicate relevant information helps to craft a research design that engages this puzzling combination of genuine secretiveness and strategic talkativeness and draw conclusions about what the regime in Pyongyang seeks to communicate about its nuclear weapons.

1.3 Five Takeaways

This thesis aims to contribute to our understanding of the DPRK and its nuclear weapons policy. Its central takeaway is that the principal message communicated by the regime in Pyongyang through its public messaging is its commitment to a nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation. This analysis sheds light on the **information the DPRK chooses to share** for the purposes of influencing the United States' strategic calculus, the broader aim of which is to deter the United States and its allies from attack. Moreover, the interpretative framework of this thesis, with its focus on the notion of strategic messaging, offers a fruitful means of approaching the tension at the core of public communications issued by authoritarian states, with their dual function as a source of both propaganda and information. In this way, this case study seeks to contribute to the literature on nuclear strategy, messaging, and signaling more generally.

First and foremost, this thesis shows that the DPRK is indeed not a hermit kingdom but a theater state and that analyzing the abundant trove of its state media communications is worthwhile. Pyongyang issues a lot of statements; its public communication channel is relatively noisy, and this noisiness pursues its own purposes. But the DPRK's **public nuclear messaging conveys relevant information** about its nuclear weapons program and policy, including its nuclear doctrine, the extent to which sets it apart from most other states in possession of nuclear weapons. Approaching this subject matter as a form of purposive messaging helps us to parse state media communication for strategic messages that convey relevant information about the regime's nuclear weapons program and related development, deployment, and potential employment decisions. As with all nuclear doctrines, postures, and related presentations of nuclear strategies, however, these findings do not necessarily prescribe reality or future actions. What this thesis does account for is the role played by nuclear weapons in the DPRK's public communication and bargaining with the United States. This public nuclear messages for the purposes of deterrence provides clues about the DPRK's strategic calculus and its attempt to influence the United States' strategic calculus.

Second, while the scope of this thesis is limited, its approach is both distinct and systematic. It provides an account of the DPRK's nuclear messaging across four subcases, spanning almost two decades. The findings of this specific case study may not ultimately be

generalizable, but the **empirical approach of parsing public state communications** issued by an authoritarian state for sensitive strategic military information can be tested on other cases and other phenomena. A growing group of scholars have turned their attention to primary materials that are normally treated as propaganda, filtering the DPRK's state media communication for information on threat perceptions, patterns of threat-making, and level of resolve (Sukin 2021); patterns with regard to provocation and test events (D'Orazio 2012; Whang, Lammbrau, and Joo 2017; Joo et al. 2016; Joo 2014); nuclear ambitions (Rich 2012a, 2014a); and indications of internal developments such as ideological and narrative trends (Oh and Hassig 2000, 2009; Dukalskis and Lee 2020; Hellmann 2020; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022), debates about policy preferences (Carlin and Witt 2006; Park and Snyder 2012; Haggard, Herman, and Ryu 2014), and the consolidation of hereditary rule (Myers 2010; Rich 2014b; McEachern 2010, 2019). Notably, these studies follow narrow research questions, whereas analyzing the DPRK's public communication through the lens of strategic messaging allows for diverse phenomena for investigation.

Third, this case study of the DPRK's nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States aims to **contribute to our understanding of messaging**. It focuses on the first dimension of public messaging—the DPRK's messaging activities—and introduces a process-oriented understanding of messaging (unlike the existing scholarship, which is more outcome-oriented and focused on the credibility and effectiveness of messaging, in particular on cost mechanisms) (Gartzke et al. 2017). Even though it represents an extreme case, the DPRK highlights the extent to which nuclear messaging by authoritarian states can be a key means of inter-state bargaining. The need for information in such contexts forms an entry point for other states who seek to influence their rivals through the strategic presentation of information. While such communication provides clues about the messaging state's strategic calculus, it also aims to influence the target state's strategic calculus. Insofar as this thesis takes a narrow focus, limiting itself to the messaging efforts of a single country, a comprehensive assessment of messaging—one that takes into account interactions within the messaging state and between that state and its target audience—is a matter of future research (see Chapter 7).

Fourth, the following analysis of the DPRK's nuclear messaging seeks to **contribute to the diverse scholarship on communication and nuclear strategy**. Where much of the existing literature emphasizes the risks associated with communication and the need for secrecy in proliferation efforts (Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Debs and Monteiro 2016; Narang 2017; Whitlark and Mehta 2017, 2019), this study highlights the important role played by communication in nuclear proliferation. In this regard, this thesis aligns with research on proliferating states that communicate nuclear ambitions for coercive purposes, such as for virtual deterrence (Levite 2002) or in the context of negotiations (Kitano 2016; Park and Peh 2020), although to varying degrees of success (Volpe 2017, 2023). Similarly, the case of the DPRK illustrates the significance of the level of sophistication of a country's nuclear forces

and the communication thereof (Gartzke and Jo 2009; Gartzke et al. 2014, 2015; Early and Asal 2018). The DPRK's presented doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation show that, rather than being limited by crude nuclear capabilities (Horowitz 2017), the regime in Pyongyang has opted to develop diverse nuclear capabilities and would be willing to employ nuclear weapons early on and theater-wide in order to outbalance and deter the United States (Narang 2013, 2014; Powell 2015; Reinhard 2018).

The fifth and final takeaway pertains to the main finding of this thesis: that what the DPRK communicates through its public messaging is a **nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation**. Asymmetric escalation follows from its strategic messages of nuclear and regional escalation, of employing nuclear weapons early in a conflict and against regional counter-force targets. Assured escalation pertains to Pyongyang's strategic messages that it is determined and able to unleash this asymmetric escalation, even in contingencies given pre-determined orders and diverse nuclear forces with a probability of surviving partially. Notably, the most recent scholarship on the DPRK's nuclear strategy has arrived at a similar conclusion, finding that the regime in Pyongyang has developed a posture of asymmetric escalation (Narang 2014; Kim Dong-hyeon 2019; Panda 2020). Researchers both past and present have ascribed diverse doctrines and postures to the regime's nuclear weapons program, from catalytic postures (Narang 2014; Smith 2015) to assured retaliation (Chung et al 2017; Lee and Alexandrova 2021) and strategic ambiguity (Cho and Petrovics 2022). What this thesis shows, however, is that the DPRK's nuclear messaging and communicated nuclear doctrine have remained consistent over time. While it has adjusted its messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity in terms of delivery, increasing the authoritativeness, content specificity, and context specificity of its messaging over time, the nuclear doctrine communicated via these messages suggests a strategic calculus at the heart of which is a rational consideration of the DPRK's strategic advantages and disadvantages, including a consideration of which capabilities and employment tactics might (out)balance the capabilities and operational plans of the United States and its allies, the ROK and Japan. The fundamental purpose of such messaging is deterrence and maintaining the status quo in the region – although non-exclusive, additional purposes are discussed in Chapter 6.2.

In addition to these five takeaways, Chapter 7.1 outlines **policy recommendations** how the United States and allies can manage risks of intended or unintended escalation by the regime in Pyongyang, including by strengthening allied early warning and defense capabilities deployed in the region as well as by sharing information about military exercises, missile test launches, and other relevant strategic assets. Lastly, this thesis is meant as a first effort to understanding nuclear messaging and what the DPRK tells about its nuclear weapons program and policy. To build off from this effort and to understand Pyongyang's nuclear messaging more comprehensively, Chapter 7.2 outlines three **fields for future research**: how nuclear messaging changed before and over the course of nuclear proliferation phases;

what role internal and external audiences as well as audience overlap play; how nuclear messaging changes when counter-messaging, interaction, learning is considered.

1.4 Thesis Structure

The next and **second chapter** sets out the theoretical basis of this thesis, outlining the conceptual framework of its analysis. The author got inspired by the literature on signaling, but understand that signaling is not a communication strategy, but the product of the target state's reading of the sending state's conscious and unconscious behavior. The following conceptual framework thus seeks to reconcile the fact that messaging is a communication strategy and subtype of signaling, that messages can inform the target state when scanning for signals. Messaging can be informative, but it can falter at the level of understanding and credibility. This also pertains to signaling. What sets messaging apart from signaling, however, is that this credibility dilemma is further intensified by the strategic purposiveness of messaging. This threefold complexity also extends to messaging about nuclear weapons (development) programs and to messaging by authoritarian states. This informs the discussion of the DPRK's strategic messages in Chapter 5.

Analyzing messaging requires clarity with regard to both method and the subject of investigation. **Chapter 3** sheds further light on the thesis's choice of focus—i.e. the DPRK's nuclear messaging, admittedly an extreme case that is conducive to exploration rather than generalization—as well as the rich corpus of primary materials. This chapter also outlines the thesis's integration of quantitative and qualitative content analysis, as well as how to distinguish between noisy and strategic messages.

The **fourth chapter** introduces the empirical part of this thesis. It outlines the political context for the DPRK's nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States, which is crucial for distinguishing messaging that has a strategic purpose from the white noise of the regime's communication, and thus noisy from strategic messages. This chapter examines the extensive stage-setting that precedes the regime's public messaging, including its definition of the conflict with the United States and its rationale for building and maintaining nuclear weapons. The stated purpose of the DPRK's nuclear weapons is discussed in Chapter 6.

The **fifth chapter** outlines the DPRK's nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States. It discusses noisy and strategic messages, highlighting messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity as two sets of strategic messages that are fundamental to the regime's nuclear weapons development program and policy, and share corresponding information. Messages of nuclear resolve, particularly of nuclear martyrdom and nuclear command and control in contingencies, form the basis of the regime's nuclear messaging. They seek to project the DPRK's abilities and willingness to wage nuclear war against the United States. The regime's messages of operational clarity convey the DPRK's capabilities and employment plans, emphasizing the regime's readiness for nuclear and regional escalation.

This chapter also outlines how consistent Pyongyang's nuclear messaging has remained over the course of four subcases.

Chapter 6 discusses what we can learn from the DPRK's messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity. It clarifies that the regime in Pyongyang seeks to manipulate perceived risks of conflict for the United States, that it tries to make escalation predictable for purposes of deterrence, and that it communicates a nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation. This provides clues as to the DPRK's strategic calculus, in particular the extent to which the regime is seeking to manage perceptions of asymmetry at the level of capabilities, information, and stakes to its advantage.

The **seventh chapter** concludes with key takeaways and recommendations for scholars and policymakers. These touch on issues such as how to approach authoritarian nuclear messaging and propaganda, recent developments in our understanding of messaging, and public communication by emerging nuclear-armed states. It also outlines policy recommendations for managing risks of escalation by the DPRK (whether deliberate or inadvertent). The chapter closes by suggesting three fields for future research that build on this thesis and could help to gain a more comprehensive understanding of messaging by looking at messaging across proliferation phases, at the interplay of internal and external audiences, or counter-messaging, interaction, and learning.

Chapter 7 is followed by a detailed **bibliography** that lists all references to secondary literature and by **appendices** that list all cited primary materials, as well as the coding scheme used in this thesis.

2. Understanding Public Messaging

“Signaling” is a term that is often used in political commentary. Yet the colloquial use of the term stands in contrast to how the academic literature theorizes signaling: **Signaling involves strategies**, but is not a strategy of communication in and of itself. Instead, **states can choose to publicly message** with words and behavior from which their counterparts retrieve signals and thereby consciously or unconsciously shared information. Messaging is therefore an element to signaling, the part of strategic communication and provision of information that can be analyzed by parsing the sending state’s communication. The literature on signaling inspired this conceptual framework for messaging. Public messaging is hence a straight-forward subject for analysis; doing so can lay the groundwork for future research to comprehensively understand messaging and signaling (see Chapter 7).

Public messaging can serve as a source of information and as an essential part of inter-state bargaining. Yet **messaging’s informative potential is stuck within a threefold complexity**: As states seek information about their environment (including their adversaries) in order to better navigate the international system, messaging can serve as an **input for their strategic calculus**. Given the nature of IR and the prevalence of worst-case assumptions, however, states are likely to **question the content and credibility** of the available information. Furthermore, states are incentivized to both **exploit** the informative potential of messaging as an opportunity to influence their adversaries’ quest for information, and thereby to indeed question the content and credibility of available information.

This threefold complexity is even harder at play when considering **public messaging about nuclear weapons**—assuming that nuclear capabilities matter particularly in bargaining contexts between adversaries—and **by authoritarian states**—considering their interest and means to shape information about themselves. Nevertheless, analyzing public nuclear messages by the DPRK is a worthwhile analytical endeavor and also “what the subjects we study [are] doing” (Kydd 2005, 25). States must operate and make decisions in contexts of incomplete and ambiguous information (Debs and Monteiro 2014). Over time, collecting information allows states to learn, improve their estimates, and thereby better manage structural uncertainty (Tetlock 1991; Rathbun 2007). Similarly, a “systematic review of [the DPRK’s communication], read critically and in context, can narrow our uncertainty” (McEachern 2018, 5).

The next section explains what this author means with the threefold complexity that is at play when it comes to messaging in bargaining contexts between adversaries. This conceptual framework is inspired by the existing scholarship on signaling, but

complemented by messaging's dimension of strategically wanting to provide certain information. Section 2.2 discusses how this complexity is intensified in the context of bargaining with nuclear weapons, when states message about their nuclear weapons (development) programs and their adversaries try to garner reliable information. Lastly, Section 2.3 applies this complexity to the particularities of authoritarian states, how and why particular regime types engage in messaging.

2.1 Informative Potential

Public messages can be the most direct and readily available source of information on the international stage, since states frequently issue nonverbal and verbal messages with a view to strategically sharing information and prevailing in a bargaining situation.⁸ What distinguishes messaging as a phenomenon is its ability to provide strategically relevant information, which sets it apart from other, noisy forms of communication (as Chapter 3.1 outlines in detail). Information is strategically relevant to the target audience if it serves as a **direct input for the target state's strategic calculus**.⁹ While a multitude of factors can play a role in this regard, three categories of information in particular are fundamental to a state's strategic calculus generally: information about the messaging state's capabilities, intentions, and the extent of its knowledge of the target state. If the messaging state includes information (or clues) about these three categories, its messages will be directly relevant to the target state's strategic calculus (Glaser 2010, 3–6). Messaging then becomes strategically relevant, where “strategy” is understood as a “rational, conscious, artful kind of behavior aimed at trying to ‘win’ a contest” (Schelling 1960, 3).

⁸ There are a number of different such pathways and sources of information, such as a state's past behavior and reputation (Freedman 2004; Lupton 2020) or past experiences and interactions (Crescenzi, Kathman, and Long 2007; Sechser 2018).

⁹ Information is central to IR and particularly critical in contexts of bargaining, but the lack and nature of available information are the principal drivers of uncertainty in IR. While perfect information is unattainable, states seek better information in order to navigate their environment and particularly relations with adversaries. In fact, seeking information is a rationally necessary endeavor in which states must continuously engage: higher levels of information are useful for states to the extent that they increase their chances of better managing given and inevitable uncertainties. Classical and offensive realists remain pessimistic about the ability of information to significantly mitigate the uncertainties of the international system (Mearsheimer 2009, 244). While differing with regard to the specific mechanisms at play, defensive and Bayesian realists, as well as other rationalist and game theoretic positions, argue that uncertainty is manageable and that information can have significant positive effects, such as on states' ability to draw inferences (Tetlock 1991; Rathbun 2007; Glaser 1994, 2010).] Rationalist schools of thought agree that uncertainty is a prevalent structural characteristic of IR and that it can never be fully avoided. States are generally uncertain about their environments (e.g., actions and information structures) and other actors (e.g., their beliefs and preferences, in particular states' intentions and future actions) (Lake and Powell 1999, 6–13), yet information can help states to orient themselves, providing them with points of reference when assessing their environment, including their own capabilities and position relative to others (Schelling 1960, 100; Rose 1998, 149). Collecting information in this context is about maximizing the expected utility of available resources and making the best of educated guesses (Bueno de Mesquita and Lalman 1992, 40–41; Mearsheimer 2009, 244) with a view to facilitating “convergence on correct beliefs” over time (Kydd 2005, 19). As self-interested actors, states seek information to safeguard their security and to navigate the international system to the best of their ability (Glaser 2003, 268–269; Lantis and Beasley 2018, 188). Purposive behavior is connected to instrumental rationality; states aim to collect and assess information objectively while remaining conscious of their epistemological limits and the impossibility of true objectivity (Tetlock 1991).

Information is fundamental to states as they craft their strategies regarding “what to do and how to do it” (Roberts 2020, 27).¹⁰ Rather than focusing on the complex scholarship on strategy, this thesis follows a “strategic choice” approach that uses the term “strategic calculus” to describe how states choose their courses of action. The strategic choice approach presumes that state behavior is purposive, driven by self-interest, instrumental rationality, and the aim of maximizing expected utility (Lake and Powell 1999, 6–7; Ayson 2008, 562). It assumes that states “search for the optimum relationship between political ends and the means available for obtaining them” (Freedman 1998, 15), making at least a reasonable effort to compile and compare courses of action and choosing the best (available) strategy for achieving self-defined goals and interests.¹¹

While information is a key input for strategic calculations and decision-making, outcomes depend on many other variables, including other states’ moves (Morrow 1999, 85). State interactions provide states with crucial information but also illustrate the dynamic nature of the strategic setting in which states develop their strategic calculi (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 37; Waltz 1979, 226; Lake and Powell 1999, 3; Freedman 2003, 172–173; Glaser 2010, 23). This thesis understands messaging as part of an interaction between states, but chooses to focus on the **first sequence or rather dimension of messaging**, namely the messaging state’s messages (see Chapter 3), leaving the analysis of interaction for future research (see Chapter 7).

“**Bargaining**” here refers to a process marked by conflict and continuous haggling—by the coordination of conflicting interests (Fearon 1998, 275), with or without formal negotiations or direct communication (Odell 2012, 381). Inter-state bargaining comprises the two commingled activities of searching for information and influencing the bargaining counterpart or outcome, which can take the form of a range of verbal and nonverbal communicative actions (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 38). Such communication can influence the receiving state directly or indirectly, such as by shaping the audience’s beliefs and perceptions regarding the messaging state (Jervis 1970; Lewis and Schultz 2003, 348). When the messaging context is one of **bargaining among adversaries**, the stakes are increased, as is the relevance of the rival states’ strategic calculi. Adversarial bargaining contexts are thus vital to the respective states; the outcomes in such cases will depend on the states involved, their strategic situation, and their relative standing in the international system (Waltz 1979, 61).

The bargaining context shapes not only why information matters, but also how information matters: Assuming that the messaging state sends clear public messages, its target audience

¹⁰ Information is thus invaluable in this continuous endeavor to calculate options and accurately assess the strategic setting in which states operate. Structural factors such as geography, resources, abilities, and constraints are not static, but their value may change in line with knowledge about other actors and their preferences, beliefs, capabilities, and motives (Narizny 2017, 160). Moreover, the general information structure of the international environment—i.e. the availability and character of information—and the amount of information held by other states are essential aspects of the strategic setting in which states operate (Lake and Powell 1999, 9–12; Glaser 2010).

¹¹ Rather than examining which goals are more likely to drive state behavior, this thesis is based on the understanding that state existence and/or survival is what primarily motivates state behavior. Without state survival, other interests are void (Waltz 1979; Rose 1998; Lake 2008).

could, nevertheless, not receive or understand, misinterpret or not believe these messages. In fact, the target audience has reasons to question information shared in public messages given the bargaining context and the messaging state's probable intentions of influencing through information sharing. This thesis runs on the assumption that parsing a state's public messaging is, nevertheless, worthwhile and that messaging states are aware of these caveats from the target state's point of view. Hence, the author has developed **expectations of how the messaging state might adjust its messaging to mitigate these caveats** and make the most out of the strategic provision of information from its perspective. These are outlined at the end of following sections and taken up again when discussing how the DPRK messages vis-à-vis the United States (in Chapter 5 and 6).

2.1.1 Content and credibility

The informative potential of messaging is limited by issues of content and credibility. This thesis does not set out to test the reception, credibility, or costliness of the DPRK's nuclear messaging (a suggestion for future research on messaging in interaction, see Chapter 7.2), but assumes the messaging state to address this caveat with a view to getting its intended messages across. As a form of interaction and part of signaling, both sides of this equation, the messaging state and the target audience, shape the effectiveness of messaging. The **messaging state cannot fully control whether the target state will receive its messaging and how it will understand it**. The existing scholarship on signaling and messaging pays less attention to the issue of content than to the issue of credibility: systemic incentives and pre-existing biases undermine the value, to the target state, of the transmitted information. Yet the messaging state can anticipate such issues and adjust its messaging with a view to increasing credibility and the likelihood of understanding. This endeavor by the messaging state cannot fully remove problems related to content and credibility, however, since the target state's perception and interpretation of (tailored) messages remains beyond the messaging state's control.

The **content** transmitted by the messaging state does not always reach the target audience as it might have been intended. Ideally, messaging will consist of clear (non-ambiguous) and persistent messages that the target audience receives and understands (Gartzke et al. 2017, 10–11; Weinberger 2003, 87–88). The reception of messages and their acknowledgement as messages and as relevant cannot be taken for granted: “the **communications system is noisy**” (Jervis 1970, 123–124), and “a signal must compete for attention” and can “easily be missed if it is not recognized as a significant deviation from the norm” (Lebow 1985, 206). IR abounds with state actions and interactions that may or may not communicate information. In addition, since they speak different languages and operate in different cultural contexts, states do not always understand content, symbols, and meanings as they were intended to be understood (Jervis 1985; Lebow 1985).

Moreover, *what* the target audience understands also cannot be taken for granted. Assuming the target state receives and recognizes the messaging state's messages, just what information it derives from these messages and how it assesses and values that information lies solely in the target state's hands. Whatever happens after the sending of messages is beyond the control of the messaging state. What the target state learns from messaging and **what meaning it attaches to the acquired information is an inherently subjective matter**—a default that is also illustrated by the security dilemma (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 38; Müller 2012, 611). Cognitive approaches to IR outline the many factors that influence how the target state perceives and interprets the messaging state's messages, from cognitive limitations such as bounded rationality and false consciousness, to dogmatic ideology and motivated biases, to unmotivated biases, cognitive predispositions, and misperceptions (Jervis 1976, 1985, 18–25; Lake and Powell 1999, 30–31). In adversarial inter-state relationships, there is **even less common ground for joint understanding** and overlapping perceptions. The tendency to confirm existing perceptions and worst-case assumptions is then presumably stronger (Scharpf 1989, 19; Slantchev 2011; Müller 2002, 372; Mercer 2013, 224).¹² Generally, the history of experiences and the nature of state relations influence how messages are understood (Quek 2016, 927).

Even if it receives the intended content, the target state is likely to question the credibility of the conveyed information. Rationalist IR assumptions outline two key caveats that undermine the (present and future) validity and value of this information: First, states have an **incentive to misrepresent the situation**. Misrepresenting certain information can simply be a tactical move in bargaining contexts, allowing states to exploit information asymmetry and to profit from a monopoly on information (Lebow 1985, 211; Fearon 1995, 381; Powell 2006, 170). Deception, bluffing, and exaggeration are not uncommon in contexts of inter-state bargaining (Slantchev 2010). Complete misrepresentation does not always lead to favorable outcomes and can indeed entail immediate costs, such as escalation (Slantchev 2005), or future costs, such as unintended reputational consequences (Sartori 2002, 2005). The **selective misrepresentation of information may then be a middle-ground tactic for maximizing utility and mitigating unintended outcomes**. In general, the genuineness of the available information is a constant issue for states (Mearsheimer 2001, 31; Müller 2002, 373–374; Wohlforth 2008, 135).

Second, the **shadow of the future** undermines the significance of information gleaned from credible sources in the present, as its validity could change in the future (Glaser 2010, 57–58; Jervis 2017, 116). States have different time horizons and attach different time-bound values to goals, actions, and outcomes (Haynes 2019); their intentions and strategies are not set in stone and can change over time (Glaser 2010, 57–58; Jervis 2017, 116; Kim Tongfi

¹² Research on the “unintended” consequences of signaling outline how signaling between adversaries can fuel escalation spirals through competing projections of resolve, power, and advantage (Özyurt 2014, 251; Schultz 2012; Kang 2019, 199) and increase the risk of warfighting (Slantchev 2005). Defensive realists thus call for the need to link negative and positive inducements explicitly in signaling, combining elements of reassurance with demonstrations of resolve in order to mitigate escalation and the risk of war (Glaser 2010, 99).

2014). Generally, and inevitably, the present provides more information about the past than the future; messaging thus enables target states to evaluate the past and the present, allowing them to predict (to a limited extent) the future (Kydd 2005, 25). This time dimension intensifies uncertainty and sets **limits on the validity of the information gleaned**, even if it is deemed to be genuine.

Although there is little that can fully remove these systemic incentives to selectively misrepresent the facts and to temper one's credulity, rationalist scholars theorize that **costliness** plays a role in determining the credibility of messages. Generally, what is at stake in this regard are the material and immaterial costs that the messaging state incurs in the process of messaging and/or as a result. In some instances, not only the extent of the (material, measurable) costs but also their nature and (ir-)reversibility speak to a message's credibility, distinguishing it from non-credible commitments and bluffing (Schelling 1966, 150). For example, Bayesian realists, defensive realists, and offensive-defensive theorists link the choice to proceed with costly messages to state motivations, arguing that certain state types are more likely to accept certain costs.¹³ The literature on messaging contains numerous discussions on different cost mechanisms, which can roughly be divided into *ex ante* costs and *ex post* costs.

Ex ante costs are costs that the messaging state pays upfront or in the process of messaging. Also called **sunk costs** (Fearon 1997; Schultz 2012), these are commonly material costs that the messaging state incurs in the present through taking action within the scope of messaging. The sinking of costs is relatively common and easy to understand.¹⁴ Particularly if very costly and difficult to reverse, sunk costs can also lend credibility to messaging for the near future (Fearon 1997, 70). Yet, sunk costs communicate commitment, but do not necessarily commit as they do not alter *ex post* payoffs. Included under the category of **ex ante costs** for increasing the credibility of intended messages are military build-ups and mobilizations, international market distortions, and economic sanctions for messages of resolve (e.g. Gartzke, Li, and Boehmer 2001; Morrow 2000; Glaser 1994; Slantchev 2005), as well as forward-deployed nuclear weapons and policy coordination for messages of assurance to allies (Morrow 1994, 2000; Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014).

The messaging state incurs **ex post costs** if its messaging fails, which means that it needs to project the credibility of its messages into the future by remaining consistent and adhering to its conveyed content (Fearon 1994, 579–581, 1997, 70). At base, *ex post* cost mechanisms compare messaging to public commitments issued by the messaging state and can involve both material and immaterial costs if such commitments are broken. Examples include

¹³ Rationalist assumptions suggest that revisionist states opt to appear status-quo seeking rather than outlining their aggressive motives and thereby triggering constraining responses (Jervis 1976; Fearon 1997; Kertzer 2016). Nevertheless, revisionist states are unlikely to bear costs that significantly endanger their ability to pursue their revisionist goals, such as unilateral arms control commitments (Schelling 1960; Fearon 1997; Jervis 2002; Kydd 2005; Slantchev 2005; Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018).

¹⁴ Quek (2016) challenges this common assumption and shows in his experimental study that the logic and perception of sunk costs does not apply to signalers and receivers systematically.

different forms of hand-tying alliance commitments that deter adversaries from attacking (Johnson and Lee 2011; McManus and Yarhi-Milo 2017). While the analogy of **tying** the messaging state's **hands** reflects the general mechanism of *ex post* costs, scholars have focused on **audience costs** that are based on specific *ex post* cost mechanisms: Reputational costs may not involve material costs, but they incentivize states to “mean” what they message (Sartori 2002, 2005; Crescenzi, Kathman, and Long 2007; Sechser 2018; Lupton 2020). For example, having a reputation for bluffing or weakness can significantly weaken a messaging state's future bargaining position (Fearon 1997, 70; Kertzer and Butger 2016, 6–7). Domestic audience costs acknowledge the role that domestic audiences (or constituencies) can play in international politics, here in terms of tying leaders' hands to adhere to publicly made commitments via messaging (Fearon 1994, 577; Sartori 2005, 10).¹⁵ Yet the logic of domestic audience costs rests on domestic institutional structures and the ability to impose material or immaterial costs on leaders (Kertzer and Butger 2016; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018; Hyde and Saunders 2020); the effectiveness of domestic audience costs increases with the presence of accountability chains and the degree of the leadership's sensitivity to constituencies (Smith 1998; Özyurt 2014, 250).

Costliness can increase the likelihood that the target state will perceive messages as credible. Costs do not determine the function of messages and cannot completely resolve issues related to content and credibility, however. **Costly messages are not silver bullets**, and their intended effectiveness comes with two caveats: First, a systemic incentive to misrepresent and to assume the worst rather than the best remains. As the scholarly discussion of how to reliably distinguish states with revisionist motives from those with benign motives shows, costliness adds a level of complexity to how the target state assesses the information it draws from the messaging state. Ungovernable aspects of behavior and unintended communication over which the messaging state has no control (and of which it may not be aware) lend greater credibility to words (Goffman 1959; Jervis 1970, 27). Moreover, the discussion of costly messaging does not address states' bias towards pre-existing assumptions. Second, the target state may not perceive or understand the cost mechanisms as intended by the messaging state. It cannot be taken for granted that the messaging state and the target state will share a common understanding of cost mechanisms, particularly if mechanisms like domestic audience costs require substantial knowledge about the messaging state's domestic politics (Mercer 2012, 403). Furthermore, issues related to observability and measurability limit the effectiveness of costly messaging: *ex ante* costs, particularly if they involve sensitive military information, are not necessarily

¹⁵ Scholars oppose the narrow argument that domestic audiences sanction leaders primarily for inconsistency, arguing that domestic audiences have actual preferences in terms of content and context and punish leaders for inappropriate policies rather than empty threats (Snyder and Borghard 2011; Trachtenberg 2012; Debs and Weiss 2014; Kertzer and Butger 2015). The majority of the criticism refers to the scant empirical evidence on the role of domestic audience costs (Snyder and Borghard 2011; Trachtenberg 2012); only Partell and Palmer (1999) appear to support the argument with a large-N empirical test.

observable; *ex post* costs are difficult to measure and observe if based on future immaterial costs that may never arise (Schultz 2001; Brown and Marcum 2011; Gartzke and Lupu 2012). Finally, “**costless**” messages can be meaningful depending on the actors and bargaining context. The aforementioned cost mechanisms are based on the public nature of messaging and the costs involved. Yet diplomatic messaging is often private, not meant for broader (domestic or international) audiences (Sagan and Suri 2003; Trager 2011; Baum 2004; Stasavage 2004; Carson and Yarhi-Milo 2017). Diplomatic messaging can be more informative, constructive, and thus effective in a bargaining context (Kydd 2003; Sagan and Suri 2003; Kurizaki 2007; Baum 2004). Such private messaging is likely to still involve material and immaterial costs, making the relevant distinction that between front-stage messaging and offstage or backstage messaging (Carson and Yarhi-Milo 2017).

A state that actively engages in public messaging can thus be assumed to be aware of these caveats, that issues of content and credibility exist, and these can be mitigated through costliness mechanisms only to some extent. Yet, it can be expected that issuing messages with **high degrees of clarity and detail** helps to alleviate fundamental issues of content. Furthermore, **high degrees of consistency** can help to build a reputation and thereby mitigate issues of credibility over time.

2.1.2 Influence and leverage

Its potential as a source of information enables messaging to serve as a strategy by which the messaging state can influence the target state. The **aim of influencing the target state’s strategic calculus is likely why the messaging state engages in messaging** in the first place. Influencing through providing information is not necessarily straightforward, however: the messaging state can choose to provide ambiguous or befuddling information. Maintaining a monopoly on information about itself, using this information asymmetry, and manipulating (perceived) uncertainty is likely to be of greater strategic value to the messaging state than simply presenting information in its messaging.

The messaging state issues messages not for the altruistic sake of enlightening its target audience but as a means of realizing its own interests: “As all actors know, signals are issued mainly to influence the receiver’s image of the sender” (Jervis 1970, 18). This context both gives rise to certain caveats attached to messaging and determines the purpose and relevance of messaging: messaging serves dual and **interlinked purposes for both the messaging state and the target state**, addressing the target state’s quest for information and influencing its strategic calculus (Morrow 1999; Bemelmans-Videc, Rist, and Vedung 2017). This duality of purpose aligns with the dual and commingled activities that are at the heart of inter-state bargaining, namely information search and influence (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 38). The messaging state thus issues messages intentionally and in the context

of bargaining with the target state, with a view to influencing the latter's strategic calculus and shaping the outcome (Morrow 1999; Gartzke et al. 2017).¹⁶

Clear and consistent messages are ideals (Gartzke et al. 2017, 10–11; Weinberger 2003, 87–88). On the one hand, the messaging state can *unintentionally* confound its target state: “mixed” messages incorporate multiple messages, suggesting multiple and potentially opposing directions of interpretation (Quek 2016, 927). While the combination of negative and positive inducements is common and inherently complementary in coercive communication, such messaging of multiple contents tends to aggravate the abovementioned issues of content and credibility (Wszolek 2007; Kydd and McManus 2017). Moreover, communication in IR is relatively noisy by default, involving multiple messaging states, target audiences, and other forms of communication. This **inherent noisiness can be unintentionally confusing** and can distract the target state, preventing it from properly receiving and understanding messaging attempts (Jervis 1970, 123–126).

On the other hand, the messaging state can *intentionally* confuse its target state. It may do so for different tactical purposes: First, the messaging state may aim to distract the target state with **noisy messaging**. It can tailor its messaging to boost quantity rather than quality, repeating information that the target state already knows; in this way, it will satisfy the target state's desire for information only on the surface, withholding new information and adding to the existing noisiness. Second, the messaging state can aim to confuse the target state with **befuddling messaging**. Befuddlement refers to an “overabundance of simultaneous signals carrying contradictory messages” (Yarhi-Milo 2014, 1). Here, mixed, contradictory messages are consciously chosen, leaving the target state with various opposing strands of evidence. Third, the messaging state can broaden the scope for interpretation with **ambiguous messaging**. Ambiguity here refers to messaging that provides strategically relevant clues that come with a substantial amount of leeway in terms of how they are to be understood. Ambiguous messaging aims to increase the messaging state's room for maneuver, allowing it to adjust the meaning of its messaging in hindsight (Jervis 1970, 126).¹⁷ These elements—noisiness, befuddlement, and ambiguity—are not mutually exclusive; they overlap to some extent but aim to pinpoint three distinct purposes. Issuing noisy, befuddling, ambiguous messages should still be expected depending on the purpose the messaging state seeks to achieve with each respective message. At the same time, however, if the messaging state issues only noisy, befuddling, ambiguous messages, then the target state is likely to increase the degree to which it questions the messaging state's shared

¹⁶ A significant strand of the literature outlines how signaling can influence whether a negotiated agreement will be possible and more beneficial than warfighting (Fearon 1994; Slantchev 2005, 2010; Schultz 2012; Levy 2012).

¹⁷ In high stakes bargaining contexts such as conflicts involving the potential use of force, messaging is “often notoriously ambiguous” (Freedman 2004, 28). Consciously managing levels of ambiguity relates to manipulating levels of perceived uncertainty: the messaging state can thereby maintain both maneuverability and its monopoly on information about itself. It can use this information asymmetry to unsettle the target state's level of knowledge to its advantage, thereby increasing its relative power and leverage (Zartman and Rubin 2000, 277–284; McKibben 2015, 18; Janusch 2018, 224). Receiving strategically relevant but “incomplete” clues as input for its strategic calculus can unsettle the target state.

information. In sync with mitigating issues of content and credibility, **higher degrees of clarity, detail, and consistency** are more likely to get the message across to the target state.

2.2 Nuclear Messaging

Nuclear messaging is often described as an epiphenomenon, although **communication is essential** to nuclear weapons politics, particularly **when it comes to instances of coercion** such as deterrence. Nuclear messaging refers here to purposive messages *about* the messaging state's nuclear weapons (development) program, with a view to influencing the target state's strategic calculus, including verbal and nonverbal communication about nuclear capabilities, development, and deployment plans.¹⁸ Notably, the threefold complexity of messaging is intensified in nuclear messaging between adversaries. Nuclear capabilities make a difference for both the messaging state and its adversary, the target state. While the adversary seeks information about the messaging state's nuclear weapons (development) program to update its strategic calculus, sharing information about its nuclear weapons (development) program is central to the coercion exercised by the messaging state, including for the purposes of deterring the target state. The **proliferating or nuclear-armed state thus has an incentive to message** and share strategically relevant information about its (potential future) nuclear capabilities; at the same time, however, the messaging state aims to maintain military secrecy and strike a balance between clarity and ambiguity in threat-making. This inherent duality further complicates issues related to content and credibility. Furthermore, nuclear messaging is undertaken for strategic purposes, such as coercion and prevailing in bargaining situations, which shape the choice and form of nuclear messages.

Many states, particularly those that built nuclear weapons, believe that **nuclear weapons make a difference** in IR.¹⁹ The scholarship on nuclear weapons is rich, focusing on why and how states pursue nuclear weapons and on the difference nuclear weapons make to foreign policy, conflict propensity, and the international system.²⁰ While the extent of their effects remains the subject of ongoing discussion, the existence of nuclear weapons impacts both the possessor state's and its adversary's strategic calculus, analogously to "atomic queens"

¹⁸ This conceptualization is relatively broad. Other scholars and political commentators commonly use the term "nuclear signaling" synonymously with "nuclear saber-rattling," in the sense of threatening the employment of nuclear weapons, as in the Cuban Missile Crisis and other past examples (Price 2007, 106) or the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (Gressel 2022).

¹⁹ Nuclear weapons matter to international politics, although they have not been employed as military weapons since 1945 (Gartzke and Kroenig 2014). Nevertheless, significant methodological challenges impede a clear and comprehensive understanding of nuclear statecraft, strategy, and its effects, as these are simply more logical than empirical (Jervis 1989, 23; Gavin 2014, 17–19, 2018, 10–11).

²⁰ The scholarship on nuclear weapons is, of course, not univocal on the differences nuclear weapons make to conflict propensity and international stability. Some theorists argue that they have destabilizing implications (Sagan 1995), while others maintain that they are stabilizing (Mearsheimer 1984; Gaddis 1987; Waltz 1990, 1995; Asal and Beardsley 2007). Others still argue that they have only insignificant (Gartzke and Jo 2007, 2011; Sechser and Fuhrmann 2017) or no relevant effects (Mueller 1988; Tannenwald 2005, 2007). While there is much more to be read and reviewed on systemic dynamics, this thesis draws upon literature that discusses the role of nuclear weapons in states' foreign policy and bargaining behavior.

in a game of inter-state chess (Nitze 1956). Nuclear weapons, even in their crudest technological form (Horowitz 2017), have been used as tools for pursuing political objectives (Bell 2021).²¹ The term "nuclear weapons" commonly refers to weapon systems that turn fissile materials into explosive devices and are capable of mass destruction and harm through releasing heat and radiation. The different compositions and designs of nuclear warheads, combined with sophisticated delivery vehicles and launch systems, operationalize the accurate and remote destruction of targets at immense speed. Nuclear weapons have thus changed the nature of warfare and related decision-making processes, including the control and sequence of events, "the relation of victor to vanquished, and the relation of homeland to fighting front" (Schelling 1966, 23), impeding "the capacity to think and reflect while war is in progress" (Schelling 1973, 204). The development, acquisition, and possession of nuclear weapons thus matters to states, projecting (potential future) military capabilities and impacting the strategic calculi of both the proliferating or possessing state and its adversary.

To the extent that war is an extension of politics, nuclear weapons are a means of achieving political objectives (Jervis 1989, 226–227). In fact, scholars and policymakers alike emphasize that the "use" of nuclear weapons refers not only to their military employment but also, or rather, to their political use. The potential consequences of military use include political mechanisms (Bell 2021, 10–11) that de-emphasize the actual use of force and **emphasize the threat of employing nuclear weapons**. Nuclear weapons have thus "revolutionized" conflicts between nuclear-armed states, turning them into **competitions in risk-taking** below the threshold of nuclear warfighting (Schelling 1966; Jervis 1984; Powell 1990, 2015; Panda 2020).

This thesis focuses on a bargaining context that includes two nuclear-armed adversaries with very different sets of capabilities and stakes involved in the conflict at hand. While the scholarship on the nuclear revolution centers mostly on dyadic deterrence relationships between Cold War powers with enormous nuclear stockpiles and the specter of large-scale nuclear war, the aspect of **risk-taking** is also applicable to other adversarial relationships, including **power asymmetries involving significantly smaller nuclear arsenals**. To illustrate, scholars have argued that nuclear deterrence hinges on perceptions of uncertainty and risk, including regarding the type of harm caused by nuclear weapons employment and the probability of its occurrence (Lieber and Press 2006, 37–38; Gavin 2018, 9). Beyond massive retaliation and mutually assured destruction, smaller nuclear forces can issue deterrent threats of assured retaliation, asymmetric escalation, and similar postures that emphasize risk tolerance and the probability of nuclear weapons use (Narang 2022; Goldstein 2000, 42–46; Yoshihara and Holmes 2012).

²¹ China's official proliferation reasoning and nuclear strategy in the 1950s and 1960s reflected the basic logic that the mere existence of nuclear weapons deters aggressors (Tellis 2022, 13–14).

More specifically, this thesis delves into **how nuclear weapons feature in a nuclear-proliferating or nuclear-armed state's public communication**, as directed toward its adversary. Aspects of purposive communication with and about nuclear weapons are discussed in the scholarship on the coercive functions of nuclear weapons: threat-making requires communication that establishes the threat and outlines the demand and the consequences of (non-)compliance (Baldwin 1971). The mere existence of nuclear weapons or the possession of crude nuclear capabilities in and of itself establishes a relevant threat (Horowitz 2017). Insofar as the quantity and quality of a country's nuclear capabilities determines the level of threat (Kroenig 2010; Fuhrmann 2012; Early and Asal 2018), however, the nuclear-proliferating or nuclear-armed state has an **incentive to communicate such information** in messaging about its nuclear capabilities, motives, and level of knowledge of its adversary. Such information shapes the target state's strategic calculus and thereby enables coercion.

"Nuclear capabilities" refers here, broadly, to the sophistication of a country's nuclear warheads, its delivery vehicles, and its launch and control infrastructure. The messaging state can tailor its nuclear threats by outlining its motives for employing nuclear weapons, including information about its force structure and doctrine, operational tactics, and contingency planning. Furthermore, the messaging state can design its messages to include information about what it knows about the target state, including the latter's capabilities, motives, and level of knowledge. While messaging knowledge can be useful for a variety of reasons, connecting the parameters on both sides of the bargaining relationship also illustrates that the messaging state is **engaging in contingency planning in earnest**. While the effectiveness of nuclear coercion remains a matter of debate, it is safe to say that perceptions of threat and risk matter greatly when it comes to the success of coercive threats with nuclear weapons (Beardsley and Asal 2009).²²

Nuclear messaging can thus communicate, establish, and maintain the nuclear threat (and its associated risks) to the target audience for the purpose of strengthening the messaging state's bargaining position. Here, the messaging state has an **interest in clarifying its ability, readiness, and willingness to carry out its nuclear threats**, since the perceived level of resolve shapes both the adversary's understanding of the related costs and risks and its expectations about (future) behavior (Mercer 1998, 18). The scholarship has paid significant attention to the importance of resolve in nuclear weapons policy-shaping; messages of nuclear resolve are at the center of credibility and coercive functions, as will be discussed in the following two sections.

²² This thesis examines the design and logic of coercive threats in nuclear messaging. For discussions of the outcome and effectiveness of nuclear coercion, the existing scholarship offers insightful and contradictory findings. In theory, nuclear capabilities can be used as tools for political coercion (Beardsley and Asal 2009), yet empirical studies have confirmed this claim only when it comes to superior nuclear forces (Kroenig 2013) or only in relation to deterrent, not compellent, purposes (Gartzke and Jo 2009; Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Sechser and Fuhrmann 2017). Overall, conceptual disagreements and empirical challenges make it difficult to draw clear conclusions about the effectiveness of nuclear coercive threats (Gartzke and Kroenig 2014).

Yet equally relevant is the **communication of information on the pursuit and development**—the prospective possession—of nuclear capabilities. Nuclear proliferation often exhibits various aspects of nuclear messaging: a state that is interested or engaged in nuclear proliferation can advertise its intention to acquire nuclear capabilities (and thus to pose a nuclear threat in the future). This projection of nuclear ambitions and potential future capabilities is a form of military statecraft that has political objectives, changing “the terms of bargaining over the disputed issue(s)” (Sobek, Foster, and Robison 2012, 152). Nuclear messaging that communicates the threat of nuclear weapons development can thus strengthen the proliferating state’s bargaining position, helping it to gain concessions from the target state (Benson and Wen 2011; Volpe 2017, 2023; Park and Peh 2020). Nuclear proliferation is a process that comprises at least four different stages: from an initial stage of lacking a nuclear weapons development program, a state can proceed to the exploration, pursuit, and acquisition of nuclear weapons (Sobek, Foster, and Robison 2012). The **protracted process of nuclear proliferation involves different moments of bargaining**, as cost-benefit calculations by the proliferating state and the target state change throughout the process (Mattiacci and Jones 2016; Spaniel 2019). With a view to dissuading the target state from taking preventive measures against nuclear proliferation, such as strikes on nuclear facilities, the proliferating state can also aim to mitigate threat perceptions through its nuclear messaging (Debs and Monteiro 2014, 2).²³ Delving into this aspect of nuclear messaging over the course of all phases of proliferation is a matter for future research (Chapter 7.2) since this thesis only explores the DPRK’s nuclear messaging over the course of nuclear pursuit and acquisition.

Inherently, nuclear messaging strikes a balance between transparency and secrecy about military capabilities, between clarity and ambiguity in threat-making. The messaging state has an incentive to issue clear, informative messages about its nuclear weapons (development) program if that serves coercive purposes, yet it also has an incentive to refrain from issuing messages or to issue only ambiguous or deceptive messages so as to misrepresent information about its nuclear weapons (development) program. Such messaging exacerbates issues related to content and credibility in nuclear messaging, as the next sections show. It can be expected, nevertheless, that the messaging state tailors its messages to show that it has **thought-through the composition of its nuclear threats and the consequences** if its nuclear threats are not complied with.

2.2.1 Inherent credibility issues

Issues related to content and credibility impede nuclear messaging’s ability to serve as a source of information for the target state. The basic challenge inherent to messaging in general extends to nuclear messaging: whether nuclear messages are received and how they

²³ Scholars have also suggested that the target state can infer the existence of benign motives if the proliferating state opts for cooperation. Helfstein (2009), however, argues that inspections are cooperative activities but are insufficient for deducing intentions.

are understood lies beyond the messaging state's control. The **lack of a common language**, including in the field of nuclear weapons, and the **high degree of military ambiguity and secrecy** about nuclear weapons (development) programs further aggravate problems related to understanding nuclear messages. Nuclear weapons are both horrifying military means (the employment of which in modern warfare lacks justification and thereby credibility) and political weapons (the political effectiveness of which remains a matter of debate). Accordingly, the messaging state has multiple complimentary and contradictory reasons to bluff, exaggerate, and misrepresent, with a view to making its nuclear messaging more credible.

There is **no common language or vocabulary when it comes to nuclear weapons**. The five NPT nuclear weapon states²⁴ have established a dedicated "P5 Working Group on the Glossary of Key Nuclear Terms" to agree upon basic definitions of central terms (including "nuclear weapon"). Nuclear messaging suffers from a lack of common terms and ways of communicating, which sets the stage for simple miscommunication when it comes to receiving and understanding the content of otherwise clear nuclear messages. Communication about nuclear weapons reflects **country-specific language, elements, and perspectives**; archival work on the Cuban Missile Crisis, for instance, illustrates the ways in which the nuclear-armed adversaries failed to receive, understand, and accurately interpret each other's nuclear messages (Zegart 2012). The fact that the United States was surprised by China's involvement in the Korean War serves as a different historical example of how the target state (here the United States) can fail to receive (and apprehend) the messaging state's (here China's) messages of resolve to invade (Lampton 1973, 28).

As in the basic dilemma of messaging, what is learned from nuclear messaging depends on the target state and its interpretation of received nuclear messages. Significant cognitive factors, including bounded rationality, unmotivated and motivated biases, and cultural and psychological lenses, shape how states interpret given situations and available information. The subjectivity of interpretation can lead to substantive misunderstandings, for example about the status quo and challenges to it (Gavin 2018, 14–15) or whether certain capabilities and actions are defensive or offensive (Müller 2012, 611). **Understanding who is acting as the challenger and who as the defender** is often at the heart of disagreements at the level of conflict definition. It is important to note here that in messaging, the messaging state acts as the protagonist and commonly presents itself as defending itself against a belligerent antagonist. This also applies to the DPRK's nuclear messaging, as detailed in Chapter 4.

Nuclear messaging reinforces these basic content-related issues while also introducing specific dynamics: the messaging state has an incentive both to issue clear nuclear messages and to refrain from issuing messages (or to only issue ambiguous messages) about its

²⁴ The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) defines nuclear weapon states as having "manufactured and exploded a nuclear weapon or other nuclear explosive device prior to 1 January 1967" (NPT, Article IX). Therefore, this thesis describes China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States as NPT nuclear weapon states, whereas India, Israel, Pakistan, and the DPRK fall outside of this designation.

nuclear weapons (development) program. Nuclear weapons (development) programs are generally shrouded in **military secrecy, both internally and externally**. The pursuit and maintenance of nuclear capabilities requires scientific and military personnel and infrastructure, and nuclear forces are often separate from conventional military forces. The provision of information can assist adversaries in their intelligence-gathering efforts and can thus influence their responses. Possible responsive measures range from diplomatic and economic statecraft to the use of force. Both for and in contingencies, knowledge about nuclear force structure and related infrastructures can improve operational plans to destroy nuclear capabilities. Nuclear-armed states thus have a strong incentive to maintain a monopoly on information about their nuclear capabilities and related structures.

Similar incentives also drive **proliferating states to keep their nuclear weapons development efforts secret**. Counter-proliferation strategies include a number of different tools, including coercive economic, military, and political statecraft. Having access to information about an adversary's nuclear proliferation efforts is an asset when making calculations and choosing policy options aimed at impeding successful proliferation (Reiter 2006; Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Beardsley and Asal 2013). Most consequential in this regard, however, is substantive knowledge about the messaging state's nuclear weapons development program that enables and incentivizes the use of force. Particularly at the pursuit stage, in the interim between exploration and acquisition, the heightened risk of counter-proliferation strikes is of concern to proliferating states; once "acquisition is achieved, however, the risk of being targeted decreases" (Sobek, Foster, and Robison 2012, 149). The different stages of nuclear proliferation represent "closing windows of opportunity or opening windows of vulnerability" (Cha 2002, 19), driving consideration of military strikes as a means of stopping nuclear pursuits and preventing the successful acquisition of nuclear weapons (Mehta and Whitlark 2017; Whitlark and Mehta 2019). A lack of (or merely unreliable) information could impact an adversary's ability and willingness to risk military action (Debs and Monteiro 2014). Concealing one's nuclear proliferation strategies—exploring and pursuing pathways to nuclear weapons under maximum secrecy—may be cost intensive, but it can also come with many benefits (Narang 2017, 2021).

At the same time, nuclear-proliferating and nuclear-armed states also have an incentive to share information about their nuclear weapons (development) programs given their **strategic value in inter-state bargaining**. Concerned adversaries are likely to trigger intelligence-gathering efforts at the first clue of potential nuclear weapons development programs. In anticipation, nuclear-proliferating and nuclear-armed states can choose to shape their adversaries' knowledge through nuclear messaging and thereby **aim to maintain their monopoly on available relevant information**. Nuclear messaging aims to strike a balance between transparency and secrecy and between clarity and ambiguity. Clear and informative messages can establish credible threats (e.g. for the purposes of deterrence);

ambiguous or befuddling messages can generate uncertainty about the available information and related inferences (e.g. for the purposes of undermining contingency planning). Nuclear messaging hinge on bargaining communication, as the next section (“Performing Nuclear Risks”) will elaborate.

More advanced weapons—including more advanced ways to use them—present greater threats. This generalization also applies to nuclear capabilities: crude nuclear explosive devices stoke fears, but the reliability and precision of nuclear weapons makes a significant difference to the (potential) target state. More sophisticated nuclear capabilities can pose “more sophisticated” threats. This gives the messaging state a **reason to emphasize—and potentially to exaggerate—the advancement of its nuclear weapons**. The more threatening the military capabilities, the greater the bargaining leverage (Fearon 1995). This also extends to nuclear proliferation: the messaging state can exaggerate the status of its nuclear weapons development program and the sophistication of its nuclear capabilities in the hopes of receiving more concessions from a target state that opposes its nuclear proliferation efforts (Volpe 2017; Spaniel 2019) or with a view to establishing virtual deterrence through potential (crude) nuclear capabilities (Baliga and Sjostrom 2008; Horowitz 2017). The considerations that speak in favor of exaggerating one’s nuclear capabilities may be distinct from those that speak in favor of communicating one’s motivations. Nuclear messaging can **communicate either defensive or offensive capabilities, benign or hostile purposes** of its nuclear weapons program. This very much depends on the messaging state’s broader motives and strategic calculus: the messaging state can opt to conceal its hostile motives and to deceive the target state in order to gain a tactical advantage. The messaging state can choose to distort the benign purposes of its nuclear forces with aggressive language, with a view to deterring an attack.

Different incentives influence what the nuclear messaging state shares about its own level of knowledge. It might have an incentive to exaggerate its own knowledge of its adversary’s capabilities and intelligence efforts while downplaying its adversary’s level of knowledge. While the messaging state may not have an incentive to message clearly regarding its motives and objectives, it may have an **incentive to message its own knowledge more clearly**: the messaging state’s level of information about the target state, including the latter’s capabilities, motives, and knowledge, is a key consideration when planning and tailoring its nuclear messaging. The communication of mission purposes and employment strategies that link the messaging state’s nuclear capabilities to targets that are valuable to the target state **shapes the target state’s perception of the level of threat**. Furthermore, placing the messaging state’s capabilities in relation to the target state’s capabilities increases the target state’s uncertainty about the effectiveness of its own military capabilities (Reinhardt 2018, 8). The messaging state thus has a strong incentive to exaggerate its level of knowledge about the target state without sharing too many details.

The **shadow of the future** adds another dimension to the issue of the credibility of nuclear messaging. Generally, information shared via nuclear messages is not necessarily a reliable basis on which to make predictions about the future; nuclear capabilities, motives, and knowledge levels are always dynamic, never static. Moreover, **nuclear messaging in “peacetime” may be informative when it comes to the present** but may have little relation to future events and conditions, particularly contingency situations. Accordingly, the value of communicating nuclear doctrines is a point of contention since they play a role in peacetime diplomacy but do not equate to operational plans for contingencies. Nevertheless, nuclear doctrines convey a combination of threat-making and predictability, that can provide clues about the respective state’s strategic calculus (see Chapter 6.3).

Messaging about nuclear proliferation is also affected by the shadow of the future, by the **uncertainty of successful nuclear acquisition**.²⁵ Irrespective of their proliferation status, however, states can issue nuclear messages: some empirical cases of nuclear restraint or reversal, such as Argentina and South Korea (Levite 2002; Schneider 2020), illustrate that states can message their interest in building nuclear weapons or their pursuit of such weapons without necessarily following through. Other examples of nuclear mismanagement and reversal, such as Iraq and Libya (Braut-Hegghammer 2016), highlight the difficulties associated with maintaining a nuclear weapons development program that is functional and that poses a credible threat to the target state. Discussions of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons development program—including questions about its ability to successfully acquire nuclear weapons during the 1990s and early 2000s and about the **genuineness and reliability** of its proclaimed nuclear capabilities in the past few years—also illustrate the complex issue of the credibility of nuclear messages regarding nuclear weapons development programs.

Nuclear messaging suffers from a further credibility problem—one that is inherent to nuclear weapons in inter-state bargaining: **threats to employ nuclear weapons lack credibility due to the normative and rational considerations** that speak against their use. Given its devastating consequences, including wide-ranging destruction, long-term human suffering, and contamination of the environment, the employment of nuclear weapons challenges the principle of proportionality under international humanitarian law. Ethical objections (such as the “nuclear taboo,” Tannenwald 2005, 2007) pose hurdles to using nuclear weapons in conflicts. The risk of escalation between nuclear-armed states informs both moral and rational, egocentric considerations (Gavin 2018, 11): a nuclear strike could trigger a **nuclear response**, thereby spiraling into nuclear war. Large-scale nuclear war would further expand the scale of the consequences, including immense mutual costs in the

²⁵ While realist scholars once projected waves of nuclear proliferation, the empirical evidence would seem to show that states face two significant disincentives to pursue nuclear weapons (or to acquire and maintain nuclear weapons development programs): The pursuit of nuclear weapons is a protracted process that requires significant resources, including human, financial, and political capital over the longer term. Moreover, success is neither easy nor assured; the benefits are hypothetical over the longer term, while political and economic costs are certain in the immediate and the long term.

immediate and the longer term.²⁶ Employing nuclear weapons could thereby “backfire” and inflict immense costs and damage to oneself. If nuclear war is an extension of politics by other means, then it is more reasonable and instrumentally rational for nuclear-armed states to pursue their political objectives via political means (or conventional warfighting) and to avoid employing nuclear weapons (Brodie 1946, 76; Jervis 1989, 251; Sagan and Waltz 1995, 7).

If the probability of their military employment were indeed zero, however, nuclear weapons would not feature significantly in states’ strategic calculi. Nuclear capabilities would merely represent resource-intensive “paper tigers” (Jervis 1989, 20). Nuclear-armed states thus have **strong incentives to message their resolve** to employ nuclear weapons. Resolve includes the political willingness (if not the determination) and the technical ability and military readiness to use nuclear weapons in a conflict. Messages of resolve thus abound in nuclear messaging. Messaging resolve allows the messaging state to project its risk acceptance, as well as its ability and readiness to bear (potential future) costs. This is essential, since not only the ability to inflict costs but also (or rather) the ability to bear costs matters in risk-taking competitions between nuclear-armed states (Jervis 1989, 182). In fact, **projections of risk acceptance and resolve may matter more than actual military capabilities and power resources** (Powell 2015); states that accept higher levels of risk are more likely to win competitions in risk-taking (Hoffmann 1965, 236; Kroenig 2013, 133–142). Messaging nuclear resolve matters in all phases of bargaining between adversaries, before and during conflicts, in “peacetime” and in “wartime,” since knowledge of the messaging state’s resolve can improve its bargaining position and influence the target state’s strategic calculus regarding whether to (further) challenge the messaging state (Glaser 2010, 96).

Communicating risk acceptance is central to messaging resolve. Resolve is determined not only by a country’s willingness to employ nuclear weapons but also by its acceptance of the consequent risks and costs, particularly escalation. In nuclear strategy and war planning, “limited nuclear war” and “all-out” nuclear war are the endpoints of this continuum. Limited nuclear war refers to a nuclear strike (or nuclear exchange) that does not escalate into large-scale nuclear war. This scenario is based on a belief in “behavior control” and “fate control”—the **idea that escalation is manageable** (Jervis 1989). Accordingly, nuclear war can remain limited if nuclear strikes show a degree of restraint, such as by employing nuclear warheads with lower yields and delivery vehicles with shorter ranges against less-valued targets, and if communication emphasizes limited intentions (Kissinger 1957, 177, 185). The messaging state can message its resolve to engage in limited nuclear war by emphasizing its nuclear capabilities and its willingness to employ nuclear weapons for “tactical” purposes.

²⁶ Given the vast differences between the existing nine nuclear-armed states, the degree of mutual damage, including complete destruction and national “suicide,” would depend on the respective countries’ nuclear capabilities—“all-out” nuclear war between the United States and Russia still tops other constellations of large-scale nuclear exchange.

At the other extreme, the messaging state can message its resolve to employ nuclear weapons whatever the chances of escalation and **whatever the consequences of (large-scale) nuclear war**. It can message its capability to perform (and contemplation of) a “splendid first strike” that aims to destroy the target state’s nuclear forces and thus its ability to mount a counterattack (Gibbons and Kroenig 2016, 410). The messaging state can also communicate its resolve to employ its nuclear weapons preemptively, that is, its commitment to “using them” rather than “losing them” in a crisis situation (Gibbons and Kroenig 2016, 410–411). The messaging state may have an incentive to exaggerate its level of resolve for the purposes of outcompeting the target state, including by emphasizing its implacability and willingness to escalate quickly and brutally (Jervis 1989, 194–195). It could opt to bluff, aiming to capitalize on a lack of pushback and on the target state’s lower levels of risk acceptance and resolve (Glaser 2010, 101–102; Powell 2015, 593).

Messaging of nuclear resolve can also backfire and trigger actual escalation: the messaging state cannot fully control either the perception and effects of its messages or the competition in risk-taking into which its messaging feeds. Given the interactive nature of competitions, messages of nuclear resolve can fuel autonomous risks and escalation spirals (Jervis 1970, 238; Özyurt 2014, 251; Schultz 2012; Kang 2019, 199). Escalation can result from taking messages of resolve (too) seriously. The target state may understand certain forms of messaging resolve, such as mobilization and deployments, as actual preparation for warfighting and thus initiate the use of force (Slantchev 2005). By contrast, the target state may not receive or believe the messaging state’s messages of resolve and therefore opt to challenge that resolve (Fearon 1997). The messaging state thus has an incentive to **tailor its messages of resolve in order to mitigate escalation**, for example by refraining from engaging in certain types of messaging or choosing to combine negative and positive inducements (Slantchev 2005; Glaser 2010, 99). If the messaging state strikes the right context-specific balance, it can use its nuclear messaging to take certain rhetorical and physical risks without fear of actual endangerment, while pursuing its political objectives.

Addressing issues of content and credibility might be the most intricate part of nuclear messaging, but several expectations follow from the review of the literature above: The messaging state **rather has incentives to exaggerate** its nuclear capabilities and its level of knowledge about its adversary than to downplay its capabilities and knowledge levels. Communicating its motives and relatedly the purpose(s) of its nuclear weapons (development) program can follow conflicting incentives, however, i.e. communicating benign purposes as they are or distorting benign motives with aggressive language in order to fulfil the purpose of i.e. maintaining the status quo. Most notable is the expectation about messaging resolve, raising the expectation that the messaging state must go to particular lengths in order to make its messages of resolve credible, i.e. by suggesting its readiness for national suicide. At the same time, the messaging state can be **incentivized to cushion its**

strong messages of resolve in order to mitigate unintended escalation, i.e. by mixing positive with negative inducements.

2.2.2 Communicating nuclear risks

Nuclear weapons have political utility. At the center of nuclear messaging is the goal of managing and **stimulating the target state's perception of the chances that the messaging state will indeed employ its nuclear weapons**. Relevant in this regard are not only messages of resolve concerning deliberate nuclear strikes but also messages concerning inadvertent escalation: the messaging state can perform with a view to manipulating the perceived probability of deliberate or inadvertent escalation. Both sources of risk increase uncertainty and are thus powerful tools of coercion. This way of manipulating nuclear risks enables the messaging state to influence the target state's strategic calculus, thus allowing it to pursue a number of different coercive purposes. Depending on the context and the concrete objective, nuclear messaging for the purposes of risk manipulation incorporates messages with varying degrees of noisiness and ambiguity, which can result in varying degrees of befuddlement.

Nuclear weapons are both **military and political tools of statecraft**, as these dimensions are intricately linked. Nuclear-armed states can use "the possibility of nuclear war to secure political values" (Jervis 1970, 238). More precisely, manipulating nuclear risk is the mechanism that enables the pursuit of coercive purposes. Reinforcing (if not increasing) the prospect of nuclear war can impact the target state's strategic calculus, leading it to alter its behavior *ex ante* in order to mitigate risks and avoid unacceptable *ex post* costs (Sagan and Waltz 1995, 7). The trick here is to increase the risk until a "culminating point" is reached: a decision point at which the target state chooses to no longer bear the costs and risks of competition (Roberts 2020, 26). **Nuclear messaging and risk manipulation thereby replicate the "Goldilocks problem"**—the problem of finding the sweet spot between too little and too much—in order to impact the target state's strategic calculus, to the messaging state's benefit.

Perceptions of risk determine the way in which nuclear weapons feature in states' strategic calculi. At base, "risk" can be understood as the **product of harm and the probability of occurrence**. The very existence of nuclear weapons thus carries inherent risk due to the immense scale of the harm that nuclear detonations can cause. As mentioned in Chapter 2.2.1, the sophistication of a state's nuclear capabilities can increase this level of harm. Determining the probability of occurrence is more complicated, however: On the one hand, threats regarding the deliberate employment of nuclear weapons lack credibility. Messages of resolve can help to mitigate this, but it is up to the target state whether (and to what extent) it believes in the messaging state's resolve. Given normative and rational considerations, the perceived probability of the messaging state's consciously choosing to employ its nuclear weapons to fulfil certain military missions may be relatively low. Yet (residual) uncertainty

about the messaging state's level of risk acceptance impacts the target state's calculus (Lake and Powell 1999, 11). On the other hand, the employment of nuclear weapons can also be accidental or inadvertent. The term "accidental employment" refers to nuclear strikes that are launched due to human or technical error. The distinction between accidental and inadvertent employments of nuclear weapons is not clear cut. A number of different causes, such as communicative misunderstanding, misperception, miscalculations, and cognitive biases, can cause crises to inadvertently escalate from the conventional level to the nuclear level.

Inadvertent escalation is also at the heart of the caution with which nuclear weapons are approached. In fact, it is often not the prospect of a (single) nuclear strike that causes states to proceed with caution but the potential of triggering nuclear responses and counter-responses, and thus nuclear exchanges and war. Nuclear war results from such interactions, in which each side becomes increasingly involved in a looming nuclear war (Schelling 1966, 98–99). If war seems inevitable, striking first may be perceived as preferable to receiving the first blow and suffering the consequences of coming second (Jervis 1989, 136–139, 164–173). The probability of the deliberate or inadvertent employment of nuclear weapons may not be high, but it is nonetheless significant. Particularly in contexts marked by adversarial state relations, it is the "threat that leaves something to chance" (Schelling 1960, 187), a brink that is analogous to "a curved slope that one can stand on with some risk of slipping" (Schelling 1960, 200). Communicating uncertainty and the "**autonomous risk**" of the conflict's spiraling "out of control" may increase the perceived probability of an inadvertent nuclear strike (Snyder and Diesing 1977, 210).

As the level of risk is contingent upon the target state's subjective interpretation of the relevant messages (Jervis 1989, 195), the messaging state can **exploit and reinforce uncertainty through its messaging nuclear risks**, including its resolve to engage in deliberate nuclear strikes and the chances of inadvertent escalation. Nuclear messaging can increase the target state's uncertainty by emphasizing the probability of a deliberate or inadvertent employment of nuclear weapons, thereby manipulating the target state's perception of nuclear risk. Brinkmanship is a particular form of messaging that manipulates the perceived risk of deliberate or inadvertent nuclear war by threatening to push the other side over the brink or by emphasizing the possibility of falling off the brink inadvertently (Schelling 1966, 99; Powell 2015, 594). Calculated projections of **irrationality or recklessness aim to increase and thereby manipulate the target state's perception of nuclear risk**, thereby influencing its decision-making (Freedman 2004, 52–53, 196; Kroenig 2018, 20). Here again, the state that faces higher stakes and that communicates those stakes may outcompete its target, particularly in adversarial relations where the risks faced by each party are not symmetrical, and indeed significantly asymmetrical (Reinhardt 2018, 4). Nuclear messaging can thus function as a presentation in which the risks of nuclear war are communicated with a view to influencing the target state's strategic calculus.

Thus, when it comes to the success of nuclear coercion and threat-making, it is “what the opponent thinks or fears that counts” (Synder 1969, 120). While building and modernizing nuclear capabilities and practicing military readiness do matter, the communication of capabilities, resolve, and readiness is as essential, if not more so, to **effective threat-making** (Lebow 1985, 204–205; Haichin 2020, 54). This communication involves at least the following three elements: First, the messaging state must convey what it is demanding of the target state. The messaging state can define its demands precisely and draw red lines, issuing clear messages about its political objectives. Since states with higher stakes are (or are perceived to be) more likely to accept higher levels of risk (Powell 2015, 593–594), the messaging state has an **incentive to emphasize the stakes involved** and the value it attaches to its demands. Doing so can lead to increased risk perception on the part of the target state. At the same time, the messaging state could also opt to issue ambiguous, befuddling, or noisy messages about its political objectives, leaving room for interpretation, causing confusion, or distracting from new information in order to capitalize on uncertainty. Secondly, the messaging state must convey information about what will happen if the target state does not comply with its demands. **Communicating the consequences of compliance and non-compliance**, thus providing positive and negative inducements, is essential to establishing a credible demand (Baldwin 1971). The messaging state can opt to share detailed and precise information, describing the exact consequences and how it will carry them out, in order to establish a credible threat. At the same time, the messaging state might choose to maintain ambiguity regarding the precise conditions and consequences of compliance/non-compliance, assuming that such uncertainty takes advantage of the target state’s risk aversion.

Thirdly, the messaging state needs to **communicate its ability, readiness, and willingness to carry out the threatened consequences**. Given the issues related to credibility discussed above, the messaging state can issue clear messages that outline its ability to develop nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles, its operational ability and efficiency in employing nuclear weapons, and its determination to do so. The messaging state can emphasize the associated risks and perform in a way that raises the “real and shared risk that the confrontation will end in a catastrophic nuclear exchange” (Powell 2015, 594).

Unsurprisingly, **messaging resolve**, high stakes involved, and readiness to unleash and absorb risks of nuclear war matters for coercive purposes and increasing **perceptions of risks** of escalation to nuclear strikes and war. The messaging state can also be expected to actively seek to manage or manipulate those perceptions by emphasizing these **risks of deliberate escalation**, but **risks of inadvertent escalation** as well. Notably, the messaging state can choose to project some degree of irrationality or **recklessness** in order to mitigate inherent issues of credibility when it comes to threatening nuclear employment – but such projections can also undermine threat-making if they suggest that the messaging state does

not know what it is threatening or how to implement the consequences of its non-complied threat.

2.3 Authoritarian Signaling

The three-fold complexity of messaging are intensified when it comes to messaging performed by authoritarian regime types. **Authoritarian states have a special relationship with public messaging:** with limited to no pluralism, independent journalism, or free speech, authoritarian regimes have a particular ability to streamline public communication and knowledge. Furthermore, their messaging is a form of public communication that significantly overlaps with propaganda, both conveying information and projecting power. Public messaging thus abounds, **servicing domestic and foreign policy purposes** and targeting both internal and external audiences. Messaging by authoritarian states is thus an important source of information that helps external audiences to construct hypotheses about foreign policy behavior: The more clues they are given about the messaging country's internal structures, cost sensitivity, risk tolerance, and actual resolve, the more varied these hypotheses will be. At the same time, however, the **overlap with propaganda** also limits the usability and relevance of messaging as a source of information: the potential for misunderstanding is significant, and credibility issues—linked in part to the purposiveness of messaging—loom large. Nevertheless, these regime-type particularities only intensify the challenges associated with analyzing messaging and underscore the value of examining messaging as a type of strategic presentation of information.

Messaging can serve as a **source of information about authoritarian states that otherwise limit the flow of information.** In fact, a key characteristic of authoritarian regimes is the significant level of political attention they pay to knowledge levels within and about the state. Forms of private messaging, either offstage or completely backstage, can be highly relevant to framing information shared directly with other states, influencing the target state's reception and interpretation of messages, and controlling public knowledge and limiting domestic backlash (McManus and Yarhi-Milo 2017). Yet authoritarian states also engage heavily in official public communication and front-stage messaging, providing external public audiences with a trove of primary materials to analyze. In principle, authoritarian messaging can allow for inferences about the messaging state's internal structures, cost sensitivity, intentions, preferences, and capabilities.

This reference to *authoritarian* messaging requires further explanation. "Authoritarian" serves here as an umbrella term for illiberal regime types and undemocratic political systems, including autocratic and/or totalitarian regimes. The term "**autocratic**" designates regimes that are organized around a central leadership figure, whereas the term "totalitarian" is used to refer to states marked by a high degree of repression, ideological enforcement, and

the imposition of a uniform worldview. These definitions overlap and are necessarily vague, as the study of authoritarian regimes lacks its own specific terminology (Ali 2022). Nevertheless, this thesis employs the term “authoritarian” as a general descriptor for such states’ public messaging on the international stage, focusing on the unit-level and system-level analysis of authoritarian messaging.²⁷

Regime type, domestic political systems, internal structures, and power dynamics all play a role in foreign policymaking and behavior. The category “authoritarian state” includes a variety of regime types with unique and generalizable particularities. Generally, scholars describe authoritarian regimes as **states with a small winning coalition relative to large selectorates**; democratic states, by contrast, feature a large winning coalition and large selectorates.²⁸ In authoritarian states, the composition of the regime and the winning coalition itself can be volatile, as internal regime security concerns and potential threats from regime insiders make it “important to keep the coalition itself off-balance ... [and] to make sure that everyone in it knows that there are plenty of replacements for them” (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011, 61). Authoritarian states with particularly small winning coalitions, such as personalist dictatorships, can be subject to intense volatility as individual leadership figures, and thus first-image factors, prevail.

Here, authoritarian messaging can provide a **glimpse into regime composition**, volatility, and internal power dynamics. Of course, authoritarian states pay close attention to portraying regime cohesion, but public messaging provide a basis for drawing inferences regarding who the important figures are, who no longer counts as a top-tier player, etc.²⁹ Generally, authoritarian messaging can help analysts to **hypothesize foreign policy behavior**. The authoritarian state’s messaging can outline information about how the state functions and what its official procedures are. Such information is crucial to understanding the political system and internal structures of the authoritarian messaging state. Such knowledge about regime structures is in itself a valuable input for the target state’s strategic calculus, but it also allows for inferences about the authoritarian messaging state’s level of cost sensitivity and risk acceptance. Scholars hypothesize that the **size of the winning coalition runs parallel to the degree of cost sensitivity**: states with smaller winning coalitions are less risk averse, cost sensitive, and selective about conflicts (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Peceny and Butler 2004; Weeks 2012; Weeks and Crunkilton 2018). As long as the government’s policies do not negatively impact the winning coalition’s rewards,

²⁷ While the DPRK is often referred to as an autocratic and totalitarian state, or as a personalist dictatorship, the following chapters treat personalism as a feature of authoritarian regimes rather than a discrete category of regime type. In fact, Pyongyang’s communicative consistency over the years, across leadership transitions and significant changes in regime composition (see Chapter 5.3), is evidence of the extent to which authoritarian messaging is deeply interwoven with enduring state structures.

²⁸ Selectorate theory describes the relationships between the nominal selectorate (the interchangeable), the real selectorate (the influentials), and the winning coalition (the essentials)—relationships that shape the political system and policy-making of the respective states (Bueno de Mesquita et al. 2003; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011).

²⁹ Scholars of the DPRK’s political hierarchies and ceremonial procedures, for example, draw inferences from the presence or absence of certain individuals, their titles, and their location in pictures or lists of attendees (Lee, Rachel Minyoung 2021). Additional inferences on relevant individuals’ careers are then drawn when forecasting whether the regime’s foreign policy direction will continue or change.

it can expect to retain their support. Furthermore, if conflict brings certain benefits to the winning coalition, then authoritarian states with smaller winning coalitions may be particularly incentivized to initiate conflict (Reiter and Stam 1998; Peceny and Butler 2004; Haichin 2020, 67–68).

The **link between states with particularly small winning coalitions (such as personalist dictatorships) and conflict propensity is significant**, as such regimes face even fewer domestic constraints and more opportunities, such as shifting costs and benefits to the leadership's advantage (Weeks 2012, 330–335, 2014; Haichin 2020, 62–63). States with larger winning coalitions, by contrast, are more cost sensitive and risk averse since the (potential) negative ramifications of conflict for the selectorates (would) have significant consequences for the regime itself. Yet conflict propensity refers to risk tolerance regarding conflict initiation, not conflict endurance: while authoritarian states with a smaller winning coalition may initially have more conflicts, they may not invest as much as states with larger winning coalitions in order to win, knowing that “their fate depends more upon the loyalty of their coalition than success on the battlefield” (Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011, 234–235). In any case, **belligerent rhetoric prevails in authoritarian messaging** which might relate to the level of conflict propensity as well as the domestic or external bargaining context.

To some extent, **authoritarian messaging about nuclear weapons is also more likely** – irrespective of the link between nuclear ambitions and successful nuclear acquisition as discussed above in Chapter 2.1.1. While the simple binary distinction between democracies and non-democracies does not reveal a significant link between regime type and the decision to pursue nuclear weapons (Gartzke and Jo 2007; Sagan 2011), the drawing of distinctions within the diverse group of authoritarian states reveals interesting (causal) connections. As nuclear weapons appear to reduce the probability of foreign interventions or regime coups, authoritarian states may consider acquiring nuclear weapons to meet external and internal security risks (Way and Weeks 2014).³⁰ States with inward-looking economic systems are more likely to pursue nuclear weapons with greater determination as they fear fewer economic ramifications (Solingen 2007). Personalist dictatorships may be motivated by their own specific drivers—in relation to the paramount leader's characteristics and related first-image factors—and face few domestic constraints on pursuing nuclear weapons (see Hymans 2006; Weeks 2014; Schneider 2020).

In addition to shaping whether and why authoritarian states harbor nuclear ambitions, domestic political institutions, constraints, and spaces for agency shape *how* certain states pursue the path of nuclear proliferation, including nuclear pursuit, reversal, and hedging (Saunders 2019; Hyde and Saunders 2020). **Personalist dictatorships are likely to be**

³⁰ The idea that internal security is a driver of nuclear proliferation by authoritarian states stems from the hypothesis that nuclear weapons development programs foster links between specific military, scientific, and party elite constituencies, which allows the regime leadership to nurture a regime-supporting enclave that is relatively separate from the conventional military.

more determined not “just” to pursue but also to sustain nuclear weapons development programs (Hymans 2006, 2008; Sagan 2018). At the same time, however, the chances of a personalist regime’s acquiring nuclear weapons are relatively low, since top-down interference is likely to impede scientific progress (Hymans 2012; Way and Weeks 2014) and a lack of monitoring could allow other regime insiders to pursue personal interests (Braut-Hegghammer 2016; Iwuoha 2019). The DPRK’s success in nuclear weapons development serves as an example of how a top-down drive to pursue nuclear weapons can translate to determination and scientific rigor—a posture that has boosted both the status and the room for maneuver granted to scientists and engineers in the country (Saunders 2019, 180–182). Authoritarian messaging that provides such clues about a country’s general political system and bureaucratic apparatus is thus essential to understanding that state’s path of nuclear proliferation and hypothesizing its level of success.

Notably, there is little empirical evidence to support the claim that regime type factors significantly in nuclear-armed states’ behavior (Jo and Gartzke 2009; Fuhrmann and Sechser 2013, 2017, 2019). Even in cases where a nuclear-armed authoritarian state’s messaging is characterized by the abovementioned hypotheses about cost insensitivity and projected belligerence, the role of nuclear weapons may be limited to exacerbating existing foreign policy behavior, including nuclear messaging (Bell 2021). The precise contours of a nuclear-armed authoritarian state’s messaging may be determined not so much by regime type as by perception, i.e. how non-authoritarian target states perceive nuclear authoritarian messaging. Yet nuclear messaging by an authoritarian state can be expected to be prone towards **belligerent language and nuclear ambitions, confirming assumptions regarding cost-insensitivity and conflict-propensity**. As with messaging in general, authoritarian messaging’s potential as a source of clues and information is limited by issues related to content and credibility. These issues are further exacerbated by regime-type factors, in particular by regime-type differences between the authoritarian messaging state and the non-authoritarian target state.

2.3.1 Language and propaganda

Authoritarian messaging suffers from the regime-type factors that make it so unique. Public messaging by authoritarian states reproduces regime-specific stories about reality and overlaps with propaganda. Such **language and worldviews affect reception and understanding**, shaping the target state’s interpretation and perception of authoritarian messages. Stark differences in regime type, such as those between an authoritarian messaging state and a democratic target state, are prone to intensify cognitive biases and confirm assumptions, thereby impacting the credibility of the messaged content.

Issues of content include the fact that although the target state may receive clear messages from the authoritarian messaging state, the former may not understand their content. Public state communication includes language, concepts, and terms that are specific to national

contexts and domestic discourses. The same applies to authoritarian states (if not more so): official public communication involves a **particular language that is political, replicating the dominant ideology and worldview**. New scholarship describes how authoritarian regimes employ framing and spin when portraying reality (Ben-Ghiat 2021; Guriev and Treisman 2022). It is important to note that the selection and framing of public stories is common across different regime types but that democratic political systems provide for plurality and opportunities to challenge official discourses (Stallard 2022, 7-8). Many authoritarian regimes control the flow of information out of, into, and within their own countries, including by controlling availability and access. As a result, official stories tend to prevail; external audiences' exposure to authoritarian language and internal stakeholders' exposure to outside vocabulary may be limited in authoritarian regimes.

The DPRK's state media communication illustrates these two dimensions. First, the language used by Pyongyang is specific to the regime and to its internal messaging. As Chapter 4 elaborates, the DPRK has built a **"truth regime"** over the decades, portraying history, present developments, and challenges in particular and consistent ways (Ryang 2021). Second, state media communication from Pyongyang often includes not only politicized but **antiquated language**. For Korean- and English-language texts alike, this may stem from a lack of exposure and from the quick pace of linguistic change outside the DPRK. In terms of Korean-language texts, the DPRK may consciously choose not to replicate the modern Korean that is spoken in the South and that includes foreign, often Anglophone, loan words. Indeed, linguistic scholars have highlighted that the regime in Pyongyang has been enforcing a language regime consisting of words of Korean origin since the 1960s, replacing words of Chinese origin and minimizing foreign influences (Ryang 2021). In English-language texts from Pyongyang, a lack of exposure and of the speed needed for digital media publication is combined with the difficulty of direct translation (Weiser 2016, 2017a, 2017b). The DPRK's 2017 description of then US President Donald Trump as a "dotard" serves as a famous example.

Such **"foreign" language facilitates misunderstanding**, which can in turn facilitate certain perceptions and assumptions about the authoritarian messaging state. Here, regime-type differences come into play in inter-state communication: **bargaining in mixed dyads is liable to miscommunication**, as significantly different political systems and domestic institutions incentivize starkly different behavior, making misperception more likely (Fearon 1997, 83; Reiter 2003 35–36; Goldsmith, Chalup and Quinlan 2008, 747–748). Regime similarity, by contrast, can positively affect bargaining between states and the chances of conflict resolution; "dictatorial peace" theory bases this claim on the empirical observation that similar authoritarian regimes rarely fight each other (Mousseau 1998; Werner 2000; Pecency, Beer, and Sanchez-Terry 2002).

Issues related to credibility stem from two main factors: incentives that drive the authoritarian messaging state to misrepresent and incentives that drive the target state to

question the content of authoritarian messaging. Both types of incentive relate to the convergence of authoritarian messaging and propaganda, as well as to audience overlap. **Authoritarian messaging includes propaganda**, understood here as “a set of communication strategies designed to sow confusion and uncertainty, discourage critical thinking, and persuade people that reality is what the leader says it is” (Ben-Ghiat 2021, 93). Propaganda further aims to showcase the authoritarian state’s power and to manage its population’s attention and information in order to synchronize society and increase cohesion (Huang 2015, 2018; Ben-Ghiat 2021; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022). Propaganda wraps the manipulation, falsification, and concealment of information around a kernel of truth, depicting reality in a way that is favorable to the regime (Ryang 2021; Guriev and Treisman 2022). Authoritarian messaging and propaganda thus overlap as types of public communication for internal and external audiences. The authoritarian messaging state may have a unique opportunity to limit the larger selectorates’ and winning coalition’s exposure to its externally oriented messaging, but some regime insiders remain as internal audiences. This small and exclusive domestic constituency is ever more essential to regime resilience and survival, as the “major threat for regime overthrow stems from within its own higher ranks” (Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022, 2).

The authoritarian messaging state thus has a strong incentive to exaggerate its capabilities, assertiveness, and cost insensitivity. Communicating **success stories about military capabilities serves the dual purpose** of deterring external security threats and mitigating internal perceptions of regime insecurity. Following from this, and in line with broader narratives such as (re-)building a “greater nation” (Ben-Ghiat 2021, 66–68), authoritarian messaging emphasizes and illustrates the authoritarian messaging state’s assertiveness and determination. This often includes preferences that depart from the status quo and that therefore suggest revisionist intentions, which are important for internal and external audiences (Reiter 2003, 36; Goldsmith, Chalup, and Quinlan 2008, 747). As mentioned in the previous section, authoritarian messaging is prone to showcase determination through cost insensitivity and risk acceptance, and existing scholarship indeed assumes authoritarian states to be more risk acceptant and thus more belligerent, particularly when they can divert costs away from the winning coalition and leadership (Weeks 2012, 330–335; Haichin 2020, 93–95). Yet warfighting can come with significant risks for authoritarian regimes, such as increasing vulnerability to internal regime threats (Debs and Goemans 2010; Bueno de Mesquita and Smith 2011, 239). Authoritarian messaging thus targets both internal and external audiences, fending off internal and external threats, at the risk of external audience not understanding or believing internally-oriented messages.

Thus, the target state can have good reason not to believe the content of the messages it receives from the authoritarian messaging state. For one, the **overlapping of propaganda and authoritarian messaging** undermines the credibility of the messages. Audience overlap generates an incentive to misrepresent, and this is clear to the target state.

Propaganda may not convince external (or even internal) audiences, but it blurs the line between truth and fiction and increases uncertainty (Ben-Ghiat 2021, 106). Additionally, there are few ways for the target state to test the genuineness of authoritarian messages without entailing costs and risks. Scholars have argued that domestic audience costs—i.e., costs that the leadership incurs if it bluffs and does not follow through with the content of its public messaging—can increase the credibility of the messaging state’s messages. **Domestic audience cost mechanisms** are predicated on the relationship between the messaging state’s leadership and population, i.e., the government’s need to be accountable to constituencies and sensitive to potential costs, which is more common in liberal democracies (Fearon 1994; Kydd 1997; Kroenig 2018). While authoritarian regimes are also sensitive to domestic audience costs (Slantchev 2006; Downes and Sechser 2012; Weeks and Crunkilton 2018; Yarhi-Milo, Kertzer, and Renshon 2018), the fact that outside observers might not observe domestic audience costs at play also limits the credibility of this credibility mechanism, and thus of authoritarian messages (Bratton and Van de Walle 1994; Weeks 2008, 2012; Hyde and Saunders 2020, 8–9).

Issues related to content and credibility significantly limit the informative potential and value of authoritarian messaging. Nevertheless, authoritarian messaging remains an important phenomenon, including as a potential source of information on the authoritarian regime. Recent scholarship highlights that authoritarian states’ public communication overlaps with propaganda, which does not make it meaningless per se but requires the careful calibration of research objectives and research designs if studies of this phenomenon are to be informative (Cumings 1999, 148–149; Rich 2014b, 128; Sukin 2021; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022). Hence, it can be expected that **particular language, regime-specific context variables, and propaganda pervade also public messaging intended for external audiences.**

2.3.2 Messaging as a means of coercion

Authoritarian messaging is a type of public performance, performed by authoritarian regimes, that targets external audiences for specific bargaining aims. Generally, authoritarian messaging intensifies the inherent duality of information search and provision. Moreover, the authoritarian messaging state has a **particular incentive and opportunity to exploit the target state’s desire for information and to manipulate information asymmetry to its advantage.** It can project certain images of belligerence, cost insensitivity, risk acceptance, and resolve with a view to increasing its bargaining leverage and achieving its coercive aims. In the context of the messaging by nuclear-proliferating or nuclear-armed authoritarian states, nuclear messaging can raise both uncertainty and the actual and perceived risks to the target state to unprecedented levels for purposes of coercion.

Authoritarian states have a particularly strong information monopoly due to how they control information flows. In relation to states that do not repress freedom of speech and the

press, mobility, and other information flows, this can create a particular **information asymmetry**. Democratic states can be at a disadvantage when much is publicly known (and discussed) about domestic issues and power dynamics. Authoritarian states, on the other hand, are better able to safeguard such sensitive information from becoming public knowledge (and have a greater interest in doing so). This information asymmetry can translate into power asymmetry, given that knowledge about the other is crucial to having leverage over it in bargaining contexts (Zartman and Rubin 2000, 271–272; Glaser 2010, 13–19).

With that said, information asymmetry is not clear cut. The relationship between the DPRK and the United States is marked by **multiple information asymmetries**. On the one hand, the regime in Pyongyang naturally has first-hand information about domestic developments, whereas Washington's access is heavily limited. Access to the broad media sphere, public knowledge, and discussions of both benign and sensitive information in and about the United States is not particularly limited. On the other hand, the DPRK's military intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities are meager. While the North has allegedly invested heavily in intelligence gathering through personal relations and infiltrations, modern ambitions seem to have shifted to cyber espionage operations and to developing unmanned aerial vehicles and space-based capabilities for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance. The US government has the necessary human resources, technologies, and partners in the private sector and allied states to collect information about the regime in Pyongyang, including its military and nuclear weapons program. Information gleaned from escapees and defectors can also provide additional, first-hand clues.

Even if information asymmetries are not definite, the authoritarian messaging state can **exploit the information monopoly** about itself with a view to increasing uncertainty for coercive purposes. It can do so with messages that manage and manipulate perceived risks to the target state, particularly by exploiting assumptions of and thereby projecting even starker images of belligerence and cost insensitivity, as well as resolve and risk acceptance. As outlined above, authoritarian states are generally more prone to conflict (Weeks 2012, 2014; Weeks and Crunkilton 2018), although this perceived conflict propensity does not automatically spill into the actual use of force.³¹ Nevertheless, an authoritarian messaging state can **exploit such perceptions of belligerence** in messaging that validates expectations about its conflict propensity and cost insensitivity. This projection of belligerence can involve the suggestion that the authoritarian messaging state is ready to respond aggressively to low-intensity or smaller-scale activities, either with reciprocal or exceeding activities. The target state may believe such messages of aggression either because it views the authoritarian messaging state as genuinely more belligerent or because it believes that the authoritarian messaging state does not fear the costs and risks of its

³¹ Theories about dictatorial peace suggest that it is the clash of opposing regime types—i.e. between liberal democracies and personal dictatorships—that matters for actual belligerence (Pecency, Beer, and Sanchez-Terry 2002).

aggression. While past behavior and reputation play into the credibility of such messaging, this is where authoritarian messaging overlaps to a large extent with the authoritarian state's propaganda. Nationalism and related stories about conflicts and threats often build on hostile rhetoric and the need for belligerence against the other (Ben-Ghiat 2021, 68–70, 93). As these constitute the baseline of everyday propaganda, **authoritarian messaging can be quite noisy**. Noisy messaging about the authoritarian state's proclaimed belligerence and cost insensitivity are repetitive and convey little new, strategically relevant information. Nevertheless, such noisy messaging is purposive, aimed at cementing perceptions of the authoritarian state's conflict propensity and the high levels of risk to the target state. Messages of belligerence require messages of resolve. Messaging resolve involves messages that convey the messaging state's ability and readiness to employ its military capabilities, as well as its willingness to risk subsequent conflict and to bear the costs of escalation. Accordingly, **public messaging of resolve abounds** in authoritarian messaging aimed at substantiating projected belligerence and cost insensitivity. The presentation of a high level of risk acceptance on the part of an authoritarian messaging state can have a significant impact on the target state's level of perceived risk (Lake and Powell 1999, 11; Powell 2015). Again, in line with propaganda overlap and repetition, messages of resolve and risk acceptance can often be clear but tend to be noisy in authoritarian messaging. This noisiness aims to confirm perceptions of conflict propensity, belligerence, resolve, and determination to put words into action. Although such messaging may not convey much new, strategically relevant information, it is nonetheless purposive. Ambiguous and befuddling messages of resolve and risk acceptance can help to convey the images that authoritarian messaging project while mitigating risks of unintended escalation (Slantchev 2005). Lastly, this section has made the case that authoritarian states can be expected to **exploit existing assumptions about belligerence and conflict-propensity** in order to manipulate perceived risks of conflict in light of coercive bargaining purposes. At the same time, however, such authoritarian messaging is prone to be **very noisy** – which can, nevertheless, lead the target state to accept uncertainty and cope with perceived risks of escalation by the authoritarian state.

3. Analyzing Public Nuclear Messages

This thesis seeks to understand what the DPRK communicates about its nuclear weapons and what we can learn from this. Mindful of the epistemological pitfalls accompanying public state communication per se, about nuclear weapons and by authoritarian states – as outlined in the previous chapter – the author chose to parse the DPRK’s abundant state media communication for purposive messages about its nuclear weapons (development) program and to narrow down this messaging further by distinguishing different levels of noisiness. These systematic judgment calls outline four particular strategic messages that, on even closer analysis, provide enough clues to infer what the regime in Pyongyang communicates as its nuclear doctrine vis-à-vis the United States: The DPRK seeks to share enough information about the purpose of its nuclear forces, its nuclear capabilities and employment plans so that its main adversary perceives early nuclear and regional escalation to be certain. This presented doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation is a version of reality that the regime in Pyongyang intentionally communicates – a narrow answer to the narrow research questions at hand.

This research focus is artificially narrow since this thesis research focuses only on one side of the coin: the “sending state” and its public messages, ignoring the reception, interpretation and (potential) interaction from the (intended) receiving state. The author defines this as the first dimension of public messaging, putting the protagonist and its strategic messaging center stage and assuming the role of targeted observer.³² The second dimension pertains to the other side of the coin, namely the (intended) audience(s), the reception, interpretation, perception of and response to intended messages (Fearon 1997; Sartori 2002, 2005; Glaser 2010). The third dimension concerns the interplay between both sides and dimensions, the interaction of messages, responses, counter-messaging and adjustments, along with additional or alternative forms of interaction between states in bargaining contexts (Kydd 2005; Kydd and McManus 2017; Haynes 2019). Most of the existing scholarship on public communication, messaging, and signaling, as discussed in Chapter 2.1, focuses more on the second and third dimensions, neglecting messages and signals that have no observable effects, outcomes, or reactions (Gartzke et al. 2017, 4).

Delving into the first dimension of public messaging, and ignoring the second and third, is the author’s pragmatic and conscious decision to conduct an in-depth, within-case analysis of an extreme case and to prioritize exploration over generalization. This study thereby seeks to make an original contribution about the DPRK and its public nuclear messaging.

³² The term “dimension” is used rather than “sequence” since public communication is not necessarily chronologically organized. States can issue public messages simultaneously, and interaction does not need to occur in sequences.

Additionally, the empirical approach and analytical scheme could serve to explore other cases as well: The author takes “text as data” while mindful of the nature and context of each text – given the fact that the DPRK presents a personalist dictatorship and centralized authoritarian system, particular attention is paid to the “authorship” and level of authority attached to texts. The research then combines quantitative and qualitative methods of content analysis to delineate messages from the bulk of the DPRK’s official written public communication. It rates these messages in five different categories (level of authority, content, packaging, frequency, context – see Chapter 3.2.3) in order to distinguish between “noisier” and “more strategic” messages. These judgement calls prepare the ground for a discussion of that state’s public messaging and conveyed strategic messages.

The following sections explain the research design behind this case study. It starts by discussing the case selection in light of the thesis’s exploratory research objective, the choice of the DPRK as an extreme case, and the four subcases for the within-case study. The second section and 3.2.1 outline the empirical approach taken in this thesis, including the choice of primary materials and the specific corpus on which the analysis draws. Section 3.2.2 elaborates on the methods used for in-depth exploration in the thesis, the quantitative and qualitative content analysis techniques it applies, and its approach to unitizing and coding. The final subsection 3.2.3 elaborates the analytical scheme to judge levels of noisiness and to define strategic messages as units of analysis.

3.1 Exploration over Generalization

This thesis focuses on the first dimension of public state communication, exploring what the DPRK chooses to communicate about its nuclear weapons (development) and what we can infer from its strategic public messaging. It privileges exploration over generalization, responding to the concern that “an important topic has been overlooked in the literature” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 16–17). In contrast to previous empirical studies, it centers not on the “end” but on the beginning of the communicative process. In order to gather new information on this first dimension, it offers a single case study of an extreme example from the universe of cases. This single case is divided into four subcases in order to account for variances with regard to the contexts in which the messaging state issues its messages. This thesis contributes to the existing scholarship on signaling and messaging by processing new raw data and creating new data from observations (George and Bennett 2005, 20–21).

This thesis takes a more exploratory approach in order to provide new data points and clues for understanding what strategically relevant information states intentionally share with their adversary and how they do so. **Single case studies** are well suited to the research objective of exploration (as opposed to generalization) (Gerring 2007, 2017) insofar as they allow for the “intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding the larger class of (similar) units” (Gerring 2004, 341–342; 2007, 20). Parsing the sending state’s public

communication for strategic messages vis-à-vis a specific target state enables a more in-depth understanding of this first dimension of public state communication (George and Bennet 2005, 17; Ruffa 2020, 1135–1136). Case study approaches generally facilitate in-depth analysis of variables, detailed consideration of contextual factors, and attention to unexpected aspects, as well as “intensive reflection on the relationship between concrete empirical observations and abstract theoretical concepts” (Blatter and Haverland 2012, 26), facilitating the heuristic identification of new variables and hypotheses. The term “heuristic” is essential here, as single case studies are rarely generalizable.

This single case study contributes to the existing scholarship by combining the topics of authoritarian messaging and nuclear messaging by examining how a specific authoritarian regime has designed its public messaging regarding its nuclear weapons (development) program. This research contributes new information and identifies previously unexplored patterns that, while potentially ungeneralizable, are valuable to understanding strategic messaging. Designing a single case study is a conscious choice to explore and try to identifying new patterns and variables, as well as developing hypotheses and underlying theories (Bennett and Elman 2007). With that said, single case studies provide only limited conclusions regarding causality. While single case studies are helpful for assessing the existence of causal mechanisms—whether and how a variable mattered to a certain outcome (George and Bennett 2005, 22–27)—cross-case studies are helpful for determining causal effects, i.e., the extent to which a variable mattered. Single case studies are not well suited to assessing the representativeness of their findings or to controlling for confounders. Case comparability remains internal to single case studies and more external to cross-case studies (Gering 2004, 346).

The **existing scholarship** on signaling and messaging consists primarily of theoretical studies that seek to develop assumptions and hypotheses about signaling interactions (Jervis 1970, 1976; Fearon 1997; Powell 2006) and comparative case studies that test theoretical constructs and assumed mechanisms (Trager 2011; Schultz 2012; Carson and Yarhi-Milo 2017). Single case studies have highlighted otherwise overlooked forms of signaling, such as multiple forms of non-public signaling and their role in inter-state bargaining (Skylar Mastro 2011; Mercer 2013). Studies on authoritarian messaging and nuclear messaging—although often not termed as such—build and test hypotheses on the basis of comparative case studies. Small-N studies often discuss the function of signaling in authoritarian regimes (Weiss 2013; Bell and Quek 2017; Haynes 2019), whereas large-N studies discuss the role of nuclear weapons in international relations (McAllister and Labrosse 2014; Sechser and Fuhrmann 2017).

Furthermore, given its exploratory aims, this thesis draws **descriptive inferences**. Single case studies and content analyses have limited utility when it comes to observing and analyzing causality (Ruffa 2020, 1133). Given the impossibility of looking into the other’s mind, “rerun[ing] history” (King, Keohane, and Verba 1994, 8–9, 91), and conducting a “strict,

controlled comparison” (George and Bennett 2004, 171), this thesis refrains from drawing causal inferences or fixed conclusions about causal mechanisms. In connection to the debate concerning the inferential potential of content analysis (Neuendorf 2002, 54–56), this case study of the DPRK’s nuclear messaging goes beyond mere description and draws descriptive inferences what the regime presents as its nuclear doctrine (King, Keohane and Verba 1994, 8; Krippendorff 2004, 38).³³ Due to their high level of conceptual validity and in-depth analysis, case studies are fertile ground for descriptive inferences that are highly informative and that provide reference points for (later) comparisons within a single case or across cases (Gerring 2004, 347).

Drawing inferences is limited, however. Instead, this thesis draws on **post-positivist insights**: it applies a theoretical and methodological framework that does not appeal to cause and effect and does not explain or make predictions about the phenomenon of messaging. Instead, this study contributes to our understanding of strategic messaging, conscious of the fact that the subjects of investigation “never quite encompass reality” (Kurowska and Bliesemann de Guevara 2020, 1212). This applies in particular to public messaging, which constitutes the sending state’s presentation of reality rather than a genuine picture of reality. Analyzing the DPRK’s strategic nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States requires an interpretivist approach that is mindful of the validity of its findings (Lynch 2014, 16). It seeks to interpret the kind of messages in which states engage (Kydd 2005, 25) but from a detached, scholarly perspective.

Fully in the spirit of an exploratory approach, this thesis explores the DPRK’s strategic messaging by conducting a within-case study of an extreme case. The research design therefore divides the single case into four subcases that reflect distinct moments of bargaining with the United States and thereby particular contexts for Pyongyang’s nuclear messaging. Doing so allows to delve into the unit-level context of the sending state’s messages, to distinguish between the “normal” and the less “normal” (or the abnormal) elements of its public communication. This is particularly useful in dealing with the DPRK’s abundant state media communication, to grapple with its conflict definition and specific domestic context.³⁴

3.1.1 Within an extreme case

The universe of cases is vast. This thesis builds on an understanding of strategic messaging as intentional communication aimed at both addressing the target audience’s desire for information and (thereby) furthering the sending state’s interest in influencing its target audience. To the extent that any actor can incorporate such messages in its communication

³³ This thesis uses the term “descriptive” to describe the activity of drawing inferences from complete and incomplete observations.

³⁴ The DPRK’s specific domestic context includes factors of propaganda, culture, mindset and other domestic normative notions (Myers 2010). Considering this aims to consider the regime’s stage-setting of its public state media communication, including its messaging vis-à-vis the United States, before interpreting its strategic nuclear messages.

with a target audience in a bargaining context, the universe of cases of strategic messaging is incomprehensively large. Even when limited to official public messages by states or similar unit-level actors (such as sovereign territories), the universe of cases remains incredibly large. The **universe of cases of nuclear messaging**, however, comprises twenty-nine states, including states with nuclear weapons, proliferation interests, and hedging strategies (Narang 2017).

This universe of cases includes at least seventeen cases of **nuclear messaging by authoritarian regimes**, most of which have not successfully acquired and/or maintained nuclear weapons.³⁵ The DPRK is among the select group of those who have “defied the theoretical odds” by developing and maintaining nuclear weapons of their own (Miller and Narang 2018): personalist dictatorships are more likely to be interested in developing nuclear weapons but are unlikely to manage to do so (Way and Weeks 2014; Sagan 2018; Hyde and Saunders 2020). In contrast to other personalist dictatorships that have explored and pursued nuclear weapons, such as Iraq and Libya (Braut-Hegghammer 2016, 2018), and despite its political system (Hymans 2006, 2012), the DPRK has proved capable of maintaining the scientific rigor and top-down professionalism to bring its nuclear weapons development programs to success. The regime in Pyongyang also appears to be relatively efficient in building its nuclear forces, particularly considering its resource constraints and limited external assistance.

In line with the exploratory nature of this thesis, this single case study stands as an **extreme case**. Extreme cases are cases that exhibit extreme or unusual values for independent or dependent variables (Gerring 2007, 101-102; 2017, 66). The selection of an extreme case for a single case study decreases that study’s representativeness but suits exploratory research that aims to identify new variables, connections, hypotheses, and similar contributions to theory development (Ruffa 2020, 1138–1140).

The DPRK’s public messaging is an extreme case as it presents almost ideal-type variables for analysis, speaking with “one voice” and engaging heavily in public state communication. First, the DPRK’s public messaging is a convenient subject of investigation since its public state communication appears particularly homogenous, and public discourse is tightly controlled by state media outlets. Censorship, repression, and conformity to the leadership’s opinions are central characteristics of personalist dictatorships, and analysts of comparative authoritarianism have suggested that the DPRK “features [what is] probably the most well-developed and self-contained media apparatus in the world” (Hassig and Oh 2009, 133–70; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022, 4). This is not to black-box the DPRK, but to acknowledge that its state media communication presents an extremely homogenous case of public messaging.³⁶

³⁵ This number is based on Narang’s own assessment of the cases listed (Narang 2017, 134) in light of the official political system in place when the state first took an interest in nuclear proliferation and hedging.

³⁶ With a view to “un-boxing” the DPRK, recent in-depth studies reveal two regime particularities regarding the country’s internal dynamics and public communication: First, publicized debates and political groupings within the regime in Pyongyang do feature different, selectively

Second, the DPRK provides large amounts for investigation as it engages in public messaging both obviously and heavily, in significant amounts and range of domestic political actors. The regime in Pyongyang maintains a theater state that invests in different forms of communication and interaction in order to project a certain image of itself as outlined in Chapter 1. Abundant public communication is a feature of the DPRK, making also **the regime's nuclear messaging an extreme case**. Pyongyang does not report on every relevant arms development or every detail, but it is surprisingly communicative and transparent compared to other states with nuclear weapons or proliferation interests (Panda 2020, 77; see Chapters 5 and 6).³⁷ The DPRK's communication about its nuclear weapons development program is notable, as nuclear (weapons) programs are commonly secretive enterprises and as the provision of precise information can increase the risk of targeted strikes for nonproliferation or disarmament by force (Debs and Monteiro 2014; Narang 2017). Strikingly, the regime in Pyongyang has increased the amounts of relevant texts conveying strategic nuclear messages as Chapter 3.2.2 outlines.

In order to maximize the insights to be gleaned from the extreme case of the DPRK's nuclear messaging, this thesis analyzes variance **within this single case**. Single case studies generally account for a "spatially and temporally bounded set of events" (Levy 2008, 2; Gerring 2007, 19; 2017, 27) and derive variance from temporal variation within the single case, diachronically (Gerring 2004, 343; 2007, 28). In order to do so, this within-case study comprises four subcases, which it both analyses and compares.

The **four subcases** span a period from 2001 to 2018. Each subcase represents a specific phase of bargaining with the United States and covers three years, comprising moments of both crisis and cooperation. Nuclear crises provide important opportunities for strategic messaging, particularly for outlining capabilities and resolve, as well as positive and negative inducements (Kroenig 2013, 142–145; Kroenig 2018, 21). Even though each of these subcases also includes direct talks or negotiations between the DPRK and the United States—and thus also encompasses private messaging and signaling—this thesis focuses on public messaging and draws on the DPRK's state media communication.

communicated voices (McEachern 2010, 2017; Carlin and Witt 2006; Park and Snyder 2012; Haggard, Herman, and Ryu 2014; Dukalskis and Lee 2020; Hellmann 2020; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022; Frank 2022). The scholarship on internal power struggles within the regime in Pyongyang is more fragmented, but analyses of leadership reshuffles seem to reveal the existence of factions in the past and in the present (Yiu 1972; Jin 2012; Person 2013; Hall 2020), of hardliners and reformers among top-tier individuals (Madden 2013; Weiser 2022), although the extent to which these labels apply remains in question. Second, political hierarchies matter; the more authoritative the statement, the stronger the regime in Pyongyang's commitment to it – as is discussed in Chapter 3.2 and incorporated into the analytical approach of this thesis.

³⁷ Of particular note in this regard is the DPRK's public displays of nuclear proliferation: when the IAEA and later US intelligence exposed the covert beginnings of the DPRK's nuclear weapons program, the regime in Pyongyang was quite outspoken about its determination to leave the IAEA and withdraw from the NPT, as well as its interest in developing nuclear weapons. In addition to state media communication, the regime in Pyongyang also invited nuclear scientists such as Siegfried Hecker (2023) for multiple visits to its nuclear facilities, likely with a view to conveying its level of determination, its technological abilities, and its advancements.

Table 1 Overview of Subcases

| | Timespan | Crises with the United States | Cooperation with the United States |
|-----------|-----------------|---|---|
| Subcase 1 | 2001–2003 | Second nuclear crisis, end of Agreed Framework, withdrawal from NPT | Bilateral talks, start of trilateral talks, initiation of Six Party Talks |
| Subcase 2 | 2006–2008 | First nuclear test, sanctions imposition, lack of implementation | Six Party Talks, including bilateral talks, 2005 and 2007 agreements |
| Subcase 3 | 2011–2013 | Satellite launch/end of Leap Day Deal, fourth nuclear test, missile tests | Bilateral talks, missile moratorium/Leap Day Deal |
| Subcase 4 | 2016–2018 | Missile test campaigns, belligerent high-level rhetoric | Unilateral testing moratorium, 2018 summitry, Singapore joint statement |

3.2 Empirical Approach

In line with the objective of exploration, this within–single case study combines qualitative and quantitative content analysis techniques. The emphasis lies on qualitative techniques that are complemented by quantitative checks. Doing so is helpful for clarifying the “baseline” in the DPRK’s public communication, carving out messages, judging their level of noisiness, and analyzing patterns of strategic messaging. This thesis treats text as data and coding segments of text as nuclear messages depending on their content, context, and packaging. Nuclear messages are thus the units of analysis. In order to analyze these units qualitatively, the author judges their level of noisiness in the five categories of their level of authority, content, packaging, frequency, and context, as well as compares them with one another. This lays the groundwork to discuss the nuclear messages that stand out as more strategic and what we can learn from this nuclear messaging.

Combining qualitative and quantitative methods can reveal new variables and connections. It can also be helpful for analyzing their contexts and conditions in further detail. Content analysis is well suited to such combinations, as content analysis approaches include quantitative and qualitative techniques. A combination of qualitative and quantitative content analysis is thus methodologically convenient and fits the research objective of exploring the first dimension of messaging to identify, describe, and analyze the sending state’s public messages.

Notably, a growing number of studies apply combinations of quantitative and qualitative content analysis to parse the DPRK’s public communication, applying quantitative

techniques first and qualitative techniques second. Yet applying quantitative techniques first may bias the subsequent analysis, particularly if quantitative methods such as word frequency analysis shape the selection of subjects for qualitative analysis (Whang, Lammbrau, and Joo 2017; Sukin 2021; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022). Depending on the research interest, focusing on quantitative features may be fine. When it comes to strategic messaging, however, a different approach is warranted. Giving qualitative content analysis priority, and using quantitative methods in a supplementary capacity, allows strategic messages that do not have specific quantitative features to more easily come to light. Indeed, public communication includes noisy messages: messaging that is repetitive and that fosters existing narratives and beliefs rather than providing new information. Moreover, noisiness is a common feature of the DPRK's state media communication: country- and language-specific analyses have highlighted the importance of understanding how the regime operates when it comes to our ability to distinguish common from particular language (Ryang 2021; Lee Jean 2021) and how contexts and hierarchies impact the importance of language and messages to the regime and us as interpreters (Lee, Rachel Minyoung 2022). Frequency is thus not a fitting starting point to analyze strategic messaging. The following sections elaborate the empirical approach taken in this thesis. This study draws upon a selected corpus of primary materials that fulfill certain selection criteria (see Section 3.2.1). This selection process also serves as a preliminary test for the coding scheme and informs the respective inductive adjustments (see Section 3.2.2). The exploration of messaging then starts with a qualitative content analysis of the selected corpus on the basis of the coding scheme—performed twice using MaxQDA—and identifying segments of text as nuclear messages. This bulk of relevant messages is then carefully analyzed on the basis of level of authority, content, packaging, frequency, and context in order to determine levels of noisiness and subsequent patterns of public messaging and, ultimately, to carve out strategic messages (see Section 3.2.3). Chapter 5 outlines the results of this analysis, namely two overarching strategic nuclear messages – nuclear resolve and operational clarity – and four strategic nuclear messages – automatic escalation and nuclear martyrdom, nuclear and regional escalation – that pertain to these two broader messages.

3.2.1 Materials for analysis

The corpus of materials for this within-single case study comprises official and written communication as published by the **Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)**. KCNA is the main state media outlet for communicating with external audiences; the Workers' Newspaper (Rodong Shinmun), by contrast, serves as the main traditional source of information for internal audiences. To some extent, KCNA is also a platform and news source for other state media outlets (Whang, Lammbrau, and Joo 2017, 979; Pacheco Pardo 2020, 15), although analysts highlight that not all information shared on KCNA is printed in Rodong Shinmun, and vice versa. In fact, it is easier to pinpoint which texts are (not) meant for

internal consumption on the basis of what domestic constituencies have access to via the DPRK's intranet (Garlauskas, Lee, and Corrado 2023). While significant audience overlap exists for all texts that are published via intranet and internet state media outlets, it is safe to assume that texts published on KCNA are deemed public communication intended for widespread dissemination, including external consumption by foreign audiences.

On the practical side, articles published by KCNA are easily accessible online. KCNA operates its own websites, one hosted domestically and one hosted in Japan. The Japan-based KCNA website is accessible only via Japanese IP addresses; it largely mirrors the DPRK-hosted KCNA website but offers more comprehensive archives of articles (Sukin 2022). The website KCNA Watch, run by NK CONSULTING, INC. (DBA: Korea Risk Group), uploads all texts from KCNA's websites, ensuring the accessibility and recording of all uploaded materials. This thesis draws on articles uploaded by KCNA Watch from both the DPRK- and the Japan-hosted KCNA websites.

This thesis bases its systematic analysis of the DPRK's public messaging on English-language texts carried by KCNA.³⁸ Doing so aligns with the research objective of delineating the DPRK's nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States. It is assumed that external English-language audiences are the main audience for English-language KCNA texts. The regime in Pyongyang may thus have US audiences primarily in mind when it comes to its English-language KCNA communication, even though US audiences, particularly government circles, regularly access the regime's state media communication comprehensively and read Korean-language KCNA texts as needed. This may relate to the fact that there are differences in content and semantics between the English-language and the Korean-language KCNA texts and to the fact that the translation of texts can be selective (i.e. not all texts or sections are translated) (Sukin 2022). Exploring whether and to what extent these differences are systematic is an interesting area of future research on public messaging directed at internal audiences (see Chapter 7, suggesting the two-level game of public messaging as a future field of research).

This thesis treats "**text as data**" (Grimmer and Stewart 2013) and borrows from the "rhetorical approach in comparative authoritarianism that takes seriously what autocrats communicate and treats their texts as valuable data" (Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022, 9). This verbal and written data serves as the material for analyzing the DPRK's nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States, which contains valuable information about the regime's nuclear weapons policy and its nuclear doctrine. This thesis thus takes a largely conventional approach to analyzing the DPRK's self-presentation and messaging. The regime's written public communication is very suitable for systemic content analysis and the

³⁸ Although KCNA predominantly publishes articles in Korean and English, it also publishes articles in Chinese, Russian, and Spanish.

exploration of the DPRK’s nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States between 2001 and 2018 – more suitable than imagery carried increasingly in state media or other outlets.³⁹

Using the regime’s written state media communication as a subject of analysis gives rise to a different empirical challenge, however: KCNA publishes an average of twenty-four articles per day, including a daily average of five articles that discuss matters relevant to international or regional security, such as military exercises, nuclear weapons, sanctions, deterrence, and war.⁴⁰ In order to deal with this abundance of state media communication, and assuming that not all texts matter the same, this thesis has carefully selected primary materials for content analysis on the basis of the level of authority attributed to the respective text. Yet, these categorizations are a general guide; the authoritativeness of each KCNA text differs from case to case, depending on factors related to content and context.

This thesis operates on the assumption that there is a distinct hierarchy within the DPRK and that it matters greatly in this personalist authoritarian system whose name is attributed to which statement (Garlauskas, Lee, and Corrado 2023). On the basis of secondary literature and the author’s own understanding, this research distinguishes between different levels of authority, as illustrated in the table below. Insofar as all state media texts go through authoritative processes prior to being published, this hierarchy does not include a category for texts with “no” level of authority (Dukalskis 2017; Fahy 2019), but ranges from low to supreme levels of authority.

Statements that are attributed to the DPRK’s leader have the highest level of authority, what the author here calls “**supreme authority.**” Statements attributed to the leader equate in effect to government decrees (McEachern 2018, 5). Direct statements by the DPRK’s leader are very rare but have increased over time. The present leader, Kim Jong Un, commissions his speeches to be published in the DPRK’s state media. His father and predecessor, Kim Jong Il, abstained from publishing his speeches, whereas Kim Il Sung, the DPRK’s “founding father,” allowed state media outlets to print his speeches. KCNA frequently publishes reports on the leader’s activities and statements, providing summaries of his utterances. Such state media

³⁹ The Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) redesigned its website in 2012 and publishes pictures alongside its articles, in line with its increasing use of better cameras and image editing tools (García 2022, 2023b). Notably, a growing number of studies take imagery as a subject of analysis insofar as the regime in Pyongyang often publishes images about strategically relevant matters (such as strike plans and warhead designs; Roberts 2016, 59; Kim Dong-hyeon 2019, 5; Panda 2020, 86) and internal meetings (which provide clues about domestic politics, such as the composition of the elite and adjustments to ideology; Kwon and Chun 2012; Lee et al. 2013; Shim 2014; Dukalskis and Lee 2020; Hellmann 2020; Bleiker, Chapman, and Shim 2021). In fact, the DPRK has shown an increasing willingness to employ imagery in its state media communication (Allard, Duchatel, and Godement 2017, 2). This may relate to the usefulness of pictures for propaganda and signaling purposes, to the growing demand for modern, appealing communication, and to the increased availability of modern equipment for high-resolution pictures—including image manipulation technologies, which would be a particularly interesting field of future research (O’Carroll 2022; García 2022). Yet the recent relative increase in the DPRK’s nonverbal communication through imagery via its state media outlets may also relate to the limited availability of equipment and knowledge in earlier years, such as during the two earlier subcases examined in this thesis (2001–2003, 2006–2008). García (2023b) highlights that the regime in Pyongyang has more and advanced photographic equipment, publishes more imagery in its state media communication, and continues to edit this imagery in order to streamline non-verbal messages and hide sensitive information such as EXIF metadata.

⁴⁰ These numbers are derived from the author’s own quantitative analysis of English-language articles uploaded on the KCNA website between 2001 and 2018. The vast majority of KCNA texts are news reports that summarize events or leadership statements; KCNA also publishes commentaries by individuals, press statements by state institutions, and detailed reports and full texts of statements from the leadership.

reports of the leader's statements do not include direct quotes, or at least do not make direct quotes explicit. Given this leader-specific context, some KCNA news reports that appear to be "different" in terms of content or timing (i.e. outlining relevant activities by Kim Jong Il in particular detail while direct negotiations with the United States are ongoing) are categorized as semi high-level statements.

The category "**high level of authority**" comprises different individuals and entities that presumably constitute the top ranks of the regime in Pyongyang. It includes individuals in top-tier military and party entities. Party entities such as the Workers' Party Korea (WPK) Central Committee and its Political Bureau, the Central Military Commission, the National Defense Commission (until 2016), and the State Affairs Commission (since 2016) represent a high level of authority as they are chaired by the DPRK's leader and are thus indirectly linked to his supreme authority. The KPA's Supreme Command is the military entity that is directly chaired by the DPRK's leader. State media texts linked directly to the DPRK's military, the Korean People's Army (KPA), and its entities, as well as other agencies and research institutions relevant to the DPRK's nuclear weapons (development) program also have a high level of authority.⁴¹

As the DPRK's authoritarian system is centered on the ruling family, the military, and the party (Tertitskiy 2023a, 69–70), government and state functions can be important in external activities, but play a largely representative role domestically. Hence, individuals such as the foreign minister, defense minister, president of the Supreme People's Assembly or permanent representatives at the DPRK's UN missions fall under the category "**semi-high level of authority**". Their statements are published infrequently but regularly, commonly in the context of routine occasions such as diplomatic multilateral or domestic parliamentary meetings. Depending on content as well as internal and external context, such as when KCNA carried no original quotes from Kim Jong Il and but detailed his activities relevant to ongoing negotiations with the United States, semi-high levels of authority are attributed to KCNA texts that would otherwise be defined as having a low level of authority.

The category "**mid-level authority**" includes all statements issued in the name of a government, military, or party institution, linked either to the institution itself or to the spokesperson of that institution. These state media texts are published relatively frequently but are always directly linked to a certain context, particularly external developments or state interactions.

⁴¹ The KPA's General Staff is in charge of translating the Supreme Command's directives into operational policy and coordinates between military entities (DIA 2021, 17; Bermudez 1999, 20-21, 33–34). The KPA's General Staff, as an entity or via its spokesperson, does issue statements relatively frequently but only in direct connection to external developments and threats of force. The KPA's Strategic Force presumably operates the DPRK's deployed nuclear weapons and its ballistic and other missile systems (DIA 2021, 40). It does not frequently issue statements; when it does, a spokesperson or even its commander issues explicit threats. Other entities relevant to the DPRK's nuclear weapons (development) program, such as the National Aerospace Development Administration, the Nuclear Weapons Institute, and the State Academy of Sciences, issue statements very rarely; when they do, it is in direct connection to the DPRK's (weapons) developments and test events.

All commentaries—only some of which identify their author or responsible institution—and news reports have a **low level of authority**, by far the most prevalent category when it comes to the DPRK’s public communication. This also includes the Institute for Disarmament and Peace, an entity within the DPRK’s foreign ministry whose statements are less authoritative than those directly linked to the foreign ministry. This thesis generally includes within its corpus texts with a low level of authority (mostly commentaries and detailed reports about relevant events and the regime’s position on various crises with the United States).

The following table offers a general picture of the levels of authority attributed to the KCNA texts analyzed in this thesis. Chapter 5.3 provides a more detailed overview of categorizations and distributions of authority levels across the four subcases, highlighting i.e. the increasing authority of texts and diversity of individuals that statements are attributed to.

Table 2 Overview of Corpus per Levels of Authority

| Level of authority | Actors, entities, and examples in subcases 1–4 | Number of documents, share |
|--|---|----------------------------------|
| Supreme authority | Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un | 19 documents 1.73% of total |
| High level of authority | Individuals in top-tier government, military, or party positions; individuals considered “close” to the leader or part of negotiations; government, military, or party entities chaired by the leader | 184 documents 16.71% of total |
| Semi-high level of authority | Diplomatic entities abroad, individuals serving representative functions abroad; Supreme People’s Assembly (SPA), individuals serving representative SPA functions; ministers | 102 documents 9.26% of total |
| Mid-level authority | Government ministries, party committees; spokesperson of government or party entities | 321 documents 29.16% of total |
| Low level of authority | Detailed reports, news reports about supreme- or high-level events and statements | 475 documents 43.14% of total |
| Total number of analyzed texts in subcases 1–4 | | 1101 documents |

3.2.2 Coding public messages

Content analysis is a suitable method for treating text as data, inferring strategic messages and thereby exploring the DPRK’s nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States. The empirical process of content analysis starts with reading the primary materials, dividing segments of written text—partial or complete phrases—and ascribing codes to them. Coding identifies and records explicit and covert meanings, or **manifest and latent content**. This

case study analyzes both types of content, using words as indicators for manifest coding and applying an additional interpretative reading for latent coding. Scholars view latent coding as the “raison d’être of content analysis” since it goes beyond the simple examination of explicit language and aims to classify content and meaning. The notion of interpretation in latent coding increases the necessity of making the coding schema transparent and of (re-)coding the primary material twice—as performed using MaxQDA—in order to mitigate subjectivity and increase empirical validity (Krippendorff 2004, 84, 39). The Annex 9.1 to this thesis provides the catalogue of codes, including coding examples.

Generally, the catalogue of codes was first deduced from theoretical assumptions about the kinds of information states share publicly in inter-state bargaining and about the kinds of information states seek to infer from their bargaining counterpart’s behavior (see Chapter 2 and Annex 9.1). This list of **deductively derived codes** was then **inductively complemented** in light of the bargaining context in which the DPRK and the United States communicate with each other, the strategic relevance of the former’s nuclear weapons (development) program, and the kinds of information that matter to the target state—here the United States—and its strategic calculus. In the process of selecting primary materials for analysis, the coding scheme was put to a preliminary test and subsequently adjusted in order to include a more diverse set of codes.

After coding, the next empirical step involves structuring the vast number of codes. The methods of quantitative content analysis applied here include statistical methods for outlining the distribution and frequency of codes across the four subcases (Bernard, Wutich, and Ryan 2017, 243). Doing so gives a preliminary structure to the many codes, clustering them and outlining their distribution and frequency across the four subcases, as well as according to content- and location-specific correlations and patterns. This thesis thus uses **qualitative and quantitative content analysis** to identify nuclear messages issued by the DPRK, first coding text segments and then structuring them.⁴² This structure allows for the next and most intricate step, namely grouping codes and assessing apparent nuclear messages in terms of noisiness in order to define strategic nuclear messages for in-depth analysis. The next subsection elaborates the structure of these judgment calls.

⁴² This combination and sequence of both qualitative and quantitative content analysis methods sets this thesis apart from other studies based on a similar corpus of English-language KCNA texts. Most analysts first apply quantitative methods, in order to then analyze frequent words in context or correlations with events. The frequency of certain words, names, and phrases allows analysts to infer ideological or narrative trends (Oh and Hassig 2000, 2009; Dukalskis and Lee 2020; Hellmann 2020; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022), internal policy debates (Carlin and Witt 2006; McEachern 2010), and how the regime conveys its nuclear ambitions (Rich 2012a, 2014a) or consolidates hereditary rule in public communication (Myers 2010; Rich 2014b; McEachern 2010, 2019). Linking frequent terms and phrases to certain internal or external events and developments allows analysts to derive patterns of threat-making and signals of resolve (Sukin 2021), as well as military provocations and test events (D’Orazio 2012; Whang, Lammbräu, and Joo 2017; Joo et al. 2016; Joo 2014). While the existing scholarship is helpful insofar as it informs code cataloguing and signal interpretation, this thesis takes a different approach: Carefully selecting primary materials on the basis of the above-mentioned levels of authority and applying qualitative content analysis first ensures that the unitizing and coding processes are biased towards interpretative selection, not quantitative features.

3.2.3 Defining strategic messages

This thesis is based on the fundamental assumption that states consciously incorporate messages in their communication, that this includes strategic messages which convey strategically relevant information in order to shape the target state's level of knowledge and ideally the bargaining outcome. The author also acknowledges, however, that not all state communication equates to messaging. In fact, the definition of messaging hinges on the purposes that it seeks to fulfil within a given bargaining context. Yet messaging also includes noisy messages that pursue purposes, as when one state attempts to influence another with repetitive vague threats. Noisiness is thus purposive but distracts from rather than convey strategically relevant information.⁴³ This thesis thus devises a system to rate coded segments of texts, here messages, in five different categories in order to determine levels of noisiness and define messages as noisier or more strategic. These judgment calls interpret what strategic messages the DPRK is sending towards the United States and what we can learn from this regarding the regime's nuclear doctrine.

Strategic messages must provide relevant content to the target state; otherwise, strategic messaging would miss its purpose of influencing the target state by providing an input into its strategic calculus and thereby shaping the bargaining context (Morrow 1999; Bemelmans-Videc, Rist, and Vedung 2017). This requires the sending state to know what information the target state desires, which is determined by the latter's strategic calculus and information environment (Lake and Powell 1999). Nuclear messaging can thus be naturally relevant to the target state given the presumed strategic relevance of nuclear weapons, but nuclear messages can also be noisy if they are, for example, not authoritative, repetitive or befuddling. Nuclear messages that are authoritative, convey new and clear strategically relevant information would be ideal, but exist rarely in public messaging between adversaries. Hence, the author assesses nuclear messages to be more or less strategic on the basis of how they perform in the following five categories: level of authority, content, packaging, frequency, and context.

Authority matters greatly in messaging, as illustrated by the choice of materials examined in Section 3.2.2. In a strict hierarchical system such as the regime in Pyongyang, messages attributed to the supreme leadership have sacrosanct authority and a direct impact on policy (McEachern 2018, 5; Lee, Rachel Minyoung 2022). When coding units do not have this supreme authority, as in the vast majority of cases, levels of authority vary and synchronize with the scheme used for the selection of primary materials, as outlined above in Table 2. Paying attention to the messaging state's political system is necessary to the extent that, as the rationalist paradigm assumes, second-image and state-level factors influence state behavior on the international stage (Rose 1998, 145). Here, this means that public messaging

⁴³ Purposive noise is thus the product of the inherent dualism of strategic messaging, of influencing through providing information while nurturing information asymmetry. "White noise," on the other hand, here refers to communication that does not fulfil the strategic purposes of either the sending state or the target audience, and whose value is thus negligible.

can reflect domestic structures. Acknowledging this does not commit one to the view that the DPRK is a unitary actor; rather, to take this approach is to treat the state as the social aggregate of domestic actors that it is (Lake 2008). In fact, it is pragmatic to assume that higher levels of authority correspond to higher levels of relevance to domestic structures and external audiences, such as the target of the DPRK's nuclear messaging (Garlauskas, Lee, and Corrado 2023). The author of this thesis thus also assumes higher levels of authority to define more strategic messaging.

“Content” refers to the information that is provided by (and connected to the purposes of) messaging. Messages must be relevant to the target state in order to serve as an input for its strategic calculus and to fulfill the strategic purposes of the sending state. The specificity of the input matters in this regard; relevant information can come in clear or befuddling messages. Befuddling messages are unclear because the information they convey is unclear or vague or because they contain contradictory information. This thesis thus also assesses the level of content specificity, assuming that the more specific and clear content, the more strategic the message.

“Packaging” refers to how information is provided, to the semantics and tone of messages, language that it uses and omits (Garlauskas, Lee, and Corrado 2023). Coded text segments can represent positive and/or negative inducements; when they are combined in messages, negative and positive inducements work in sync in a complete message, such as communicating the consequences of compliance or non-compliance in a specific threat. While inducements are noted, this thesis focuses more on whether information is presented in a clear or ambiguous way. Naturally, this thesis assumes the less ambiguity the less noisy the message.

Coding unit **frequency** is the most straightforward variable when it comes to assessing noisiness. Coded text segments that are repetitive in terms of content and packaging are combined in messages that are often referred to as noisy. Noisy messages contribute to the already noisy communication system (Jervis 1970, 123–124; Lebow 1985, 206), but they can also fulfill purposes relevant to bargaining, such as cementing certain perceptions and distracting or overwhelming the target state. Given the DPRK's noisy baseline of state media communication, changing the volume and frequency of messages, including nuclear threats, matters (Sukin 2023). The author assumes that the less frequent, the more strategic the message.

Context relates to the timing of the provided information. A piece of information's relevance can shift in line with developments within the bargaining context, in line with changes in the information environment, or due to developments related to learning (Lewis and Schultz 2003, 348). Messages can provide information at random or within a certain context; the latter can be explicit or implicit. Timing within, causation by, and correlation with a specific context are all things that relate to the content, relevance, and strategic purpose of a given message. Domestic, regional, and international developments matter when it comes to

understanding the relevance and extent of a message’s strategic purpose (Gavin 2018, 15; Ryang 2021, Lee Jean 2021). It is essential to understand messages in context, not as single data points, and to treat them as providing clues that correspond to internal and external circumstances (Garlauskas, Lee, and Corrado 2023). While it is interesting to note whether the given message makes explicit reference to timing and context, this thesis focuses more on the specificity of the context to which the message is explicitly or implicitly connected and assumes that the more specific the context, the less general and noisy the message.

Table 3 Overview of Categories for Assessing Messages' Levels of Noisiness

| Noisier message | Strategic message |
|---|---|
| Authority: What level of authority does it hold? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Who issued this message? - Who is mentioned in this message? | |
| Lower levels of authority | Higher levels of authority In line with choice of corpus, Section 3.2.1 |
| Content: What information does this message convey? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How relevant and specific is the information to the target audience’s strategic calculus? - Is this message clear or befuddling? | |
| Lower levels of content specificity | Higher levels of content specificity Specific and clear information |
| Packaging: How is this information presented? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the information combined with negative and positive inducements? - Is the information framed ambiguously or clearly? | |
| Higher levels of ambiguity or befuddlement | Lower levels of ambiguity or befuddlement Clear threats that include positive inducements |
| Frequency: Has this information been shared before? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is this information new? - How often has this information been shared? | |
| Higher levels of frequency, repetitiveness | Lower levels of frequency New or rarely issued information |
| Context: When was this message issued? | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Is the message implicitly or explicitly linked to a particular context, development, or situation? - How specific is this context? | |
| Lower levels of context specificity | Specific (implicit or explicit) connection to context <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Connection to internal activities - Connection to external developments, activities carried out by the target audience |

| | |
|--|--|
| | - Connection to interactions between the messaging state and the target audience |
|--|--|

Using these five categories helps us to ask systematic questions and rate the given message per category. Doing so allows to compare messages with one another and to determine which messages are more strategic than others. Chapter 5 outlines what strategic messages shape the DPRK's nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States, elaborating four particular strategic nuclear messages that provide information about the nuclear doctrine that the regime seeks to present. Before delving into these descriptions and subsequent discussion in Chapter 6, however, the following Chapter 4 reflects the DPRK's stage-setting for its nuclear messaging.

4. North Korea's Stage-Setting

Knowledge about the DPRK's domestic **context and setting for its public messaging** is essential to interpret ratings for noisiness and analyze its nuclear messages (see previous Chapter 3.2.3). As a theater state, internally and externally oriented public messaging is simply an indispensable pillar for the regime in Pyongyang: All citizens and members of the regime, including the supreme leadership, participate in this collective performance and messaging, following rigid rules of behavior, language, and presentation (Kwon and Chung 2012).⁴⁴ These rules of language and presentation, including about nuclear weapons, often spin around kernels of truth, but tailor language and presentation to set a certain stage for its public messaging. Accordingly, many of the DPRK's stories for stage-setting are repetitive, and its state media communication overall relatively noisy.

Knowledge about the regime's stage-setting helps to be aware of this **audience overlap**, to understand what is "**normal**" in its public messaging, and to thus carefully delineate and interpret the regime's strategic nuclear messages vis-à-vis the United States (see Chapter 5 and 6). As the following sections outline, the regime in Pyongyang lives up to its description as a theater state, putting its leadership center stage as stage-managers and hero protagonists liberating and safeguarding the DPRK's population from the evil imperialistic United States as Chapter 4.1 outlines. Pyongyang has heavily invested into its stage-setting since its foundation, suggesting a degree of consistency and coherence that also implicates its nuclear messaging (see Chapter 5.3).

As Chapter 4.2 makes clear, nuclear weapons are one aspect of the broader conflict, but the key aspect in Pyongyang's conflict definition as it emphasizes nuclear threats as central to Washington's hostile policy. This lays the ground for the regime's justification to build nuclear weapons: to reciprocate US nuclear threats and to make the DPRK a "greater nation" as Chapter 4.3 elaborates. Despite this justification of its "righteous" nuclear proliferation, Chapter 4.4 explains how and why the DPRK keeps denuclearization – the promise of eventually dismantling its nuclear weapons program – as an aspiration and positive inducement for bargaining with the United States. Understanding the regime's stage-setting for its public messaging about nuclear weapons – its conflict definition, its justification for nuclear proliferation, its offer to reverse proliferation – is essential for analyzing the purpose(s) of the regime's nuclear weapons (development) program (see Chapter 6.2).

⁴⁴ These rules permeate all areas of private and public life (Kwon and Chung 2012; Abrahamian 2020; Zwetsloot 2022). This serves specific internal functions, such as streamlining public knowledge and the interpretation of information, thereby imposing a truth regime (Ryang 2021) for the purposes of cohesion and legitimation (Hellmann 2020; Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022) and projecting the regime's ability and power to do so (Geertz 1981; Hwang 2015, 2018).

4.1 Stage-managers and Protagonists for Consistent Public Messaging

The DPRK is a personalist dictatorship which dictates the stage-setting of public messaging. The ruling Kim family is presented as the nation's *raison d'être* and intricately linked the DPRK's fate. Unsurprisingly, the regime's supreme leaders thus play the key protagonist roles in state media communication. But the ruling Kim family has assumed different and additional roles highly relevant to the DPRK's public messaging. Notably, this did not endanger the consistency of the regime's nuclear messaging, but influenced the availability of texts with supreme- or high-level authority (see 5.3): Kim Il Sung, the "founding father" of the regime, and his grandson Kim Jong Un, the present supreme leader, act both as **main protagonists** and **stage-managers**. Kim Il Sung even lives on in frequent references to him as "eternal president" and through Kim Jong Un's re-enactment and communication style. Kim Jong Il (supreme leader from 1994/97 to 2011) assumed roles of **scriptwriter** and stage-manager rather than main protagonist, making fewer supreme-level texts available in subcases 1 to 3 of this research design. Additionally, the ruling Kim's siblings, in-laws and closest confidants serve as scriptwriters, directors and sometimes as part of the main cast for public messaging, including increasingly for nuclear messaging as subcase 4 and Chapter 5.3 illustrate.

Kim Il Sung, who reigned from 1945 to 1994, is the founder of the regime and its communication style that remain in place today.⁴⁵ Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Kim Il Sung propagated specific versions of history and ideology to consolidate his power; his 1972 biography and the DPRK's constitution are manifestations of his own self-conception as the "founding father" of the DPRK, legitimizing his rule as paramount leader (*suryong*).⁴⁶ Kim Il Sung reportedly gave much thought to how to stage his "liberation" of Korea in 1945 and made his pseudonym his "real name" (Suh Dae-Sook 1967, 256-260).⁴⁷ In addition to acting the part, seeking opportunities to hold speeches and be photographed with crowds, he commissioned stories in which he was cast as the heroic protagonist, recruiting writers who had worked on the regime's major films to craft his memoirs (Stallard 2022, 14). This **foundation myth** and related stories helped Kim Il Sung to interweave his regime with the nation's fate and to cement the fundament of the regime's political system until today.

⁴⁵ The following discussion of the DPRK's storylines aims to strip the regime's public communication of many of its excessive exaggerations (including the attribution of supernatural qualities, the theme of worship, and father figure imagery) (Frank 2014, 60–65). In doing so, it aims to reveal the regime's version of history and how these storylines set the scene and plot for its nuclear messaging. These storylines are grounded in kernels of truth from modern Korean history (Gauthier 2022) and offer an illuminating case study of how states rewrite history for their own purposes (Ehrhardt 2022; Stallard 2022).

⁴⁶ In common Korean parlance, *suryong* (수령) refers to a leader of an entity, but the regime in Pyongyang has reinvented the term to refer to a leader who has absolute authority over "any other political institutions, including the party [and] the constitution" (Dowling and Hong 2021, 49–50). The 1972 constitution remains an important symbol of independent statehood, as the 1948 constitution was dictated by the Soviet Union (Tertitskiy 2023a, 65).

⁴⁷ Kim Il Sung was a guerrilla fighter during the 1930s. Many guerrilla fighters had pseudonyms, including the name Kim Il Sung, which was the name of a legendary Korean partisan figure. The DPRK's founding father was originally named Kim Song-ju (Suh Dae-Sook 1967, 256–260; Henderson 1968, 325; Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 3–4).

Kim Il Sung also invested in **continuation of his stories** through hereditary succession, ensuring that his son assumes the role of main director and (succeeding) protagonist. Since the 1970s, **Kim Jong Il** was written into the regime's version of the DPRK's history and played a supporting role alongside his father, the real protagonist.⁴⁸ In addition to performing publicly as the next in line, Kim Jong Il contributed to propaganda efforts himself, for example by joining the Publicity and Information Department (unofficially, the Propaganda and Agitation Department) of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) in 1966 (Armstrong 2013, 321).⁴⁹ After officially pronouncing Kim Jong Il the future leader in 1980 (Oh Gyeong-Seob 2023, 4–5), the regime stepped up its public messages to prepare for hereditary succession.⁵⁰ Kim Jong Il finally acceded to the throne in 1994/1997,⁵¹ ruling until his death in 2011. Kim Jong Il was supposedly responsible for the strategy of concealing the DPRK's internal politics from outside observation (Cha and Sohn 2012, 74).⁵² In contrast to the “founding father” Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il reportedly did not enjoy the limelight; there are much fewer statements directly attributed to him.⁵³

In contrast to Kim Jong Il who was written into Kim Il Sung's stories, the present supreme leader, **Kim Jong Un**, is in a sense imitating or “re-enacting” his grandfather:⁵⁴ Kim Jong Un's appearance— in particular his hairstyle and clothes —resembles Kim Il Sung's; conversely,

⁴⁸ Examples of this include multiple joint visits to deliver Kim Il Sung's guidance to the population, as well as the politically important honor of Kim Jong Il's announcing the “Ten Great Principles for the Establishment of the Unitary-Ideology System,” which codified the nation's highest ideological norms, including hereditary succession (Abrahamian 2020, 88; Oh Gyeong-Seob 2023, 5).

⁴⁹ The Propaganda and Agitation Department is said to be the key authority for all of the DPRK's public communication. The Department and its sub-agencies engage in a constant cycle of feedback and coordination mechanisms to streamline public messages, whether through media reporting or publications (Yonhap 2002, 410; Abrahamian 2020, 50). Over the course of the 1970s, Kim Jong Il began to make a name for himself as a knowledgeable stage director, giving on-the-spot guidance at filmsets and overhauling the DPRK's film industry (Frank 2014, 73). Kim Jong Il reportedly enjoyed Hollywood movies and wanted to improve the DPRK's cinematography, which led him to abduct South Korean film director Shin Sang-ok and actress Choi Eun-hee in 1978 (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 272–273). According to Kim Jong Il, all arts and culture must serve the state as means of ideological education (Frank 2014, 57; Zwetsloot 2022).

⁵⁰ The regime then started to attribute the authorship of major ideological writings, such as the 1982 paper “On the Juche Idea,” to Kim Jong Il (Abrahamian 2020, 90). This built the groundwork for the DPRK's proclaimed ideology of Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism, an extension of Kimilsungism after Kim Jong Il officially succeeded Kim Il Sung, celebrating both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il as ideological and political masterminds.

⁵¹ Kim Jong Il presumably became the de facto paramount leader following Kim Il Sung's death in July 1994. According to the regime, however, Kim Jong Il officially succeeded his father after three years of mourning had passed. Notably, Kim Jong Il became Supreme Commander of the KPA in 1991, Chairman of the National Defense Commission in 1993 and General Secretary of the Party in 1997 (Tertitskiy 2023a, 66–67).

⁵² Kim Jong Il supposedly said this to his officials in the mid-1990s, when the DPRK was descending into famine and was negotiating a deal with the United States to mitigate nuclear proliferation and the first nuclear crisis, a context in which it sought to hide vulnerabilities and maximize bargaining leverage (Abrahamian 2020, 41). Unfortunately, but understandably, given its content, only secondary sources report on this quote.

⁵³ A common example of this is the fact that Kim Jong Il discontinued Kim Il Sung's tradition of New Year's speeches and instead had the country's main newspaper to issue a consolidated commentary on New Year's Day. Kim Jong Un later re-introduced his grandfather's tradition of end-of-the-year speeches. Chapters 3.2.2 and 5.3 detail how Kim Jong Il's personal preference of not issuing direct statements impacts the corpus for this thesis.

⁵⁴ Outside observers speculate that Kim Jong Il suffered from cardiovascular disease in 2008, chose Kim Jong Un as his successor in 2009, and began to make joint public appearances with him thereafter (Tertitskiy 2023a, 46). Kim Jong Un formally joined his father as Vice-Chair of the party's Central Military Commission in September 2010, taking over after Kim Jong Il's death in December 2011 (Oh Gyeong-Seob 2023, 5). Unlike Kim Il Sung's and Kim Jong Il's birthdates, which are public holidays in the DPRK, Kim Jong Un's birthdate has not been officially confirmed but is presumably January 8, 1984 (Fifield 2019).

newly built statues of the DPRK's founding father bear a striking similarity to the present ruler (for example the statue of a young Kim Il Sung at the Korean War museum, Abrahamian 2020, 10–11, 69). Kim Jong Un has re-convened and publicized major party meetings and speeches, providing plenty of audio, image, and text material for the regime's state media communication.⁵⁵ Moreover, the celebration of Kim Il Sung's accomplishments, thereby his stories, and **the regime's version of history** have become even more pronounced in everyday propaganda and public messaging under Kim Jong Un.⁵⁶

Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un—although to different degrees—have each acted as protagonists and stage managers in the regime's stories and messaging efforts. Designing and managing this public messaging has never been a one-man job, however. In addition to the ruler himself, **particular individuals** (such as family members and other confidants) and **groups of professionals** have been key to designing, managing, and implementing messaging efforts.⁵⁷ For example, Kim Jong Un's sister, Kim Yo Jong, has officially served as Deputy Director of the aforementioned Publicity and Information Department (presumably the de facto chief of the regime's propaganda efforts) since 2015. Other politically relevant and domestically well-established figures have chimed in as storytellers as well.⁵⁸ The so-called "Political News Team" comprises a select group of professional photographers who have reported on the reigning paramount leader for years, if not decades, lending consistency and professionalism to the photographic elements of the regime's public messaging (García 2023a).

Hereditary succession and the DPRK's personality cult facilitate **repetition** and reaffirmation of the past and prior rulers. The regime's baseline of public messaging is thus relatively repetitive and its overall public communication very noisy. Nevertheless, repetition here is purposive and cements a notion of **consistency** over time, regime **cohesion** and stability, as well as political **path-dependency** for the DPRK although outside

⁵⁵ The current supreme leader, Kim Jong Un, held his first New Year's address on January 1, 2013—continuing a tradition that his grandfather Kim Il Sung had nurtured until his death in 1994—and his last New Year's address on January 1, 2018. Since 2019, however, the regime in Pyongyang has opted to convene plenary meetings of the Central Committee of the ruling Workers' Party Korea at the end of each year. These high-level party meetings serve as a platform for major speeches and reports by Kim Jong Un and other top-tier officials, which suggests a notable mix of highlighting the supreme leader as well as the role of the party and domestic structures in this highly centralized personalist authoritarian system (see Section 6.3. for a brief discussion of this).

⁵⁶ Kim Jong Un reportedly prompted an overhaul of a museum commemorating the Korean War (the "Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Museum") in 2013 and the "Sinchon Museum of American War Atrocities" in 2015, both major destinations on propaganda study tours. In 2016, he arranged for the captured spy ship USS Pueblo to be moved to the Korean War Museum so as to display the "shameful defeat of the United States." Tertitskiy (2023, 68–69; 2023b) argues that Kim Jong Un is increasingly portraying himself as second to his grandfather and the DPRK's "founding father," Kim Il Sung, and thus equal to his father, Kim Jong Il. After his death, Kim Il Sung was named Eternal President of the DPRK, and Kim Jong Il was likewise posthumously named Eternal General Secretary of the ruling party and Eternal Chairman of the highest state organ, the National Defense Commission. Until 2016, Kim Jong Un officially served as First Secretary of the party and the National Defense Commission; since then, his titles have changed, i.e. from Chairman (2016) to General Secretary (2021) of the ruling party.

⁵⁷ While acknowledging the collective effort behind public messaging, this thesis focuses on the unit level rather than analyzing intra-unit factors. In the theater state that is the DPRK, the general population is not merely the audience and consumer, but also must actively participate in public messaging, everyday propaganda, and mass festivities (Kwon and Chung 2012).

⁵⁸ One notable example is Ri Ui Sol, Marshal of the KPA from 1995 until his death in 2016, who was very close to all three rulers (Tertitskiy 2023a, 173). The stories attributed to him by the DPRK depict the Kim family's greatness and suggest a different level of authority and authenticity—or at least an attempt to solidify such a picture.

observers have noted at times implicitly loosened rules and adjusted ideological interpretations.⁵⁹ The new rulers in Pyongyang have never explicitly changed the script, preferring to commemorate and build on their legacy (Tertitskiy 2023b).⁶⁰ New policy lines recycle past ideas and terms;⁶¹ the regime's military and party bureaucratic structures also "have remained relatively unchanged since the late Kim Il Sung era" (Tertitskiy 2023a, 69).⁶² Chapter 5.3 outlines how this general notion of consistency implicates the regime's nuclear messaging.

Within its repetitive public messaging, however, the DPRK conveys its conflict definition that carries relevant information why the regime has initiated a nuclear weapons development program. The following section discusses how Pyongyang defines the broader conflict at hand and how nuclear weapons are part of the general existential threat that the regime faces from the United States. This scene-setting, emphasizing the country's innocence and victimhood and the regime's virtue and heroism vis-à-vis evil imperialist powers (here, Japan and the United States), spins history in a way that is beneficial to justifying the DPRK's nuclear proliferation.

4.2 Conflict Definition: Victim Nation, Hero Regime, Nuclear-armed Antagonist

The DPRK sees **nuclear weapons as one aspect of the broader conflict**, as part of the existential threat posed by the United States and a compelled means to ensure its existence. The regime in Pyongyang presents itself as the morally superior protagonist – a hero regime that liberated and safeguards a victim nation – constantly challenged by the United States as the barbaric antagonist, and the ROK as the United States' submissive sidekick. The DPRK sees itself as in a constant state of war since 1950; belligerent language and two parallel stories about the Korean War permeate its public messaging, including its nuclear messages:

⁵⁹ Examples include the fact that Kim Il Sung dropped his own strict rule of only using purely Korean terminology in his memoirs, incorporating traditional Chinese-origin vocabulary (Ryang 2021). Scholars note that communist terminology remains a part of the regime's rhetoric and propaganda, although in this context it speaks more to nationalist notions (Myers 2010; Dukalskis and Lee 2020; Schäfer 2021). Moreover, Dukalskis and Lee (2020) argue that the DPRK has moved from national communism to militarist nationalism, particularly since the 1990s.

⁶⁰ While the *Realpolitik* objectives of regime cohesion and survival certainly factor into this, the regime in Pyongyang portrays path dependency as a feature of stability, a virtue in the neo-Confucian mindset of honoring one's elders and a condition of success. Hereditary succession facilitates this path dependency: "[...] holding Kim Jong Il at the highest post of the revolutionary armed forces made it possible to steadily advance the *juche*-oriented cause of army building started by President Kim Il Sung generation after generation, steadfastly carrying forward the history and tradition of the Korean revolution which has emerged victorious [...]" (2008-12-23 KCNA report, words attributed to Vice Marshal of the KPA Kim Il Chol, minister of the People's Armed Forces).

⁶¹ For example, Kim Jong Il's 1997 "military first" (*songun*) policy can be traced back to Kim Il Sung's guerrilla struggles against Japanese imperialists (Frank 2014, 103), and Kim Jong Un's 2016 *byungjin* line (the parallel development of the economy and nuclear weapons) is based on a term that Kim Il Sung mentioned in a different context in 1962 (Frank 2014, 141; Panda 2020, 17–19).

⁶² There have been plenty of minimal changes and renaming efforts in the past, which likely aimed at maintaining the long-standing political system in substance while adjusting it to the third hereditary succession, contemporary policy challenges, and efforts to maintain the appearance of being a more "normal state." Examples include the 2016 constitutional changes that turned the National Defense Commission into the State Affairs Commission. The commission remains the highest state organ, and while Kim Jong Il technically remains Eternal Chairman of the National Defense Commission, Kim Jong Un is the Chairman of the State Affairs Commission.

one about Pyongyang's attempt at "liberating" and reunifying the Korean peninsula, the other about the destruction of the DPRK and start of the "hostile policy" of the United States against the regime in Pyongyang. This conflict definition forms the context to interpret the DPRK's nuclear messages.

The scene-setting for the DPRK's public messaging is straightforward. The protagonist is the regime in Pyongyang, a brave and virtuous actor embodied by Kim Il Sung and his hereditary successors. Without the regime, there would be no independent Korean nation or DPRK, since the regime in Pyongyang has in effect created this Korean nation and the state it has successfully been protecting. **The regime's raison d'être is the DPRK; the DPRK's raison d'être is the regime in Pyongyang.** To cement this, the regime in Pyongyang is committed to an action film-like story about the creation of the DPRK, which remains omnipresent until today (Stallard 2022, 10). This foundation myth remains omnipresent through everyday propaganda and public messaging, and it revolves almost entirely around Kim Il Sung and his sacrifices to liberate the Korean people from Japanese colonial rule.⁶³ The foundation myth was fundamental to Kim Il Sung's efforts to consolidate his power and thereafter enshrine the centrality of his person within the political system of the DPRK.⁶⁴

Central to this foundation myth is also the notion of a particular **Korean nationalism**.⁶⁵ Kim Il Sung interwove his regime and a "new" Korean identity and tradition with existing Korean identity traits and traditions (*minjok*; Myers 2001; Myers 2010; Shin 2006; Schäfer 2021).⁶⁶ Illustrative are references to the Baekdu Mountain as the sacred place where history began: according to traditional Korean folklore, Baekdu Mountain represents the legendary origin

⁶³ Kim Il Sung, born in 1912, supposedly left his childhood home in Mangyongdae, on the outskirts of Pyongyang, at the age of twelve in order to join Korean partisans in their fight against Japanese colonial rule (Stallard 2022, 14). His decades of guerrilla fighting then finally paid off in 1945, when Japanese forces surrendered and retreated from the Korean Peninsula; the regime thus presents Kim Il Sung as having unshackled the Korean people by defeating the Japanese imperialists. Most successful propaganda builds its falsehoods around a grain of truth (Ben-Ghiat 2021, 95), and the DPRK's founding father was indeed a successful Korean guerrilla fighter. Yet he led only one of several partisan groups that sought to degrade Japanese forces by fighting them in northern China throughout the 1930s, with few excursions into northern Korea (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 3–4). In contrast to the regime's foundation myth, the DPRK's Kim Il Sung did not liberate Korea. By August 26, 1945, Soviet forces had liberated Korea and were occupying the north of the peninsula; they brought Korean partisan fighters to Pyongyang, including Kim Il Sung on September 19, 1945 (Cumings 1997, 186; Panda 2020, 36–37). Between 1940 and 1945, Kim Il Sung had to withdraw his guerrilla fighters from northern China so that they could undergo training in the neighboring Soviet Union, just as many Korean partisans were doing in the face of growing Japanese forces (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 60).

⁶⁴ Kim Il Sung was an opportunistic, relatively junior partisan figure who did not enjoy great support from other returning revolutionary forces or existing constituencies in Korea. He successfully exploited the "good fortune" of having Chinese and Soviet connections (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 54) and the chaos of political fragmentation and power struggles on the peninsula, first gaining control of all military and internal security posts in the north by 1948, when the DPRK was established (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 101; Tertitskiy 2023a, 7–15), and later consolidating his control over the DPRK's ruling Workers' Party Korea (WPK) by 1961 (Suh Dae-Sook 1976). Kim Il Sung and his followers were one of at least four groups of Korean communist revolutionary movements that formed the Workers' Party of Korea in 1945 (Suh Dae-Sook 1976, 163). Notably, despite his formal leadership position, Kim Il Sung won the party-internal power struggles over time through a combination of eliminating his rivals and training a new, loyal generation of party officials who dominated the composition of the party's Central Committee by 1961 (Suh Dae-Sook 1976, 186–187). Purges within the party and the military led to the adjustment and deletion of certain events from the official historical record in the 1950s and 1960s (Tertitskiy 2023a, 35).

⁶⁵ Since the late 1960s, most obviously in Kim Il Sung's first biography in 1968, official storylines about the liberation of Korea have aimed to build a new Korean identity and tradition, omitting the role of the Soviet Union and Kim Il Sung's Chinese and Soviet connections (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 31, 53, 104).

⁶⁶ The term *minjok* is ambiguous; literal translations include *race*, *ethnicity*, *nationality*, and *people*. For Koreans, however, *minjok* carries a powerful notion of being ethnically, racially, and culturally distinct, if not superior (Cha 2002, 21; Abrahamian 2020, 92–93).

of the Korean people,⁶⁷ and the regime in Pyongyang describes the Baekdu Mountain as the setting for Kim Il Sung's legendary guerrilla fights against Japanese imperialist forces and acclaimed birthplace of Kim Jong Il.⁶⁸ To further tie this nationalist trait to the regime, the DPRK refers to itself as “the great Baekdusan nation”, legitimizing **hereditary succession** through fabricating “the Baekdu bloodline” from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il and the present ruler, Kim Jong Un (Ryang 2021, 170-171). In late 2019—an obvious homage to Kim Il Sung and his foundation myth, as well as a dramatic propaganda stunt in the context of failed summitry with the United States—Kim Jong Un traveled to Baekdu Mountain, riding white horses to the peak and visiting the regime's sacred sites.

Beyond having liberated and founded the DPRK, the regime in Pyongyang portrays itself as constantly defending the true Korean nation from **annihilation and subjugation**. The regime's stories and version of the Korean War are central to this public self-image as well as its perception of existential (nuclear) threats by the United States: Kim Il Sung sought to wage a righteous “Great Fatherland Liberation War” to free the South from US occupation forces, complete the North's communist revolution across the entire Korean Peninsula, and thereby build the Korean *minjok* under Pyongyang's rule.⁶⁹ The United States, however, invaded the North in order to topple the regime in Pyongyang and consolidate its own power on the Korean peninsula.⁷⁰ The kernels of truth in these stories concern the suppressed sentiments of communism and nationalism particularly in the South that the emerging regime in Pyongyang sought to exploit,⁷¹ as well as the United States' objective of destroying

⁶⁷ Baekdu Mountain is located on the border between China and the DPRK. As Korea's highest mountain, it serves as a spiritual place and has inspired many traditional Korean folktales. The most famous myth concerns the god-king Dangun and his founding of Korea's very first kingdom, Gojoseon (2333–108 BCE); the lake on the peak of Baekdu Mountain serves as the legendary spot where Dangun's father descended from heaven. Notably, the DPRK's personality cult portrayed Kim Il Sung as a god-like figure and Kim Jong Il as having heavenly qualities at least until the mid-1990s (Frank 2014, 62–64; Abrahamian 2020, 48).

⁶⁸ The Baekdu mountain is portrayed as a safe haven for Kim Il Sung and as the birthplace of Kim Jong Il in 1942. Although Kim Jong Il was actually born in 1941 in the Soviet Union, the regime in Pyongyang tells stories of an infant Kim Jong Il running around Kim Il Sung's base camp and studying guerrilla tactics (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 51).

⁶⁹ On June 25, 1950, Kim Il Sung initiated the Korean War, launching an invasion of the South with the aim of reuniting the Korean Peninsula. Notably, most Korean political figures at the time, including the president of the South, assumed that reunification by force would be the most efficient, if not the only, path forward (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 112–114; Stallard 2022, 37). The division of Korea was an unorganized process carried out by the Soviet and US occupation forces alongside Korean political figures and movements. Internal rivalries and a lack of unity around a common Korean cause undermined Korean efforts at unification (Henderson 1968). Nevertheless, Koreans in the North and the South generally and genuinely believed that the division would be temporary and that achieving unity was only a matter of time (Ryang 1997; Ryang 2021, 143). The establishment of the DPRK in the North and the ROK in the South accelerated the perceived timeline for achieving unity, making unification by force conceivable if not inevitable (Cumings 1997, 238; Shin Soon-Ok 2022). Kim Il Sung seemed to be the most resolved to act on this to exploit the domestic chaos and geopolitical vacuum and to distract from domestic shortcomings, mobilize the masses, and cement his rule (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 114–121).

⁷⁰ In fact, in the DPRK's history books, it's the United States that initiated the Korean War in order to bring the entire peninsula under its imperialist rule (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 7). Testimonies from defectors and escapees from the DPRK confirm that this particular story—the United States invading the North and launching the Korean War, seeking to annihilate the DPRK—is particularly convincing and enshrined in popular thinking (Abrahamian 2020, 69).

⁷¹ Communism was depicted as a means of liberation from colonial rule, served as an ideological framework for “awakening” Korean intellectuals and revolutionaries prior to 1945 and as a progressive, practical framework for local politicians and youth groups after 1945 (Suh Dae-Sook 1967, 68, 113; Henderson 1968, 116–140, 316; Cumings 1975, 1981). The South remained the main political battleground between centrist, leftist, and rightist groups until 1948; by 1950, however, US military occupation forces had installed a rightist government that systematically suppressed communist groups (Suh Dae-Sook 1967, 253–254; Cumings 1997, 192–209, 243–247). While the regime in the South

the DPRK through a massive counteroffensive and thereby diminishing communism in Northeast Asia.⁷²

Cementing its version of the Korean War, the DPRK's state media outlets frequently iterate the mantra of "**bringing the revolution to final victory**".⁷³ This mantra connects the regime's stories of Kim Il Sung's liberation of the Korean people from Japanese rule to those of his efforts to liberate the South from US occupation in the Korean War, and depicts "liberation" as a remaining task for the regime today.⁷⁴ Kim Il Sung propagated the notion that the Korean revolution must be continued for the sake of liberty and unity; Kim Jong Il also incorporated references to the final victory in his major speeches, as does Kim Jong Un, although such references have decreased in number over the decades. The government in Seoul is still referred to as a "puppet regime" that follows the orders of its master in Washington DC. In practice, "final victory" refers to the complete withdrawal of US troops and influence from the ROK, as well as the latter's reunification with the DPRK (Panda 2020, 26–27; Zwetsloot 2021). Irrespective of the regime's genuine interest in reunification with the South, however, the "final victory" mantra is likely to remain integral to the DPRK's public messaging as an aspirational goal and tool for keeping the regime's stories alive (Panda 2020).

In addition to describing the United States as the evil imperialist power interfering in Korean reunification, the regime in Pyongyang emphasizes the United States' actions during the Korean War as outrageously brutal and **amoral considering nuclear strikes** against a devastated country. The United States did indeed cause massive destruction of the DPRK

was considered nationalistic, the DPRK viewed nationalistic themes of bottom-up self-determination through the lens of communism. Generally, the Kim regime's version of a communist revolution was largely nationalistic, promoting the mobilization of the Korean people, including the proletariat, peasants, and other constituencies. While many individuals from the South joined the North's war effort to reunify the peninsula, believing in the communist cause and viewing the DPRK as the truly sovereign Korean nation, Kim Il Sung held illusionary assumptions regarding the popularity of communism across the ROK (Tertitskiy 2023a, 16–17). The Soviet Union withdrew its forces by 1948; while the United States considered doing so as well in 1949, the Korean War and the mutual defense treaty between the United States and the ROK in 1953 enshrined a US military presence in the South. Chinese forces occupied the North from 1950 to 1958 (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 155).

⁷² The DPRK's troops overran the South within days of its invasion on June 25, 1950, seizing the ROK's territory; ROK troops struggled to hold Busan, the second largest city, located in the southwest. The war changed course after the United States pulled off an amphibious landing at Incheon in mid-September 1950. The United States then led the forces of the United Nations Command (UNC) to recapture Seoul and push the DPRK's forces back over the border along the 38th parallel. When UNC forces moved further north, however, China entered the Korean War on November 25, 1950. The Korean War then predominantly hinged on holding the dividing line and exchanging prisoners of war, cementing the division of Korea along the 38th parallel (Cumings 2010; Chang David Cheng 2020; Tertitskiy 2023a, 19). The United States' primary objective was containment, to be followed by a rollback and the unification of Korea (Cuming 1997, 276–278). The latter fit into President Eisenhower's "internationalist agenda," including the perception of the Korean War as a limited war and an opportunity to dampen communist expansion. Yet there was no concrete plan for how to do so (Zagacki 1995, 233–235); simplified, if not distorted, views of positions held in Beijing, Pyongyang, and Moscow only added to the indecisiveness in Washington (Li Xiaobing 2017, 90; De Mellow 2023).

⁷³ This mantra contradicts the regime's story that Kim Il Sung defeated the United States in 1953—just as he defeated Japan in 1945—and celebrated July 27, the day the armistice was signed, as "The Day of Victory in the Great Fatherland Liberation War." Warfighting ceased with the armistice signed by representatives from the DPRK, China (on behalf of the People's Volunteer Forces), and the United States (on behalf of the United Nations Command) on July 27, 1953 (Burzynski 2022). The DPRK's version of history omits the intricacies of the negotiations and China's role in them. The war museum, however, reportedly features exhibition rooms dedicated to commemorating Chinese (and Soviet) contributions to the Korean War which are shown to Chinese (and Russian) tourists (Abrahamian 2020).

⁷⁴ The United States is portrayed as an evil power, causing division and impeding the reunification of the Korean people. While the United States bears "the lion's share of the responsibility for the thirty-eighth parallel" (Cumings 1997, 186–192), this dichotomous narrative and division into good and evil only serves the regime's propaganda purposes.

through bombing raids, contemplated and threatened the employment of nuclear weapons privately and publicly against the North of the peninsula and Northern Manchuria.⁷⁵ While the United States did consider the employment of nuclear weapons for tactical purposes— to win the Korean War and to contain communism in East Asia— “**nuclear annihilation**” was not an objective pursued by the United States, contra the (proclaimed) perception of the regime in Pyongyang (Cumings 1997, 293–294). Nevertheless, Kim Il Sung took measures to anchor this intense destruction of the DPRK and the threat of complete (and potentially nuclear) annihilation into its daily public messaging, which his successors, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un, neatly maintained (Abrahamian 2020, 10–11).⁷⁶

Extending this story of US threats of complete and potentially nuclear annihilation from the Korean War to present day, the regime in Pyongyang refers to the continuous **state of war** and **hostile policy** by the United States. While the Korean War has indeed not ended *de jure*, Pyongyang argues that the armistice in 1953 did neither end nor mitigate the conflict at hand, since Washington continues to dislike the regime and seeks to topple it. Moreover, the year 1953 also marked the beginning of the US–ROK alliance, and thus the United States’ commitment to defending the South and the long-term presence of US troops on the Korean Peninsula—manifestations of the US hostile policy to challenge and end the regime in Pyongyang. While “hostile policy” is a catchphrase for all US actions and utterances that show discontent with the regime, the threat of nuclear weapons use by the United States is at the heart of this term and concern of the DPRK.

The **threat of nuclear weapons use** is also central to Pyongyang’s perception of Washington’s hostile policy. The regime’s stories connect all instances in which the United States covertly or overtly considered nuclear strikes against the DPRK during the Korean War and the Cold War, such as in response to the downing of a US reconnaissance plane in 1969 (Wampler 2010). The alliance between the United States and the ROK, formally established in 1953 as the result of the Korean War, further illustrates the threat of nuclear weapons use: Washington provides general security commitments to the government in Seoul that include the ready-made option and thus the implicit threat of resorting to the use

⁷⁵ The United States utterly dominated the airspace over the Korean peninsula. The US Air Force began bombing civilian and other targets in the North even more harshly following China’s entry into the war (Kim Taewoo 2012, 469); the United States employed more bombs during the Korean War than in the Pacific Wars against Imperial Japan, including tons of napalm (for the first time in any war) (Cumings 1997, 289–290). A few weeks into the war, General MacArthur considered using nuclear weapons against targets in the DPRK and bordering Chinese Manchuria as a means of bringing about surrender (Dingman 1988/89; Armstrong 2009). Even after General MacArthur’s removal in 1951, the United States prepared for nuclear strikes “against Manchurian bases if large numbers of new troops came into the fighting or if bombers were launched from there” (Cumings 1997, 291–293). Presidents Truman and Eisenhower each publicly threatened the use of nuclear weapons (Cumings 1997, 290; Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 196).

⁷⁶ Some in the DPRK have first- or second-hand experience or memories of the devastation of the Korean War. The regime has invested heavily in reminding its population of their victimhood during the war and of Kim Il Sung’s heroism in defending the nation. This storyline is the baseline for the anti-Americanism that has been cultivated in the DPRK, which includes everyday propaganda on street posters to education and iteration in schools, universities, and study sessions for all citizens, as well as frequent rallies and events. Hatred of the United States is also explicitly nurtured via organized visits to the Sinchon Museum of American War Atrocities, which is also open to foreigners (Cumings 1992, 221; Abrahamian 2020, 97). Notably, all parties to the war were guilty of atrocities – ROK forces conducted a number of massacres under US supervision, although on a smaller scale (Cumings 1997, 272–275, 281–283).

of nuclear weapons should the ROK, its formal ally, or its forces stationed on the Korean Peninsula be attacked (its so-called posture of extended nuclear deterrence) (Lewis and Stein 2023). US forward-deployed tactical nuclear weapons to ROK territory from 1957 to 1991 and related “neither confirm nor deny” policy provided the DPRK with more reasons to see nuclear threats at the heart of US hostile policy towards Pyongyang.⁷⁷

As additional manifestations of **existential and nuclear threats** from Washington, the DPRK points to US high-level statements, operational plans, and allied military exercises. Officially, the United States maintains strategic ambiguity about the conditions for nuclear strikes against Pyongyang, mentioning nuclear weapons only as among the options to end the regime. Nevertheless, the DPRK often refers to all strategic and existential threats as (implicit) nuclear threats by the United States: Previous US administrations under Bill Clinton, George W. Bush, and Donald Trump have also publicly considered other military options, such as preemptive strikes with conventional precision-guided missiles on military facilities to impede the DPRK's military buildup and deter the regime from continuing its weapons programs. Operational plans—as leaked and commented on in the DPRK's state media—include so-called “decapitation strikes” or “beheading operations” (2016-02-23 KPA Supreme Command) to prevent the regime from functioning and continuing the war effort. The United States and the ROK regularly conduct joint and combined military exercises, from computer simulations to large-scale live-fire exercises. Most noteworthy in terms of threatening strategic and potentially nuclear strikes are those instances when the United States temporarily deploys **strategic assets** to or in the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula (CSIS 2019).⁷⁸

The stage for the DPRK's public messaging is set in the regime's domestic context and conflict definition; its public messaging heavily features language about the heroic regime and victim nation that must “bring the revolution to final victory”, and about the evil imperialist United States that perpetuates its “hostile policy” and threatens the regime with complete and potentially nuclear annihilation. “Founding father” Kim Il Sung initiated this stage-setting, and his hereditary successors nurtured this legacy, using contemporary developments as further arguments to strengthen the same case: the regime in Pyongyang is the righteous defender of the Korean *minjok* against existential threats from the United States; regime

⁷⁷ In a move to bolster this deterrent threat and to reassure its allies in Seoul, the United States deployed tactical nuclear weapons on ROK territory from 1958 to 1991 (Lee Jae-Bong 2009; Kristensen and Norris 2017). Given its strategy of neither confirming nor denying the existence of nuclear weapons, the exact numbers remain speculative (Reiss 1988, 292; Drennan 2003, 165); the DPRK claims that the United States “massively introduced aggressor armed forces and WMDs including nuclear weapons into south Korea, turning it into a military base for invading the DPRK and the biggest nuclear arsenal in the Far East” (2008-10-02 KNPC Spokesman). Washington's “neither confirm nor deny” posture also applied to the withdrawal of its tactical nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula. Although ROK President Roh Tae-woo declared on December 18, 1991, that there were no nuclear weapons stationed on ROK territory (Koh Byung Chul 1994, 58; Sigal 1997, 30), and despite an affirmation of withdrawal in the 2005 Six Party Talks Joint Statement, the DPRK “has constantly called for the withdrawal of the US nuclear weapons since their shipment to south Korea” (2013-03-08 NPKC Memorandum; Panda 2021, 16–17), questioning the supposed absence of US nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula.

⁷⁸ “Strategic assets” refers here both to aircraft carriers and advanced fighter jets for conventional precision strikes and to bombers and submarines capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

security thus equals national security, and vice versa. The regime's public messaging does not dwell merely on this conflict definition and its stories of tragedy, victimhood, and partial salvation, but expands its stage-setting to emphasize the DPRK's agency, self-determination, and self-empowerment. Central to this is the regime's "greater nation" project of nuclear proliferation.

4.3 "Greater Nation" Project: Nuclear proliferation

The DPRK's nuclear messaging has a particular setting: It is part of the regime's project to build a greater nation (Ben-Ghiat 2021, 66–68), to not only build and defend the Korean nation, but also elevate the DPRK **from victimhood to strength and sovereignty**. This nuclear nation project centers on bending the arc of history towards justice and on building a nation for its Korean *minjok* that has agency, is able to break away from past tragedies, and can form its own, glorious future. Fitting to its conflict definition, the regime remains thereby on the "right side" of history: The DPRK's nuclear proliferation is portrayed as a justified response to Washington's threats of nuclear annihilation and as a means of empowering the DPRK as an international state. The regime seeks to meet past and present threats with nuclear threats of its own and to elevate itself on the basis of its nuclear forces, ensuring that it is **never again at the mercy of another state**—whether adversary or ally.⁷⁹

Beyond the stories about the Korean War and the threat of (nuclear) annihilation, the regime builds on a **deep-seated perception of vulnerability**, surrounded by powerful neighbors to the north, who threaten the DPRK's political independence, and resourceful adversaries to the south, who threaten the regime's physical existence and security. Geography has long dictated the fate of the Korean people; the Korean Peninsula has often fallen prey to surrounding powers' geopolitical interests, fallen under the rule of Chinese dynasties to the east and serving Imperial Japan as a passageway to mainland Northeast Asia. A Korean proverb tells that "when whales fight, the shrimp's back gets broken" (고래 싸움에 새우등 터진다), and indeed, the Korean Peninsula is situated between China and Russia to the west and Japan, the United States, and the broader Pacific to the east, a position that has cemented the "geopolitical importance and strategic value of the Korean Peninsula[,] situated at the entrance to the Eurasian continent" (2017-05-03 KCNA report). The DPRK covers the northern half of the peninsula, featuring mountainous terrain and two distinct coastlines, yet the regime in Pyongyang is well aware that it is "small in [terms of] its territory and population" (2003-04-30 KCNA report) and that "the **strategic depth of the DPRK is not extensive**" (2017-03-30 MFA Spokesman).

⁷⁹ Observers have argued that the DPRK changed its security policies and perception of partnerships after the end of the Cold War as Pyongyang's decision to build nuclear weapons correlated with the geopolitical changes in 1991 and 1992—the Soviet Union's demise and Russia's and China's recognition of the ROK—that ruptured the DPRK's already fragile security environment (Hecker 2023, 30), bolstering the case that no one can be trusted and that a maximum of self-reliance was the safest bet.

According to the regime in Pyongyang, nuclear weapons are the key to ending this entrenched victimhood and to bringing about justice.⁸⁰ This notion of nuclear justice has two prongs: tit-for-tat and reciprocating US nuclear compellence, as well as nation-building. First, the DPRK's nuclear proliferation is meant to reciprocate US threats to strike the northern part of the Korean Peninsula with nuclear weapons. Washington's threats of nuclear annihilation can thus only be balanced by Pyongyang's own threats of nuclear devastation. This notion of proportionality and reciprocity to "counter the nuclear weapons in kind" (2016-04-26 MFA Spokesman), "maintain a balance of forces" (2016-03-04 Kim Jong Un), and "establish the equilibrium of real force" (2017-09-16 Kim Jong Un) permeates its nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States, but it contradicted by its clearer and more coherent messages that communicate a notion of escalation throughout its nuclear messaging (see Chapters 5 and 6). Balancing nuclear threats with further nuclear threats exemplifies a **tit-for-tat logic** that attempts to justify nuclear proliferation by appealing to the United States' massive bombardment of and threatened nuclear strikes against the North during and after the Korean War: "Early in the 1950s, the U.S. invaded the North, brandishing the A-bomb against rifles, but it is standing up to the irresistible entity possessed of even a tremendous H-bomb, called an 'absolute weapon,' on our planet at present" (2016-05-25 NDC Policy Department).

On this line of justification, the regime's state media commonly refers to **American "nuclear compellence"**: Washington and its threats of nuclear weapons use have compelled the DPRK to pursue nuclear weapons and thus to equalize the existential threat. And indeed, it was soon after the Korean War and the stationing of US tactical nuclear weapons in the ROK that the regime in Pyongyang showed an interest in nuclear weapons, as Russian and Hungarian archives report (Szalontai and Radchenko 2006). Its public messaging of nuclear proliferation then began in the 1990s and was connected to the first and second nuclear crises with the United States.⁸¹ But the regime in Pyongyang connects this nuclear compellence justification with the **larger conflict at hand**, its state media frequently referring to the United States' "hostile policy" and pursuit of regime change as the "root cause" of the regime's nuclear proliferation (2012-08-31 MFA Memorandum). Emphasizing the resources at the United States' disposal, nuclear weapons are supposed provide the DPRK with an ultimate means of protecting itself: "to cope with the U.S.'s escalating hostile policy and nuclear blackmail against the DPRK, it was compelled to have access to just nuclear force for self-defense" (2013-04-18 National Defense Committee Policy Department).⁸²

⁸⁰ Justice concerns play a role in the global nuclear disarmament debate, and the DPRK has expressed its agreement that the international nuclear order—which legitimizes the possession of nuclear weapons by five states, as outlined in the NPT—is unfair (Shin Soon-ok 2022).

⁸¹ It was due to such nuclear war moves by the U.S. against the DPRK and the partiality of the IAEA that the DPRK was compelled to declare its withdrawal from the NPT in march 1993" (2003-01-10 government statement); "the U.S., which openly scrapped the [Agreed Framework], instigated even the IAEA to internationalize its moves to stifle the DPRK, thus putting into practice its declaration of a war against the DPRK. This compelled the DPRK to withdraw from the NPT [...] in order to protect its sovereignty and right to existence" (2003-01-22 KCNA report).

⁸² The regime in Pyongyang commonly emphasizes the power and resources at the United States' disposal, from financial capital and military equipment, including nuclear weapons, to political dominance in international institutions and a network of allies and partners. It has continually

Developing nuclear weapons is thus a matter not only of equalizing the threat but of **ensuring the regime's existence** and the security of the DPRK (Mansourov 2014, 4–5). In reference to Afghanistan, Iraq, and Libya, the regime in Pyongyang has argued that “allowing disarming through inspection does not help avert a war but rather sparks it” (2003-04-06 MFA Spokesman). On its view, the United States has consistently pursued regime change and global hegemony objectives with military force whenever there was no powerful deterrent against doing so, an example being “the destiny of Libya or Iraq, which collapsed because they yielded the whole of their countries to big powers” (2018-05-16 VFM Kim Kye Gwan). The regime's high-level diplomatic stakeholders have clarified that the DPRK has built nuclear weapons “in order not to follow in Libya's footsteps” and that it is “absolutely absurd to dare to compare the DPRK, a nuclear weapon state, to Libya, which had been at the initial stage of nuclear development” (2018-05-16 VFM Kim Kye Gwan). The counterfactual argument that Saddam Hussein's and Muammar Gaddafi's regimes would not have fallen had they maintained their clandestine nuclear weapons development programs and brought them to fruition is clear in the regime's state media communication.

The DPRK has clearly shifted **all blame to the United States** and its threats, frequently stating that the United States is accountable for the regime's choice to pursue nuclear weapons (2003-02-26 FM Spokesman; 2011-03-01 FM Spokesman). The DPRK's nuclear proliferation was thus “inevitable” (2017-12-14 FM Spokesman) and presents a “legitimate countermeasure for self-defense” (2016-07-21 FM Spokesman). Yet this framing of US compellence in fact theoretically backfires in relation to the regime's self-image and diminishes the supposed **agency of the DPRK**, which the second prong of nuclear justice seeks to override. Instead, the US compellence argument portrays the DPRK as reacting to threats and the United States as successfully forcing the regime to pursue nuclear weapons, which it would not have otherwise considered doing.

The second prong of nuclear justice is at the center of the DPRK's stage-setting to its nuclear messaging: nuclear weapons are central to the regime's efforts to **build a greater nation**—the broader aim the Kim family has set for itself. Building and maintaining nuclear weapons is in essence an effort to return to glory and self-determination, to never again be at another state's mercy, whether friend or foe. While the DPRK's nuclear stage-setting also involves the other prong of nuclear justice as in reciprocity, the project of achieving national greatness is fundamental, as it spins Pyongyang's story away from past and present hardship towards a brighter future, with the regime playing the role of successful hero again.

The ruling Kim family and the regime in Pyongyang pursue a project of national greatness that seeks to make up for past misery and victimhood, guided by a **vision of destiny and utopia** (but not nostalgia; Ben-Ghiat 2021, 66–68). Building a *greater* nation for the Korean *minjok* continues Kim Il Sung's foundation myth and nationalist legacy that was obediently

claimed that this “nuclear superpower” (2002-12-03) intends “to achieve hegemony across the world by means of force and, particularly, the goal of stifling our country and turning the entire Korean Peninsula into an outpost for seeking that hegemony” (2017-12-22 MFA Spokesman).

taken up by his successors, Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un. While memories of colonial rule and the Korean War are important for cohesion, a sense of collective agency and the pursuit of something greater attracts and mobilizes individuals to transform tragedy into victory, shame into glory (Boussalis, Dukalskis, and Gerschewski 2022, 2). Indeed, the regime in Pyongyang emphasizes this sense of agency and the shift from victim to hero, from object to subject, with its mantra of *juche* (Frank 2014, 94). *Juche* is an invented, DPRK-specific term.⁸³ The word connotes agency, emancipation, ownership, self-awareness, and self-determination; it consists of the syllables ‘ju’ (master, owner, main: 주 / 主) and ‘che’ (body, substance, style: 체 / 體).⁸⁴ To the present day, *juche* has served as a mantra to boost national identity and sovereignty and as a call for internal unity and independence from foreign powers—a call to be one’s own master (Howell 2020, 1057). It is a message to internal and external audiences that the DPRK’s destiny will be determined by the regime in Pyongyang (Jackson 2018, 20; Panda 2020, 29), but it is also a catchy and fluid term that can be applied to all aspects of life and everyday propaganda of the DPRK (Abrahamian 2020, 133). This stage-setting of the regime’s nuclear messaging around *juche* means that the DPRK’s nuclear proliferation is **not only a matter of survival and security but one of status and sovereignty**.⁸⁵ Sovereignty, in fact, is framed as being of the utmost importance as “the country and the nation without sovereignty are more dead than alive” (2013-01-24 NDC Issues Statement). In this context, nuclear weapons not only physically protect the DPRK from attack and regime change but also convey **determination and self-determination** (McEachern 2018, 12, 15; Howell 2020, 1061–1062). The regime has repeatedly emphasized that it has built indigenous nuclear forces “through an arduous struggle under the harshest sanctions regime” (2017-08-07 government statement), despite heavily controlled access to knowhow and equipment.⁸⁶ It has joined the ranks of nuclear-armed states, an exclusive

⁸³ As one of his nation-building efforts, Kim Il Sung sought to make the Korean language “more Korean” by reducing Chinese-origin words and inventing new Korean words (Ryang 2021). The term *juche* is an example of this highly politicized new vocabulary, which Kim Il Sung reportedly linked back to unnamed “Korean scholars in the early years of the 20th century” (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 15–16).

⁸⁴ This provides an indication of how the concept of *juche* can be utilized, but its uses in propaganda and ideological interpretations have varied over the decades: Kim Il Sung first employed the concept of *juche* in order to degrade his party rivals and consolidate his power. In this internal function, *juche* bore an analogy to “body” (which also speaks to Confucian notions of social structures and loyalty), evoking the idea of unity and centralization around a single leader (Frank 2014, 97–99). Over the course of the 1960s, Kim Il Sung promoted *juche* as an ideological concept among both internal and external audiences. At that time, *juche* embodied the call for political independence, national sovereignty, self-determination, and self-reliance in international politics. Kim Il Sung’s speech in Indonesia in 1965 was his first effort to frame *juche* as an ideological concept that can be tailored to other countries’ national situations and can thereby be exported from the DPRK to other countries within the Non-Aligned Movement (and beyond) (Kim Seok Hyang 1993, 28). Over the course of the Cold War, the DPRK indeed succeeded in forming *juche* study groups abroad (Abrahamian 2020, 89) to nurture economic and political relations with certain states, marketing itself as a *juche*-oriented guerrilla state in international politics (Buzo 1999; Suh Jae-Jung 2012; Young 2021). The Sino-Soviet split, the Non-Aligned Movement, and Kim Il Sung’s prominence in domestic politics provided a fitting internal and external context; in the 1972 constitution, *juche* was enshrined as state ideology. The 1974 “Ten Great Principles for the Establishment of a Monolithic Ideological System” specified *juche* as consisting of independence (자주) in political work, self-sustenance (자립) in economic affairs, and self-defense (자위) in military affairs (Suh Dae-Sook 1988, 302).

⁸⁵ Nuclear weapons also factor into matters of national identity for the DPRK (Hymans 2006; Ballbach 2016); the regime in Pyongyang has consistently embedded its nuclear status and doctrine in its broader ideological system (Howell 2020).

⁸⁶ For outside observers as well, the DPRK has exceeded expectations by translating its ambitions into reality. The literature on regime types and nuclear proliferation identifies personalist dictatorships as those authoritarian regimes that are most likely to be interested in nuclear arms

club of nine, becoming “a nuclear power, a military giant, in the East which no enemy, however formidable, would dare to provoke” (2017-01-01 Kim Jong Un). Chapter 5.1 details how the regime in Pyongyang presents its abilities in terms of knowhow and possessing the resources required to develop and build advanced nuclear weapons and maintain and bolster its nuclear arsenal.

Following the notion of *juche* and turning victimhood into emancipation, the DPRK portrays nuclear weapons as a tool for redeeming the past and building a brighter future. Having the capability of threatening promises to never again be beholden to or controlled by any foreign power (Abrahamian 2020, 88). Its nuclear weapons are depicted as deterring foreign and superior powers, first and foremost the United States, from attacking and annihilating or subjugating the DPRK. Authority over this “nuclear shield and sword” lies with the regime in Pyongyang, which follows the *juche* notion of *self*-defense, with an emphasis on “self” as in self-determination. Nuclear weapons thereby serve the DPRK’s military **self-defense**, political self-determination, national sovereignty, and its **freedom to choose its own fate as a Korean nation** – this nuclear messaging is tailored particularly against the United States, but not only the United States, as the regime has flagged the objective of “put[ting] an end to the moves of aggression and *intervention by foreign forces, including the United States*” (2017-01-01 Kim Jong Un; emphasis added). This messaging what nuclear weapons symbolize accommodates nationalistic notions of a strong and independent Korean *minjok*, and it foreshadows strategic purposes of political self-determination and operational flexibility.⁸⁷ The combination of both shapes, for example, the message of nuclear martyrdom, outlined in Chapter 5.1.2, where nationalist values of collective suicide combine with the strategic objective of choosing one’s own fate and claiming cost-insensitivity in order to win competitions of resolve.

Motivations to reciprocate US nuclear threats, safeguard regime security, and build a greater, sovereign nation permeate the regime’s stage-setting for its nuclear messaging. Building a greater nation with nuclear weapons, however, carries a notion that goes beyond ensuring the DPRK’s existence and well-being in its current form, but hint at objectives of **changing the status quo**. The regime oftentimes portrays its nuclear weapons as a silver bullet that

and to launch a nuclear weapons development program (Hymans 2006; Weeks 2014; Schneider 2020). Nevertheless, personalist dictatorships are also most likely to fail to actually build and acquire nuclear weapons (Hymans 2012; Way and Weeks 2014; Braut-Hegghammer 2016). The regime in Pyongyang has defied the theoretical odds, however, and has successfully proliferated over a relatively short time span (Horowitz 2017; Vipin and Panda 2017; Saunders 2019, 180–182). In 2013, the year of the DPRK’s third nuclear test and the codification of its nuclear status in its constitution, few policy analysts ascribed credibility to the regime’s nuclear threats, and most questioned the functioning and reliability of its supposed capabilities. While questions about the technicalities of the DPRK’s claims remain live, and rightfully so, the regime in Pyongyang continues to celebrate its successes—often in direct reference to external skepticism about its achievements.

⁸⁷ The regime in Pyongyang has never mentioned China explicitly as a reason for its nuclear armament, and the DPRK has upheld its propaganda message of socialist brotherhood with China over the decades, despite many significant frictions in the bilateral relationship. It was only in 2017 and early 2018 that the regime’s state media began to broadcast negative statements regarding China, such as the commentary titled “Reckless Words and Deeds Undermining DPRK-China Relations Must Be Stopped” (2017-05-03 KCNA). Bilateral relations had already been at a low point since 2012—the start of both Kim Jong Un’s and Xi Jin Ping’s reign—and further deteriorated when China agreed to new and wide-ranging UNSC sanctions impositions in 2016 and 2017, as well as increasingly negative public media discussions in China about the DPRK’s massive nuclear weapons and missile tests at that time.

will “bring the revolution to final victory,” its particular vision of a nuclear weapons program that both dominates and reunifies the peninsula (DIA 2021, 6) and reunifies the Korean *minjok* (Mansourov 2014, 5). Chapter 6.2 discusses what purposes for its nuclear weapons (development) program the regime in Pyongyang communicates in its nuclear messaging, whether purposes of deterrence and maintaining the current status quo, or rather purposes of compellence and changing the status quo to one's strategic advantage. Yet, the next section outlines how the DPRK has suggested flexibility regarding the purpose of its nuclear weapons development program, providing negative and positive inducements, including the stop and reversal of its nuclear proliferation, in **bargaining with the United States**.

4.4 Bargaining Options: The Dream of Denuclearization

Bargaining and threat-making include negative and positive inducements, but Pyongyang's nuclear messaging incorporates extreme positive inducements vis-à-vis the United States: The regime promises that denuclearization is possible, that there is room to negotiate the stop, end, and dismantlement of its nuclear weapons development program. The dream of denuclearization does not only play an indispensable role to negotiations with the United States, but also to its stage-setting for nuclear messaging generally: The regime in Pyongyang uses the term “denuclearization” to refer alternately to the absence of nuclear weapons on the Korean peninsula, the removal of nuclear threats to the DPRK, as well as to global nuclear disarmament. This is part of its self-image as a responsible, “peace-loving” state as well as a righteous regime that strives for a greater future and keeps the door open for finding a negotiated solution with the United States. Moreover, such positive inducements as part of its nuclear messaging are essential to mitigate risks of escalation as Chapter 6.1 discusses in detail.

In theory, a denuclearized Korean peninsula – in its maximalist definition referring to the absence of nuclear weapons on and nuclear threats to the peninsula – is an ideal that fits to the regime's vision of a brighter future and a prosperous and secure Korean *minjok*. Accordingly, maintaining the aspiration to denuclearize the Korean peninsula bolsters Pyongyang's leadership propaganda and positive self-presentation. In fact, DPRK diplomats have reportedly said in private conversations with US negotiators in 2005 that a **denuclearized Korean Peninsula was the founding father's dying wish**; the present ruler, Kim Jong Un, reportedly ascribed this dying wish to both Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il (Mansourov 2014, 5; Panda 2020, 5). In the DPRK's political system, such attributions to its past and present supreme leaders equate to an immutable policy, even though there is no official record of this.⁸⁸ The 1992 inter-Korean declaration first introduced the phrase “the

⁸⁸ Before the 1990s, “denuclearization” was not a term used by the regime, but the vague notion was common in its foreign politics: During the Cold War, the regime in Pyongyang promoted anti-nuclearism and the notion of denuclearization as global disarmament in sync with its self-presentation as a guerrilla state in international politics and its participation in the non-aligned movement (Young 2021). The 1958 forward

denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” into the diplomatic vocabulary.⁸⁹ Denuclearization has been integral to US-DPRK negotiations ever since.⁹⁰

Referring to denuclearization is thus important for internally-oriented public messaging. It is supposed to draw a direct line to Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, underpinning the proclaimed linear path from the founding father to the present ruler. The DPRK's mid- to high-level diplomats iterate that the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula was Kim Il Sung's "last instruction," "lifetime teaching" and "behest" (2006-10-12 MFA Spokesman; 2007-10-02 VFM Choe Su Hon; 2008-09-27 VFM Pak Kil Yon). At the same time, attributing **supreme authority to denuclearization** requires Kim Jong Un to uphold this "revolutionary inheritance" (Mansourov 2014, 5), suggesting a level of general commitment to denuclearization. The examples of negative statements mentioned below, however, are evidence of the regime's inconsistent commitment to denuclearization. With that said, like the "final victory" mantra and the goal of reunification, the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula may remain part of the regime's state media communication, as it represents an inherited aspiration and a virtuous effort (Panda 2020, 5). Additionally, references to denuclearization pursue externally-oriented purposes.

Preferring denuclearization is also important for its externally-oriented public messaging and fits to its self-image as small and as minding its own business, having been compelled to arm itself with nuclear weapons vis-à-vis a militarily superior United States that seeks global hegemony through the threat of its nuclear forces.⁹¹ Calls for the denuclearization of the

deployment of US tactical nuclear weapons to the southern half of the Korean Peninsula provided the DPRK with a concrete reason to join global anti-nuclear movements and to call for a nuclear-weapon-free zone/zone of peace in Northeast Asia. In the late 1950s, the Soviet Union, China, and others proposed nuclear-weapon-free zones in Central Europe and the Asia-Pacific region following the United States' forward deployment of tactical nuclear weapons. Although none of these proposals ever gained traction, scholarly interest in them has persisted, particularly in the idea of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in Northeast Asia (Hamel-Green 2021). As the geopolitical environment and military balance between the two Koreas shifted, the regime in Pyongyang limited its anti-nuclear weapons stance geographically and politically to the Korean Peninsula, most explicitly in the 1990s (Shin Soon-Ok 2022).

⁸⁹ In the post-Cold War context of inter-Korean détente and the US withdrawal of its tactical nuclear weapons from the South, the DPRK and the ROK signed a joint declaration "on the Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula" in January 1992, promising "not [to] test, manufacture, produce, receive, possess, store, deploy, or use nuclear weapons" and "not [to] possess nuclear reprocessing and uranium enrichment facilities" (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 203–206). The DPRK and the ROK never followed up on their joint declaration with the agreed-upon implementation measures, such as joint inspections, despite continuing inter-Korean talks. Furthermore, the DPRK quickly brought its denuclearization promises into doubt by maintaining its plutonium production and reprocessing facilities, raising suspicions in the IAEA regarding reported amounts of reprocessed plutonium and thereby initiating the first nuclear crisis with the announcement that it would withdraw from the NPT in 1993 (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 207–218; Hecker 2023, 31). Since then, the DPRK's nuclear proliferation has turned the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula into a promise to which to return rather than a commitment to uphold.

⁹⁰ Nuclear (weapons) issues play the central role in diplomacy between the DPRK and the United States. Inter-Korean dialogue has featured nuclear issues as one of many topics behind closed doors. Only the 1992 Joint Declaration discusses denuclearization explicitly; the 2018 Panmunjom and Pyongyang Joint Declarations include brief confirmations of a commitment to denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula. Diplomatic communications between the DPRK and China, Japan, and Russia have also mentioned the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. Yet, making good on the promise of denuclearization is a matter of negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington.

⁹¹ In fact, the United States is portrayed as having undermined denuclearization negotiations by not fulfilling its agreed-upon commitments, and measures such as building and delivering light-water reactors to the DPRK (as promised in the 1994 Agreed Framework) did encounter significant delays. Other unilateral actions such as George W. Bush's inclusion of the DPRK in his 2002 "axis of evil" speech, the imposition of unilateral sanctions in 2005, and the temporary deployment of strategic assets further torpedoed negotiations, on this view, and illustrate the United States' bad faith. According to this narrative, the United States is seeking to use "the aggravated tension on the Korean peninsula [...] as a pretext for reinforcing its military forces in the North-East Asian region" (2006-09-26 VFM Choe Su Hon). Multilateral actions such as

Korean Peninsula seek to complement the picture that the regime in Pyongyang seeks to convey to internal and external audiences, i.e. a picture of the **DPRK as a responsible and peace-loving state** that is committed to promoting local, regional, and global peace. The DPRK emphasizes its origin story regarding the term “denuclearization,” claiming that it was the “initiative of the DPRK” to codify and work towards denuclearization (2003-10-04 Head of DPRK Delegation at UNGA). It continues to frame references to denuclearization in agreement texts as proof of its efforts to build peace on the Korean Peninsula and a peaceful, more stable security environment in Northeast Asia. Notably, the regime in Pyongyang alternates the reference point of denuclearization, oftentimes referring to regional or global denuclearization as in nuclear disarmament.

With its references to global denuclearization, the regime in Pyongyang is either seeking to distract from peninsular denuclearization and the relevant negotiations or to portray itself as a responsible nuclear-armed state. In fact, most of its references to global denuclearization and **disarmament are linked to the notion of responsibility**: The DPRK's first law formalizing the country's nuclear-armed status links the deterrence purpose of the regime's nuclear weapons program with the phrase “until the world is denuclearized” and promises “to finally build a world without nukes and fully support international nuclear disarmament efforts against a nuclear arms race” (2013-04-01 SPA). This law was overhauled by the update in 2022, which omitted the term “denuclearization” and refrained from advocating nuclear disarmament; instead, the regime has chosen to center its conception of responsible nuclear behavior on pacifism against “all forms of war[,] including nuclear wars[,] and [on] aspir[ing] to build a peaceful world,” as well as on the principle of non-proliferation, committing to “neither deploy nuclear weapons in the territory of other countries nor share them and not to transfer nuclear weapons, related technology and equipment, or weapon-grade nuclear substances” (2022-09-09 SPA). State media outlets connected this expression of a “non-proliferation duty before the world society as a responsible nuclear weapons state” with a commitment to “strive for global denuclearization” (2016-05-28 MFA Spokesman) and the “noble purpose of defending peace and stability in the world” (2017-11-29 Government statement).

When referring to denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, however, the DPRK's public messaging clearly defines “denuclearization” in the maximalist interpretation most advantageous to the regime: It refers to the **denuclearization of the Korean peninsula** as in the physical absence of US nuclear weapons on or in the vicinity of the peninsula as well as the removal of the threat of using nuclear weapons against the DPRK.⁹² Denuclearization

allied military exercises and the imposition of sanctions since 2006 further exemplify the extent to which the United States is “spoiling the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” (2011-02-27 KPA Mission Statement). The DPRK attributes the United States' actions to broader intentions and objectives, circling back to the claim that the United States is striving for regional and global hegemony (at the very least, for control over the entire Korean Peninsula) and would thus prefer the regime in Pyongyang to crumble.

⁹² In the following, and in this thesis in general, the focus lies on official public statements carried by the DPRK's state media. Yet private signaling, direct promises, and other utterances in the context of direct negotiations certainly exist and play an important role in diplomacy,

would thus require the United States to change its nuclear doctrine and posture, as well as its security assurances to the ROK. As an even more maximalist demand, denuclearization is sometime equated to the end of US hostile policy.⁹³ In contrast, US policymakers commonly refer to the denuclearization of the DPRK as in the “complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization” (2001–2017) or the “final, fully verified denuclearization” (2018–2021) of the regime’s nuclear weapons program, if not the dismantlement of its entire nuclear program and related facilities. References to “denuclearization” in negotiated texts from 1994, 2005, and 2007, however, described concrete measures by the DPRK such as to freeze its fissile material production for weapons use, demolish part of its production or testing facilities, as well as allow international inspections to take place.⁹⁴

In addition to positive inducements of calling for and promising denuclearization, the DPRK has also made **negative statements about its commitment to denuclearization**. This apparent pattern consistently features the United States as the cause of the lack of progress but has shifted between three different versions regarding the fate of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The first highlights the DPRK as the only party that is committed to denuclearization and as standing ready to implement further actions. Here, it is the United States that has not fully committed to denuclearization and is hindering negotiations—which was particularly pronounced in the regime’s state media communications in the 1990s, the early 2000s, and during the Six-Party Talks (2002-06-13 MFA Spokesman; 2008-11-13 MFA

including in negotiating the definition and implementation of denuclearization in a less maximalist fashion (a research gap that is outlined in Chapter 7).

⁹³ In line with the regime’s perception of the nuclear issue as an extension of its fundamental issues with the United States, its denuclearization demands relate to the underlying conflict on the Korean Peninsula and thus to broader security demands (Sobek, Foster and Robison 2012, 152). The demand that the United States withdraw its hostile policy is broad, but the DPRK has centered its denuclearization demands on the removal of threats to regime security, the normalization of bilateral relations, and the establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula (Joo Hyung Min 2014). Normalizing bilateral relations and building a peace regime—thereby reducing tensions and threats, if not ending enmity and building trust—have long been among the DPRK’s goals (Hecker 2023, 86–87). Doing so could also improve the regime’s reputation, bolster its victorious self-image and storylines, end international isolation, and facilitate economic and political exchange between the DPRK and the United States. Even though the regime’s references to normalizing relations have decreased since its first nuclear test, promises to improve and normalize bilateral relations found their way (in different words) into the joint statements of 1994, 2000, 2005, and 2018 (Pacheco Pardo 2020, 4-5).

⁹⁴ References to the “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” appear in the inter-Korean 1992 and 2018 Joint Declarations and in the 1994 US-DPRK Agreed Framework, the 2005 Six-Party Talks Joint Statement, the 2012 US-DPRK Leap Day deal, and the 2018 US-DPRK Joint Statement. All of these diplomatic texts reiterate a commitment to denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula: the 1992 inter-Korean declaration, the 1994 Agreed Framework, and the 2007 Action Plan to implement the 2005 Six-Party Talks Joint Statement include tangible measures for denuclearization, and diplomatic engagement with and by the regime in Pyongyang between 1994 and 2000, between 2006 and 2009, and in 2018 produced further actions in the spirit of denuclearization. The agreed-upon steps included the DPRK’s cooperation with the IAEA between 1994 and 2000, including the verified freezing of plutonium reprocessing in Yongbyon in the context of the Agreed Framework, and between 2007 and 2009 in the context of the Six-Party-Talks and the 2007 Action Plan. The United States agreed in 1994 to build light-water reactors for the DPRK, the most important part of the Agreed Framework for the DPRK; this process came to a close in 2006 and illustrated conflicting US policy approaches regarding the scope of DPRK denuclearization efforts (Oberdorfer and Carlin 2014, 285–288). Other notable, tangible, but ultimately reversed steps towards denuclearization were unilateral in nature, aimed at showing the conflicting parties’ goodwill and at facilitating negotiations (Braut-Hegghammer 2021 Survival, 122). After its withdrawal from the NPT, the DPRK suggested bilateral “separate verification” with the United States (2003-01-10 government statement). The regime invited international media to watch the demolition of the cooling tower at the Yongbyon nuclear reactor on June 27, 2008, and the demolition of the testing tunnels at the Punggye-ri nuclear test site on May 24, 2018. The United States postponed or temporarily adjusted large-scale military exercises with the ROK in 1994 and 2018 and de-listed the DPRK as a state sponsor of terrorism in 2008 (this was reversed in 2017).

Spokesman). The second version is more extreme, further emphasizing that the United States harbors ulterior motives, namely a preference for regime change in Pyongyang and aspirations to dominate the region. Since the United States' policy towards the Korean Peninsula has remained consistent and stuck in the past, the regime will continue its nuclear proliferation until the United States changes its “anachronistic” approach (2016-11-21 MFA Memorandum). The regime's third version is the bleakest and abandons all hope for a denuclearized Korean Peninsula, declaring that “no dialogue on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula will be possible in the future” (2013-01-24 NDC) or that “there will never be any declaration of ‘giving up our nukes’ or ‘denuclearization’” (2022-09-09 KJU).

Yet, alternating negative and positive statements about denuclearization are crucial inducements for US-DPRK negotiations. If denuclearization was indeed not possible, if denuclearization was not on the table as an aspiration to define and work towards in negotiations, there would be no reason to negotiate. First and foremost, it is a promise that **a negotiated solution is possible and that escalation can be mitigated**. If diplomatic solutions are indeed off the table, and the conflict needs to be resolved in any way, military and other policy options gain more traction. This is particularly risky for the DPRK as precision strikes to destroy the regime's facilities were publicly discussed before. Unilateral and multilateral sanctions already heavily impact the DPRK's economy and society. Additionally, US-DPRK negotiations can stabilize the security environment in Northeast Asia and bring about economic benefits particularly for Pyongyang. Even though the DPRK has iterated that its nuclear weapons program “cannot be bartered for anything” and is “neither a political bargaining chip nor a thing for economic dealings” (2013-03-31 REPORT WPK), it has also repeated its interest in diplomacy, as it “is sure to get a greater benefit from the implementation of the agreed provisions” (2006-09-26 VFM Choe Su Hon).⁹⁵

In hindsight, the regime in Pyongyang has alternated negative and positive statements about denuclearization, and built the promise of denuclearization into a dual-track strategy of negotiating with the United States while continuing its nuclear weapons development program. Doing so has allowed the regime to hedge its bets and keep its options open while avoiding military strikes and war with the United States (Shin Soon-Ok 2022; Hecker 2023, 9–10). The dream of denuclearization has thereby been an essential part to its stage-setting for its public nuclear messaging, towards internal and external audiences. Chapter 6.1 builds on this stage-setting and details what positive and negative inducements the DPRK's public

⁹⁵ Negotiating with the United States has a number of benefits for the DPRK, particularly in the realms of economic security and regime security (Habib 2011). Agreed-upon texts, such as the 1994 Agreed Framework and the 2005 Six-Party Talks Joint Statement, affirm the right to nuclear technologies for peaceful purposes and promise to support the regime's efforts in nuclear power production. While the 1994 Agreed Framework forced the halting of operations and the construction of reactors at Yongbyon, the regime benefited from heavy fuel oil deliveries—put in place to bridge dire energy shortages as the construction of agreed-upon light-water reactors needed more time (Hecker 2023, 86-87). Diplomacy with the DPRK often also included arrangements for humanitarian, economic, and infrastructure aid, as in the Leap Day Deal from 2012. Moreover, the United States imposed unilateral sanctions the reversal of which was beneficial to the regime in Pyongyang, such as the “frozen funds” held in Banco Delta Asia in 2005 (2007-04-21 Director of DPRK GDAE). In 2018 and 2019, to little success, the DPRK also sought to leverage adjustments to the multilateral sanctions regime, such as the sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council in 2016 and 2017.

nuclear messages carry as well as what they tell about the purpose of the regime's nuclear weapons program vis-à-vis the United States.

5. North Korea's Strategic Nuclear Messaging

What are the DPRK's strategic nuclear messages? What does this messaging communicate, and how does it do so over time? The regime in Pyongyang is relatively clear, consistent, and authoritative in its nuclear messaging. Central to its nuclear messaging is the promise of escalation, that the DPRK is ready to escalate and employ its nuclear weapons, which its strategic messages of nuclear resolve communicate (see Chapter 5.1). Its messages of automatic escalation and nuclear martyrdom make this case by addressing issues of credibility, that the regime is able to launch nuclear weapons even when decapitated and that the entire DPRK stands ready for collective suicide. Its strategic messages of operational clarity (see Chapter 5.2) detail how that escalation would unfold, to the nuclear level and to the regional level. This nuclear messaging has not changed significantly over time, but, instead, has only adjusted to include more supreme-level texts and texts from more different high- to semi-high level actors.

These clear messages convey **that and how the DPRK would fight a nuclear war**. Doing so is not necessarily unique, but the degree of details is particular: Many nuclear-weapon states communicate that they would fight a nuclear war; ultimately, the ability and willingness to employ nuclear weapons is fundamental to nuclear threat-making. Messaging nuclear resolve thus abound among most nuclear-armed states. Yet most nuclear armed states limit the degree of operational details in order to maintain flexibility and benefits of surprise, and not to provide strategically advantageous information to adversaries. The specificity of the DPRK's messages of operational clarity, of how asymmetric escalation would take place, are peculiar. The purposiveness of its nuclear messaging, why the regime in Pyongyang conducts such public nuclear messaging, is discussed in Chapter 6. Notably, the DPRK communicates the purpose(s) of its nuclear weapons, the conditions for nuclear employment, and missions for nuclear capabilities, which are ingredients for Pyongyang's public bargaining tactic with nuclear weapons and nuclear doctrine (see Chapter 6).

Analyzing the DPRK's nuclear messaging allows us to **sidestep issues of genuineness and prediction**, to make the most of the available research material, and to explore what the regime in Pyongyang wants to convey to its target audience, the United States. In line with the empirical approach outlined in Chapter 3, this research parses the DPRK's abundant state media communication for strategic messages about its nuclear weapons (development) program and assesses their level of noisiness (see Section 3.2.3). Knowledge of the regime's particularities, i.e. its personalist authoritarian system, rigid centralism and hierarchy, its normalcy of belligerent language, repetitive mantras, and positive self-image, as outlined in

Chapter 4, helps to distinguish and interpret which messages are more strategic and less noisy.

Doing so highlights the two strategic nuclear messages—**nuclear resolve and operational clarity**—that are authoritative and elaborative; they correspond closely to specific contexts and build on the regime's stage-setting. Strategic messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity also operate with degrees of noisiness and credibility issues but still stand out as the cornerstones of a coherent and consistent conceptual framework for the regime's nuclear development and deployment decisions. Strategic messages of nuclear resolve communicate an ability to develop nuclear weapons and to maintain and use nuclear forces, as well as a willingness to use nuclear weapons. This set of messages is quite broad, and the focus of this thesis lies on the more intricate part, on strategic messages of nuclear resolve that convey the regime's willingness to launch nuclear strikes—even if this means collective suicide (messages of nuclear martyrdom)—and its ability to implement this determination even in the case of a decapitated leadership, creating a sense of certain nuclear launch (messages of automatic escalation). Strategic messages of operational clarity outline when and how Pyongyang would employ nuclear weapons, its employment plans for its diverse nuclear forces, promising early escalation from the conventional to the nuclear and from the local to the regional level.

Table 4 Overview of the DPRK's Two Sets of Strategic Nuclear Messages

| Messages of nuclear resolve (Chapter 5.1) | | Messages of operational clarity (Chapter 5.2) | |
|---|----------------------|---|---------------------|
| Nuclear martyrdom | Automatic escalation | Nuclear escalation | Regional escalation |

5.1 Strategic Messages of Nuclear Resolve

Messages of nuclear resolve are the cornerstone of the DPRK's nuclear messaging. They make the case that the regime in Pyongyang is resolved to employ nuclear weapons and that therefore **escalation is certain**. Messaging resolve—where “resolve” is understood as the ability and willingness to use nuclear weapons—is fundamental to nuclear deterrence; it is also inherently difficult to convince the adversary and target audience that the sending state is indeed able and willing to implement its nuclear threats. The regime in Pyongyang has been issuing a multitude of—often repetitive and noisy—messages of nuclear resolve. Among these are two particular strategic messages of nuclear resolve: First, and very explicitly, the DPRK has messaged its readiness for collective sacrifice and martyrdom, negating the possibility of surrender and embracing escalation. This notion applies to all, from the general population to the security establishment and the ruling family, and draws on the regime's stories about the DPRK's *raison d'être* (Chapter 4.2). Second, and more

recently, the regime in Pyongyang has hinted at contingency planning with regard to its nuclear command and control, conveying the certainty of nuclear strikes even if the regime is decapitated. These two strategic messages of nuclear resolve—nuclear martyrdom and automatic escalation—are essential to the DPRK's messaging for deterrence, as Chapter 6.2 will detail.

The concept of “resolve” is ubiquitous in crisis bargaining, as key to influencing states' calculations about escalation and therefore their bargaining behavior before and during warfighting (Schelling 1966; Snyder and Diesing 1977). Resolve generally refers to the ability to pursue or hold on to, for example, a bargaining position; the ability to do so includes material and immaterial elements, such as diplomatic and military statecraft, as well as political determination, steadfastness, and willpower. The latter qualities also account for the stakes involved, the values states attach to the issue at hand, and how sensitive (or not) a state is to related costs (Drennan 2003), which are particularly important elements when it comes to convincing one's bargaining counterpart of one's resolve and that one's material abilities will indeed be used to this extent (Fearon 1995; Sartori 2005, 25; Kertzer 2017, 111–118, 130). States that are militarily inferior and concerned with higher stakes—which applies to the DPRK in its existential conflict with the United States—are more prone to invest heavily in messages of resolve and to shift the conflict at hand towards a competition of resolve rather than a competition of actual military capabilities (Powell 2015).

Nuclear weapons increase the importance of resolve in international politics and crisis bargaining between adversaries. “Nuclear resolve” here refers both to a state's military ability to employ nuclear weapons—as in technical capabilities and operational infrastructure—and to its willingness to employ nuclear weapons. As outlined in Chapter 2.2.1, nuclear threats suffer from inherent credibility issues, given moral and rational considerations, including the potential of unbearable escalation and all-out war. Accordingly, communicating nuclear resolve is essential to building credible threats of nuclear weapons use and to highlighting one's ability and determination to follow through with the consequences of compliance or non-compliance with issued threats (Kroenig 2013, 142–145). Moreover, communicating resolve is fundamental to winning risk-taking contests in international politics, i.e. to prevailing in nuclear brinkmanship and crisis bargaining while avoiding actually launching nuclear weapons (Haichin 2020, 54).

This is why messaging nuclear resolve are generally prone to being noisy: statements of determination and willingness to fight and employ nuclear weapons can be abundant and repetitive (loud words without much concrete information or immediate consequences). As discussed throughout Chapter 2, scholars highlight that such messages of resolve may be “cheap” in terms of immediate material costs, but they can entail later and immaterial costs as they shape reputation and audience expectations over time and with repetition (Sartori 2002; Sechser 2018; Lupton 2020). In addition to convincing the adversary and target state of one's steadfastness and willpower, messaging resolve can fulfill multiple additional

purposes, including domestic functions such as mobilizing internal constituencies (Weeks 2008; Hyde and Saunders 2020). In nuclear crises and bargaining, scholars argue that communicating resolve through physical demonstrations and material costs, as in deploying troops, is more credible; at the same time, such actions are also riskier, as they can provide sensitive information and trigger escalation (Slantchev 2005; Trager 2011; Bernhard and Sukin 2020; Sukin 2020). Messages of nuclear resolve thus do not necessarily solve the credibility issues related to nuclear threats and can, in fact, worsen the credibility dilemma. The DPRK issues a multitude of messages of nuclear resolve. Generally, both parts of nuclear resolve—the ability and the willingness to employ nuclear weapons—are equally important to establishing and maintaining credible nuclear threats. The ability part of resolve involves a multitude of messages, including the determination and ability to build and maintain nuclear weapons. The most crucial ability element concerns nuclear command and control, i.e. a state's ability to launch nuclear strikes in whatever contingencies—Chapter 5.1.1 will detail the regime's messages of automatic escalation, i.e. of its ability to launch nuclear strikes even if the supreme leader is unable to do so. Such messaging is strategic due to its highly relevant content and nuanced framing, and it is unusual for personalist dictatorships like the regime in Pyongyang. The willingness part of resolve builds on messages of readiness and willingness to launch nuclear weapons. While such messages abound in the DPRK's state media communication, its messages of nuclear martyrdom are hyperbolic but convincing and strategic.

Table 5 Overview of the DPRK's Messages of Nuclear Resolve

| Messaging nuclear resolve (Section 5.1) | |
|--|---|
| Ability to launch nuclear strikes | Willingness to launch nuclear strikes |
| Determination to pursue and acquire nuclear weapons, to maintain a nuclear weapons program | Willingness to deploy nuclear forces, maintain combat readiness and high alert |
| Ability to develop and operationalize nuclear weapons, to produce and maintain nuclear forces | |
| Ability to command and control nuclear employment (Strategic Messages of Automatic Escalation , Section 5.1.1) | Determination to launch nuclear strikes (Strategic Messages of Nuclear Martyrdom , Section 5.1.2) |

All of these messages are essential elements to communicating nuclear resolve and laying the groundwork for credible nuclear threats. The following paragraphs provide a brief overview of the content of the DPRK's messaging concerning its determination and ability to build and maintain nuclear weapons. The first set of messages concerns the regime's pursuit of nuclear proliferation. The second concerns its intellectual abilities to develop, build and

operationalize advanced nuclear capabilities, and the third its material ability to produce and maintain its nuclear forces.

First, the DPRK presents itself as **determined to build up its nuclear weapons program**: “Ours are a heroic people who carry out without fail whatever they are determined to do, and an indomitable people who never mark time even for a moment in the struggle to realize their lofty ideals” (2011-01-01 KCNA Joint Editorial). Yet the regime’s messages of determination to develop and maintain nuclear weapons have not always been so clear. Over the course of the 1990s and the early 2000s, in light of its negotiations with the United States, the DPRK was much more ambiguous about its desire to pursue a nuclear weapons program. The regime combined ambiguous threats of nuclear proliferation with its desire and right to have a nuclear energy production program. It added references to its commitment to global disarmament and non-proliferation while denouncing the unjust treatment it received from the international audience during bargaining crises. The bargaining moments between the DPRK and the United States also included positive inducements, acts, and affirmations of the possibility of stopping nuclear proliferation and rolling back its nuclear weapons development program as outlined in Chapter 4.4 regarding the dream of denuclearization. Notably, the regime in Pyongyang announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 1993 and 2003, but did not explicitly and publicly communicate its interest to build nuclear weapons then. Instead, it was on February 10, 2005, that the DPRK first announced its determination to pursue a nuclear weapons development program; October 6, 2006, marks the day of its first nuclear explosives test. Since then, the regime in Pyongyang has generally increased its public nuclear messaging and has issued frequent messages of its determination to build nuclear weapons. The stage-setting of its conflict definition and nuclear threats by the United States (Chapter 4.2), its pursuit of nuclear justice and justifications of nuclear proliferation (Chapter 4.3) include references to the regime’s nuclear path—a self-chosen product of the United States’ compellent threats. Since 2012, the DPRK’s state media have made reference to increasing its nuclear weapons arsenal “in quality and quantity” (2012-10-25 MFA Spokesman), also stating that its nuclear weapons program is not subject to negotiation and, since 2016, that the regime will not “flinch even an inch from the road of bolstering its nuclear force” as part of Kim Jong Un’s *byungjin* line of parallel economic and nuclear weapons development (2017-07-07 FM Spokesman). These references communicate the DPRK’s determination and ability to build and maintain nuclear weapons.

Second, the regime in Pyongyang emphasizes its **intellectual abilities**, i.e. its **scientific, engineering and military advances related to developing and building nuclear weapons**: “military and technological superiority is no longer a monopoly of the U.S. and gone are the days never to return when the U.S. could threaten and blackmail the DPRK with A-bombs” (2012-06-24 FM Spokesman). The regime has explicitly stated its ambition to develop innovative and advanced (“new-type and ultra-modern”) technologies and to make

“fresh leaping progress in the strengthening of military capability,” meaning capabilities for intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance, as well as air defense and strike capabilities (2016-03-04 Kim Jong Un Guides Test-fire of New Multiple Launch Rocket).⁹⁶ Reported visits and statements by the regime's three past and present supreme leaders consistently emphasize the importance of science and technology in the economic realm, particularly for agriculture and manufacturing. References to science and technology for military applications, particularly nuclear weapons and missile programs, increased following the DPRK's announcement that it would be developing nuclear weapons in 2005. Successful test events are often followed by articles announcing awards given to “defense scientists,” celebratory group photos, and receptions with the supreme leader (2016-06-23 REPORT KJU Photo Session; 2017-07-11 REPORT KJU Reception).⁹⁷

Notably, the DPRK's public messaging about its intellectual abilities to develop, build, and maintain nuclear weapons emphasizes messages about professionalism with cultural and regime-specific values. **Emphasizing professionalism** fits to accommodating external audiences that the regime's messages of determination and ability should be taken serious. The existing literature assumes professionalism to be the key variable for successful nuclear proliferation and that top-down interference in personalist dictatorships impedes professionalism.⁹⁸ In contrast, the DPRK projects a level of professionalism and refinedness when it comes to the structure of its nuclear weapons program, suggesting an apparatus that imbeds and links engineers and scientists to the military and party apparatus. It is notable that the regime in Pyongyang frequently publishes pictures of the supreme leader amidst his military and/or party apparatus, commonly publishing lists of those present at specific events. This corresponds to the fact that, while the regime's winning coalition may be small relative to other regime types, it is spread across different constituencies, as its nuclear weapons program requires consistent buy-ins and vast resources—financial, human, political, and technical capital—over extended periods of time and from a number of different groups within the regime's bureaucracy.

As a theater state and in terms of **internal messaging**, the regime accommodates **cultural values** and the neo-Confucian importance of intellectualism, knowledge, and education with

⁹⁶ The regime in Pyongyang has integrated scientists into its everyday propaganda, featuring them in movies (Gabroussenko 2020) and propaganda posters and slogans alongside more traditional depictions of peasants, soldiers, and workers. The “Future Scientists Street” (미래과학자거리), which opened in Pyongyang in 2015, celebrates this particular class of scientists and the country's engineering abilities. Even though the DPRK's state media outlets also carry heavily edited images in which certain individuals are pixelated, outside observers follow the make-up of the regime in Pyongyang closely (Garcia 2022, 2023b; NK Leadership Watch 2023).

⁹⁷ The regime in Pyongyang celebrates its nuclear weapons achievements in internally-oriented public messaging efforts by, for example, declaring national holidays of certain missile test-events, manufacturing missile systems as fireworks and toys, issuing stamps, naming streets, districts, and monuments after missile systems or test-events (Smith 2024). It is unclear from the outside, however, whether (and to what extent) these celebrations constitute new traditions. For example, media reports identify both November 29 (the date of the regime's first test launch of its Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile in 2017) and November 18 (a significant date in the flight testing of the Hwasong-17 ICBM in 2022) as the regime's “Rocket Industry Day”.

⁹⁸ Iraq and Libya commonly serve as examples (Hymans 2012; Way and Weeks 2014; see Chapter 2.3 on authoritarian signaling).

its messages of nuclear science and engineering abilities.⁹⁹ Emphasizing such abilities contributes to the regime's ***juche* mantra of self-determination** and self-sufficiency, as well as to the notion of national pride, justice, and superiority: "The Korean nation is no longer a miserable weak one in a colony in the past when it regarded sycophancy and ruined nation as its fate" (2012-04-19 REPORT KCST); now "the scientists and technicians of the Academy of Defence Science for thrillingly succeeding at one try in even the test-launch of Hwasong-14 capable of striking the U.S. mainland this time, thus fully demonstrating the dignity of independent Juche Korea and indomitable spirit of its heroic people and devotedly defending the absolute authority of the Workers' Party of Korea" (2017-07-05 REPORT KJU). The notion that developing (and using) advanced capabilities is not "a monopoly of the United States" (2012-06-24 MFA Spokesman) is a common framing. References to advanced weapons of "its own style" (2008-04-25 Government Report) or of "Korean-style" (2013-03-05 Supreme Command Spokesman) accommodate nationalist sentiments and suggest the intellectual ability to innovate and develop ambitious weapons technologies.

Moreover, the DPRK's public messaging heavily features the supreme leader, aligning with its very own ***suryong* system** and theater state communication: It is normal for the DPRK's state media to carry many articles about the supreme leader and his visits to provide "guidance." "Guidance" refers here to setting micro- and macro-level goals as well as (presumably) providing technical instructions. Reports and pictures of Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un, respectively, visiting militarily relevant research institutes and factories are common in the DPRK's state media communication; they provide a fitting setting for glorifying the ruler's strategic thinking and knowledge, as well as personal guidance for scientists and officers (2011-07-25 KJI Inspects Command of KPA Navy; 2017-02-13 REPORT KJU Pukguksong-2 test-launch; 2017-07-05 REPORT KJU ICBM launch). Kim Jong Un, in particular, has used these visits as a platform for affirming specific development ambitions. Examples include an inspection of warhead designs at the Nuclear Weapons Institute and a visit to a submarine capable of launching ballistic missiles under development at the Sinpo Shipyard.

These messages with supreme authority often include celebratory language, such as Kim Jong Un's claim that "we have proudly acquired the reentry technology, possessed by a few countries styling themselves military powers, by dint of self-reliance and self-development, thus making great progress in the ballistic rocket technology that helps increase the independence of the country's defense capability and munitions industry and remarkably enhance the invincible might of the powerful revolutionary Paektusan army" (2016-03-15

⁹⁹ As mentioned in Chapter 4, founding father Kim Il Sung integrated neo-Confucian traits into his personalized ideology and the value system of the DPRK. For example, the ruling Workers' Party's emblem combines the hammer and sickle with the brush—in reference to the *yangban* class of Confucian intellectuals and aristocrats in feudal Joseon Korea. Knowledge, education, intellectualism, science, and technology thus have a particular standing in the DPRK's political culture and society. Alongside significant progress in developing nuclear weapons, scientists and engineers have received notable public praise and rewards, making them a new constituency for the regime (Choi Ha-young 2015; Ji Dayum 2019).

after a re-entry vehicle test). This celebratory framing of nuclear weapons development aligns with the DPRK's framing of itself as a heroic regime but also **blurs the line regarding when weapon systems or components are operational**. Reports and statements about missile test events, for example, often frame developmental tests as confirming the correctness of choices regarding the functionality, accuracy, and reliability of systems. Over the years, the DPRK's state media reports have become increasingly detailed concerning the specifications of tested or showcased missiles and nuclear weapons. Examples include tests of engines and re-entry vehicles, multiple flight tests of its intercontinental ballistic missiles, and accompanying media reporting that frames the number of flight tests—although such tests are performed on lofted trajectories—as key to ensuring the reliability of missile launch and guidance, survivability, and the accuracy of warhead re-entry and targeting (2016-03-15 REPORT KJU; 2017-07-05 REPORT KJU; 2017-11-29 REPORT KJU).

The line between where weapons development ends and where operationality and deployment begin is generally not clear-cut. Theoretically, the regime in Pyongyang could field nuclear-capable missile systems “prematurely” and/or work to further develop and improve deployed systems. Nevertheless, it is notable that the DPRK's state media reports have increasingly portrayed an image of **nuclear weapons deployment and modernization** rather than “mere” nuclear weapons development. The vast majority of military parades, exercises, and test events are accompanied by detailed reports—usually written texts (increasingly with images) and television broadcasts—highlighting the diversity, likely number, and operationality of the regime's arsenal of missile systems, including launch vehicles. In subcase 4 in particular, the DPRK continued to emphasize the novelty of its weapons systems at a first test event but framed later **tests as operational trainings and drills rather than developmental tests**. Certain statements, such as those made following a successful flight test of the DPRK's first intercontinental ballistic missile system, the Hwasong-14 (2017-07-07 FM Spokesman), were likely exaggerated, but the claim of operationality may ring true in other instances, such as following four successful flight tests of the Hwasong-12 intermediate-range ballistic missile system.¹⁰⁰

The **genuineness of the regime's claims about innovation, reliability, and operationality** remains a matter of debate. The open source research community that has been analyzing the DPRK's nuclear weapons program has deemed certain missile launch events as trainings, suggesting that certain systems are indeed operational, i.e. deployed and ready for employment (Dempsey 2020; Panda 2022). There are also debates about several of the regime's claims concerning its capability development and the reliability of its proclaimed systems, particularly concerning the miniaturization of nuclear warheads, re-entry vehicles, and missile guidance systems. Notable in this regard are the temporal

¹⁰⁰ The report accompanying the last Hwasong-12 test noted: “In the drill the rocket operational capacity of the Hwasong artillery units of the KPA Strategic Force for an actual war and the combat efficiency of the newly equipped intermediate-range strategic ballistic rocket were all proved perfect. ... [Kim Jong Un] said that it is necessary to positively push forward the work for putting the strategic force on a modern basis by conducting more ballistic rocket launching drills with the Pacific as a target in the future” (2017-08-30 REPORT KJU).

correlations between public debates about the DPRK's capabilities and the regime's public, explicit messaging concerning its nuclear capabilities; in 2016 and 2017, as public debates about the technicalities of miniaturizing a nuclear warhead were gaining traction, the regime's state media outlets displayed Kim Jong Un together with nuclear scientists and diverse warhead design models (Panda 2020, 122–123, 126–127). Further analysis of the links between international public debates and the DPRK's public messaging would be an interesting area for future research (see Chapter 7.2).

Returning to the DPRK's messages of nuclear resolve and, in addition to its messaging of its determination and intellectual abilities with regard to building and developing nuclear weapons, the regime in Pyongyang consistently issues a third set of public messages that concern its **material ability to produce and maintain nuclear weapons**. Following the successful test launch of the new Pukguksong-2 medium-range ballistic missile system, which adds to the diversity of the DPRK's missile forces, Kim Jong Un “expressed belief that the national defense scientists and workers at the munitions factories intensely loyal to the WPK would produce better and more Juche weapons, nuclear offensive means” (2017-05-22 REPORT KJU). Some of the DPRK's verbal and non-verbal communication, such as the frequency of military parades and missile test events, particularly in subcases 3 and 4 (2011–2013 and 2016–2018), project the operationality of systems and provide clues about the regime's production capabilities. More tailored messaging efforts, such as the supreme leader's visits to missile factories, assembly halls, and storage facilities, illustrate the extent to which the DPRK seeks to present its production capabilities as highly advanced.

Yet most of the regime's **messaging concerning its intellectual and material abilities is relatively noisy, repetitive, and empty** – particularly so when new sanctions have been imposed on the DPRK. In this context, the DPRK's state media convey statements that downplay the role of external limits to access to knowhow and technology. Kim Jong Un emphasizes that the DPRK's nuclear weapons program is built “by our own efforts and technology” (2017-09-03 Kim Jong Un Gives Guidance to Nuclear Weaponization). A statement attributed to the DPRK government states that “the DPRK has already gained everything it needed while having everything wanted in its hands through an arduous struggle under the harshest sanctions regime created by numerous UN ‘sanctions resolutions’ adopted at the instigation of the U.S during the last several decades” (2017-08-07 DPRK Government Statement). This statement by Kim Jong Un also carries the message that the DPRK can “produce powerful nuclear weapons as many as it wants” (2017-09-03 Kim Jong Un Gives Guidance to Nuclear Weaponization).

Messages regarding the willingness element of nuclear resolve are also prone to being noisy. In fact, most of Pyongyang's nuclear messaging concerns its **willingness to deploy its nuclear forces and its readiness for nuclear launch**. In line with its broader stage-setting—particularly the continuing formal state of war with the United States and the continued existential threats to the regime in Pyongyang—the DPRK depicts itself as being

in a constant state of high alert and combat readiness, which it extends to its conventional and nuclear forces. The regime emphasizes “full readiness the diversified strategic nuclear strike [...] ready to open fire of justice by order which can be made any moment” (2017-08-09 KPA Spokesman). It seeks to communicate a constant readiness to employ nuclear weapons, which corresponds to its threat perceptions of “sudden surprise attack of the U.S. ultra-modern military hardware and special units” (2016-03-06 FM Spokesman), “surprise nuclear preemptive attack” (2013-03-26 FM Spokesman) or “surprise invasion” (2002-12-20 KJI).

While **high levels of alert are thus “normal”** for the DPRK, the regime seeks to boost the credibility of potential nuclear employment. Rhetorically, state media reports have long emphasized how easily the situation on the Korean Peninsula could escalate from a “cold war” and armistice to all-out nuclear war, and thus how uncertain and unstable this “touch-and-go situation” is (2002-03-18 MFA Spokesman; 2017-12-06 MFA Spokesman), with all parties standing figuratively “at the brink.” The regime in Pyongyang also continues to communicate through its military activities that its test events are development steps, operational confirmations, and increasingly, explicit training for combat readiness (2017-03-07 Kim Jong Un Supervises Ballistic Rocket Launching Drill.). Chapter 5.1.1 on messages of pre-determined orders details how the regime’s projection of nuclear command and control before and in contingencies adds to this notion of nuclear combat readiness. For the past few years, it has framed its **military drills with ballistic missiles as “routine” and “normal”** means of modernizing and maintaining its nuclear forces, just as the United States does (2016-06-25 PerMission at UN; 2017-04-11 KPA General Staff). Moreover, the regime in Pyongyang has conducted missile tests with and without the explicit presence and “guidance” of Kim Jong Un; the latter section on pre-determined orders discusses this gradual change in “reporting profile” (Kae and Town 2022).

The aforementioned messages of the DPRK’s intellectual and material ability to build advanced nuclear weapons and its willingness and readiness to launch nuclear strikes are relatively noisy. They have been frequent and repetitive; they are partly hollow mantras but also provide clues about development priorities, successful capability development, and potential deployments. Notably, the regime in Pyongyang has gradually adjusted the packaging of these noisy messages over the past three decades, which correlates with the change of leadership and the significant progress of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons and missile programs. Under Kim Jong Il’s rule, for example, statements from low to mid-levels of authority reinforced the public *juche* chant of defying sanctions and building advanced weapon systems. State media outlets carried high-level statements in moments of acute bargaining between the DPRK and the United States, such as during the second nuclear crisis in 2002 and the start of the Six-Party Talks in 2003. Since Kim Jong Un’s reign in 2012, the

share of high and supreme levels of authority attributed to messages of nuclear resolve has increased significantly over time.¹⁰¹

Noisy messages are still purposive, and the aforementioned noisy messages are the foundation of the regime’s messaging of ability and willingness, which combine to convey nuclear resolve. Noisiness aside, two other dilemmas concern the credibility of the DPRK’s messages of nuclear resolve. Given the potential chaos into which its personalist system would descend if a US strike were to successfully decapitate the regime in Pyongyang, would the DPRK still be able to launch its nuclear weapons? Nuclear command and control are highly sensitive and generally secretive, but the regime *messages automatic escalation* by providing clues about its contingency nuclear command and control apparatus, as the next section (5.1.1) details. Assuming the regime’s ability to launch nuclear strikes in contingencies, would it indeed employ its nuclear weapons if escalation were ultimately to result in the use of force by the United States and the annihilation of the DPRK? Section 5.1.2 will outline the regime’s messaging of its willingness to commit collective suicide, here called *messages of nuclear martyrdom*.

Table 6 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Nuclear Resolve

| Strategic nuclear messages | | Level of authority: very low (1) to very high (5) | Content specificity: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | packaging: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Frequency : very repetitive (1) to very rare (5) | Context specificity: explicit or implicit |
|--------------------------------|-----------|---|---|---|--|---|
| Nuclear resolve ¹⁰² | Subcase 1 | 2 – low levels of authority | 1 – very unclear, very befuddling | 1 – very unclear, very ambiguous | 3 – neither repetitive nor rare | Explicit context: Second nuclear crisis, start of Six-Party Talks |
| | Subcase 2 | 4 – high levels of authority | 2 – not clear, relatively befuddling | 2 – not clear, relatively ambiguous | 3 – neither repetitive nor rare | Explicit context: Six-Party Talks, inter- |

¹⁰¹ Many scholars highlight how much has changed under Kim Jong Un’s rule and argue that this relates to his personal leadership style. Chapter 4 details the unique protagonist role played by Kim Jong Un in the regime’s broader public messaging. Indeed, the regime in Pyongyang has also boosted its non-verbal signaling and has increasingly pictured Kim Jong Un within the messaging of nuclear resolve. Yet the proliferation of certain hardware and software, which has enabled the DPRK to gain more access to better cameras and photography editing tools, for example (Garcia 2023), as well as the trajectory of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons and missile development programs over the past three decades, may have presented the regime with opportunities to improve its nuclear signaling vis-à-vis the United States. Chapter 7 suggests this as a topic for future research.

¹⁰² The umbrella term “messages of nuclear resolve” refer here in this table to three messages of determination to pursue, acquire, maintain; ability to develop, operationalize, produce, maintain; willingness to deploy nuclear forces, maintain combat readiness.

| | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|----------------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|---------------------|--|
| | | | | | | Korean military talks |
| | Subcase 3 | 3 – mid-level of authority | 4 – clear | 5 – very clear | 1 – very repetitive | Explicit context: Leap Day Deal missile moratorium |
| | Subcase 4 | 5 – very high level of authority | 5 – very clear, detailed | 5 – very clear | 1 – very repetitive | Explicit context: Third nuclear crisis |

5.1.1 Automatic escalation

The threat of using force and fighting a nuclear war is central to the DPRK’s nuclear messaging. Implicit and explicit broad references to nuclear war are frequent, but within this noisy setting are strategic messages about the regime’s **ability to launch nuclear weapons**. As mentioned in Section 5.1, the DPRK issues a multitude of strategic messages of its determination and ability to build nuclear weapons, but the regime’s nuclear arsenal will appear more threatening if it is indeed usable in contingencies. The DPRK’s strategic messages provide clues about its nuclear command and control system: It suggests rigid top-bottom command lines that implement immediate launch orders from the supreme leader or launch orders that are pre-determined by the supreme leader. Both types of orders ensure the application of supreme launch authority but enable a **default direct order or pre-determined orders in contingencies**, such as the leader’s death. This particular message is key considering the personalist dictatorship and centralist political system under the regime in Pyongyang. Messaging this ability to launch nuclear weapons in contingencies is central to the DPRK’s broader message of nuclear resolve. It communicates that the regime is able and willing to escalate by launching nuclear strikes and that such escalation would be automatic and certain. Chapter 6 discusses how this element is complemented by projecting survivability of forces (Chapter 5.2) and thereby factors into the “assured” part of the DPRK’s nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation.

The term “nuclear command and control” refers to the procedures taken before and during the launch of nuclear weapons. It includes preparing and finalizing operational plans, assembling and mating nuclear warheads with respective delivery vehicles, deploying and readying these nuclear weapons, and then launching nuclear weapons and controlling their flight and targeting. Having such procedures in place is crucial to the ability to launch nuclear weapons. The term “nuclear command, control, and communication” refers to the entire

infrastructure behind nuclear weapons employment, combining “wetware (people), hardware (sensor, communications, and control technology), and software (digital code that enables the digital elements to connect people with machines, although much of the technology is analog inherited from a pre-digital era in the older nuclear-armed states)” (Hayes 2021, 2). The focus of this thesis and its analysis of the DPRK's nuclear messaging is nuclear command and control, particularly command line aspects and clues about what systems for issuing and implementing launch orders are in place.¹⁰³

Launch order systems operate on the basis of a system of positive and negative controls (Feaver 1993, 163–164). **Positive controls** have the goal of reliability, of ensuring a quick launch following an order, and include measures for deploying nuclear weapons and providing command authority to local commanders. **Negative controls** are focused on safety and security, i.e. preventing an accidental explosion or the unauthorized use of nuclear weapons, and include measures such as storing nuclear weapons in a disassembled fashion at separate locations. The DPRK's strategic messages emphasize **strong negative controls and few positive controls** in the regime's nuclear command and control. This fits, on the one hand, with the regime's domestic political system of rigid top-down command lines; on the other hand, it undermines operational readiness and warfighting functions. As the following paragraphs outline, the DPRK's messaging suggests that it has struck a balance between negative and positive controls and has the ability to launch nuclear weapons in contingencies, either through direct and immediate order by the supreme leader or through pre-determined orders from the supreme leader.

The DPRK is a highly centralized authoritarian regime with rigid top-down lines of command; consistency is of utmost importance. The paramount leader (*suryong*) is fundamental to the functioning of all domestic political structures, and that is by design (*suryong cheje*; Frank 2014, 59). This is the system that Kim Il Sung installed while consolidating his power in the 1960s; it has remained relatively consistent despite two leadership transitions, plenty of reshuffles among the leadership, minimal structural changes, and new names for state and party structures (Tertitskiy 2023a, 69; Chapter 4.1). The regime in Pyongyang generally distinguishes between **the party, the military and the state**, but this distinction would seem to be largely nominal. There is significant overlap among the top-tier party, military, and state leadership; most obviously, the supreme leader is the head of the party and the military, as well as the de facto head of state.¹⁰⁴ In all three dimensions, the regime enforces rigid top-down command and bottom-up accountability. This highly centralized, personalized authoritarian system is also replicated in its nuclear command and control structures, in which sole launch authority remains in the hands of the supreme leader.

¹⁰³ Other studies have assessed the DPRK's nuclear command, control, and communication, making assumptions about internal aspects of communication in particular (Narang and Panda 2017; Cheon Myeongguk 2019; Hayes 2021).

¹⁰⁴ Nominally, the president of the DPRK's parliament, the Supreme People's Assembly, is the head of state. It is fair to say, however, that this role has a representative function, while the head of the highest state organ—formerly the National Defence Commission, and as of 2016 the State Affairs Commission—has paramount state authority. The supreme leader also holds this office.

The default nuclear command and control rests on **supreme launch authority**. The supreme leader has the sole authority to launch the DPRK's nuclear weapons with the proverbial "nuclear button [...] on [the supreme leader's] office desk all the time" (2018-01-01 KJU). This applies generally to all artillery, cruise missile, and ballistic missile forces that can (potentially) carry nuclear warheads. The 2013 nuclear law states that "the nuclear weapons of the DPRK can be used only by a final order of the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army" (2013-04-01 SPA; Smith 2015, 16; DIA 2021, 18). Notably, the 2022 nuclear law links Kim Jong Un's supreme launch authority to his function as the president of the State Affairs Commission, politically the de facto head of state and government. The 2013 nuclear law, as well as previous and later statements, links supreme launch authority to Kim Jong Un's military role and his function as supreme commander or head of "the dignified Supreme Command" (2016-03-12 KPA General Staff). Other statements mention "the supreme headquarters of the DPRK" as the source of launch orders (2017-01-08 FM Spokesman). Refraining from solely militaristic framing may be an expression of integrating and normalizing the nuclear weapons program as part of its **political *suryong* system**. Other scholars have long discussed how the DPRK builds nuclear weapons into its projected national identity and political system (Hymans 2006; Ballbach 2016; Howell 2020).

In its reporting on missile tests, drills, and related statements on missile systems, the regime outlines the **de-fault procedure for launch orders**: military units prepare and report an operational plan to the supreme leader, who ultimately orders the launch of the plan, either on-site or from headquarters. The August 2017 threat to launch "an enveloping fire at the areas around Guam with medium-to-long-range strategic ballistic rocket Hwasong-12" affirms this sequencing but emphasizes that, as a prior step, Kim Jong Un "recommended examination of a powerful and effective action plan for containing the U.S. imperialists' aggression hardware" (2017-08-09 KPA Strategic Forces Spokesman).

The 2022 nuclear law clarifies another detail of the default procedure of launching an order: "members appointed by the president of the State Affairs of the DPRK assist the president of the State Affairs of the DPRK in the whole course from decision concerning nuclear weapons to execution" (2022-09-09 SPA). This is a first explicit strategic message that, while **the DPRK's nuclear command and control is a one-man decision, it is not a one-man operation**. This strategic message emphasizes professionalism and thereby seeks to deliver another counterexample to the assumption that centralism and top-down interference in personalist dictatorships impede professionalism and successful development, maintenance, planning, and employment of nuclear weapons. Professionalism here fits to the regime's political system: Deliberation is not incompatible with sole launch authority; the former does not undermine the latter. Paramount decision-making power still lies undeniably with the supreme leader, but his decision-making process and the enforcement of its results involve others.

The DPRK's state media commonly reports on the **top-tier defense officials who accompany the supreme leader** and watch test events and trainings with him. It also publishes pictures of the supreme leader reportedly considering operational plans and looking at regional maps together with top-tier military personnel. Yet such reporting does not convey the exact roles these individuals would play in contingencies concerning the decision-making and implementation of nuclear launch orders. This messaging fits to the DPRK's emphasis of professionalism and exemplifies a common feature of advertising its supreme leader as well as collective performances, considering that the DPRK represents a theater state, while keeping a degree of secrecy: The regime presents top-tier military chiefs and party officials as being involved in matters of nuclear weapons development, deployment, and (potentially) employment decisions. Outside observers have noted that the regime in Pyongyang maintains significant task sharing between the party and the military in order to ensure "compliance with directives" (Hayes 2021, 13). Presumably, the party's Central Military Committee manages the DPRK's nuclear warheads, whereas the armed forces' Strategic Forces Command (since 2014, previously the Strategic Rocket Command) is responsible for the diverse arsenal of (ballistic) missile systems (Cheon Myeongguk 2019, 7-9). This separation of responsibilities entails that nuclear warheads and delivery systems are kept "at separate locations under distinct though parallel chains of command" (Bernstein and Smith 2022b). Distinct responsibilities and command structures are negative controls to ensure only authorized nuclear employment.

Designing, applying, and emphasizing this rigid command system for supreme launch authority aligns with the DPRK's political system and allows for **formative negative control** over its nuclear command and control structures. It imposes rigid centralized and top-down command lines that seek to ensure that any nuclear launch would be conditional on the authorization of the supreme leader. Preventing an accidental or unauthorized launch is important given the regime's otherwise very noisy and belligerent language in messaging directed at internal and external audiences. These "physical and administrative controls [...] prioritize Kim Jong Un's absolute authority over nuclear matters, even at the expense of operational readiness and flexibility" (Smith and Bernstein 2022a, 5).

Moreover, supreme launch authority entails a **major vulnerability**: if the DPRK's nuclear command and control indeed depends entirely on the supreme leader's decisions in the here and now, an attack on the regime's leadership and command centers could impede the DPRK's ability to launch nuclear strikes. Accordingly, the regime has publicly denounced plans for decapitation strikes (Panda 2022b) or a "beheading operation" (2016-02-23 KPA Supreme Command) by the United States and the ROK. Article 6 paragraph 2 of the 2022 nuclear law explicitly lists "a nuclear or non-nuclear attack by hostile forces against the state leadership and the command organization of the state's nuclear forces [that] was launched or is imminent" as concrete scenarios for launching nuclear strikes (2022-09-09 SPA).

As a key means of conveying its positive control over operational readiness, and to communicate its ability to launch nuclear strikes even in leadership contingencies, the regime in Pyongyang issues various strategic messages concerning **pre-determined orders**. The DPRK has communicated the existence of a set of nuclear launch orders that the supreme leader has decided upon in advance. These could include operational plans for the “assembly and dispersal of the weapons” and for employing “available weapons from pre-designated sites against pre-assigned targets” (Bernstein and Smith 2022a, 6; 2022b). Such pre-determined nuclear launch orders would be issued “automatically and immediately” if “the command and control system over the state nuclear forces is placed in danger owing to an attack by hostile forces” (2022-09-09 SPA). It is unclear how such pre-determined orders are recorded, who is clued in, who would issue them if the supreme leader himself were unable to do so, and what the process is to put “automatic escalation” into practice. To preserve the supreme leader’s supreme launch authority, pre-determined orders or a “pre-planned operation [are] not intended to be reviewed or reassessed by surviving leadership figures” (Bernstein and Smith 2022b).

Despite the lack of detail, the DPRK’s messaging on pre-determined orders is strategic. It puts its messages of combat readiness (Section 5.1) into a stronger light, emphasizing its ability to launch nuclear weapons on the basis of a reliable command line and quick launch orders. Observers assume that the DPRK “has already developed a set of standard operating procedures” (Mansourov 2014, 10) and that **commanding officers** play a decisive role in enforcing these (Haichin 2020, 337). It is notable that the DPRK’s state media has begun to explicitly mention the presence of commanding officers alongside top-tier defense officials and scientists at drills “guided” by the supreme leader (2016-01-10 KJU; 2016-07-20 KJU; 2017-04-13 KJU); in previous years, state media reports praised commanding officers alongside common soldiers for their allegiance (2003-04-07 KJI; 2006-12-04 KJI; 2008-12-27 KJI; 2012-01-01 KCNA). It is unclear whether commanding officers are involved in anything other than preparation and enforcement, i.e. in decision-making or adjusting operational plans, although Kim Jong Un has praised commanding officers “for rounding off operational and tactical plans” (2016-11-25 REPORT KJU).

The question whether commanding officers play any type of role beyond obedient enforcement is central, however. It opens the door to significant **positive controls** that would message an immense shift in the DPRK’s nuclear command and control structures. The regime in Pyongyang could combine its supreme launch authority system with delegating operational decisions at a certain level of conflict, in emergencies, or for certain nuclear weapons systems (Cheon Myeongguk 2019, 6; Bernstein and Smith 2022; Panda 2020, 2022). Such delegation could “provide military officials with some flexibility over the execution of the decision to employ nuclear weapons but not the decision itself,” which would remain with the supreme leader (Smith and Bernstein 2022a, 8).

Notably, the DPRK has begun to suggest a distinction between shorter-range and longer-range systems in its nuclear command and control. On the one hand, the regime has highlighted the supreme leader's sole launch authority regarding the DPRK's **intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM)**. In 2017, the first year of ICBM tests, the DPRK state media published pictures of hand-signed launch orders by Kim Jong Un for the ICBM test launches. This may relate to the regime's celebratory propaganda concerning its ability to build advanced nuclear weapons (Section 5.1) and the value of these missile systems for targeting the continental United States and as symbols of eye-to-eye level threats. Notably, Kim Jong Un was present at all test events for longer-range ballistic missiles, whereas some test events for short-range missile systems began to take place without his presence being mentioned or documented (Zwirko 2019; Kae and Town 2022).

On the other hand, the DPRK has explicitly developed "**tactical nuclear weapons**." The term "tactical nuclear weapons" generally refers to the battlefield use of nuclear weapons, either in a limited nuclear war or all-out nuclear war. Chapter 5.2 will outline what kind of warfighting role the regime in Pyongyang envisages for its tactical nuclear weapons; for now, it has framed long-range land-attack cruise missile systems and short-range ballistic missile systems, both of which can target the entire Korean Peninsula with nuclear explosive devices, as tactical nuclear weapons. The DPRK first announced its interest in developing tactical nuclear weapons in January 2021; Kim Jong Un then elaborated, at the Eighth Party Congress, that the DPRK's defense scientists had "proceeded to develop ultra-modern tactical nuclear weapons" and promised the development of more tactical nuclear weapons systems. The regime in Pyongyang has conducted tests on the KN-23, KN-24, and KN-25 nuclear-capable short-range ballistic missile systems since May 2019 and the Hwasal-1 and Hwasal-2 long-range cruise missile systems since September 2021 (Panda 2020, 2021). The regime framed a series of missile tests as drills with "tactical nukes" in September to October 2022 and March 2023 (as of January 2024; Van Diepen 2023). Notably, the regime's March 2023 drill was reportedly undertaken to "reexamine the reliability of the operation system for the command and management over the tactical nuclear force in a multi-faceted way and to get familiar with the order of action" (2023-03-20 KCNA).

It is unclear whether the DPRK would indeed delegate operational decision-making for tactical nuclear weapons to commanding officers. If so, the regime could maximize the "deterrent and operational utility" of its tactical nuclear weapons (Bernstein and Smith 2022); **pre-delegating launch authority to field operators** in peacetime would be the most significant positive control and pragmatic measure to increase the rapid employment of, e.g., close- to short-range and lower-yield nuclear weapons for tactical purposes. Insofar as doing so would presumably be particularly challenging for an emerging nuclear-armed state (Feaver 1992/93; Narang 2014, 18–19) and a personalist authoritarian system, the DPRK's emphasis on readiness to rapidly employ its nuclear weapons "anytime" remains either hollow (Chung et al 2017, 18–20) or restricted to a future state of play (Panda 2021,

18). The development of tactical nuclear weapons can entail incentives for more positive control measures at least in contingencies, such as pre-delegating employment authority over tactical nuclear weapons systems early in a crisis (Panda 2021, 18–19). This would boost its strategic messaging for deterring attack by the United States and its allies and feeds into ambiguous messages about the sequence of regional escalation (see Section 5.2.2).

Yet the March 2023 “tactical nuke” drill report mentions another training activity, that of “strictly examining in the light of security the accuracy of the procedures of issuing and receiving an order of nuclear attack under various simulated emergency circumstances, the order of handling nuclear weapons and the operation procedures for implementing different nuclear attack plans” (2023-03-20 KCNA). This framing highlights the **enforcement of supreme launch authority** and suggests that the transmission, reception, and **implementation of pre-determined nuclear launch orders** has been practiced. The role of commanding officers, beyond enforcement, remains ambiguous and hinges on the explicit reference to “tactical nukes,” which could suggest that the regime is considering the delegation of certain systems in contingencies. There have been no messages suggesting that the supreme leader has diminished his preference for assertive control. Instead, the DPRK’s strategic message of automatic escalation suggest a nuclear command and control system that is based on centralism (supreme launch authority) but that is considering contingencies including those without the supreme leader.

Another ambiguous message concerns maintaining political continuity over nuclear decision-making in the event of the supreme leader’s death. The regime in Pyongyang highlights the supreme leader’s “monolithic command” over its nuclear weapons, projecting the image that political continuity is not a matter of concern and therefore discussion. It thereby extends its general mantra of building a “monolithic ideological system” to that of “the **monolithic command system** of the Supreme Commander in the whole army” (2011-01-01 KCNA), “the monolithic leadership system, command and management system of the Supreme Commander over the nuclear force” (2017-08-15 KJU; 2017-03-07 KJU), and “the monolithic command of the president of the State Affairs of the DPRK” (2022-09-09 SPA).¹⁰⁵ Moreover, the regime’s contingency planning must also include considerations of who will take over and make new decisions when the supreme leader is hampered and pre-determined orders cannot be accommodated in the warfighting situation. The DPRK’s supreme leader, who acts as commander-in-chief, has two immediate military deputies; this has been the common system under Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un (Weiser 2022). But the regime’s public messaging does not suggest that considerations about succession are taking place. This has led analysts to assume that a **devolution** model may be in place behind the scenes in order to avert “political vulnerability for [the ruling] Kim” (Bernstein and Smith

¹⁰⁵ Although the regime in Pyongyang’s self-presentation conveys absolute unity and monolithic thinking, recent scholarship has revealed aspects of pluralism in the DPRK (Frank 2022). McEachern (2010) calls North Korea an “institutionally pluralistic state” in its actual practice. For an excellent discussion of North Korea’s institutions, see Kyung-ae Park and Scott Snyder (eds.), *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

2022, 6). The DPRK successfully completed two leadership transitions through hereditary succession following Kim Il Sung's death in June 1994 and Kim Jong Il's death in December 2011. While the line of succession from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il had been clear since the 1970s (see Chapter 4.1), it was not until September 2010 that the regime publicly groomed Kim Jong Un for succession. The DPRK's belligerent rhetoric and presentation of military readiness remained largely consistent in the first transition period between 1994 and 1997 and after Kim Jong Il's observable health decline after 2008. The clues given in the DPRK's public messaging were restricted to references to the persistent *suryong* system, supreme launch authority, monolithic thinking, and unity among the party and military.

Table 7 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Automatic Escalation

| Strategic nuclear messages | | Level of authority: very low (1) to very high (5) | Content specificity: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Packaging: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Frequency: very repetitive (1) to very rare (5) | Context specificity: explicit or implicit |
|----------------------------|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Automatic escalation | Subcase 1 | 1 – very low level of authority | 1 – very unclear, very befuddling | 1 – very unclear, very ambiguous | 1 – very repetitive | Explicit context: Second nuclear crisis |
| | Subcase 2 | / | / | / | / | / |
| | Subcase 3 | 3 – mid-level of authority | 2 – not clear, relatively befuddling | 2 – not clear, relatively ambiguous | 1 – very repetitive | Implicit context: leadership transition |
| | Subcase 4 | 4 – high levels of authority | 4 – relatively clear | 5 – very clear | 3 – repetitive with new information | Explicit context: Third nuclear crisis |

Nuclear command and control is a highly sensitive matter, but conveying related clues is important for messages of nuclear resolve and for messaging the ability to launch nuclear weapons. The DPRK's messaging regarding supreme launch authority and pre-determined orders is very clear. Its nuclear command and control system is thus biased towards negative controls, focused on ensuring only authorized launches of nuclear weapons. In order to facilitate its operational readiness and ability to launch nuclear strikes in contingencies, the regime has communicated the existence and training of pre-determined orders. In this context, Kim Jong Un's claim that "the nuclear button is on [his] office desk all the time" alludes to this combination of rigid supreme launch authority and pre-determined orders

(2018-01-01 KJU). The DPRK's strategic nuclear messaging thereby conveys the message that it is indeed able to order the launch of nuclear strikes and that this escalation will be automatic and certain, even in contingencies. This crucial ability element of nuclear resolve is complemented by the DPRK's messages of its ultimate willingness to launch nuclear strikes and to accept the consequences, in the form of collective suicide and nuclear martyrdom.

5.1.2 Nuclear martyrdom

The DPRK is very blunt about its willingness to employ its nuclear weapons. It frequently communicates its determination to launch nuclear strikes and to accept all-out nuclear war and the ultimate result of collective suicide. These messages of nuclear martyrdom build on the notion of escalation and attribute value to doing so. The regime in Pyongyang exploits the notion of an inevitable joint fate, the idea that without the regime in Pyongyang there would be no DPRK (stage-setting, Chapter 4.2). It frames **all-out war and collective suicide as a matter of dignity, pride, and virtue**. Surrender and subjugation are not an option. Martyrdom is normalized and celebrated in the DPRK's everyday propaganda and militarized society. As part of the regime's nuclear messaging, its strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom underline the willingness element of nuclear resolve, in addition to the ability to launch nuclear strikes, even if doing so would trigger retaliation and annihilation. That the DPRK is a "peace-loving state" but "neither fears a war nor wants to avoid it" is a common statement from low- to high-ranking officials (2017-04-22 FM Spokesman). Having a reputation for bluffing factors differently from having a **reputation for being trigger happy** in assessments of the messaging state's willingness to launch nuclear strikes. The willingness to employ nuclear weapons is the most intricate part of nuclear resolve and lies at the heart of competitions of resolve. Nuclear threats suffer from inherent credibility issues given normative considerations related to launching nuclear strikes and the risk of escalation from a singular strike to nuclear war (Section 2.2.1). Whereas the ability element of nuclear resolve seems more tangible and measurable, communicating one's level of willingness to employ nuclear weapons is more complicated. Statements are common to set the bar but can easily be discounted as cheap talk and exaggerations. Related actions, such as demonstrably deploying nuclear weapons, can increase both the credibility of willingness statements and the risk of being interpreted as an imminent strike rather than a message of willingness. For the regime in Pyongyang, messaging that it is indeed willing to employ its nuclear weapons is particularly intricate given its already belligerent general rhetoric and the questions of its rationality.

The DPRK comprises a **heavily militarized state and society**. The military and the act of serving are generally tightly knit into society.¹⁰⁶ Through this and through its founding myth, everyday propaganda, and festivities, the regime in Pyongyang frames its military forces as indivisible from the DPRK and as indispensable to building and continuously protecting the state.¹⁰⁷ This helps the regime to build a sense of **common fate, collectivity and homogeneity** around militaristic notions, which also helps with the regime's mantra of *juche* and its greater nation project (see Section 4.3). References to "the all-people and nationwide defense system" are frequent in the DPRK's public messaging (2003-04-21 WPK Central Committee). The DPRK presents its entire society as unanimous, ready to follow and to fight. State media outlets often combine high-level statements with reports on how certain domestic constituencies react in order to confirm that "all the service personnel and people are fully determined to demonstrate the dignity and power of Songun Korea in the spirit of annihilating the enemies, upon hearing the statement of the KPA Supreme Command" (2013-04-02 KCNA). High-level statements and reports proclaim **unity** among civilian and military elements of the state and society to "dash forward more dynamically for the final victory of the great Paektusan nation" (2016-02-23 KPA Supreme Command).¹⁰⁸

Defending the DPRK, the Korean nation, is a **whole-nation effort**: "The army and people of the DPRK will launch an all-out offensive to decisively counter the U.S. and its followers' hysteric nuclear war moves [...] not content with wantonly encroaching upon the sovereignty and security of the dignified DPRK" (2016-03-07 NDC statement). The regime's public messaging seeks to mobilize the masses in particular, celebrating "single-hearted" and "single-minded" unity as sources of power (2002-12-25 report; 2007-04-09 report; 2011-02-27 KPA statement; 2013-08-25 KJU; 2017-01-01 KJU; 2018-01-01 KJU). It calls on soldiers to be "a-match-for-a-hundred" and applauds frontline military units for their readiness to initiate this **collective sacrifice** (2016-11-25 KJU). The DPRK's state media outlets carry the order of mobilization, including the call for its soldiers to "become young heroes in the *Songun* era who ardently love the country and unhesitatingly dedicate their youth and lives to the fight for the country just as Hero Ri Su Bok did" (2008-05-06 REPORT

¹⁰⁶ "All the families of the country are called upon to become families of servicemen and those of revolutionary soldiers and everybody is urged to glorify his youth through service in the army. All the people are urged to earnestly learn from the noble ideological and moral trait of the people's army in order to achieve the perfect unity of the people and army in thinking and militant trait" (2003-04-21 WPK Central Committee).

¹⁰⁷ Founding father Kim Il Sung intertwined military and societal affairs early on with his military guidelines, including the call to arm all citizens and to fortify the entire country (Frank 2014, 102–103; Tertitskiy 2023a, 36). The "military first" policy line of Songun, officially proclaimed by Kim Jong Il in 1997, only manifested the already prevalent societal and political role of the military (McEachern 2018; Kim Sunghee 2019). The regime in Pyongyang operates a rigid and wide-ranging conscription system (Tertitskiy 2023a, 41, 47). Conscripts remain in compulsory part-time service until the age of 40 and then serve as reservists in local chapters of the paramilitary "Worker-Peasant Red Guards" (IISS Military Balance 2023, 262–265). The paramilitary Red Guards boost the DPRK's warfighting personnel numbers while also serving domestic functions related to internal policing and civil defense (Young 2021b). These local, large, and active reserve units form the backbone of the DPRK's mantra of "all-people resistance" and ensure the ever-presence of the military in society (Motin 2023; DIA 2021, 55–56). They provide a sense of normalcy, of being part of a unit and system, such as party or military units (Lankov 2023).

¹⁰⁸ "The history of the DPRK-U.S. confrontation clearly records the immutable law that certain victory is the tradition of Songun Korea and the brigandish U.S. is fated to sustain a defeat. ... For the U.S. to roll back its anachronistic hostile policy toward the DPRK as early as possible, though belatedly, would only offer it an opportunity of escaping a miserable fate." (2016-05-25 NDC Policy Department).

KJI). Moreover, the DPRK's state media communication outlines the **supreme leaders' dedication** and personal "mental and physical efforts to the strengthening of the Juche-based defense capability" (2016-03-04 KJU). Emphasizing sacrifice as a two-way effort fits with the *juche* analogy of head and body (see Section 4.1); the leadership and the population depend on each other to have collective agency. Propaganda depicts the supreme leaders as strict and caring characters—aligning with Confucian notions of social hierarchy—and as sacrificing themselves for the wellbeing of the Korean nation.¹⁰⁹

Notably, the level of sacrifice is highest for the general population: The DPRK is a militarized society and state that unfailingly follows the paramount leader.¹¹⁰ Kim Il Sung and his heroic stories (see Chapter 4.2) laid the ground for cementing **martyrdom as expected and "normal."** The regime in Pyongyang celebrates martyrdom as an absolute expression of nationalism and patriotism, which includes loyalty to the leadership. This notion of absolute self-sacrifice for the greater good, specifically for the Korean nation, is an omnipresent feature of the DPRK's daily propaganda.¹¹¹ Martyrdom is "the ideal-driven death" (Kim and Kim 2019, 4–5), a virtue and something to strive for, particularly when it concerns the security and dignity of the DPRK and its leadership.

The regime thus calls for punishment for punishment's sake; fighting in the name of defending or restoring dignity is not about winning or losing but about fighting for the right reasons and accepting this ideal-driven death (2016-03-07 NDC statement). **Retreat and surrender are not an option; defeat is possible**, not something to shy away from, but it must take the form of martyrdom.¹¹² As the DPRK's state media report, Kim Jong Un "defined the spirit of defending the leader to the death, the spirit of implementing his instructions whatever the cost and the heroic self-sacrificing spirit displayed by the service personnel as the revolutionary spirit symbolic and representative of the *Songun* era, as the revolutionary soldier spirit, and led all the service personnel and people to live and struggle in that spirit" (2013-08-25 KJU).

The regime extends this notion to nuclear martyrdom, using its nuclear weapons as a type of punishment. Bringing significant harm to the attacker is purposeful; there is still

¹⁰⁹ The regime in Pyongyang broaches hardship, errors, and suffering in its everyday propaganda and state media communication. This includes blaming weather extremes, corruption, and external sanctions, as well as Kim Jong Un's tearful apologies for not fulfilling expectations at the 75th anniversary of the ruling Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) on October 10, 2020.

¹¹⁰ Slogans at the military parade celebrating the 60th anniversary of the armistice of the Korean war included: "Letters reading 'Kim Il Sung', 'Kim Jong Il', 'Kim Jong Un', 'Celebration 60', 'Glory', 'Iron-willed Commander', 'Great Army-People Unity' and Great Victory' and the WPK flags of the DPRK and WPK were portrayed in succession by the background stand at the square" (2013-07-27 REPORT KJU Military Parade).

¹¹¹ School education at all levels emphasizes child martyrs during the Korean War; "defense through martyrdom" (*gyeolsaongwi*) is a common slogan at military parades and similar occasions (Ryang 2021, 4). The DPRK's state media communication praises "the concepts of yukt'an (옥탄, human bomb or human bullet) and chap'ok (자폭, suicide attack) as virtues" (2003-04-28 REPORT KJI; Kim Sunghee 2019, 353). Kim Jong Il declared the military as the primary unit in everyday propaganda and *Songun* "military first" politics. When Kim Jong Un succeeded his father Kim Jong Il, the regime clarified that "the whole party, the entire army and all the people ... will become human bulwarks and human shields in defending Kim Jong Un until death" (2012-01-01 KCNA).

¹¹² Heroes can make mistakes; victors can die and remain virtuous warriors. These notions align with the particular version of Confucianism and regime-specific ideology that the DPRK has cultivated. Against this value set, common theories of victory (Roberts 2016) are limited, since the DPRK values virtuous forms of victory other than regime survival, namely martyrdom.

something to fight for even if victory is out of reach. It is worth standing up for one's principles, such as patriotism, loyalty, sacrifice for the greater good and the punishment of those who have sought to attack the DPRK. If defeat and destruction are inevitable, punishing the other and determining one's own suicide has more value than capitulation (Lee Soon Ho 2011, 243). The regime frames **nuclear martyrdom as reinstating the combatants' dignity**, accentuating their agency and self-determination. The annihilation of the DPRK by the United States may be inevitable, but choosing this fate through nuclear martyrdom is presented as restoring *juche* glory: "It is the most worthwhile and proud life and the highest honor for an independent human-being to live as a hero and become such fighter, [Kim Jong Il] urged everybody to become a hero in the sacred struggle to defend the country" (2007-11-23 REPORT KJI).

In addition to normalizing collective sacrifice and suicide, nuclear martyrdom and the notion of "match-for-a-hundred" also **normalize escalation**.¹¹³ The regime commonly emphasizes its mercilessness: since threats to the DPRK and the regime in Pyongyang concern the nation's dignity, merely reciprocating the threat is not enough. Indeed, there can be no mercy when punishing perpetrators: "the army and people of the DPRK will as ever courageously counter those who encroach upon the dignity and sovereignty of the DPRK and will always mercilessly foil all the provocative options of the U.S. with Korean-style toughest counteraction" (2017-04-14 KPA General Staff). Rather than tit-for-tat retaliation and reciprocating threats in kind, the regime frames its "Korean style" and "mode for counteraction of Mt. Paektu style" as comprising escalation: It promises to attack "a dagger with a sword, a rifle with an artillery piece and nukes with precision nuclear strike means" (2013-03-05 Spokesman for Supreme Command of KPA).

Such strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom suffer from issues related to both **content and credibility**. First, the notion of collective sacrifice for the sake of the state and regime in Pyongyang may not be as intuitive and conceivable to analysts and policymakers who are more familiar with notions centered on individualism. Second, nuclear martyrdom does **not seem rational** to outside observers, particularly those in the United States. Some have long questioned the plausibility of nuclear employment by the DPRK as this would automatically be met with retaliation and with the termination of the regime in Pyongyang (Cha Victor 2002, 65; Roehrig 2012, 95; Hayes and Cavazos 2015, 7; Roberts 2016, 70). If the regime in Pyongyang indeed prefers its survival to its demise, then it would only be rational to abstain from the use of nuclear weapons (Habib 2011, 48).

On the other hand, such strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom imply sober calculations by the regime in Pyongyang. It admits that its nuclear strike policies will result in **suicide** (Hayes and Cavazos 2015, 7) and that its nuclear weapons are not silver bullets to win a war

¹¹³ "Today's training is a forge that produces tomorrow's war hero. The entire army should conduct intense combat training in an atmosphere of actual battle as required by the tense situation so as to reliably prepare all the officers and men to be all-round officers and a-match-for-a-hundred combatants who support our Party's will of Songun by force of arms" (2011-01-01 KCNA_Joint_New_Years_Editorial).

against the United States (DIA 2021, 42). The DPRK's nuclear weapons have the purpose of deterring attack by the United States and "nuclear war itself" (2016-03-09 REPORT KJU). The regime's messages of nuclear martyrdom stipulate escalation to all-out nuclear war and its **subsequent self-triggered annihilation**. The DPRK thereby combines the ultimate form of willingness to launch nuclear strikes—accepting nuclear martyrdom—with the threat of **automatic and all-out escalation** to project a maximal level of nuclear resolve.

In the context of nuclear resolve, the regime's strategic messaging of nuclear martyrdom seek to emphasize the asymmetry, in terms of stakes and cost sensitivity, between the DPRK and the United States. The **stakes and cost-tolerance** involved for both parties to the conflict matter when it comes to their competitiveness in risk-taking. As Chapter 2.2.1 outlined, the higher the stakes and cost tolerance projected by the messaging state relative to its adversary and target state, the better the messaging state's chances of prevailing in a contest of nuclear resolve (Schelling 1966; Powell 2015, 595).

The DPRK's strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom indicate how high the stakes are for the regime in its conflict with the United States. These **stakes concern the independence of the state and the very existence of the regime in Pyongyang**. This introduces a clear asymmetry between the DPRK and the United States at the level of showing resolve: the regime in Pyongyang projects a "**singleness of purpose**" in its nuclear messaging and its projections of nuclear weapons development and nuclear deterrence. Meanwhile, the conflict on the Korean Peninsula is one of several challenges to the United States' vital interests (Drennan 2003, 179–180). Emphasizing such high stakes strengthens the regime's strategic messages of nuclear resolve; having more to lose—its very existence—boosts the credibility of its determination to build and employ its nuclear forces.

This projected readiness for martyrdom also underscores the very high level of risk involved. The DPRK has consistently communicated its determination to initiate and further an escalation to all-out nuclear war (Ochmanek and Schwarz 2008, 42; Roberts 2016, 72–73). This adds to the asymmetry between the DPRK and the United States; not only the stakes involved but the risks that come with following these stakes through to the ultimate level are very different for each country. Here, the DPRK presents itself as highly **cost- and risk-insensitive**, the regime and entire nation ready for the ultimate cost of collective suicide, and thereby exploit perceptions of risk-tolerance in bargaining with the United States. These perceptions even fit to theoretical assumptions that a personalist dictatorship is less cost-sensitive than a pluralist democracy, and therefore the former's threat of war presumably more credible in bargaining situations (Weeks 2012, 2014; Haichin 2020, 8). The perception that the DPRK would not hesitate to sacrifice its leadership and its people creates this perception of ultimate cost insensitivity and risk acceptance.

Notably, the regime's strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom communicate not only the DPRK's determination with regard to escalation but also its **willingness to dominate escalation management**. Objectively, the United States outguns the DPRK in terms of

material and military abilities. The regime in Pyongyang operates with the dilemma “that their threats to employ nuclear weapons might not seem credible to us in view of our overwhelming capacity to respond” (Roberts 2016, 67). Through its strategic messaging of nuclear resolve, however, **the regime suggests that it outguns the United States in terms of its immaterial abilities and the willingness and determination elements of nuclear resolve**—which suggest that the DPRK could ultimately prevail in a competition of resolve (Powell 2015, 592–593). It promises automatic escalation to all-out nuclear war in response to nuclear attack on the DPRK or conventional attack on its leadership or strategic targets (see next Chapter 5.2; Roberts 2016, 71; Lee Manseok 2021). The regime in Pyongyang thereby argues that escalation is not manageable by the United States, which is a strong demonstration of resolve but contradicts the DPRK's strategic message of regional escalation to some extent (see Chapter 5.2.2).

The DPRK's strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom are part of the regime's overall nuclear messaging. The purpose of this overall messaging is nuclear deterrence, the **threatening of all-out nuclear war in order to prevent attack and nuclear war**. At first sight, this messaging may seem irrational; discussions of the regime's (ir)rationality have abounded since the 1990s (Smith 2000; Panda 2020). While the DPRK's messages of nuclear martyrdom run parallel to the assumptions of the “madman” theory (Roy 1994; Cho Youngwon 2014), the regime's messaging makes sense in its general stage-setting and if understood as aimed at winning a contest of resolve with—and deterring attack by—a superior adversary. Its strategic messaging of nuclear resolve communicates an intense ability and determination to build and employ nuclear weapons and its acceptance of the ultimate risk of escalation in the form of collective suicide. Its strategic messages of operational clarity – as discussed in the next Chapter 5.2 – build on this messaging of absolute nuclear resolve, seeking to communicate how the regime would behave in contingencies and how it would escalate to the nuclear and the regional level.

Table 8 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Nuclear Martyrdom

| Strategic nuclear messages | | Level of authority: very low (1) to very high (5) | Content specificity: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Packaging: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Frequency: very repetitive (1) to very rare (5) | Context specificity: explicit or implicit |
|----------------------------|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nuclear | Subcase 1 | 1 – very low level of authority | 5 – very clear | 5 – very clear | 1 – very repetitive | Explicit context: Second nuclear crisis |

| | | | | | | |
|--|-----------|---------------------------------|----------------|----------------------|---------------------|---|
| | Subcase 2 | 1 – very low level of authority | 5 – very clear | 5 – very clear | 1 – very repetitive | / |
| | Subcase 3 | 1 – very low level of authority | 5 – very clear | 5 – very clear | 1 – very repetitive | Implicit context: Leadership transition |
| | Subcase 4 | 2 – low levels of authority | 5 – very clear | 4 – relatively clear | 1 – very repetitive | Explicit context: Third nuclear crisis |

5.2 Strategic Messages of Operational Clarity

Strategic messages of nuclear resolve make the case that escalation is certain, and strategic messages of operational clarity make the case **how that escalation would unfold**. Communicating its ability and willingness to build and employ nuclear weapons provides the regime in Pyongyang with a foundation on which to outline its plans for nuclear employment. Outlining conditions and employment plans underlines the ability and willingness of escalation. The regime in Pyongyang communicates a **two-pronged form of escalation: to the nuclear level and from the local to the regional level and beyond**. A nuclear attack on the DPRK would be reciprocated with nuclear strikes; at the same time, though, the regime's messages of nuclear escalation threaten a nuclear response to non-nuclear attacks on its leadership or on militarily and politically strategic targets as well. The DPRK's employment of nuclear weapons would be primarily directed at American counterforce targets in the region. The regime's messages of regional escalation are clear: the DPRK would expand its nuclear warfighting beyond the Korean Peninsula. It remains unclear where this escalation would end geographically, whether with nuclear strikes on Guam and Hawaii or on counterforce targets on the US mainland.

Building nuclear weapons and maintaining nuclear forces is only one side of the coin, however; the other side concerns planning how to employ nuclear weapons. This could involve different **employment plans depending on the arsenal of nuclear weapon systems**, the available targets, military and political goals, and contingencies. Commonly, contingency planning is a very secretive matter, and nuclear employment planning even more so, given the military potential and value attached to nuclear weapons.

Yet communication pertains to both sides of the coin. In theory, a nuclear-proliferating state could stop at communicating its nuclear weapons build-up and exploit the power of virtual deterrence (Levite 2002). In practice, communicating employment plans amounts to evidencing strategic thinking, knowledge of one's adversary, and the relation of the adversary's capabilities to one's own capabilities, as well as outlining the consequences of

non-compliance with an issued threat. **Communicating these elements are all helpful for establishing a threat**, making that threat credible, and achieving its purpose. This can extend to sharing information about nuclear employment plans for the sake of nuclear deterrence, since “there is no point in a deterrent that nobody knows you have, or if nobody understands how you might use it” (Panda 2020, 77).

As with messaging other strategically relevant information, communication about nuclear employment plans need not always be clear and straightforward. Instead, messaging about nuclear employment, posture, and force structure can pursue principles of strategic ambiguity or of operational clarity. The author vaguely defines **strategic ambiguity** as the principle to convey as little concrete information as possible while still establishing a nuclear threat. As its opposite, this thesis understands the term “**operational clarity**” as in conveying as much concrete information as possible without creating additional vulnerabilities and increasing the risks to oneself.

Table 9 Overview of the DPRK's Strategic Messages of Operational Clarity

| Messages of operational clarity (Section 5.2) | | |
|--|---|--|
| Inevitability of escalation | Escalation pathways | |
| Diverse arsenal for survivability | Clear conditions for nuclear strikes (Messages of Nuclear Escalation , Section 5.2.1) | Clear targeting list for nuclear strikes, but ambiguous about immediate all-out escalation or piecemeal sequencing (Messages of Regional Escalation , Section 5.2.2) |
| Diverse arsenal for operational flexibility | | |

The DPRK is very clear about its **guiding principle of escalation**. It frames escalation as its strategic choice for contingencies with the United States. Two lines of argument are prevalent here: First, the regime in Pyongyang often underlines the **limited strategic depth of the DPRK**. Its surface area is limited, and the bombing raids by the United States during the Korean War razed the country to the ground. The northern half of the Korean Peninsula also features a number of mountain ranges that facilitate underground tunnel networks and other concealed basing modes (Lee and Alexandrova 2021, 386). Nevertheless, the probability that vast bombing raids would destroy large amounts of the DPRK’s infrastructure, military facilities, and assets is very high. Notably, the regime’s state media has released several mid- to high-level statements condemning the United States’ and the ROK’s plans for “high-density strikes” (2016-02-23 KPA Supreme Command).

Second, the regime in Pyongyang fears **surprise attack by the United States** (or by the ROK with support from the United States). It explicitly describes the United States as eager to launch a “surprise attack on [the DPRK] to overthrow its political system” (2002-12-28 KCNA;

2012-03-14 KJU) and has claimed that Washington deploys strategic assets to the region for the purpose of “maintaining a surprise strike posture” (2017-11-16 UN Rep Letter).

Vulnerability to “high-density” and “surprise” strikes thus drives the principle of escalation in order to mitigate the fear of disarming first strikes by the United States against the DPRK. While complete disarmament through singular strikes is theoretically conceivable but very unlikely in practice, the probability of significant destruction's impeding its own ability to strike (back) may seem very high to the regime in Pyongyang. This would explain the **strong use-or-lose pressures** that have steered the regime to depend on escalation as its guiding principle in its nuclear doctrine and posture. The regime thus makes the case escalation as certain, if not inevitable, as well as well-thought through operationally.

Most of the DPRK's messaging on nuclear employment revolves around the notion of diversity. The supreme leader clearly set out the goal of diversification (다종화), to “produce many more types of nuclear weapons delivery vehicles” (2013-03-31 KJU). Having a **diverse arsenal of nuclear weapons** has value in itself. It is connected to national pride and the status of having the intellectual and material ability to build a diverse range of advanced nuclear weapons technologies (see Messages of Nuclear Resolve, Section 5.1). More importantly, maintaining a diversity of nuclear warheads and nuclear-capable delivery vehicles facilitates at least two operational advantages that are crucial for using nuclear weapons in conflict: increasing the survivability of nuclear forces and increasing the range of employment options.

There is a general argument in the nuclear scholarship to the effect that states seek diverse platforms to deliver nuclear weapons for the purposes of nuclear deterrence (Gartzke, Kaplow and Mehta 2014) and that maintaining a **diversity of nuclear forces increases the survivability of nuclear forces** (Parachini et al. 2020, 86). Diversity refers here primarily to a multitude of different basing modes and launch methods; this increases the chances that disarming strikes by the adversary will not be (fully) successful and that relevant nuclear weapon systems will “survive.”¹¹⁴ This is crucial to retaining the capability to respond to and threaten nuclear strikes. Following the general argument, nuclear forces that comprise a **nuclear triad**—capabilities to launch nuclear weapons from the air, ground, and sea—are believed to be particularly survivable given the diverse set of basing modes across three different operational domains.¹¹⁵ This may explain why the DPRK has suggested that it is aiming for a nuclear triad, “a powerful nuclear force built in every way and various

¹¹⁴ In addition to maintaining a diverse arsenal, dispersing, concealing, and fortifying storage, deployment, and launch sites and related facilities is crucial to boosting the survivability of nuclear forces. The DPRK is believed to have a favorable topography for such efforts and an extensive system of bunkers and tunnels (Lee Soon Ho 2011, 2013; DIA 2021). Yet the survivability of a country's forces is also conditioned on the adversary's intelligence and strike capabilities (Lieber and Press 2017; Cho and Petrovics 2022, 46).

¹¹⁵ Sea-based nuclear weapons, particularly when deployed at sea and submerged on submarines, are believed to be the most survivable form of nuclear deployment. The degree of stealth also relates to the strategy of deployment; the Soviet Union chose a Bastion model, whereas France, the United Kingdom, and the United States maintain the patrol model.

ultramodern striking means deployed in the ground, sea, underwater and air” (Lee and Alexandrova 2021, 379-380; 2014-10-25 National Defense Commission).¹¹⁶

A diverse arsenal of nuclear weapons also facilitates **operational flexibility** by providing a broader range of options for nuclear employment from which to choose in a given contingency. Notably, the regime in Pyongyang has alluded to this vaguely by referring to “Korean-style” tactics and listing a multitude of possible nuclear strikes such as “involving maneuvers on the ground, in seas, under waters and in the air and various other methods and the Korean-style tough counter-actions” (2017-04-22 FM Spokesman). Furthermore, the DPRK’s statements convey the principle of escalation, of non-reciprocal countermeasures to threats by the United States and its allies, which it expresses through the language of responding to “a dagger with a sword, a rifle with an artillery piece and nukes with precision nuclear strike means of Korean style more powerful than them” (2013-03-05 KPA Supreme Command Spokesman). In this sense, **survivability and operational flexibility through diverse capabilities enable diverse escalatory responses.**

On closer examination, the regime’s strategic messaging suggests two pathways of escalation that communicate the **conditions and operational plans for nuclear employment**: First, its strategic messages of nuclear escalation threaten an early and first use of nuclear weapons in response to an attack that is imminent, underway, or occurring. “Attack” refers here to any nuclear strike against the DPRK or conventional strikes against the leadership in Pyongyang, its command structures, or other strategic targets. Identifying and defining imminent attack is the most crucial and ambiguous part of the DPRK’s nuclear posture. Second, the regime’s strategic messages link its diverse arsenal of nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles to targeting plans. It emphasizes regional escalation, i.e. the message that it is prepared to launch nuclear strikes beyond the Korean Peninsula and to fight a nuclear war that involves the region. Where this regional escalation would end, geographically, remains ambiguous and would likely be contingent on the DPRK’s nuclear posture in the given contingency.

Table 10 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Operational Clarity

| | | | | | |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Strategic nuclear messages | Level of authority: very low (1) to very high (5) | Content specificity: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Packaging: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Frequency: very repetitive (1) to very rare (5) | Context specificity: explicit or implicit |
|----------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|

¹¹⁶ As of January 2024, the DPRK has showcased a number of basing modes and launch methods, from fixed silo-basing, to launches from railcars and road-mobile vehicles, to launch platforms at or below water surface of lakes and at coast lines. The regime has also suggested the presence of launch capabilities from sea by presenting a newly refurbished cruise missile-capable corvette in August 2023, as well as a newly redesigned cruise missile- and ballistic missile-capable submarine in September 2023.

| | | | | | | |
|---------------------|-----------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|--|
| Operational clarity | Subcase 1 | 1 – very low level of authority | 2 – not clear, relatively befuddling | 2 – not clear, relatively ambiguous | 2 – repetitive | / |
| | Subcase 2 | 2 – low levels of authority | 4 – relatively clear | 1 – very unclear, very ambiguous | 2 – repetitive | Explicit context: Six-Party Talks |
| | Subcase 3 | 1 – very low level of authority | 3 – clear, but befuddling | 4 – relatively clear | 3 – repetitive with new information | / |
| | Subcase 4 | 4 – high levels of authority | 4 – relatively clear | 5 – very clear | 3 – repetitive with new information | Explicit context: Third nuclear crisis |

5.2.1 Nuclear escalation

Explicit threats of nuclear employment have taken center stage over time. Over the course of the DPRK's proliferation and acquisition of nuclear weapons, the regime's threats of nuclear weapons use have become not only more frequent but also more precise. It has clarified the **operational role that nuclear weapons play** in conflict, in addition to the employment of conventional weapons. It outlines four forms of attack that the DPRK would respond to with nuclear strikes. The regime has further clarified that it intends to respond to these forms of attack when they are imminent, underway, or occurring. This doctrinal formulation of the conditions for nuclear employment is relatively clear; there is only conceptual ambiguity about how the regime would define an attack that is imminent or underway. Yet a doctrine of responding to an attack that is imminent or underway requires a particular posture that centers on capabilities for early threat identification and communication and for the rapid employment of nuclear weapons. While it remains unclear whether the DPRK has maintained either set of these capabilities, the regime issues ambiguous messages that positive controls in nuclear command and control exist in order to allow for rapid nuclear employment. These strategic messages align to some extent with strategic messages of automatic escalation: if the DPRK perceives attack that is imminent, underway, or occurring, this will initiate direct supreme launch orders or pre-determined orders with supreme launch authority.

The regime in Pyongyang has a clear and simple overall message: It will employ its nuclear weapons in the case of conflict and will do so **early**. In line with its message of nuclear resolve, the DPRK does not show any hesitancy to use nuclear weapons, indeed communicating **low thresholds for launching nuclear strikes**. The regime frames its threats of early nuclear use in line with its plotline of bending the arc of history towards nuclear justice (Section 4.2,

building nuclear weapons as a tit-for-tat response, the result of compellence, and a nation-building measure), counter-balancing and outbalancing the United States' nuclear and conventional threats in order to safeguard and strengthen the Korean *minjok* nation. The notional involvement of the whole nation permeates the regime's messages of early nuclear employment.

The DPRK's most basic reasoning in support of early nuclear use follows a **tit-for-tat rationale**: the United States has threatened a "surprise preemptive nuclear attack" (2013-03-26 FM Spokesman; 2016-08-17 FM Spokesman). More concretely, the regime in Pyongyang frames the United States' and its allies' threatened "beheading operation" as a preemptive strike with a view to "removing in advance the one empowered with the mandate of order" and their "removal operation" as a preemptive strike to destruct and disarm the DPRK's nuclear and strategic rocket forces and related facilities (2016-02-23 KPA Supreme Command Crucial Statement). This is the context of the mantra that "a preemptive attack is not the monopoly of the United States" (2006-03-15 KPA Panmunjom Mission). This oft-repeated statement corresponds to messages of nuclear resolve—in particular, notions of intellectual ability and determination—and **normalizes the threat of early nuclear employment by the regime in Pyongyang**. The threshold for launching nuclear strikes is already low, and the DPRK's messages of nuclear escalation simply balance out the United States' threat of early nuclear employment (Mansourov 2014, 12–13).

Building on this foundation of counterbalancing, the regime in Pyongyang has communicated its **determination to out-balance the United States' nuclear and conventional threats**. The DPRK's state media describes an environment of omnipresent outsized threats as the United States plans a "surprise invasion" (2002-12-20 KJI report) or a "sudden surprise attack of the U.S. ultra-modern military hardware and special units" (2016-03-06 FM Spokesman). Notions of ambush and looming regime change, superior conventional and nuclear capabilities, and its own relative inferiority form the context of messaging early nuclear employment and first use in the case of conflict. Such threats of nuclear escalation are "the only way for the DPRK [...] [to] protect itself as its strategic depth is not long" (2016-03-06 FM Spokesman). In addition to referencing the few clear utterances of nuclear employment against the DPRK, the regime in Pyongyang has emphasized the overwhelming and increasing **threat of conventional weapons** that the United States has conveyed and advanced through extensive investment in, and research and development on, new weapons systems and military reconnaissance, as well as through temporary and permanent deployments to the region.

In fact, the DPRK admits that its strategic depth is limited and that the United States has superior capabilities and resources. Most of the secondary literature agrees that it is the **broader military balance on the Korean Peninsula** that incentivizes the regime to threaten (and set) low thresholds for nuclear weapons use. The line of argument is simple: The DPRK is generally militarily inferior to both the ROK and the United States. This applies

to precision strike capabilities as well as intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities (Lieber and Press 2017). Moreover, while the specter of a nuclear strike remains in place, the allies have been relatively clear about launching conventional attacks in order to—at a minimum—disarm the regime by force or—at a maximum—punish and “end the regime.” Thus, irrespective of the regime’s nuclear proliferation, the **conventional military balance on the Korean Peninsula shifted clearly to the DPRK’s disadvantage** as “North Korea became less and less likely to prevail in a conventional war on the peninsula” (DIA 2021, 4).

Originally, the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula was more mixed. Historically, the North harbored crucial resources and industrial bases, facilitating Kim Il Sung’s drive to reverse engineer inherited imperial weaponry and set up small arms production lines. Geographically, its mountainous terrain benefits the DPRK’s concealment, whereas the line of division makes it possible for the regime to deploy long-range artillery and other strike capabilities and to bring the ROK’s capital, Seoul, easily into range. The DPRK’s threats of turning Seoul into a “sea of flames/fire” allude to this longstanding operational advantage (2011-11-24 KPA Supreme Command; 2013-11-22 KPA Command in Southwestern Sector). The regime in Pyongyang thus possesses non-nuclear means to effectively deter allied forces in the South and is able to rapidly target both the ROK’s capital and US military bases with long-range artillery and rocket strikes (Debs and Monteiro 2017, 287, 293; Lee and Alexandrova 2021, 386–387).

Yet the DPRK’s broader military disadvantage drives particular **use-or-lose pressures** for the regime in Pyongyang. All three kinds of grounds for use-or-lose pressures apply to the DPRK: operational incentives such as short decision-making windows, strategic incentives such as conventional inferiority, and grand-strategic incentives about regime survival (Kelly 2023). The United States and the ROK have a wide range of capabilities that pose an existential threat to the DPRK (Cha 2002, 19–23; Narang 2017; Haichin 2020, 27; Lee Manseok 2021). These existential threats concern the survival of the regime’s nuclear forces, its command and control structures, and its leadership. It would thus be rational for the DPRK to use nuclear weapons early in a conflict in order not to lose a significant portion of its nuclear weapons or its capacity to employ them effectively (Panda 2020, 11, 83). It is this **asymmetric constellation**—characterized by the high stakes for, and the military inferiority of, the regime in Pyongyang—that drives its messages of nuclear resolve and its repeated message that it would use nuclear weapons early in a conflict (Narang 2013; Powell 2015, 616–617).

The DPRK’s messages of operational clarity and automatic escalation heavily feature nuclear weapons, demonstrating the **prevalent role played by nuclear weapons** in the regime’s public messaging. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that the DPRK’s warfighting would include a massive employment of its conventional weaponry. Alongside its large infantry and artillery, its rocket forces could deliver conventional and nuclear warheads, possibly even

biological and chemical warfare agents, to adversarial targets on the Korean Peninsula and beyond (Roberts 2016, 63–65).

Notably, not only have the DPRK's messages of nuclear escalation been consistent over the years, but its threat of early and first nuclear use have become more detailed, outlining concrete conditions for nuclear weapons employment. In the past, the DPRK has linked **conditions for employing its nuclear weapons to the nuclear nature of the attack or of the attacker**. The 2013 nuclear law provided for nuclear employment “to repel invasion or attack from a hostile nuclear weapons state” or against non-nuclear weapon states that have joined “a hostile nuclear weapons state in its invasion and attack on the DPRK” (2013-04-01 SPA, Articles 4 and 5). These statements do not specify precise conditions, however, and instead refer to the general constellation of the United States and the ROK (Cho and Petrovics 2022, 47–49). Such statements are thus relatively noisy, conveying little more than the general threat perception posed by the United States' hostile policy.

In its 2022 revised nuclear law, by contrast, the regime in Pyongyang outlines four distinct **conditions under which it would employ its nuclear weapons**: it states that it would respond with nuclear strikes to attacks with nuclear or other weapons of mass destruction against the DPRK and to nuclear or non-nuclear strikes on its leadership, the command organization of its nuclear forces, or other strategic targets (2022-09-09 SPA, Article 6).

The conditions for launching a nuclear strike are thus more concrete, as they hinge on the nature and targets of the adversary's attack rather than the character of the attacker. There remains some ambiguity concerning the exact definition of “non-nuclear” forms and of “important strategic objects of the state.” This level of ambiguity provides the DPRK with room to maneuver; clarifying what would count as a strategic object and whether non-kinetic forms of attack such as cyber operations would trigger nuclear strikes could, on the other hand, provide the United States with details it could exploit. Nevertheless, the DPRK is still relatively clear (Panda 2020, 77).

The DPRK has thereby threatened both the **first use and the second use of nuclear weapons**. Threatening nuclear strikes in response to nuclear strikes by the adversary complies with the notion of reciprocity and the regime's storyline of nuclear justice. Threatening nuclear strikes in response to conventional strikes would be a form of escalation, i.e. escalating the conflict from the conventional to the nuclear level. On the one hand, this would contradict the DPRK's proclaimed commitment not to “be the first to use nuclear weapons” (2016-01-06 Government Statement), i.e. its longstanding claim that it would use nuclear weapons only in a retaliatory, defensive fashion. The regime in Pyongyang has historically used the wording of a no-first-use policy to present itself as a responsible nuclear weapon state. At the same time, numerous, explicit and authoritative messages of nuclear first use have long outshined its hollow references to “no first use” (2013-04-01 SPA; 2018-01-01 KJU; 2022-01-01 KFJ).

The conditions under which the DPRK would use nuclear weapons are also specified in temporal terms. The 2022 revised nuclear law envisages nuclear strikes in relation to the aforementioned four forms of attack where such attacks are “**launched**”—which could mean underway or occurring—or “**imminent**.” Nuclear strikes in response to an attack that has already occurred equates to actual retaliation. Such threats of retaliatory nuclear strikes are the most straightforward to define and thus to understand. They refer to the employment of nuclear weapons following an attack on the DPRK by the United States and its allies, which would equate to first nuclear use in response to a conventional attack or second nuclear use in response to a first nuclear use by the United States.

The **retaliatory function of nuclear weapons** has long been pronounced in the DPRK's state media. Since the early phases of exploring nuclear proliferation and the very beginning of its nuclear proliferation path, the regime in Pyongyang has issued statements that envisage the employment of (non-existent or crude) nuclear weapons to retaliate for attacks against its territorial integrity, national sovereignty, and dignity: “If the enemies invade our inviolable sky, land and seas even an inch, destroy the aggressors with a merciless annihilating strike” (2003-04-21 WPK Central Committee); “it is quite natural for the army and people of the DPRK to go into an all-out offensive to finally destroy those daringly challenging its dignified socialist system” (2011-02-27 KPA Panmunjom Mission). Since then, **retaliatory threats of nuclear employment** have remained relatively consistent in terms of content and packaging. As retaliation requires little definition and issues related to content are relatively few, threats of a retaliatory nuclear strike suffer from issues of credibility that relate to the survivability of nuclear forces and related infrastructure. Employing nuclear weapons after an attack has occurred requires nuclear capabilities and relevant command and control structures that can survive a first strike; nuclear messaging states thus have an incentive to emphasize the survivability of their nuclear forces even in the case of a “splendid first strike” (Gibbons and Kroenig 2016; see Chapter 2.2). Nevertheless, the DPRK's messages of nuclear escalation in retaliation, after an attack has occurred, remain their most frequent threat of nuclear weapons use, with all levels of authority reiterating this posture.

The DPRK's state media has also long relayed the threat of employing nuclear weapons in cases where one of the four forms of **attack is underway**. Most of these statements are vague: early statements emphasize the regime's readiness to use force, including nuclear weapons, in response to a use of force by the United States on the Korean Peninsula. Such statements emphasize the regime's combat readiness and resolve to use nuclear weapons, but they do not clearly communicate that the regime in Pyongyang is prepared to launch on warning, should an attack by the United States be underway (but before it has actually hit the DPRK): “The ceaseless sabre-rattling staged by the U.S. in South Korea against this backdrop is creating an extremely tense situation where it may make a preemptive strike at the DPRK any time. [...] This compels the army and the people of the DPRK to keep themselves in full

readiness by using all means and possibilities necessary to cope with it” (2003-02-26 FM Spokesman): “we should always be ready for immediate nuclear counterattack to cope with the enemy’s maneuvers for a nuclear war” (2018-01-01 KJU).

The threat of nuclear employment should an attack be underway thus suffers from significant issues of content. It is **unclear how the regime in Pyongyang defines an attack that is underway**, in particular the grey zone between the launch of an attack and its arrival on the DPRK’s soil (DIA 2021, 26; Cho and Petrovics 2022, 40–41). What does it mean when the DPRK threatens to respond “once their buttons [of adversaries’ strike capabilities] are pressed” (2013-03-05 Spokesman for Supreme Command of KPA)? Here, frequent statements to the effect that a range of different actions by the United States would count as acts or declarations of war add noisiness and intensify issues of content.¹¹⁷

These significant issues of content also spur issues of credibility, relating to how the regime would determine that an attack is underway. Generally, scholars note the **necessity of having a comprehensive network of deployed intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities** that can identify, communicate, and track relevant adversarial activities in real time. Such capabilities are necessary for determining whether the proverbial button to launch an attack has been pressed and the relevant actions taken. In order to then respond quickly, other capabilities and force structures are needed; as this also relates to responding to an imminent attack, this will be detailed further below. Even though the DPRK’s messages regarding nuclear escalation when an attack is underway are vague, they are strategic, issued relatively frequently and from all levels of authority, building upon the regime’s strategic messages of nuclear resolve.

Finally, the regime in Pyongyang has threatened to employ its nuclear weapons when one of the four aforementioned forms of attack is imminent. The DPRK’s state media has carried statements threatening “preemptive” strikes since 2006; the frequency and authority of such threats has increased from low to high since then. In addition to this **increase in frequency and authoritativeness**, the regime has also stressed its determination to “continue to build up [...] the capability for preemptive strike as long as the United States and its vassal forces keep on nuclear threat and blackmail” (2017-01-01 KJU). Notably, the DPRK emphasizes its threats of preemption in its messages of nuclear escalation, framed as “preventive measures by merciless preemptive action in case the U.S. and its vassal forces show any sign of conducting a kind of ‘decapitating’ operation on our headquarters or military attack against our country” (2017-09-23 UN General Assembly Yi Rongho). The regime in Pyongyang describes “resolute preemptive attack” as “the only way to defend itself from the sudden preemptive attack from the U.S. modern strategic assets and special warfare units” (2017-03-30 FM Spokesman).

¹¹⁷ The DPRK’s state media outlets have published frequent messages condemning US statements about the regime, the Nuclear Posture Review, the imposition of multilateral or unilateral sanctions, military exercises, and temporary deployments of strategic assets to Northeast Asia as declarations of war.

“Imminent attack” is generally defined in a very diffuse way, and this is especially the case for the DPRK. The regime in Pyongyang refers to its threatened **nuclear response to an imminent attack as a preemptive strike**. “Preemption” is a term that is generally reserved for responses to attacks that are imminent or underway, in preparation for an attack rather than in response to an attack that has already been launched. Despite its frequent use of the term “preemption,” it is unclear how the DPRK would define this notion (DIA 2021, 26; Cho and Petrovics 2022, 40–41). Moreover, the regime’s frequent reference to US–ROK military exercises as preparations for war add to the level of noisiness and issues of content. The general discussion of how to distinguish between preemption and prevention also applies to the DPRK’s threat to respond to an imminent attack: preemptive and preventive strikes both seek to impede an attack before it occurs. This distinction would seem to be temporal and a matter of interpretation, since a strike can be “preventive” even in the absence of preparations for an actual launch.

These significant issues of content combine with significant issues of credibility. Similar to launch on warning postures and threats to respond to an attack that is underway, **preemptive or preventive strikes require capabilities that reliably indicate when an attack is imminent**. Advance knowledge of covert preparations by the United States (and the ROK) to launch disarming strikes against the DPRK would require significant intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities. Moreover, the regime would require rapid command and control and communication structures to function and launch a nuclear response. The regime in Pyongyang often emphasizes its rapid “surprise” launch capabilities (2017-07-29 KJU) and has threatened to surprise the surprise by launching an earlier “preemptive attack” (2016-03-06 MFA Spokesman), but such strike capabilities also require the implementation of fewer negative controls and more positive controls in nuclear command and control. Yet, as outlined in Section 5.1.1, scholars assume that the DPRK has de-mated its nuclear warheads and delivery vehicles, storing them at separate locations and under separate operational commands. Such negative controls could impede the regime’s ability to launch a rapid strike in response to an attack that is imminent or underway.

Despite these significant issues of content and credibility, the DPRK’s **messages of nuclear escalation are relatively clear**. They outline conditions for nuclear employment, namely nuclear weapons use in response to four distinct kinds of attack and in three different temporal scenarios (i.e. where that attack is either imminent, underway, or occurring). These strategic messages of nuclear escalation also correspond to the regime’s stage-setting and its strategic messages of nuclear resolve, amplifying in particular the aim of balancing the threat posed by the United States and strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom. Finally, these strategic messages of nuclear escalation coincide nicely with strategic messages of regional escalation, as will be detailed in the following section. Both sets of strategic messages present two complementary pathways of escalation by the DPRK vis-à-vis the United States and its allies.

Table 11 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Nuclear Escalation

| Strategic nuclear messages | | Level of authority: very low (1) to very high (5) | Content specificity: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Packaging: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Frequency: very repetitive (1) to very rare (5) | Context specificity: explicit or implicit |
|----------------------------|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nuclear escalation | Subcase 1 | 3 – mid-level of authority | 4 – relatively clear | 2 – not clear, relatively ambiguous | 1 – very repetitive | Explicit context: Second nuclear crisis |
| | Subcase 2 | 4 – high levels of authority | 4 – relatively clear | 1 – very unclear, very ambiguous | 2 – repetitive | Explicit context: Six-Party Talks |
| | Subcase 3 | 3 – mid-level of authority | 5 – very clear | 4 – relatively clear | 4 – new information | Implicit context: leadership transition |
| | Subcase 4 | 5 – very high level of authority | 5 – very clear | 5 – very clear | 3 – repetitive with new information | Explicit context: Third nuclear crisis |

5.2.2 Regional escalation

Whereas strategic messages of nuclear escalation indicate when nuclear weapons would be employed, strategic **messages of regional escalation foreshadow what nuclear strikes could look like**. The regime in Pyongyang is relatively clear about its targeting plans, prioritizing counterforce targets in the region. Nuclear strikes by the DPRK would not be limited to the Korean Peninsula but would include strikes on US military targets in Japan and the Asia-Pacific region. The DPRK's messaging highlights close- to theater-range nuclear-capable systems, including so-called tactical nuclear weapons. The regime has also emphasized its ability to launch a nuclear attack on the US mainland, although it remains unclear whether this escalation beyond the region would be immediate or secondary. Notably, the choice between immediate all-out nuclear war and a two-phase nuclear escalation would likely depend on the DPRK's confidence in the survivability of its nuclear forces, particularly its intercontinental-range strike capabilities, assuming that lower degrees of confidence spur use-or-lose pressures. While the regime's strategic messages of

regional escalation are relatively straightforward, its surrounding communication is noisy, giving rise to issues of content and credibility.

In addition to nuclear escalation, the regime in Pyongyang has another clear and simple overall message: its **nuclear warfighting would not be limited to the Korean Peninsula but would extend to the Pacific**. This messaging of regional escalation is linked to its strategic messages of nuclear escalation: “any conflict on the Korean Peninsula will immediately lead to an all-out war and a nuclear war, not confined to a local war” (2013-03-28 DPRK Spokesman Issues Statement). It is with this threat of a two-pronged escalation in particular that the DPRK has expressed operational clarity regarding how it would employ its nuclear weapons in a conflict with the United States.

The regime in Pyongyang conveys its threats of regional escalation in three complementary ways: it communicates information about its **targeting plans**, notably through diverse statements and imagery featuring the supreme leader; it gives credence to these targeting plans through the observable and explicit development of the relevant missile systems; and it issues statements about the sequencing of nuclear regional escalation as an **immediate all-out or phased escalation**.

Despite the diversity of the potential targets mentioned by the DPRK over the years, the regime in Pyongyang clearly **prioritizes counterforce targets** held by the United States and allied forces in the region. Most state media statements carry the threat of counterforce retaliation, often phrased in terms of “reduc[ing] the bases of aggression and provocation to ashes [...] in case the U.S. and the south Korean puppet forces fire even a single bullet at the territory of the DPRK” (2017-03-08 FM Spokesman). “Bases of aggression” likely refer to military bases and command posts involved in launching strikes at the DPRK, such as “the U.S. mainland and the bases of the U.S. imperialist aggressor forces in Hawaii, Guam and the Pacific” as well as military bases in the ROK and in Japan (2013-03-28 DPRK Spokesman).

Given the stationing of strategic assets on Guam, the regime in Pyongyang has expressed a particular interest in the US island territory of Guam: “The U.S. should not forget that the Anderson Air Force Base on Guam where B-52 takes off and naval bases in Japan and Okinawa where nuclear-powered submarines are launched are within the striking range of the DPRK's precision strike means” (2013-03-21 KPA Supreme Command Spokesman). In parallel with its missile developments in 2016 and 2017, there was a surge in statements with supreme levels of authority that contained **explicit threats against Guam**. This included the supreme leader's review of plans to launch “enveloping strikes” in 2017 (2017-08-15 KJU at KPA Strategic Force Command), which triggered a flood of low- to mid-level state media texts repeating this threat. Notably, the DPRK's state media has also started to carry more imagery underlining this counterforce targeting. One example is the 2013 picture of the “US Mainland Strike Plan,” which included Hawaii (the headquarters of the Indo-Pacific Command), San Diego (the base of the Pacific Fleet), Washington DC, and Louisiana (the headquarters of the Air Force Global Strike Command) (Panda 2020, 86).

Taken as a whole, the DPRK's state media texts outline a long list of potential counterforce and countervalue targets. In contrast to counterforce targets, countervalue targets are non-military structures and places that are of high value to the adversary, such as large cities or critical infrastructure. Many of the DPRK's statements **include countervalue targeting but leave room for ambiguity** as to whether it would employ conventional or nuclear weapons against them (Allard, Duchatel and Godement 2017, 3; Parachini et al. 2020, 72). A frequent example of this is the DPRK's threat to turn Seoul into a "sea of flames/fire," which could refer to its massive employment of conventional artillery stationed along the land border, with Seoul easily within range. Accordingly, some scholars argue that the regime in Pyongyang has no particular preference for counterforce or countervalue targeting, neither for conventional nor for nuclear strikes (Roehrig 2013; Allard, Duchatel and Godement 2017). Nevertheless, countervalue targeting threats are repetitive and noisy even when they carry supreme authority, conveying notions of pride and revenge for the sake of dignity rather than any concrete information. Counterforce targeting, on the other hand, has long been consistently communicated in increasingly detailed and pronounced messages with supreme authority (Mansourov 2014).

The ranges of the DPRK's missile systems convey additional information regarding its envisaged targets. The regime in Pyongyang has developed a **diverse arsenal of ballistic missile systems** featuring weapons with close to short ranges (for use on the Korean Peninsula), medium to intermediate ranges (capable of reaching Japan and Guam), and intercontinental ranges (capable of reaching the United States mainland).

The DPRK has issued mostly non-verbal communication when it comes to its **close- to short-range ballistic missile systems** (SRBMs). This could be for a number of reasons, including the fact that its SRBM programs are the oldest of all its programs, based on imports of Scud SRBMs in the 1980s, or that flight-testing SRBMs is not as geographically risky as testing with longer-range missiles.¹¹⁸ Public discussions in Anglophone media tend to convey the image that test events with SRBMs are less provocative than those of longer ranges. With that said, the regime in Pyongyang has corroborated suspicions that SRBMs hold the southern half of the Korean Peninsula at risk, including US troops and military bases, as well as other allied counterforce targets. Notably, the DPRK's arsenal of SRBMs is the most diverse in terms of type and variant, range, propulsion, and basing and launch mode. Moreover, the regime has started to message that SRBMs can be launched without the presence of the supreme leader, suggesting that there may be predetermined orders in place, as discussed in Section 5.1.1.

¹¹⁸ The DPRK's ballistic missile programs gained traction through the importing and reverse engineering of Soviet-origin Scud-B SRBMs. They initiated the regime's own series of SRBM models and the development of ballistic missiles with longer ranges. The regime's first medium-range ballistic missile, the Nodong-1, presumably first flight tested in 1993, utilizes a cluster of four Scud missile engines (Wright and Kadyshv 1994). The point of contention concerning the technical overlap between the DPRK's programs for space-launch vehicles and long-range ballistic missiles led to the demise of the 2012 Leap Day Deal: "why are they claiming the satellite to be launched by the DPRK is an intercontinental ballistic missile" (2012-03-19 MEDIA).

Still, outside analysts note that not all of its close- to short-range ballistic missile systems have the dimensions to be technically capable of delivering nuclear warheads.

Medium- to intermediate-range ballistic missile systems (IRBMs) can be described as “theater-range” systems as they are meant to cover the immediate strategic theater. This category includes the arsenal of ballistic missile systems that can reach US military bases in northern and southern Japan, Guam, and Hawaii. Messaging with IRBMs is particularly bombastic, but the noisiness of such strategic messages has been refined over the years. Statements concerning the DPRK's IRBMs, particularly the Hwasong-12, have increased in detail and authority: “He told leading officials of the Department of Munitions Industry of the Party Central Committee and the field of defense scientific research accompanying him that our final goal is to establish the equilibrium of real force with the U.S. and make the U.S. rulers dare not talk about military option for the DPRK. And he stressed the need to run at full speed and straight, continuing to qualitatively consolidate the military attack capacity for nuclear counterattack the U.S. cannot cope with” (2017-09-16 KJU report). The evident importance of theater-range nuclear weapons is connected to the regime's threat of using nuclear weapons early in a conflict as using them against theater-range counterforce targets early could help to degrade a US-led campaign against the DPRK given that significant reinforcements would likely be brought in from Guam (Panda 2021, 11). In contrast to SRBMs, all reports of IRBM test events mention the supreme leader's presence and his launch authority, messaging that the employment of nuclear-armed IRBMs indeed hinges on the supreme leader (see supreme launch authority, Chapter 5.1.1).

In contrast to SRBMs and IRBMs, the regime's interest in developing **intercontinental-range ballistic missile systems** (ICBMs) has been most pronounced over the course of more than two decades. The DPRK reportedly developed its first longer-range ballistic missile models in the early 1990s, but these programs were framed as relating to the development of space launch vehicles, in reference to Kim Il Sung's speech on the DPRK's need to put a satellite into orbit (Bermudez 1999, 28–29). This may also have been related to concealment efforts and ongoing diplomacy with the United States.¹¹⁹ Yet the regime in Pyongyang has also communicated its ambitions to develop long-range ballistic missiles, among them ICBMs to hold the US mainland at risk: “As already known, the DPRK has not only a satellite activity program for peaceful scientific researches into space but also a missile development program for the nation's defense capabilities. [...] There would be no reason for us to fire missiles at the U.S. if they are not a warring party and if they do nothing

¹¹⁹ The 1990s saw a flurry of working-level talks between the DPRK and the United States, from the first nuclear crisis and the 1994 Agreed Framework to the latter's implementation phase and additional talks on ballistic missiles and towards normalizing relations. After several rounds of talks, the DPRK and the United States agreed on a missile moratorium and the 2000 joint communiqué of mutual non-hostility; the latter also entailed mutual high-level visits, a first in DPRK–US history: “As for the moratorium on long-range missile test-fire which the DPRK agreed with the U.S. in 1999, it was valid only when the DPRK-U.S. dialogue was under way” (2006-07-07 FM Spokesman). ICBMs continue to be of particular importance in their adversarial relations and in diplomatic talks between the DPRK and the United States; the regime in Pyongyang has highlighted its willingness to compromise through unilateral measures of good faith such as temporarily halting the testing of long-range missiles (2001-02-22 FM Spokesman; 2018-04-21 REPORT KJU).

harmful to us, even if our missiles can reach the U.S. mainland. [...] It is long since that Japan has been within range of missiles of other countries. However, it is now making a fuss, highly sensitive only to our missiles" (1999-08-18 FM Spokesman).

The DPRK explicitly claimed to have **successfully developed ICBMs** before the announced "final stage of preparation for the test launch of intercontinental ballistic missile" (2017-01-01 KJU) and the first flight tests in 2017, via less authoritative but also some more authoritative statements. The latter were attributed directly to "Strategic Rocket Force Commander Kim Rak Gyom" (2013-04-24 Government report) and Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong (2016-03-29 FM Ri Su Yong Interview TASS). The three flight tests of the Hwasong-14 and the Hwasong-15 systems provided the regime with an opportunity to demonstrate its ability to build ICBMs and to emphasize this capability in its nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States. Notably, all authoritative statements about the DPRK's ICBM capabilities in subcase 4 emphasize "operational accuracy and creditability," describing "specific features of the rocket system such as the rocket's separation from its launching pad, stage-separation, structural system, [...] performing features of motors [...] as well as the accuracy and reliability of the improved guidance and stability system [...] [and that] the accurate guidance and attitude control of warhead was ensured at the atmospheric reentry" (2017-07-05 REPORT KJU; 2017-07-29 REPORT KJU; 2017-11-29 REPORT KJU). Mentioning such details could relate to outside observers' discussions about the **reliability of the DPRK's ICBM** capabilities, particularly the re-entry of the (nuclear) warhead (see Chapter 5.1; Suh 2023). As with its IRBMs, the regime emphasizes the supreme leader's sole authority to launch the DPRK's ICBMs.

In addition to targeting plans and range capabilities, the regime in Pyongyang continues to send strategic messages about how it would sequence the employment of different nuclear weapons systems in the case of war. This messaging is **ambiguous between immediate all-out nuclear war and phased escalation**, however. On the one hand, the DPRK has threatened that it will not discriminate and would employ a multitude of ballistic missile systems against counterforce targets at different ranges in the early stages of a conflict with the United States. Some statements emphasize the early use of ICBMs against the continental United States (2013-03-29 Report KJU; 2013-04-25 Government report; 2017-05-15 KJU). This strategic message of all-out escalation is a longstanding notion and part of the storyline of bending the arc of history towards nuclear justice. The idea of being able to inflict immense damage and destruction on the United States (and its allies) affirms the goal of building reciprocity vis-à-vis the United States, uplifting the DPRK from its victimhood, and restoring the nation's dignity (see Section 4.3), as well as compensating for its limited strategic depth, its military inferiority, and its great distance from the US heartland (2016-04-09 Report KJU; 2017-07-05 Report KJU).

The threat of all-out nuclear regional escalation is clear but suffers from higher levels of noisiness. It comes in frequent and repetitive statements that carry all levels of authority. At

the same time, these **strategic messages of all-out nuclear war are detailed** and pronounced, many carrying supreme authority. Messaging immediate all-out escalation fits well with the regime's strategic messages of nuclear resolve and martyrdom, with its projected understanding that nuclear weapons use would trigger the end of the regime, and with its communicated readiness to follow this through to the end (see previous Chapter 5.2.1).

On the other hand, the regime in Pyongyang has communicated that any employment of its missile systems would be piecemeal, indicating a phased approach to nuclear escalation. Indeed, it describes **two phases of nuclear regional escalation**: First, it has suggested that it would initially employ a set of theater-range ballistic missiles and launch nuclear strikes at counterforce targets such as US military bases in the ROK, in Japan and on Guam (2016-09-22 KPA General Staff; 2017-08-09 KPA Strategic Force; 2017-08-30 Report KJU). The second (and final) phase would involve the employment of ICBMs against targets on the US mainland. This projected phased nuclear and regional escalation is based on the assumption that the employment of nuclear weapons would not automatically escalate to all-out war and that the use of theater-range nuclear weapons and the absence of immediate full-scale war would be possible, facilitating the potential future employment of ICBMs (Panda 2021, 11). Such a logic ties in with the logic of limited nuclear war, i.e. of employing "one set of nuclear devices to stave off the conventional invasion" and holding "in reserve longer range, more powerful devices that threaten the enemy's cities to deter nuclear annihilation" (Narang 2017).

Yet **strategic messages of phased nuclear and regional escalation undermine strategic messages of nuclear resolve and readiness for nuclear martyrdom**. Strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom are grounded in the assumption that any use of nuclear weapons would automatically entail total escalation, thereby bringing about the destruction of the DPRK, including disarmament by force. Strategic messages of phased regional escalation, however, build on the opposite assumptions that nuclear weapons employment would not necessarily trigger total nuclear war and that escalation is controllable. Notably, strategic messages of phased regional escalation are strategic and suffer from few issues of content; strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom clearly threaten all-out war and suggest that escalation is immediate and not controllable. The idea of controlling nuclear escalation is generally a point of contention among nuclear scholars (see Section 2.2.1). At the same time, there have been few but newer and highly authoritative statements suggesting that nuclear regional escalation by the regime in Pyongyang, while not immediately total, could unfold to be total in phases. Moreover, the DPRK has begun to use the term "tactical nuclear weapons" in recent years.¹²⁰

¹²⁰ Since Kim Jong Un's speech in January 2021, the DPRK has been most explicit about its tactical nuclear weapons. In contrast to its ICBM capability development, the regime in Pyongyang has never explicitly announced the pursuit of tactical nuclear weapons, restricting itself to referencing the accomplished development and further refinement of tactical nuclear weapons (Panda 2021, 10). Before 2021, its language of

Strategic messages concerning tactical nuclear weapons suggest piecemeal nuclear escalation, as the term “tactical” is associated with the assumption that nuclear escalation can be managed and nuclear warfighting limited. **Tactical nuclear weapons** are nuclear weapons with tactical missions, such as striking enemy targets in operational areas. Definitions of the term diverge, but overlap exists regarding nuclear-capable delivery vehicles with shorter ranges of up to 500 km and the potential of adjustable or lower yields of nuclear explosives (NATO 2007, Appendix 2, 22–24; Jackson 2015; Parachini et al. 2020, 73). There is also the concept of “battlefield nuclear weapons” that overlap in purpose with tactical nuclear weapons but that may have shorter ranges, smaller yields, or other operational characteristics. Scholars usually define tactical nuclear weapons in contrast to strategic nuclear weapons, which are designed to strike geographically remote targets, presumably high-value targets deep inside the enemy's homeland.

Yet the DPRK has commonly used the word “strategic” to refer to the nuclear role played by a particular weapon system, referring to nuclear-capable delivery systems of various ranges as “**strategic nuclear weapons.**” This definition, alongside doctrinal rather than technical characteristics, is not unique, as France also refers to its nuclear forces as “strategic nuclear weapons” (Panda 2021, 9). On the one hand, the DPRK has upheld its original convention of describing its systems as “strategic”; the unveiling of its 1200-km-range “strategic cruise missiles” in January 2021 suggested a potential long-range cruise missile capable of delivering a nuclear warhead. On the other hand, the regime in Pyongyang has also started to explicitly distinguish among its various nuclear capabilities, referring to strategic nuclear weapons, tactical nuclear weapons, and battlefield nuclear weapons, providing their definition alongside vague but common distinctions according to range, yield, and mission (see previous paragraph; Parachini et al. 2020, 73). The DPRK thus uses various conventions when it comes to describing its weapons and has explicitly communicated its possession of tactical nuclear weapons.

The DPRK has also highlighted the **diversity of its warhead stockpiles in terms of composition, design, and explosive yield**, in addition to the ranges that its nuclear forces can cover. Most attention-grabbing in this regard were pictures from 2016 depicting supreme leader Kim Jong Un inspecting different warhead designs (Kim Dong-hyeon 2019). These pictures, tests of nuclear explosives, and related statements put emphasis on the regime's capability to build warheads with diverse designs and fissile material compositions, potentially combining fission and fusion designs for super large (if not thermonuclear) yields. While large yields grab attention, state media texts also mention adjustable yields and “miniaturization”: miniaturization here refers to the “dialing down of yields,” with “nuclear bombs under 1kt [defined] as super miniaturized, from 1 to 15 kt as miniaturized, from 15 to 100 kt as mid-size nuclear bombs, those from 100 kt to 1 Mt as large-size nuclear bombs,

diversified, small, miniaturized nuclear weapons suggested the development of nuclear weapons system akin to what might be understood as tactical nuclear weapons.

and those above 1 Mt as super-large size nuclear bombs” (Mansourov 2014, 8). The development of adjustable nuclear yields is connected to the idea of tactical nuclear weapons that involve smaller yields for operational plans: “The army and people of the DPRK have everything including lighter and smaller nukes” (2013-03-05 KPA Supreme Command Spokesman).

The DPRK's messaging concerning regional escalation includes strategic messages about immediate all-out and step-by-step escalation. In terms of their content, both strategic messages are relatively clear about the extent of nuclear employment. The operational purpose of any such nuclear employment remains unclear, however. The regime's general stories frame **any contingency as a matter of survival and nuclear weapons as protection against existential threats**. Any employment of nuclear weapons would therefore be strategic, since it would concern the very existence of the DPRK and the regime in Pyongyang, particularly given the likelihood of a massive response by the United States and its allies. The regime's original practice of equating “strategic weapons” with “nuclear weapons” confirms this framing, leaving outside observers unsure about what “tactical purposes” nuclear weapons could possibly serve (Lee and Alexandrova 2021, 379–380; Panda 2021, 9).

The DPRK thereby also blurs the projected political and overarching purpose of its nuclear forces. Threatening immediate escalation to all-out nuclear war fits with the purposes of deterrence, messaging martyrdom in order to raise the perceived costs of attack and thereby coerce restraint from the use of force. **Threatening to employ different sets of nuclear weapons step-by-step aligns with a strategy of calculated escalation management**, i.e. using force to achieve operational goals and pursue coercive purposes in a conflict. Combining demonstrations of resolve and restraint in warfighting enables forms of “nuclear blackmail,” i.e. coercing concessions by holding strategic values hostage (Roberts 2016, 67). Several scholars have noted that the DPRK may be aiming to challenge the United States' extended deterrence commitments to the ROK and Japan with a view to one day decoupling the allies, forcing a halt to allied operations by holding theater-range and intercontinental-range targets at risk with sequenced nuclear strikes (Narang 2017; Panda 2021, 12; Garlauskas 2021, 8).

Issues of credibility evolve around matters of survivability and command structures. **A piecemeal employment of nuclear weapons is only possible on the assumption that the relevant nuclear weapons systems and necessary infrastructure would survive an adversarial strike**. Strategic messages of phased escalation thus hinge on the survivability of the messaging state's nuclear forces and on the adversary's ability to disarm by force. All-out nuclear regional escalation builds on use-or-lose pressures, on the idea that a “piecemeal employment of nuclear weapons might only invite a disarming U.S. attack” (RAND report Parachini et al. 2020, 71). In terms of nuclear command and control, phased escalation might also suggest a twofold structure: tactical nuclear weapons are more likely to fulfill tactical

purposes in conflict if the respective warfighting units are capable of launching them more autonomously, requiring a significant level of pre-delegation (Panda 2021, 18; Cho and Petrovics 2022, 45). (Pre-)Delegating launch authority to field operators would be a pragmatic form of positive control for rapid launch, not only for tactical nuclear weapons (close- to short-range missile systems) but also for theater-range missile systems. Yet, while the regime’s messages of nuclear command and control are clear about supreme launch authority and pre-determined orders, they are unclear regarding (pre-)delegation (see Section 5.1.2).

This ambiguity may be intentional or unintentional, a product of strategic ambiguity or of learning. It is notable that the DPRK’s messaging about tactical nuclear weapons and phased escalation has become more pronounced in recent years, correlating with the development of its SRBM and ICBM systems. The regime in Pyongyang may be in the **process of re-configuring its nuclear messaging and adjusting its strategic messages of operational clarity from immediate all-out to phased regional escalation**. Now that its regional escalation may be piecemeal, it can be presented as piecemeal. Yet this messaging has not (yet) superseded longer-standing strategic messages of all-out nuclear regional escalation. On closer inspection, messaging all-out escalation or phased escalation makes the sequencing of nuclear regional escalation ambiguous, but these strategic messages are not mutually exclusive: as long as the DPRK is confident about the survivability of certain of its nuclear forces, it can threaten piecemeal escalation with all-out escalation to follow as automatic escalation. Impediments to supreme launch authority could then function as the regime’s redline and threshold between the limited and all-out employment of its diverse nuclear forces.

Table 12 Rating Noisiness Levels of Messages of Regional Escalation

| Strategic nuclear messages | | Level of authority: very low (1) to very high (5) | Content specificity: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Packaging: very unclear (1) to very clear (5) | Frequency: very repetitive (1) to very rare (5) | Context specificity: explicit or implicit |
|----------------------------|-----------|---|---|---|---|---|
| Regional escalation | Subcase 1 | 1 – very low level of authority | 3 – clear, but befuddling | 2 – not clear, relatively ambiguous | 1 – very repetitive | / |
| | Subcase 2 | 1 – very low level of authority | 3 – clear, but befuddling | 1 – very unclear, very ambiguous | 1 – very repetitive | / |
| | Subcase 3 | 2 – low levels of authority | 4 – relatively clear | 4 – clear, some ambiguity | 3 – repetitive with new information | Explicit context: Missile moratorium |

| | | | | | | |
|--|--------------|--|----------------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| | Subcase 4 | 5 – very high level of authority | 4 – relatively clear | 5 – very clear | 3 – repetitive with new information | Explicit context: Third nuclear crisis |
|--|--------------|--|----------------------------|-------------------|--|--|

The DPRK presents itself as knowing precisely how it would employ its nuclear weapons. It is very clear about its **guiding principle of escalation**: it would escalate warfighting on the Korean Peninsula to the nuclear and regional levels. It has underlined the specter of nuclear war in the region and beyond with clear strategic messages concerning its conditions for nuclear employment, targeting plans, and capabilities. The regime has nurtured a degree of ambiguity and operational flexibility concerning the exact sequencing of regional escalation, i.e. whether it would hold its ICBMs in reserve or launch direct strikes at the US mainland early in a conflict. This element of ambiguity and piecemeal escalation undermines strategic messages of nuclear martyrdom, but other strategic messages of operational clarity support the regime's messages of nuclear resolve, and vice versa. The next chapter outlines how the DPRK's nuclear messaging and levels of noisiness have changed over course of four subcases. Chapter 6 discusses what can be learned from the regime's strategic nuclear messaging.

5.3 Adjustments Over Time

The DPRK's nuclear messaging over the course of four subcases presents a **high degree of consistency over time**. This fits to the expectation outlined in Chapter 2.1.1, higher degrees of consistency over time are likely to help mitigate issues of credibility and thereby help the sending state to tailor the effectiveness of its public messaging. Consistency can also project regime stability irrespective of leadership transitions. Its stage-managing, continuous stories, and rigid top-down centralist political system have helped to build this perceived consistency by streamlining public language, cross-referencing to stories, and recycling terms. This also facilitates a relatively high degree of repetition and noisy communication channel by the DPRK. Notably, the regime has **adjusted its nuclear messaging in terms of level of specificity and authoritativeness**: All of its strategic nuclear messages outlined above have become more explicit and precise in terms of content, potentially correlating with the regime's progress in nuclear proliferation. Particularly in subcases 3 and 4. The regime also increased the quantity of supreme-level statements as well as the diversity of actors with high- to semi-high levels of authority that statements are attributed to.

Yet assessing consistency comes with caveats given the research design of this thesis. As the next section outlines, the corpus of materials for analysis is not standardized but made up differently per subcase. The **distribution of relevant KCNA texts and the level of authority attributed to them varies across subcases**. For example, the fact that there are more texts with supreme-level authority available in subcases 3 and 4 raises the probability

of more nuclear messages with supreme-level authority in subcases 3 and 4. Nevertheless, the distribution of primary materials and levels of authority is an interesting finding in itself, that might relate to opportunity and benefit of more authoritative nuclear messaging: Kim Jong Un is reportedly ready to seek the limelight (unlike his father, see Chapter 4.1), more nuclear capabilities to present in public messages, fewer occasions of direct negotiations, and thereby more opportunities to invest in public nuclear messaging as a way to influence bargaining with the United States and present itself as a stable, thriving state.

5.3.1 Corpus critique

Assessing the DPRK's nuclear messaging for change and consistency gives rise to another caveat related to the research design of this thesis: the **corpus for analysis looks slightly different across the four subcases**. These differences are quantitative but also concern the level of authority attributed to the analyzed texts. As elaborated in Section 3.2.1, this thesis delves into a corpus of primary materials from the regime's main outlet for English-language news reporting, the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). It draws on the abundant KCNA texts to build a corpus for analysis by filtering for KCNA texts that are relevant to nuclear messaging and that discuss matters of international or regional security, such as military exercises, nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles, sanctions, deterrence, and war.

Quantitatively speaking, the **total amount of texts published via KCNA** as uploaded by KCNA Watch increased between subcase 1 and subcase 3 and indeed doubled between subcase 2 and 3.¹²¹ Fewer KCNA texts are available for subcase 4 in total, but the number of KCNA texts for used for analysis is the highest. Notably, subcase 1 and subcase 4 have a similar percentage of analyzed texts from available KCNA sources. This share of state media texts discussing matters relevant to the DPRK's nuclear weapons development program may relate to the respective moments of bargaining: subcase 1 covers a period that includes the second nuclear crisis between the DPRK and the United States, the end of the 1994 Agreed Framework, the DPRK's withdrawal from the NPT, and the initiation of the Six Party Talks. Direct negotiations and private signaling between the DPRK and the United States took place over the course of these moments of bargaining between 2001 and 2003, but the regime also invested in state media communication. Subcase 4 similarly covers a period that saw the third nuclear crisis between the DPRK and the United States, unprecedented amounts of nuclear and missiles tests, and working- to high-level talks and summitry. The regime in Pyongyang accompanied almost every political and technical development with multiple state media texts. Subcases 2 and 3 are both characterized by more consistent working-level diplomacy between the DPRK and the United States, providing opportunities for private signaling. Subcase 3 is also characterized by the leadership change from Kim Jong Il to Kim

¹²¹ The increase in statements may not be political and may correlate with the availability of access to better equipment and skills to report, publish, and multiply. More technical options can provide more opportunities for state media communication, including more actors, outlets, and forms.

Jong Un, as well as satellite launches and nuclear tests that the regime in Pyongyang followed up with a large amount of state media communication.

Table 13 Overview of Corpus per Subcase

| | Subcase 1 (2001–2003) | Subcase 2 (2006–2008) | Subcase 3 (2011–2013) | Subcase 4 (2016–2018) | Total number of KCNA texts |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|--|---|
| Available KCNA texts | 12,378 | 17,610 | 34,175 | 23,341 | 87,504 available KCNA texts |
| Analyzed KCNA texts | 218 | 158 | 321 | 404 | 1,101 analyzed texts in total |
| | 19.80% of 1,101 analyzed texts | 14.35% of 1,101 analyzed texts | 29.16% of 1,101 analyzed texts | 36.69% of 1,101 analyzed texts | |
| | 1.76% of total available texts in this subcase | 0.90% of total available texts in this subcase | 0.94% of total available texts in this subcase | 1.73% of total available texts in this subcase | 1.26% of total available KCNA texts |

Regarding quantitative and qualitative differences, the corpus of KCNA texts per subcase shows an interesting **distribution with regard to the level of authority** attributed to the respective texts. KCNA texts with low levels of authority make up the largest share of KCNA texts across all four subcases; KCNA texts with mid-levels of authority make up the second largest share. In subcase 2, the share of KCNA texts with higher levels of authority is relatively high, with most of these being statements attributed to high-ranking diplomatic and military personnel with links to the then-ongoing Six-Party Talks and other relevant negotiations. Most notably, the overall levels of authority increase in subcase 3 and 4.

Table 14 Overview of Corpus per Subcase and Level of Authority

| Level of authori ty | Number of documents per subcase, percentage of total documents in that subcase and of total documents in that level of authority | | | | | | | | Total number of texts |
|---------------------------|---|------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|--------------------------|------------|-----------------------------|
| | Subcase 1 (2001–2003) | | Subcase 2 (2006–2008) | | Subcase 3 (2011–2013) | | Subcase 4 (2016–2018) | | |
| Suprem e level | 0 | 0% | 0 | 0% | 5 | 31.58 % | 13 | 68.42 % | 19 1.73% of total |
| | 0.00% | | 0.00% | | 1.87% | | 3.22% | | |
| High level | 23 | 12.50 % | 38 | 20.65 % | 52 | 28.26 % | 71 | 38.59 % | 184 16.71% of total |
| | 10.55 % | | 24.05 % | | 16.20 % | | 17.57 % | | |
| | 13 | | 13 | | 40 | | 36 | | 102 |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|------------------------|---------|-------------------------|
| Semi-high level | 5.96% | 12.75 % | 8.23% | 12.75 % | 12.46 % | 39.22 % | 8.91 % | 35.29 % | 9.26% of total |
| Mid-level | 60 | 18.69 % | 45 | 14.02 % | 84 | 26.17 % | 132 | 41.12 % | 321 29.16% of total |
| | 27.52 % | | 28.48 % | | 26.17 % | | 32.67 % | | |
| Low level | 122 | 25.68 % | 62 | 13.05 % | 139 | 29.26 % | 152 | 32.00 % | 475 43.14% of total |
| | 55.96 % | | 39.24 % | | 43.30 % | | 37.62 % | | |
| Total number of texts | 218 19.80% of total | | 158 14.35% of total | | 321 29.16% of total | | 404 36.69% of total | | 1101 documents in total |

On closer inspection, not only does the level of authority increase significantly by subcase 4, but the **diversity of individuals and entities** to whom the statements are attributed has increases as well. Subcase 4 includes the broadest range of actors, particularly in statements with mid- and high levels of authority. Over time, the regime in Pyongyang has refined which texts carried by KCNA are attributed to which government, party, or military entity. This attribution is tailored to the content and target audience of the respective statements. Notably, the KPA Supreme Command and the Nuclear Weapons Institute are involved in the DPRK's public messaging only in subcase 4, even though both existed long before that time period. In the categories of low, mid-, and high-levels of authority, more statements are also attributed to individuals—in the case of highly authoritative statements, commonly to the individual leading the respective entity—rather than attributing the statement to the entity as a whole.

Most obvious is the shift regarding **supreme authority**: The DPRK's state media commonly carries reports about the supreme leader's activities and statements, albeit in summarized form and in the style of a report. With Kim Jong Un's ascent to supreme leadership of the DPRK in 2012, state media began to publish texts that reproduce the supreme leader's statements, sometimes in full-text. Accordingly, subcases 1 and 2 do not include statements that are directly attributed to the then-supreme leader Kim Jong Il (the closest we find are KCNA texts concerning his activities and statements). This may relate to accounts that Kim Jong Il simply did not like public speaking (see Chapter 4.1). Given this lack of direct attribution to Kim Jong Il, subcases 1, 2, and 3 include a wider range of actors with semi-high levels of authority: KCNA carried joint editorials on the occasion of the New Year and detailed reports on political and technical developments; given their unique framing and level of detail, it is assumed that these texts were approved by someone with a high level of (if not supreme) authority. In subcase 3, in 2012, a year of leadership transition, there were notably more texts about government and party activities, presumably to present the stability of the regime and the supreme leader. After 2012, and in subcase 4, however, KCNA's reporting

becomes less authoritative given the increase in direct statements with higher and supreme levels of authority.

Table 15 Overview of Levels of Authority per Subcase

| Level of authority | Attributions of texts in subcase 1 (2001–2003) | Attributions of texts in subcase 2 (2006–2008) | Attributions of texts in subcase 3 (2011–2013) | Attributions of texts in subcase 4 (2016–2018) |
|--------------------|--|--|---|--|
| Supreme level | / | / | Kim Jong Un | Kim Jong Un |
| High level | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (minister, vice ministers) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (minister, vice ministers) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (minister, vice ministers) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (minister, vice ministers) |
| | Government, president of the Supreme People’s Assembly | Government, president of the Supreme People’s Assembly | Government, president of the Supreme People’s Assembly | Government, president of the Supreme People’s Assembly |
| | Central Committee of the Workers’ Party Korea | Central Committee of the Workers’ Party Korea | Central Committee of the Workers’ Party Korea | Central Committee of the Workers’ Party Korea (individual attribution) |
| | Korean People’s Army General Staff | Korean People’s Army General Staff (attribution to chief) | Korean People’s Army General Staff | Korean People’s Army General Staff |
| | Korean People’s Army Panmunjom Mission | Korean People’s Army Panmunjom Mission | Korean People’s Army Panmunjom Mission (attribution to chief) | Korean People’s Army Panmunjom Mission |
| | Korean People’s Army Navy Command | Korean People’s Army Navy Command | Korean People’s Army Southwestern Front | Korean People’s Army Navy Command |
| | | Korean People’s Army delegation to inter-Korean military-to-military talks | | Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Country (attribution to chief) |

| | | | | |
|-----------------|--|--|--|---|
| | | DPRK’s General Department of Atomic Energy | | Nuclear Weapons Institute |
| | | | Korean People’s Army Supreme Command | Korean People’s Army Supreme Command |
| | | | National Defense Commission | National Defense Commission |
| | | | Korean Committee for Space Technology | National Aerospace Development Administration |
| | | | | Korean People’s Army Strategic Forces |
| Semi-high level | Diplomatic Representative (mission to UN, ambassadors abroad) | Diplomatic Representative (mission to UN, ambassadors abroad) | Diplomatic Representative (mission to UN, ambassadors abroad) | Diplomatic Representative (mission to UN, ambassadors abroad) |
| | Media coverage with special attribution (New Year’s editorials; Six-Party Talks) | Media coverage with special attribution (New Year’s editorials; Six-Party Talks; nuclear test) | Media coverage with special attribution (New Year’s editorials; nuclear test; activities by supreme leader, party, parliament, government) | Supreme People’s Assembly’s Foreign Affairs Committee |
| Mid-level | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) | Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) |
| | Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland | Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland | Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland | Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of the Fatherland |
| | Central Committee’s International Department | Korean National Peace Committee | Korean National Peace Committee | Korean National Peace Committee |
| | National Reunification Institute | | | National Reunification Institute |

| | | | | |
|-----------|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Korean Asia-Pacific Peace Committee |
| | | | General Federation of Trade Unions of Korea | National Coordination Committee for anti-money laundering and countering financing of terrorism |
| Low level | Media coverage of relevant events (reports about Kim Jong Il, government, Korean People’s Army, National Defense Committee) | Media coverage of relevant events (reports about Kim Jong Il, government, Korean People’s Army, National Defense Committee) | Media coverage of relevant events (reports about Kim Jong Il and Kim Jong Un, government, Korean People’s Army, Workers’ Party Korea) | Media coverage of relevant events (reports about Kim Jong Un, government, Korean People’s Army, Workers’ Party Korea) |
| | Commentary | Commentary (mostly no individual author specified) | Commentary (including MFA’s Disarmament and Peace Institute) | Commentary (including multiple MFA institutes, other committees) |

This detailed overview of the corpus foreshadows how the DPRK’s public nuclear messaging may have developed across the four subcases. Yet, the number and authorship of the texts does not equate fully to the quantity and quality of the regime’s nuclear messages. The following section will outline these nuances and adjustments over time.

5.3.2 Consistent strategic nuclear messaging

The DPRK’s **nuclear messaging has remained relatively consistent** over the analyzed four subcases that span between 2000 and 2018. In fact, it appears as if the regime has invested more in its messaging with and about its nuclear weapons program than any other type of messaging. Not only has the general quantity of strategic messages increased, but the regime has also issued more strategic messages and adjusted the overall noisiness of its public nuclear messaging. It has issued more messages with higher and supreme levels of authority, as well as messages with new content. There are more nuances in terms of both the information conveyed and the context and timing of the strategic messages. Notably, messages are attributed to an ever-increasing set of actors; particularly in subcase 4, the category of high-level authority has grown in diversity. Consistency also relates to the

general degree of noisiness in the DPRK's nuclear messaging writ large; this thesis highlights that the regime in Pyongyang has issued more strategic messages in a generally still very noisy messaging channel. Given the research design of the four distinct subcases selected for in-depth analysis, the regime's messaging between the subcases was not considered for analysis, and it is therefore difficult to ascribe a process of gradual adjustment to the DPRK's nuclear messaging, as opposed to snapshots of observable adjustments from subcase to subcase.

The **five categories to assess levels of noisiness**—as outlined in Section 3.2.3—has been the key to identifying and assessing the DPRK's strategic messaging. Messages are defined as more strategic if higher levels of authority are attributed, if content and packaging are clear, if they are not repetitive or at least share new information, and if context is clear explicitly or implicitly. Chapter 5.1 and 5.2 outlined how the regime's strategic messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity correspond to each of these five categories across the four subcases considered in this thesis. In order to discuss how the DPRK's nuclear messaging has evolved as a whole, however, the following paragraphs analyze observable adjustments per category across the four subcases.

Level of authority may be the most important category for assessing the DPRK's abundant state media communication. In such a personalist authoritarian system, messages that are attributed to the supreme leader or to an individual or entity close to him carry particular weight. Since Kim Jong Un's reign, the regime in Pyongyang has not shied away from attributing messages directly to the supreme leader—a significant change from public nuclear messaging under Kim Jong Il's rule (subcases 1, 2, and 3, until 2011). Notably, the few nuclear messages that have been directly attributed to Kim Jong Il stem from contexts of private messaging and diplomatic encounters, such as during his exchange with then Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in 2000.

From subcase 1 to subcase 4, the level of authority that was attributed to the six analyzed strategic messages increased significantly, but not in a linear progression from subcase to subcase. Subcase 4 easily illustrates that messages of nuclear resolve, nuclear escalation, and regional escalation have supreme authority and messages of automatic escalation and operational clarity have very high authority. This relates to the increasing attribution of these messages to Kim Jong Un and major political and military entities chaired by him (such as the National Defense Commission and the Supreme Command). This presentation could suggest the existence of an **increasingly technocratic apparatus** behind the DPRK's public messaging, or the regime's attempt to present itself as technocratic. Only messages of nuclear martyrdom remain on the low spectrum of authority; there are high- and supreme-level statements that convey nuclear martyrdom, but the majority of these messages were still issued by low- to mid-level actors.

Notably, the total **rating of authoritativeness is similar between subcase 2 and 3**. Subcase 2 covers a period that includes the ongoing Six-Party Talks, alternating between

intricate moments of cooperation, as in the 2005 Joint Statement and the 2007 Action Plan, as well as abandonments of negotiations, unilateral sanctions imposition by the United States, and the DPRK's first nuclear test in 2006. Given these contexts, high-level actors that also played a role in the Six-Party Talks (and thus private messaging) issued public messages of nuclear resolve and nuclear escalation, as in the ability and willingness to build nuclear weapons and employ them early in a conflict. Other nuclear messages received less to no political attention in the regime's public nuclear messaging over the course of subcase 2. Subcase 3 includes agreement on a missile moratorium by the DPRK, the regime's satellite launch and the demise of the Leap Day Deal with the United States, its third nuclear test, and the nuclear law. These events set the scene for mid- to high-level messaging about the DPRK's nuclear resolve, automatic escalation, and nuclear escalation, especially the ability to build nuclear weapons and the ability and willingness to effect an early nuclear employment.

Table 16 Overview of Subcases and Authoritativeness of Strategic Messages

| | Subcase 1 | Subcase 2 | Subcase 3 | Subcase 4 | Rating of strategic messages |
|---|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| Level of authority: Rating from very low (1) to very high (5) | 2 | 4 | 3 | 5 | Nuclear resolve |
| | 1 | / | 3 | 4 | Automatic escalation |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | Nuclear martyrdom |
| | 1 | 2 | 1 | 4 | Operational clarity |
| | 3 | 4 | 3 | 5 | Nuclear escalation |
| | 1 | 1 | 2 | 5 | Regional escalation |
| | 9 | 12 | 13 | 25 | Total rating per subcase |

Not all messages attributed to Kim Jong Un are automatically strategic, however. Even the supreme leader can repeat himself and long-standing public narratives rather than sharing new information. This is the case for most of Kim Jong Un's statements: they reiterate and thereby tie in with the regime's stories. This pertains particularly to messages of nuclear resolve and nuclear martyrdom. Once new information is shared, the DPRK commonly repeats it, contributing to **repetitiveness** and related noisiness of the regime's nuclear messaging. This may seem natural for a personalist authoritarian system and has been the case for messages of operational clarity, nuclear escalation, and regional escalation: Supreme- and high-level statements (including about the nuclear law) in subcase 3 issued new information about the conditions and pathways of nuclear employment, information that was repeated by low- to mid-level state media texts over the course of subcases 3 and 4. In subcase 4, supreme- and high-level statements then included new information in messages of operational clarity, nuclear escalation, and regional escalation.

Table 17 Overview of Subcases and Frequency of Strategic Messages

| | Subcase 1 | Subcase 2 | Subcase 3 | Subcase 4 | Rating of strategic messages |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| Frequency: Rating from very repetitive (1) to very rare (5), (3) describes relatively repetitive but new information | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | Nuclear resolve |
| | 1 | / | 1 | 3 | Automatic escalation |
| | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 | Nuclear martyrdom |
| | 2 | 2 | 3 | 3 | Operational clarity |
| | 1 | 2 | 4 | 3 | Nuclear escalation |
| | 1 | 1 | 3 | 3 | Regional escalation |
| | 9 | 9 | 13 | 14 | Total rating per subcase |

The supreme leader can also issue messages with befuddling content and/or ambiguous packaging, contradicting his own messages or messages attributed to other actors. This pertains particularly to the regime's messages of regional escalation: the DPRK started issuing clear messages in 2012 (subcase 3) detailing how the regime would launch nuclear strikes against different counterforce targets in the region and threatening the continental United States with nuclear employments. Up to then, only the ambition to possess regional- and intercontinental-strike capabilities was clear. Between 2016 and 2017 (subcase 4), however, Kim Jong Un relayed befuddling and ambiguous messages concerning how he would sequence regional escalation, alternating between all-out and piecemeal escalation, emphasizing IRBM strikes against Guam and keeping ICBM employment as a back-up measure (see messages of regional escalation, Section 5.2.2).

Table 18 Overview of Subcases and Content Specificity of Strategic Messages

| | Subcase 1 | Subcase 2 | Subcase 3 | Subcase 4 | Rating of strategic messages |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| Content specificity: Rating from very unclear and befuddling (1) to very clear (5) | 1 | 2 | 4 | 5 | Nuclear resolve |
| | 1 | / | 2 | 4 | Automatic escalation |
| | 5 | 5 | 5 | 5 | Nuclear martyrdom |
| | 2 | 4 | 3 | 4 | Operational clarity |
| | 4 | 4 | 5 | 5 | Nuclear escalation |
| | 3 | 3 | 4 | 4 | Regional escalation |
| | 16 | 18 | 23 | 27 | Total rating per subcase |

Table 19 Overview of Subcases and Packaging Specificity of Strategic Messages

| | Subcase 1 | Subcase 2 | Subcase 3 | Subcase 4 | Rating of strategic messages |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|------------------------------|
| | 1 | 2 | 5 | 5 | Nuclear resolve |

| | | | | | |
|--|-----------|-----------|-----------|-----------|---------------------------------|
| Packaging: Rating from very unclear and ambiguous (1) to very clear (5) | 1 | / | 2 | 5 | Automatic escalation |
| | 5 | 5 | 5 | 4 | Nuclear martyrdom |
| | 2 | 1 | 4 | 5 | Operational clarity |
| | 2 | 1 | 4 | 5 | Nuclear escalation |
| | 2 | 1 | 4 | 5 | Regional escalation |
| | 13 | 10 | 24 | 29 | Total rating per subcase |

Notably, the regime in Pyongyang treated the **content and packaging of its messages** of operational clarity, nuclear escalation, and regional escalation differently in the earlier subcases. The DPRK's plan to build a diverse arsenal in order to facilitate survivability and operational flexibility, to use its nuclear weapons early in a conflict, and to expand nuclear warfighting beyond the Korean Peninsula have long been clearly communicated. In subcases 1 and 2, however, the packaging of these plans was relatively ambiguous; messages included clear information about them but in language that undermined the frankness of these messages. In subcases 3 and 4, messages of nuclear resolve, operational clarity, nuclear escalation, and regional escalation were clearer in terms of both content and packaging: Not only did the DPRK communicate its ability and determination to build a diverse arsenal, but the diversity of its nuclear warhead designs and delivery systems for its nuclear explosives was also clarified. It communicated conditions for early nuclear employment as well as regional targeting plans.

This **growing clarity in content and packaging** pertains to the regime's verbal and non-verbal nuclear messaging. Its clearer messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity were conveyed in high- to supreme-level statements, highly authoritative reports from entities like the Nuclear Weapons Institute, and media coverage alongside pictures of tests, inspections, parades, and celebrations. The diversity of actors thus added to the quality of the messaging, fitting with the explicit content and tailored packaging. Moreover, the DPRK's messages of operational clarity tie in with its messages of nuclear resolve; its messages of automatic escalation bring more substance to the claim of nuclear martyrdom and early nuclear and regional escalation.

Lastly, the DPRK adjusted its nuclear messaging by being **explicit about the context of its nuclear messages**. This is a particularly strategic move as the regime has framed context specificity as the rationale for the actions conveyed in each nuclear message. When context specificity was explicit, the DPRK's state media made sure to detail the activities by the United States and its allies that provided the context and reason for the regime's communicated action. When **context specificity** was implicit, the author inferred from the timing and content of the messages that domestic developments might play a role. Subcase 3 includes the 2011–2012 leadership transition from Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un, implying this as the domestic context for the then unclear messages of automatic escalation and relatively clear messages of nuclear martyrdom and nuclear escalation. Between subcase 1 and subcase 3, there were also no implicit clues or explicit information about the context and

timing of the respective messages. Explicit context specificity, however, decreases the level of noisiness and pinpoints the bargaining purpose of nuclear messages.

Table 20 Overview of Subcases and Context Specificity of Strategic Messages

| | Subcase 1 | Subcase 2 | Subcase 3 | Subcase 4 | Rating of strategic messages |
|--|---------------------|---------------------|--|---------------------|------------------------------|
| Context specificity: either explicit or implicit context, (/) equals unclear contextualization | explicit | explicit | explicit | explicit | Nuclear resolve |
| | explicit | / | implicit | explicit | Automatic escalation |
| | explicit | / | implicit | explicit | Nuclear martyrdom |
| | / | explicit | / | explicit | Operational clarity |
| | explicit | explicit | implicit | explicit | Nuclear escalation |
| | / | / | explicit | explicit | Regional escalation |
| | 4/6 explicit | 3/6 explicit | 2/6 explicit 3/6 implicit | 6/6 explicit | Total per subcase |

Overall, the DPRK's nuclear messaging appears relatively consistent and coherent. There have been **no apparent inconsistencies over time**, including during the leadership transition between 2011 and 2012 and over the course of crises and cooperation with United States regarding its nuclear weapons program. In fact, as mentioned in Chapter 4 concerning the DPRK's stage-setting, and as other scholars have noted (McEachern 2018, 3–4), consistency in public messaging and the notion of path dependency are important values for the regime in Pyongyang. The DPRK's nuclear messaging take place within the broader stage-setting that includes its conflict definition and storylines about denuclearization and nuclear justice; the adjustments to its nuclear messaging over time appear to be refinements to this storytelling. Moreover, consistency in and the coherence of state media communication may relate to efforts to present regime cohesion and stability towards internal and external audiences. Consistency and coherence in nuclear messaging may also relate to the purposes of nuclear messaging, which will be discussed in the following section.

At the level of relative consistency and coherence, it is also apparent that the DPRK has adjusted its nuclear messaging.¹²² For the purposes of this thesis, the focus lies on describing and analyzing the regime's nuclear messaging and its adjustments thereof, assuming that the DPRK has chosen to do so in order to better pursue the purposes of its nuclear messaging. A discussion of these purposes will follow in the next chapter.

¹²² The research design and findings do not allow for inferences about why the regime in Pyongyang has adjusted its nuclear messaging, however. Doing so would require an analysis of messaging as the interactive process that it is, not just the sending state's messaging—as analyzed in this thesis—but also the target state's reception, interpretation, and perception of these messages, as well as its response and counter-signaling (see Chapter 7 about avenues for future research).

6. Messaging for Deterrence

Public messaging can play an important part for nuclear deterrence, but there is a fine line between communicating **enough to establish a credible threat and retaining sensitive information** to minimize vulnerabilities—and the DPRK is well-aware of this. In fact, what the regime in Pyongyang is communicating are benign motives of maintaining the status quo as well as high levels of conflict-propensity, thereby aiming to manage expectations of behavior and boost the credibility of its threats. The DPRK used strategic messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity to make the case for deterrence through assured asymmetric escalation. It threatens automatic escalation to the nuclear and to the regional level, assured through pre-determined orders and survivability through concealment and diversity, that would unfold if Pyongyang was under (imminent) attack.

Messaging is purposive type of presentation, a strategic form of communication. It can **provide information and clues for making inferences**, but issues of content and credibility, as well as the aim of influencing the target audience, put the potential usefulness of the information received into question. Chapter 2 outlined the threefold complexity of public messaging as a source of information. Accordingly, this thesis has analyzed how the DPRK engages in nuclear messaging, what information it shares, and how it does so. This chapter delves into the details of how the regime manages perceived risks of escalation through its public nuclear messaging, threatening escalation that is certain and predictable (Chapter 6.1). These risks of escalation are also fed by the regime's ambiguous mentioning of hostile motives. These messages exist, but are more relevant in the domestic context. The DPRK's strategic nuclear messages towards the United States emphasize deterrence as the key purpose of its nuclear forces (Chapter 6.2). Its strategic nuclear messaging communicates a nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation that is presented as the strategy to deter the United States from regime change by force (Chapter 6.3).

Analyzing the purposes of the DPRK's nuclear messaging is interpretative. This thesis has analyzed the regime's public communication concerning its nuclear weapons program as **nuclear messaging that has strategic purposes in the bargaining context** with the United States. Given its analytical biases and methodological limits, this thesis cannot check for the genuineness of shared information or for the validity of its purposes vis-a-vis different audiences. Instead, the following sections take the fact that the DPRK actively engages in nuclear messaging seriously and reflect on what its nuclear messages mean, how this pertains to the purpose of influencing the United States' strategic calculus and ideally the process and outcome of bargaining with the United States.

Notably, the DPRK emphasizes in its public messaging the **relevance of its nuclear messaging**, suggesting that the clarity of threats also seeks to communicate a notion of **predictability and risk management**. The regime's nuclear messaging is supposed to make

“hostile forces have a clear understanding the fact that the military confrontation with the DPRK brings about ruin and give up attempts at aggression and attack” (2022-09-09 SPA). The regime promised, early in its nuclear proliferation, clarity of nuclear messaging by stating that it will “open its nuclear deterrent to the public as a physical force and then there will be no need to have any more argument” (2003-10-17 MFA Spokesman). It framed its first test of nuclear explosives as “proving its possession of nukes in a legitimate manner after fairly announcing it in advance, something unprecedented in view of international practice” (2006-10-18 MFA Spokesman).

The regime’s nuclear messaging seems to follow the line of thinking that “there is no point in a deterrent that nobody knows you have, or if nobody understands how you might use it” (Panda 2020, 77). As outlined in Section 5.1, strategic messages of nuclear resolve seek to convey the DPRK’s ability and determination to build nuclear weapons, as well as its ability and determination to use them. Messages of automatic escalation and of nuclear martyrdom underline the ability and determination to launch nuclear strikes even in the case of leadership decapitation and collective suicide. Section 5.2 outlined messages of operational clarity and the regime’s efforts to detail conditions for nuclear weapons use, as well as pathways of nuclear regional escalation, seeking to convey that the DPRK has clear contingency plans for nuclear employment. The **clarity and detail of its nuclear messaging are purposive** and are central to stimulating perceptions of risks and thereby managing nuclear deterrence. The costs and risks of escalation are important inputs into a state’s strategic calculus about whether to take a certain course of action or to refrain from it. For the regime in Pyongyang, communicating the costs and risks of nuclear and regional escalation are fundamental to convincing the United States not to attack the DPRK. Hence, the following section discusses how Pyongyang manipulates perceived risks before this thesis assesses what we can learn in terms of purposes and doctrine of the DPRK’s nuclear forces.

6.1 Predictable Escalation for Risk Manipulation

The regime in Pyongyang emphasizes its **high stakes and low threshold for nuclear employment**. Doing so allows the DPRK to mitigate issues of credibility inherent to nuclear messaging and exploit assumptions of conflict-propensity about authoritarian states, as outlined as expectations in Chapter 2.2 and 2.3. The regime in Pyongyang can thereby increase perceived risks, seeking to tilt the competition of resolve with the United States to its favor, outmatching US capabilities with cost-insensitivity and determination to employ nuclear weapons. The regime even suggests that it can control and manage escalation, which is a broad claim and might only pertain to the escalation that Pyongyang would launch itself. Escalation is the prevalent principle in the DPRK’s nuclear messaging. Pyongyang is very clear that its nuclear forces are meant for escalatory use, how that nuclear and regional

escalation would unfold automatically, and that this is a credible threat given its abilities, high degree of determination, and thought-through operational plans. Notably, it frames escalation as a matter of reciprocity, as counter-balancing specific threats posed by the United States, even though the acts it describes go beyond threatening reciprocal harm.¹²³

The DPRK thereby makes **escalation predictable as it sets clear expectations**: Pyongyang will launch nuclear strikes at regional counterforce targets if the DPRK is attacked with nuclear weapons or its strategic facilities with conventional weapons and if attack is imminent, underway, or occurring. While some details, such as what constitutes strategic facilities or imminent attack, what about countervalue targets, remain ambiguous, the regime in Pyongyang communicates clearly the consequences of non-compliance with its deterrent threat. **Projecting escalation as certain** and its implementation as predictable follows the “main mission” of the DPRK’s nuclear forces: to “deter a war by making hostile forces have a clear understanding the fact that the military confrontation with the DPRK brings about ruin and give up attempts at aggression and attack” (2022-09-09 SPA).

The regime’s nuclear messaging conveys notions of identity and status, changing the status quo in line with its greater national project, regime cohesion, and stability. These messages also pertain to the broader bargaining context with the United States, as they further cultivate the **DPRK’s monopoly on information about itself**, and perceptions of the risk of escalation. It is assumed, however, that the fact that the DPRK is an authoritarian state also matters for the purposiveness of its nuclear messaging. This will be reflected in this section, although to a less conclusive and rather exploratory extent. What stands out, however, is that the DPRK’s nuclear messaging promote regime-specific perceptions of conflict propensity and cost insensitivity that in turn fuel perceptions concerning the probability of nuclear and regional escalation.

Of course, states can also conduct **messaging simply for the sake of messaging**. This can be the case with authoritarian messaging that seeks to “fill the void” and keep domestic audiences occupied; even such inane messaging is purposive, however, pursuing internal aims such as regime cohesion and acceptance. The description of the DPRK as a theater state whose population is forced to partake in performances to glorify and uphold the regime in Pyongyang (Kwon and Chung 2012) may be a fitting example of this. Regarding nuclear messaging, however, this thesis builds on the assumption that these are “naturally” strategically purposive. Nuclear weapons are simply too strategically meaningful; that a state would message about and with nuclear weapons for no particular or for strictly domestic reasons is therefore unlikely. Moreover, the DPRK is a theater state that has invested heavily in its nuclear messaging and employs this messaging in domestic and

¹²³ The regime in Pyongyang often emphasizes its rapid “surprise” launch capabilities (2017-07-29 KJU) and has threatened to surprise the surprise by launching an earlier “preemptive attack” (2016-03-06 MFA Spokesman). The DPRK also threatens to reciprocate the threat of “decapitation” and “high-density” strikes with “ultra-precision blitzkrieg strike of the Korean style” (2016-03-12 KPA General Staff).

foreign politics, including for strategic purposes in the context of bargaining with the United States.

As a theater state, the regime's messaging shares the same protagonists, screenwriters, and stage-setting; stories may be distinct but overlapping in terms of context, narrative, and audiences. It is thus natural for the DPRK's nuclear messaging to be tied to its broader public messaging. Moreover, the regime's nuclear messages stand out and play a central role in building a greater nation and shedding past victimhood. The regime's messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity feature nuclear weapons primarily as a key means of keeping the United States in check, deterring attack, and ensuring the DPRK's existence. At the same time, these messaging also convey notions of identity and status.

The DPRK has **codified its nuclear weapons possession in its own constitution**, first in 2013 and then updated in 2022. All five NPT nuclear weapon states, India, Pakistan, and the DPRK refer to themselves as "nuclear weapon states" in their public messaging. The regime in Pyongyang uses a Korean term that translates literally to "nuclear force/power country" (핵강국). Legalizing or institutionalizing its nuclear weapons development in its constitution served to formalize its nuclear status and enshrine nuclear weapons as part of the country's official identity, beyond statements by the supreme leader, which showcases that the regime values institutionalization, or at least the presentation of domestic institutions, while nonetheless remaining a personalist dictatorship. Even though the Supreme People's Assembly is not an independent parliament or sovereign representative of the people, the DPRK has opted to highlight the notion of process and state backing (2013-04-01 Seventh Session of 12th SPA).

The DPRK's codification of its nuclear weapons possession may also relate to its bargaining relationship vis-à-vis the United States. The original nuclear law was adopted in Pyongyang one year after the 2012 Leap Day Agreement and after related US-DPRK negotiations had failed. The then Obama administration pursued a "strategic patience" approach, leaving the diplomatic door for talks on denuclearization open, applying pressure through sanctions, and maintaining deterrence and defense together with its allies. The nuclear law was revised in 2022, three years after summitry between the DPRK, the ROK, and the United States had failed and the strategy of applying economic, military, and political pressure was further cemented. In these bargaining contexts with the United States, the DPRK's nuclear laws were clear signs that Pyongyang was not pursuing unilateral denuclearization.

Rather than viewing the DPRK's nuclear laws as snapshots, however, it is important to note that they have been integral components of the regime's public nuclear messaging. The DPRK's nuclear messaging conveys confidence and pride, drawing direct lines from the regime's communicated plans to build advanced nuclear weapons and its proclaimed successes in possessing diverse nuclear forces. Joining the club of nine nuclear-armed states, building sophisticated nuclear weapons, being ready to employ nuclear weapons against the United States, and achieving nuclear martyrdom are all associated with glory, virtue, and

status. These notions are also integral to the regime’s story of bending the arc of history towards nuclear justice, from shedding victimhood through nuclear deterrence to building a greater nation with military might and international prominence – and all this despite sanctions and isolation—or rather, through following the mantra of *juche*.

Moreover, nuclear messaging that **nurtures perceptions of conflict propensity and cost insensitivity facilitate perceptions of increased nuclear risks** and thus brinkmanship as a bargaining strategy. Brinkmanship is a particular type of messaging that emphasizes the risks of deliberate or accidental/inadvertent escalation (Schelling 1966, 99; Powell 2015, 594; see Section 2.2.3); authoritarian regimes can capitalize on regime-specific assumptions about conflict propensity and cost insensitivity with a view to emphasizing the probability that inadvertent escalation will indeed occur (see Section 2.3.3). Scholars commonly describe the DPRK’s foreign policy behavior in crises with the United States as utilizing brinkmanship (Reiss 1995; Wit, Poneman and Gallucci 2004; Funabashi 2007; Jackson 2018; Pacheco Pardo 2020). The regime in Pyongyang has itself embraced the image of brinkmanship, frequently describing the bargaining situation with the United States as “close to the brink of a war” (2002-12-28 KCNA) and as a “touch-and-go situation” (2002-03-18 MFA Spokesman; 2017-12-06 MFA Spokesman) that provides a basis for deliberate or accident/inadvertent escalation.

Nuclear messaging that nurtures perceptions of conflict propensity and risk tolerance are also likely linked to **internal purposes of regime acceptance and cohesion**. Authoritarian states often combine nationalism and belligerence in order to mobilize the masses and frame their greater national projects (Ben-Ghiat 2021). For the DPRK in particular, belligerence and nationalism are engrained in stage-setting, and bringing the legacy of the founding father Kim Il Sung to fruition is portrayed as salient. Suggesting that there has been progress in achieving these belligerent goals is also key for output legitimacy, i.e. to the regime’s ability to present itself as successful and thus as the righteous inheritor of the nation. The stage-setting is rigid, and the regime needs to attend to these parameters of the DPRK as a virtuous, strong, and independent nation that breaks with victimization and achieves final victory (see Chapter 4) in its public messaging. Members of the state apparatus and the general public—even if not empowered to criticize or exert much influence—are likely to expect these notions of belligerence and to expect to participate in presentations of belligerent nationalism. Yet analyzing the two-level game—the role of domestic dynamics and the internal purposes of nuclear messaging, and vice versa—requires tailored research with a different research design (see Chapter 7).

Presenting **consistency and coherence over time** (see Chapter 5.3) is also purposive in light of regime characteristics and related assumptions, as well as broader bargaining purposes with the United States. The regime in Pyongyang runs a personalist totalitarian state; the supreme leader is indeed central, but the DPRK has taken care to emphasize regime stability and cohesion beyond the paramount leader. The regime appears to strike a balance

between confirming the unique power of the supreme leader and emphasizing the existence of domestic processes and state structures, all of which is conveyed in particular by its messages concerning nuclear command and control, its framing of some missile tests as routine and some Kim Jong Un's nuclear messages as taking place within a broader domestic context and comprehensive military meeting. Moreover, the DPRK remained consistency and coherence of messaging despite the death of Kim Jong Il in 2011 and the young Kim Jong Un's rule since 2012, undermining assumptions about regime instability or potential policy shifts with leadership transitions.

Presenting consistency and coherence also spills into perceptions of regime unity, determination, and steadfastness, which can be useful for bargaining with the United States. The DPRK generally emphasizes the **unity, homogeneity, and monolithic thinking of the regime**, if not the nation as a whole. At the same time, however, its nuclear messaging highlights the salience of the supreme leader, as well as the role of other top-tier officials and processes behind decision-making and implementation, such as through the growing diversity of high-level actors issuing strategic messages.¹²⁴ The DPRK's messages of automatic escalation build on this notion of unity through process, suggesting that its military, party, state apparatus and population function in sync and stand ready to implement the regime's decisions, even in the case of pre-determined orders the implementation of which the supreme leader cannot personally ensure. This is notable not just in light of the "decapitation plans" by the United States and its allies, as discussed in the previous section, but also since the complexity of nuclear weapons organizations and decision-making process can drive a wedge "between what a country's leaders say and what its nuclear war planners and military units do" (Hayes and Bruce 2014, 17, 29). This nuclear messaging of consistency, coherence, unity, and process seek to cement risk perceptions despite regime-specific assumptions and to nurture the certainty of nuclear regional escalation should the United States and its allies wish to exploit moments of assumed regime instability.

As a whole, the DPRK's nuclear messaging is targeted at risk manipulation. This analysis builds on the basic assumption that perceived levels of risks correspond to the level of harm from escalation and on the probability of escalation. In this context, clear messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity influence the perceived level of harm. Regime-specific assumptions about conflict propensity and cost insensitivity in turn influence perceived levels of probability. Communicating risks and manipulating perceptions of risk are central to nuclear deterrence; the degree and probability of harm are essential inputs in the United States' strategic calculus, meant as incentives to refrain from attacking the DPRK. The purpose of nuclear deterrence is therefore fundamental to the regime's nuclear messaging,

¹²⁴ Chapter 4 briefly mentioned the example of Kim Jong Un's re-instatement of the tradition of New Year's addresses in 2013—as his grandfather did until 1994—although rather than solo speeches these took the form of major reports and announcements at the plenary meeting of the party's Central Committee.

while this does not exclude additional purposes related to overlapping audiences. The next Chapter will go into detail on this.

6.2 Messaging for Deterrence and Beyond

The **purpose of deterring attack is prevalent** in the DPRK's nuclear messaging, but there are also ambiguous messages that suggest additional purposes. But as outlined in Chapter 2.2.1, a messaging state can have incentives to distort benign purposes with belligerent language. Its stage-setting already foreshadows purposiveness: Nuclear weapons are central to the conflict and US hostile policy, requiring nuclear weapons itself to deter regime change by the United States. The DPRK was thus compelled to build nuclear weapons in order to counter-balance US threats, and then decided to frame nuclear proliferation as a greater nation project. Building a greater nation with nuclear weapons implies that the regime in Pyongyang could prefer to not just maintain the status quo as it is, but adjust it to accommodate its interests.

The DPRK has iterated that its nuclear weapons seek to **safeguard the country's existence and security, as well as its dignity and sovereignty**. Both apply implicitly to the regime in Pyongyang and explicitly to the DPRK as a whole, the independent nation of the Korean *minjok* that the regime has built and protected (Section 4.1). As outlined in Section 4.2, the DPRK's nuclear proliferation is part of the regime's aim to bend the arc of history towards nuclear justice through reciprocating the United States' nuclear threats, impeding the latter's plans for regime change in Pyongyang, and building a greater nation project. In this context, the DPRK's nuclear weapons have the purpose of translating "into reality the centuries-old desire of the nation to have national power strong enough not to allow anyone to dare provoke it and provided a fundamental guarantee for dynamically advancing the cause of building a great prosperous powerful socialist nation" (2007-04-09 report). The regime therefore promises to "take further measures to bolster the state nuclear force in quality and quantity for safeguarding its dignity and right to existence and genuine peace from the U.S. increasing threat of a nuclear war" (2016-09-09 Nuclear Weapons Institute).

The pursuit of nuclear justice and the notion of being "a **nuclear weapons state for independence and justice**" (2016-05-28 MFA Spokesman) suggest a broad range of purposes that the regime seeks to pursue with its nuclear weapons. The regime frequently mentions physical security and defense against attacks, but also vague notions of other interests ranging from sovereignty and dignity to development: its nuclear proliferation was "a righteous and inevitable choice to defend our national sovereignty and dignity and our people's rights to existence and development from increased nuclear threats and blackmail by the U.S. and its hostile moves against the DPRK" (2017-11-11 FM Spokesman). This and other state media communication emphasize internally-oriented functions—nuclear weapons as a shield to safeguard and build the nation—and allude to externally-oriented

functions of nuclear weapons, as a sword to be used against threats to its physical survival and political self-determination.

References to the regime's **nuclear weapons as a shield and as a sword** have been used alternately, never in direct combination. The shield metaphor is straightforward; nuclear weapons serve as "a firm guarantee for frustrating the U.S. imperialists' wild ambition to annex the northern half of the Republic and reduce all Koreans to modern-day slaves" (2017-03-31 Government Memorandum). It is the mere existence of nuclear weapons in the hands of the regime in Pyongyang that prevents the United States from implementing its regime change plans; this nuclear shield can thus "never be a bargaining chip in any case" (2013-07-01 Spokesman CPRK). As a theoretical argument, the shield metaphor formulates the deterrence purpose of the regime's nuclear weapons, which is to dissuade the United States from undertaking a planned action, namely an attack on the DPRK.

The sword analogy arises more frequently in the DPRK's state media communication and is another building block for the purpose of deterrence – alluding to **defense if deterrence fails**. The underlying idea is that it is the possession of nuclear weapons, the development of advanced nuclear strike capabilities, and the threat of launching nuclear strikes "that prevents a war" (2012-08-31 DPRK Foreign Ministry Memo). Here, the threat to "establish the equilibrium of real force with the U.S." (2017-09-16 Kim Jong Un) and to "mercilessly foil the nuclear war racket of the aggressors with its treasured nuclear sword of justice (2017-03-02 KPA General Staff) substantiates the deterrence function of the DPRK's nuclear weapons. It is this ability and willingness to use nuclear weapons as a sword and to "settle accounts with the United states" (2013-03-29 KJU) that manifests the threat and deters the United States from attacking the DPRK.

The regime's use of the sword analogy also suggests further purposes of coercion in relation to its nuclear weapons program. Theorists of nuclear strategy commonly distinguish between two forms of nuclear coercion: **nuclear deterrence** involves coercing the target state to refrain from undertaking an intended action; **nuclear compellence** involves coercing the target state to undertake an action it did not originally intend to undertake.¹²⁵ The DPRK's state media communication frequently describes the United States as applying "anachronistic" policies and closing its eyes to reality (2003-01-17 KCNA; 2012-08-20 MFA Spokesman), whereas what it should do is "squarely look at the strategic position of the DPRK that has joined the rank of the global nuclear and military powers" and change its policies in line with the regime's demands accordingly (2016-09-19 SPA). In this context, the nuclear sword seems to have a purpose that goes beyond deterring attack: the more

¹²⁵ The distinction between compellence and deterrence is semantic rather than substantial: both are forms of coercion with the aim of changing behavior. Scholars emphasize differences in process, since compellence refers to changing ongoing behavior whereas deterrence aims to induce the coerced to refrain from certain behavior (Fisher 1994). These functions overlap, however, and the distinction can be a matter of perspective and point of reference. For example, military exercises by US and ROK forces can be framed as a product of both compellence and deterrence by the DPRK: the regime's nuclear threats compel the allies to conduct military exercises; the regime's nuclear threats deter the allies from launching a full-scale attack on the DPRK rather than "merely" staging military exercises.

assertive purpose of coercing fundamental policy change when it comes to the United States' approach to the DPRK.

The regime in Pyongyang frames its **nuclear weapons development as a matter of path dependency**, upholding the founding father Kim Il Sung's revolutionary path of combining the "power of both pen and sword" to bend the arc of history towards nuclear justice and to bring the Korean revolution to its final victory (2012-04-20 KJU). This goes beyond benign motives of nuclear deterrence and ambiguously removing "the nuclear clouds of tyranny" (2017-10-08 REPORT Government) and instead suggests an "offensive" role for nuclear weapons and malign, belligerent intentions related to changing the status quo and indeed re-unifying the Korean peninsula by force, this time with nuclear weapons. Yet it is important to remember the individual contexts of these pronouncements: particularly in subcase 3 (2011-2013), considering the recent leadership transition in 2012, the regime's presentation of a final victory with the help of nuclear weapons seemed to be directed at internally-oriented purposes of regime cohesion and acceptance. In subcase 4 (2016-2018), supreme- and high-level statements link this final victory not to reunification but to the "showdown with the imperialists and the U.S." (2017-07-29 REPORT KJU) and mutual public threat-making with the then Trump administration (Jackson 2018).

In addition to these subcase-specific contexts, the regime in Pyongyang will likely continue to broach the "final victory" mantra and combine this with its nuclear weapons development, given its broader concern with its continued existence: the DPRK is focused on deterring the United States and its allies from attack and on deterring regime insiders and the general public from questioning the supreme leader and his regime. Suggesting that its nuclear weapons play a **compellence role contributes to perceptions of belligerence and risk-tolerance**, which leads the United States and its allies to prepare for contingencies and to exercise caution in order to prevent the regime in Pyongyang from finding opportunities for nuclear compellence. Scholars have long noted that nuclear weapons are effective tools for deterrence, less so for compellence (Petersen 1986; Sechser and Fuhrmann 2017), but whether this compellence function is genuine or makes sense is beside the point here: By suggesting that its aims are centered on nuclear compellence, the DPRK can nurture regime-specific assumptions and expectations of conflict propensity and cost-insensitivity with a view to increasing perceived risks and substantiating the specter of nuclear regional escalation (Weeks 2012, 2014; Weeks and Crunkilton 2018; see Section 2.3.3). Nuclear messaging that nuclear weapons could be used to reunify the Korean Peninsula thus do not necessarily reflect true intentions and operational plans and may instead reflect elements specific to the DPRK's nuclear coercive bargaining with the United States in the here and now. The DPRK's state media communication conveys the multitude of functions performed by the regime's nuclear weapons program, all of which fall within the spectrum of **changing the United States' hostile policy towards the DPRK**. The regime's messages range from refusing unilateral disarmament and engaging in nuclear deterrence against attack (2016-

05-25 NDC Policy Department) to demanding adjustments to US nuclear posture, the halting of military drills, and the withdrawal of US troops from the Korean peninsula (2013-04-18 NDC Policy Department), as well as reversing unilateral or multilateral sanctions and halting public discussion of the DPRK's human rights situation (2016-02-20 FM Spokesman). This multitude of functions and abundance of vague statements run parallel to the DPRK's general stage-setting, including its description of the "root cause" of its nuclear proliferation (Section 4.2). While the regime in Pyongyang would certainly prefer to see broader changes to the United States' policy towards the DPRK, deterring the United States from attacking the DPRK is the primary purpose of the regime's nuclear weapons program. Using nuclear threats for this existential objective is also more likely to be effective than threats for broader coercive purposes (Petersen 1986; Fuhrmann and Sechser 2014; see Section 2.2.2).

Such functions mostly involve forms of compellence by the regime in Pyongyang, i.e. the coercion of the United States and its allies to abandon their alliance, surrender, or pursue similar paths that would count as a victory for the DPRK. The regime indeed conveys such **functions of compellence and nuclear warfighting** with the aim of changing the status quo by force. This relates to the fact that its nuclear messaging is an integral part of its broader public messaging, which frame nuclear weapons as essential to bending the arc of history towards nuclear justice. This understanding envisions nuclear weapons, at a minimum, through the image of the shield and sword: as ensuring that "nobody can deny the entity of the DPRK," deterring attack but also available as an offensive option should deterrence fail (2017-12-22 KJU). The sword function of its nuclear forces commonly refers to enabling self-defense, ensuring independence and justice, and removing "the nuclear clouds of tyranny" (2017-10-08 REPORT Government), as well as achieving vaguely defined "victory" (2017-03-30 FM Spokesman). These framings of removing tyranny and achieving victory suggest notions of going beyond deterrence and self-defense. At a maximum, nuclear weapons are presented as playing a role in accelerating the regime's revolution and bringing about a "final victory," serving the function of re-unifying the Korean Peninsula by force or political coercion (Zwetsloot 2022). This suggestion of potential nuclear compellence and warfighting could, however, relate to other purposes rather than representing actual operational plans.

Such compellence purposes could undermine deterrence if measures as the former could trigger escalation by the United States and its allies. With that said, the two purposes are **not necessarily mutually exclusive**. In fact, the purpose of nuclear deterrence could form the first part of the sequence, the second part being strategies of nuclear compellence once conflict has erupted. The regime in Pyongyang has declared that its nuclear forces will achieve "decisive victory of war in case war deterrence fails" (2022-09-09 SPA). In warfighting scenarios, after deterrence has failed, the regime in Pyongyang could also forgo its threats of nuclear martyrdom and opt for a limited nuclear war rather than an all-out nuclear war. After initiation of conflict, the DPRK could pursue strategies of nuclear

blackmail and brinkmanship, employing “limited nuclear attacks that North Korea might deem as falling beneath the US response threshold” (Roberts 2016, 67). Instead of expending its entire arsenal, the regime could aim to manage escalation and keep major US and ally targets at risk, employing military restraint as leverage for coercive purposes (Panda 2021, 11; Garlauskas 2021, 8; Work 2023, 164).

Notably, the regime in Pyongyang mentions two additional conditions for nuclear weapons use that relate to the compellence function of nuclear weapons. The DPRK envisions a **role for nuclear weapons in contingencies** in order to “prevent an expansion and protraction of war, and taking an upper hand in a war” (2022-09-09 SPA, Article 6). This fits with nuclear warfighting scenarios and the tactical employment of nuclear weapons, scenarios involving limited nuclear strikes, and managed escalation. The last condition that the DPRK mentions is very vague: “In other cases where a catastrophic crisis has occurred that threatens the existence of the state and the safety of the people, and is inevitably compelled and cannot help but use nuclear weapons to respond” (2022-09-09 SPA, Article 6).

Moreover, the regime’s nuclear doctrine emphasizes the **purpose of deterrence** and detail the deterrence function of its nuclear forces. The DPRK justifies its nuclear deterrence activities by citing the threat of attack and regime change by the United States. Its public rhetoric combines threat perceptions with awareness of its strategic disadvantages and vulnerabilities: given the DPRK’s small size and limited strategic depth, as well as its encircled location on the Korean Peninsula and the United States’ military/material superiority and past and present nuclear threats, the regime has built nuclear weapons for the purpose of deterring attack and ensuring its existence (2003-04-30 KCNA report; 2017-03-30 MFA Spokesman). The regime’s first law of formalizing the DPRK’s nuclear-armed status describes the purpose of its nuclear weapons as lying in “deterring and repelling the aggression and attack of the enemy against the DPRK and dealing deadly retaliatory blows at the strongholds of aggression until the world is denuclearized” (2013-04-01 SPA). Notably, the stated purpose of deterring attack does not hinge explicitly on the United States and is instead directed at the existence of nuclear weapons per se. Furthermore, the deterrence purpose of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons is focused on deterring physical attack and the use of force, as opposed to the other threats to sovereignty and self-determination that are frequently referenced by the regime (2013-01-24 NDC Issues Statement).

Nuclear deterrence is thus the primary purpose of the DPRK’s nuclear weapons development program and nuclear forces. This narrow focus on deterring attack facilitates operationalization and clarity. The regime in Pyongyang revised the 2013 nuclear law in 2022, clarifying the two interconnected actions and inducements it is prepared to pursue as a means of deterring attack: first, the DPRK’s nuclear forces seeks to “deter a war by making hostile forces [...] give up attempts at aggression and attack”; second, it is prepared to fight nuclear war “in case its deterrence fails” (2022-09-09 SPA). In laying this out, the regime in Pyongyang thus clarifies the purpose of nuclear deterrence in textbook form, stating the **goal**

of deterrence (preventing attack) the positive **inducements to comply** with the threat (no nuclear war) and the negative **inducements against non-compliance** (nuclear war). As threat-making requires the presentation of both positive and negative inducements (Baldwin 1971), nuclear deterrence formulations require communication about what will happen should deterrence fail. Notably, the regime's nuclear messaging emphasize negative inducements and detail why and how the DPRK would fight nuclear war.

The DPRK's nuclear messaging aims at deterring attack by making very clear how escalation would unfold. Additional purposes abound, such as internally oriented mobilization or managing the perceived level of risks for the United States, but the nuclear doctrine that the DPRK communicates rests entirely on the purpose of deterrence.

6.3 Messages for Doctrine

The DPRK communicates a **doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation** through its nuclear messaging through consistent and clear nuclear messages that have increased in detail over time. This fits to expectations as outlined throughout Chapter 2 that projecting well thought-through nuclear employment and contingency plans complement nuclear messages of resolve and help to make the case that the presented doctrine is credible version of reality. Pyongyang's strategic messages of nuclear and regional escalation make the case for asymmetric escalation whereas its set of messages of nuclear resolve assure escalation through high degrees of determination, a diverse nuclear arsenal, and pre-determined orders. The regime presents asymmetric escalation as assured by communicating that surviving nuclear forces and contingency command and control structures would still be able to launch escalation even if the DPRK is under attack. Notably, codifying information about its nuclear doctrine correlates with the regime's progress in developing its nuclear weapons, delivery vehicles, command and control processes, force structures, and related infrastructure for maintaining and further developing its nuclear forces.

It is important to emphasize here, however, that a nuclear-armed state's nuclear doctrine is **not a sufficient basis for making predictions** about that state's future decisions and forms of behavior. **Nuclear doctrines are a source of clues** about that nuclear-armed state's existing nuclear forces, as well as its development and deployment decisions (past, present and future). Yet communicating this information implicitly or explicitly is strategic; even if framed as a good-faith commitment to transparency and responsible behavior, such communication takes place within the broader bargaining context in which each nuclear-armed state operates (Freedman 2003; Sechser 2018). Generally, states' future behavior, particularly in crises, may deviate from what was previously declared or expected. This relates to the aforementioned "shadow of the future" and a broad range of factors given the contingency, cognitive aspects, and other elements of decision-making processes (Stein 2002; Glaser 2010; Jervis 2017). Scholars mention two further contrary dynamics within

authoritarian regimes that can lead to outcomes that deviate from their stated nuclear doctrine and posture: first, the word of the paramount leader trumps everything, causing all officials to ignore existing laws, previous statements, and policies (Parachini et al. 2020, 89); second, “nuclear weapons organizations are complex entities that often distort outcomes intended by high-level decisionmakers,” which means that the paramount leader’s knowledge and commands may diverge from reality (Hayes and Bruce 2014, 29).

The regime in Pyongyang actively uses nuclear messaging as a means of communicating strategically for the purposes of nuclear deterrence. It communicates a nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation with a view to establishing a credible nuclear deterrent threat vis-à-vis the United States. Messages of nuclear resolve seek to convey the certainty of escalation; messages of operational clarity outline what asymmetric escalation means and how it would unfold. This assessment derives from applying the research design outlined in Chapter 3. The DPRK’s messages regarding its nuclear weapons development program, which nuclear forces it seeks to develop, and when and how it would employ its nuclear forces are relatively abundant and noisy, at times ambiguous and befuddling. Yet these two particular sets of nuclear messages—messages of nuclear resolve and of operational clarity—stand out as strategic messages: both are elaborate and communicate what the regime deems it important for its adversarial target audience, the United States, to understand about the nature of its nuclear doctrine and posture, as well as the credibility of its nuclear deterrent threat. Specific levels of authority, in specific contexts, have been attributed to the DPRK’s messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity. Even though messages of nuclear resolve are frequent, both sets of messages incorporate relatively low degrees of noisiness. All in all, the regime’s messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity can be seen as strategic messages that draw on the DPRK’s general setting for public messaging and build a coherent nuclear doctrine and posture.

Nuclear doctrines set out the conceptual framework for nuclear weapons (development) programs.¹²⁶ The term “nuclear doctrine” commonly refers to a set of political statements, texts and implicit tenets that form a conceptual framework for development and deployment decisions in a nuclear-armed state. At its core, the nuclear doctrine concerns the purpose(s) of the respective nuclear weapons (development) program; it conveys information about the goals that the respective nuclear-armed state pursues with its nuclear forces, how it seeks to achieve them, and how this relates to its adversaries and potential allies. Nuclear-armed states can communicate their respective nuclear doctrines,

¹²⁶ Nuclear postures complement this picture. Nuclear posture draws from nuclear doctrine, bridging the political and the operational. The term “posture” refers to actual nuclear forces, assembled and non-assembled nuclear explosive devices, delivery vehicles for nuclear bombs and warheads, and the necessary infrastructure to maintain, train, and deploy nuclear weapons (nuclear command, control, and communication). Nuclear postures commonly translate policy goals into mission goals, outlining operational plans and procedures for how and when to employ which part of a country’s nuclear forces. Nuclear-armed states have an incentive to be relatively secretive about their nuclear posture as a whole or to maintain ambiguity regarding certain aspects of their force posture; sharing such sensitive details as exact numbers, locations, and mission goals could prove disadvantageous should contingencies arise. In peacetime and contexts of bilateral and multilateral diplomatic efforts, privately exchanging information about one’s nuclear force posture is central to achieving arms control and reductions (Zarimpas 2003).

clarifying how their nuclear forces seek to deter unwanted actions, drawing redlines for adversaries, stating conditions for their employment of nuclear weapons, reassuring the use or non-use of nuclear weapons in stated conditions, and committing to forms of “responsible” nuclear behavior (see Chapter 6). Communicating this can be either implicit and private or public, through declaratory policy (Perkovich and Vaddi 2021). Declaratory policy plays a particular role in conveying a sense of predictability and “transparency” towards domestic, allied, and adversarial audiences; the United States, for example, publishes Nuclear Posture Reviews that outline the purpose of its nuclear weapons, concrete development and deployment decisions, and the number of weapons in its nuclear warheads stockpile.

As nuclear weapons are believed to be of the utmost strategic importance, there are **conflicting incentives** both to keep nuclear weapons developments and force structure details **secret and to share** this sensitive military information with adversaries (see Section 2.2). Notably, most nuclear-armed states communicate, to different extents, information about their nuclear weapons programs and forces; few share many details about their nuclear doctrine or information about the purposes of their nuclear weapons, their principles of nuclear employment, assurances of restraint and about force structure, command and control, and mission goals. Strikingly, the DPRK actively uses its nuclear messaging to communicate its nuclear doctrine. The regime’s presentation of its nuclear doctrine stands out given the extent of the information shared, the consistency and the clarity of the communicated doctrine. This relates to the purpose of nuclear deterrence and the need to manage perceived risks; clarity about nuclear capabilities and operational plans stimulates perceptions of the risk of escalation by emphasizing the potential harm from and ability to launch nuclear and regional escalation.

Unlike other nuclear-armed states,¹²⁷ and contrary to its “hermit kingdom” image, the regime in Pyongyang has **invested heavily in the public presentation of its nuclear capabilities, motives, and knowledge levels**. As discussed in Chapter 2, such nuclear messaging provides clues about the sending state’s strategic calculus—not for altruistic reasons, but for the purposes of influencing the target state’s strategic calculus, the bargaining process, and ideally the outcome as a whole. The DPRK’s nuclear messaging project a nuclear doctrine, a distinct conceptual and operational framework for its nuclear weapons program.

The most fundamental doctrinal principle relates to the purpose of its nuclear weapons program. The regime emphasizes the **ultimate purpose of deterrence**: deterring the United

¹²⁷ States with nuclear weapons can communicate information about nuclear doctrine and posture via public messaging; the five nuclear weapons states (as recognized by the NPT: China, France, Great Britain, Russia, the United States) and India (which possesses nuclear weapons and has never been party to the NPT) have issued authoritative statements, such as legal and political documents, that pertain to the respective country’s nuclear doctrine. The other two nuclear-possessing states that fall outside of the NPT communicate via verbal public signaling only to a limited extent: senior individuals such as Pakistan’s former Director General of Strategic Plans Division, Lieutenant General (retired) Khalid Kidwai, publicly shared information about the country’s nuclear doctrine, whereas Israel’s politicians rarely offer any clues about the country’s nuclear forces in public statements. In anecdotal comparison, the DPRK has taken a different approach in communicating information about its nuclear weapons (development) program, as this thesis has shown.

States (and its allies) from attacking the DPRK as they presumably plan to disarm and topple the regime in Pyongyang. With a view to convincing the United States to refrain from pursuing this plan of action and to therefore not having to actually employ its nuclear weapons, the regime seeks to establish and maintain its clear and credible nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric deterrence. This doctrine emphasizes that, should deterrence fail, early nuclear employments against regional counter-force targets would be certain. The DPRK has focused most of its nuclear messaging on messages about what would happen if the DPRK were to be attacked; these messages seek to deter the United States from attack and are pinpointed to particular forms of attack that the regime's nuclear forces aim to deter. The nuclear law codified this clear deterrence function as the "main mission to deter war by making hostile forces have a clear understanding of the fact that the military confrontation with the DPRK brings about ruin, and make them give up attempts at aggression and attack"; "in case war deterrence fails," the DPRK's nuclear forces "shall carry out an operational mission for repelling hostile forces' aggression and attack" (2022-09-09 SPA, Article 1). Nuclear deterrence is the central function of every nuclear-armed state's nuclear weapons program. Doctrinal formulations commonly portray nuclear weapons as a last resort that would only be used if deterrence has failed.

Other fundamental doctrinal principles relate to **matters of responsibility and restraint**. Like most other nuclear-armed states, the DPRK promises the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons (2022-09-09 SPA Article 10) and the employment of nuclear weapons only as "the final resort means" (2022-09-09 SPA Article 5). In its nuclear messaging, however, while the regime in Pyongyang presents the employment of nuclear weapons as a last resort in its bargaining with the United States, it has made clear that it would be its first military recourse should conflict erupt. Nuclear forces function as "the backbone of the state defense capacity", "a powerful means for defending the sovereignty, territorial integrity and fundamental interests of the state, preventing a war on the Korean peninsula and in Northeast Asia and ensuring the strategic stability of the world" (2022-09-09 SPA). The principle of escalation is prevalent in its nuclear doctrine, however, as will be elaborated below. Similar to the United States, for example, the DPRK also formulates **negative security assurances** to non-nuclear weapons states, with the caveat that this excludes non-nuclear weapons states that have participated in any "aggression or attack against the DPRK in collusion with other nuclear weapon states" (2022-09-09 SPA, Article 5; Dalton and Jones 2022). The regime has stressed this point in its messages of operational clarity, clearly messaging that it would attack counterforce targets held by the United States and its allies, the ROK and Japan.

Doctrinal principles aside, the largest share of the regime in Pyongyang's nuclear messaging to communicate what would happen if deterrence were to fail. Its messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity communicate a nuclear doctrine and posture of assured asymmetric escalation. Escalation is a fundamental principle of nuclear employment. The regime in Pyongyang has threatened that it would **use its nuclear weapons first and/or**

early in the case of a failure (actual or looming) of deterrence. For these nuclear use scenarios, the DPRK has spelled out **four conditions**—namely forms of attack—that would trigger nuclear escalation: the use of nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction against the DPRK, the use of nuclear or non-nuclear weapons against the state leadership and/or the command organization of the state’s nuclear forces, and a fatal military attack against important strategic objects of the state (2022-09-09 SPA, Article 6). Most other states that possess nuclear weapons are more vague about the conditions under which they would consider employment, leaving the definition of vital interests (United States) or existential threats (Russia) relatively ambiguous.

Escalation can be symmetric, especially when it is based on an escalation ladder and the notion of reciprocity in tit-for-tat behavior. Asymmetric escalation, by contrast, involves the absence of reciprocity and the threat of escalation by **introducing nuclear weapons into a conventional conflict** (Narang 2014, 19; Panda 2021, 11–12). In fact, asymmetric escalation in the case of the DPRK would be twofold, escalation from the conventional to the nuclear level, and from the local to the regional level. The regime’s messages of nuclear and regional escalation outline operationally clear threats of launching theater-range, if not intercontinental-range, nuclear first strikes. This goes beyond a threat to reciprocate an (imminent or occurring) attack and instead equates to the DPRK’s threatening to “bring its full power to bear” with a view to deterring a stronger state “from attacking altogether” (Powell 2015, 616-617). Other scholars have discussed the clear and rational line of argumentation behind this doctrine of asymmetric deterrence (RAND report Parachini et al 2020, 87) and posture of asymmetric escalation (Narang 2014; Narang and Panda 2017; Cho and Petrovics 2022, 41) for states that are conventionally inferior or particularly vulnerable to precision strikes and that hope to prevent such attacks through threats of nuclear escalation (Allard, Duchatel and Godement 2017; Kim 2017; Narang 2017; Panda 2020).

The DPRK conveys a **clear strategic calculus** in its nuclear messaging, particularly reflecting its own capabilities and its knowledge of its threat environment. The regime in Pyongyang **speaks openly of its strategic disadvantages**, its limited strategic depths, and the United States’ capabilities and military, economic, and political might, alongside praising its own capabilities and strengths. It references the United States’ operational plans of “beheading operations” and “high-density strikes” (2016-02-23 KPA Supreme Command). The possibility of a first strike or similarly disarming strikes by the United States and its allies creates **use-or-lose pressures** for the regime in Pyongyang, giving rise to strong incentives for asymmetric escalation and for presenting a “willingness to introduce nuclear weapons early and before any *actual use of force* against it by the United States and its allies” (Panda 2020, 83). The rationality behind the DPRK’s doctrine of asymmetric escalation is open and clear (Narang 2013; Powell 2015, 616–617; Panda 2020, 89–90). The regime in Pyongyang communicates a doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation and thus its decision to meet the asymmetry of capabilities and stakes—for the DPRK, high stakes, military inferiority,

strategic disadvantages—with capability and posture developments to credibly threaten early nuclear and regional escalation.

The regime in Pyongyang **emphasizes the element of certainty** in the presentation of its nuclear doctrine. Its strategic messages of automatic escalation spell out the DPRK's system of supreme launch authority and pre-determined orders for contingencies. The regime in Pyongyang thereby communicates its strategic calculus regarding strengthening its nuclear command and control by including positive and negative controls and openly considering contingency scenarios. The DPRK reflects reports on operational plans by the United States and its allies to “behead” the regime and strike its leadership and command and control structures early in a war. The regime is apparently considering scenarios in which the United States and its allies impede the supreme leader from issuing direct orders, potentially due to confinement, evacuation, injury, or death. It communicates the existence of positive controls in the form of predetermined orders within the supreme launch authority system (see Section 5.1.1), which does not go as far as actual pre-delegation, which would technically allow “field commanders to rapidly use nuclear weapons before the adversary can neutralize them” (Feaver 1992/93; Narang 2014, 18-19). The regime's nuclear messaging illustrates its aim of ensuring a nuclear launch even if supreme launch authority is impeded; this is meaningful considering potential contingencies with the United States and the DPRK's personalist system. Current messages of automatic escalation may also represent intermediate steps in a process of strengthening nuclear command and control, potentially with an eye to further positive controls for the sake of tactical nuclear weapons use for early nuclear escalation (Narang and Panda 2017; Panda 2021, 2020 Chapter 9; Smith and Bernstein 2022).

The element of certainty applies to scenarios of collective suicide, as performed by the regime's messages of nuclear martyrdom as well (Section 5.1.2). The US Defense Intelligence Agency (2021, 14) agrees that the DPRK's defense planning “has adapted to deter direct U.S. military intervention by messaging that the cost of such intervention would be unacceptably high to the United States even if North Korea ultimately lost the engagement”. The regime's presentation of its nuclear doctrine and posture of assured asymmetric escalation emphasizes the risk of automatic escalation even if this equates to collective suicide, conveying a high level of resolve and risk acceptance. This messaging conveys a **sense of predictability** in order to stimulate the United States' assessment of risks and costs, thereby seeking to influence its strategic calculus.

The DPRK's messages of resolve and nuclear and regional escalation also communicate **certainty through diversity**. The regime in Pyongyang emphasizes that it is able to develop and maintain diverse systems for nuclear employment and that this diversity pertains to basing, concealment, launch modes, and performance characteristics to fulfil certain employment missions. As noted in Section 5.2, diversity of nuclear forces can increase perceptions of their survivability. Notionally, having diverse and dispersed nuclear assets

decreases the likely success of disarming strikes, raising the probability that enough (or the relevant) nuclear weapon systems will remain intact. Diversity can thereby project the certainty of surviving conventional or nuclear strikes and launching nuclear employments in response. This certainty of second-strike capability (and the related threat of annihilation) is what put the “assured” in the mutually assured destruction between the Soviet Union and the United States. The regime in Pyongyang applies a similar logic, messaging that its asymmetric escalation is “assured” in light of nuclear command and control arrangements for contingencies and its possession of diverse nuclear forces that would likely (partially) survive US attempts of disarmament by force.

The regime also assures asymmetric escalation by stressing two different escalation pathways. As noted in Section 5.2, diversity of nuclear forces can provide operational flexibility and diverse options for escalation in contingencies. At first sight, **such a diverse missile arsenal overshoots the requirements of asymmetric escalation** but also facilitates operational flexibility and ambiguity about immediate all-out or tactically sequenced regional escalation, as discussed in Section 5.2.2. Ambiguity is relatively distinct and pertains only to the question whether the regime in Pyongyang would indeed launch an all-out nuclear war, attempting to overwhelm its adversaries with its comparably small but diverse nuclear forces, or whether it would instead utilize missile diversity to conduct a piecemeal escalation. Supporting the notion of certainty, however, diversity in terms of capability development reflects the DPRK’s determination and ability to build and maintain nuclear forces for early nuclear and regional escalation. The regime in Pyongyang portrays itself as meeting its communicated strategic disadvantages and military inferiority vis-à-vis the United States not only by emphasizing the asymmetry between them in terms of the stakes and resolve (Powell 2015), but also by overcompensating through determined diverse capability development. Given the military superiority of the United States (and its allies), diverse missile systems can increase the DPRK’s chances of challenging early warning and missile defense efforts and of performing counterforce targeting in the region.

This overcompensation and emphasis on diversity match assumptions that the sophistication of a country’s nuclear capabilities and the clarity of its operational plans matter for deterrence purposes, as more information and the quality of the threat increases the credibility of the threat (Gartzke, Kaplow and Mehta 2014; Early and Asal 2018). Doing so may also be an attempt to counter outside perceptions of the DPRK as poor and incapable in terms of nuclear weapons development and strategic planning, as bluffing and inferior vis-à-vis the combined military might of the United States and the ROK. Yet an assessment of these aspects would take us beyond the limits of this thesis, as this would require a different research design, one with a focus on messaging and signaling as an interactive process (see Chapter 7).

The low threshold for escalation, the certainty of asymmetric escalation, and the degree of ambiguity concerning whether it would be all-out or piecemeal nuclear regional escalation

increase the United States' perception of risk and uncertainty. The regime's messages of nuclear resolve and operational clarity undermine operational plans to "incapacitate the enemy by disabling its central nervous system," stressing the severity and probability of harm that the DPRK would unleash if attacked (Lieber and Press 2017; Powell 2015, 591). Such **messages aim to stress the level of risk that the United States would have to tolerate** if it were to launch an attack against the regime in Pyongyang, aiming to influence the former's strategic calculus, its perception of the risks involved, and cost-benefit calculations. The DPRK's nuclear messaging also create a sense of uncertainty for the United States concerning its own capabilities and knowledge levels. Indeed, emphasizing advantages of related to topography, concealment efforts, and the diversity of its nuclear weapons systems, basing, and launch modes could stimulate the United States' "first-strike uncertainty," thereby further increasing risk-perceptions in its strategic calculus (Goldstein 2000, 44-45; Wu Riqiang 2013; Panda 2020, 243).

With this doctrine and posture of assured asymmetric escalation, as presented above, the DPRK seeks to convince the United States to refrain from attacking. The regime has communicated that **deterrence is the fundamental purpose** of its nuclear forces and nuclear escalation and warfighting as the purpose should deterrence fail and should an attack (in the described forms) be imminent or underway. Given the guiding principle of escalation, nuclear weapons are commonly described as "war deterrents," viewed as maintaining the status quo on the Korean Peninsula and the region (2003-06-03 Rodong Sinmun; 2006-07-27 KPA General Staff Chief; 2012-10-01 VFM Pak Kil Yon; 2017-09-23 FM Ri Yong Ho; 2018-01-01 KJU): "Our self-defensive nuclear deterrent is, indeed, an all-purpose, precious sword that prevents a war and reliably safeguards peace and stability on the Korean peninsula" (2012-08-31 FM Memo). This nuclear messaging emphasizes benign motives: an ultimate preference to maintain the status quo of having two Koreas, as long as this guarantees the existence of the regime in Pyongyang. The presentation of benign motives clashes with the communication of additional motives or a preference to establish a different situation on the Korean Peninsula, as outlined in the previous section.

Notably, the regime's **doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation** illustrates the DPRK's fear of being vulnerable to the United States' disarming strikes. Alternative doctrines and postures, such as those of assured retaliation, minimum deterrence, and strategic ambiguity, could also satisfy the regime's overarching goal of deterring the United States from attack. Assured retaliation depends on the survivability of a country's nuclear forces and its capacity to launch a second nuclear strike in retaliation for a first nuclear strike, which requires survivable command and control structures and the readiness of strike capabilities (Lee and Alexandrova 2021). Minimum deterrence is a combinable principle that relies on the notion that a certain quantity of nuclear weapons, of a certain quality, is "enough"; it thus focuses on survivable and ready second-strike capabilities (Chung et al. 2017). Strategic ambiguity leverages uncertainty regarding whether the DPRK would indeed launch a first or second

nuclear strike (Cho and Petrovics 2022). Instead, the regime in Pyongyang presents a doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation, which combines certainty about nuclear first use, regional escalation, and contingency-ready command and control structures. A catalytic posture that required China to extend its nuclear forces may have been conceivable as the regime's unofficial assumption during the early years of its nuclear proliferation but does not reflect bilateral relations between Beijing and Pyongyang or the DPRK's nationalist nuclear ambitions and capability development (Narang 2014; Smith 2015).

Yet there are major caveats to this analysis of the DPRK's nuclear doctrine. Generally, **statements about doctrine are presentation of reality**, and even though they may accurately capture the present situation, they are not generally predictions of future contingencies. This “problem might be somewhat attenuated in a totalitarian system in which all officials will be looking closely to the ultimate leader's statements for guidance” (Parachini et al 2020, 89), but the complexities of nuclear command and control can impede exact top-down follow-through (Hayes and Bruce 2014, 17, 29). Moreover, the leader of a personalist authoritarian regime is able to change decisions and policies on a whim, increasing the chances that that state's behavior before and during contingencies will be erratic and volatile. In any case, the DPRK's nuclear messaging communicates a distinct nuclear doctrine that aims to influence the United States (and its allies) not to launch an attack or regime change operation against the regime in Pyongyang. Should this deterrence goal fail, the regime in Pyongyang could instead implement its doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation to compel the end of warfighting.

Nevertheless, the DPRK's nuclear messaging detail the level of harm that the regime in Pyongyang could unleash against the United States and its allies, emphasizing assured asymmetric escalation and its aim of undermining the United States' capabilities and operational plans. Doing so is a central ingredient in establishing and improving nuclear deterrence, managing the multiple asymmetries between the DPRK and the United States—in terms of the stakes involved, relative military might, real-time information about the threat-environment, and opportunities to exploit a monopoly on information—and influencing the perceived risk of nuclear and regional escalation. In addition to clarifying the level and certainty of the harms associated with escalation, the DPRK's nuclear messaging also capitalizes on potential additional purposes and regime-specific assumptions and characteristics that influence perceptions regarding the probability of harm and escalation.

7. Closing the Curtain

The DPRK is a theater state. This does not mean that what the regime in Pyongyang does and says is hollow propaganda, but that its public communication includes strategic messaging. Contrary to the common perception of the DPRK as a hermit kingdom, the regime shares clear and detailed information about its nuclear weapons program; it communicates in a **more explicit way than to other nuclear-armed states**. This is strategic: The regime in Pyongyang aims to influence the United States' strategic calculus and, ideally, the outcome of bargaining between the DPRK and the United States by clarifying its nuclear capabilities, motives for nuclear employment, and knowledge of the United States, its capabilities, and its operational plans.

This case study has examined an **extreme case of nuclear messaging**: public messaging generally has informative potential, but they often suffer from issues of content, credibility, and the target's awareness of strategic purposiveness; this **threefold complexity** is what drives the value of conducting (and analyzing) public messaging and is all the more so at play when authoritarian regimes engage in messaging about their nuclear weapons (development) programs (see Chapter 2). The universe of cases is very small, and the DPRK is an ideal subject for analyzing what such states choose to convey in their public nuclear messaging, since the regime in Pyongyang invests heavily in such messaging, with clear stage-setting, omni-present stories, and a clear group of stage-managers and protagonists (see Chapter 4). The narrow research design of this thesis—focusing only on what the regime in Pyongyang communicates with its nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States (see Chapter 3)—matches the epistemological objective of exploration for the sake of highlighting not generalizable but new pieces of knowledge.

There are **five takeaways** that this thesis contributes to the relevant fields of academic scholarship and to policy-oriented research and policymaking. First, authoritarian states like the regime in Pyongyang issue propaganda, but **among abundant noisy messages are strategic messages** that present an informative version of reality. Second, the empirical approach of treating public state communication as public messaging helps to **deal with the limits of the information provided** and can be applied to other cases. Third, even the study of an extreme case sheds light on the informative potential and strategic purposiveness of public messaging and adds a **process-oriented understanding of messaging** to the existing scholarship. Fourth, **communication matters for nuclear deterrence**, and emerging nuclear-armed states often have an incentive to issue clear and detailed nuclear messages in order to improve their bargaining situation with a superior adversary. Lastly, the DPRK messages a **nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation**, emphasizing its ability and willingness to escalate to the nuclear and the regional level early and thus the warfighting role of its nuclear forces should deterrence fail.

These takeaways form the groundwork of additional aspects, and this thesis will close by highlighting three **fields of future research**. Analyzing the DPRK's nuclear messaging prior to the pursuit and acquisition of nuclear weapons, investigating the role of internal audiences and actors in nuclear messaging, analyzing the target audience's dimension and the third dimension of interaction and learning would help to shed more comprehensive light on the DPRK's nuclear messaging. On the one hand, this would be a natural extension of this thesis; on the other, it would give rise to new questions about the materials for and methods of analysis. While focusing on the messaging side, on what information the regime in Pyongyang shares about its nuclear weapons program, addresses only the first dimension of the DPRK's nuclear messaging, it lays the necessary ground for future contributions to our understanding of the phenomenon of messaging in general, and the DPRK's nuclear messaging in particular.

7.1 Five Takeaways and Policy Recommendations

Analyzing public messaging by authoritarian states is meaningful, both for academic scholarship and for policy-oriented research and policymaking. Understanding public communication as a form of strategic presentation helps to deal with what authoritarian regimes propagate and how they control the flow and nature of information about themselves. Rather than neither taking the DPRK's abundant state media communication at **face value nor negating its informative potential per se**, this thesis developed its own empirical approach to analyzing strategic messages and thereby contributes to the study of messaging, nuclear weapons, and the regime in Pyongyang specifically.

As the first and most fundamental takeaway, this thesis illustrates that the DPRK is indeed not a hermit kingdom but a theater state. Understanding the regime in Pyongyang as a theater state provides scholars and policy researchers with a suitable epistemological mindset: the DPRK's state media communication is very noisy, encompassing a multitude of messages (many crude and repetitive), but even this **noisiness is informative** and purposive, establishing its conflict definition and nurturing perceptions of determination and cost insensitivity that can be useful for its bargaining with the United States (see Chapter 4). Among these many noisy messages are **strategic messages that are more informative and purposive**. Chapters 5 and 6 outlined the DPRK's strategic nuclear messages and what information they convey regarding its nuclear weapons program, development, deployment, and potential employment decisions. Yet it is important to remember the purposiveness of public messaging; intentionally presented information—as with all nuclear doctrines, postures, and related state presentations of nuclear strategy—cannot account for the present reality or for future actions. Scrutinizing the genuineness of the communicated information is beyond the scope and purpose of this case study. Instead, this thesis took the DPRK's public nuclear messaging as they are, outlining what the regime presents as its

nuclear doctrine and posture in order to convince the United States (and its allies) to refrain from launching an attack and what this messaging for deterrence suggests about the DPRK's strategic calculus and its attempt to influence the United States' strategic calculus.

Second, the **distinct and systematic research design** of this thesis has made the most out of publicly available primary materials from an extreme case. The empirical approach of parsing the DPRK's state media communication for strategic messages concerning its nuclear weapons development program reveals the nuclear doctrine and posture that the regime seeks to present vis-à-vis the United States. Central to this approach is awareness that the nature of the research object and primary materials influences what research questions can be asked and answered, pertaining to the limits and potential of the presented version of reality. This empirical approach can be applied to other forms of public messaging, i.e. aspects of the DPRK's economic policies and its relations with China, Japan, Russia, and the ROK, as well as to other cases of nuclear messaging, i.e. messaging by other nuclear-armed states or potential cases of nuclear proliferation such as Iran, the ROK, and Saudi Arabia.

Third, this case study contributes to the scholarship on messaging in two ways. Thus far in the scholarship, the concept of messaging has primarily been developed theoretically; this thesis contributes an extreme case—**authoritarian nuclear messaging**—to the mix. The general assumption that states engage in messaging in order to influence their target audiences through providing information holds, even when messaging concerns highly sensitive matters such as nuclear weapons development programs and force posture. Moreover, the existing theoretical and empirical scholarship on messaging is largely outcome oriented, delving in particular into costliness mechanisms and thus the credibility and effectiveness of messaging (Gartzke et al. 2017). The narrow research design of this thesis, however, introduces a process-oriented understanding of messaging and focuses solely on the messaging state's side of the exchange. **Exploring the first dimension of messaging first**—and leaving the analysis of the other two dimensions of response and interaction for future research (see below)—allows for an in-depth analysis of how the messaging state seeks to influence the target state's strategic calculus and what this suggests about its own strategic calculus.

Fourth, the analysis of the DPRK's public nuclear messaging provided interesting findings concerning the **role of communication in emerging nuclear-armed states**. The existing scholarship on nuclear proliferation highlights either the bargaining purpose of communicating nuclear ambitions and latency (Levite 2002; Benson and Wen 2011; Kitano 2016; Mattiacci and Jones 2016; Volpe 2017, 2023; Spaniel 2019; Park and Peh 2020) or the need for secrecy in order to impede counter-proliferation measures (Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Debs and Monteiro 2016; Narang 2017; Whitlark and Mehta 2017, 2019). Additional research is needed to assess how messaging change over the course of different proliferation phases (see below). Nevertheless, the fact that the regime in Pyongyang communicates its nuclear doctrine through public messaging contributes to the study of emerging nuclear-

armed states, illustrating that the mere existence of nuclear weapons does not necessarily satisfy the deterrence purposes of a small state and that the sophistication of nuclear forces matters and needs to be communicated (Gartzke and Jo 2009; Gartzke et al. 2014, 2015; Early and Asal 2018). Indeed, the case study of the DPRK's nuclear messaging reveals the extent to which clear communication about diverse nuclear capabilities and knowledge levels about the United States' capabilities and operational plans matter to the regime's strategy of deterrence. Rather than noisiness, ambiguity, or befuddlement (see Chapter 2), **clarity in strategic nuclear messaging seems central** to the DPRK's bargaining with the United States, in its endeavor to counterbalance its military inferiority, to exploit the asymmetry of the stakes involved, and to manipulate perceptions of risks to its advantage. Fifth, the regime in Pyongyang communicates its nuclear doctrine through its public nuclear messaging. This is already an interesting finding given that other nuclear-armed states communicate quite differently in terms of quantity and detail when it comes to their nuclear weapons program and force structure. Moreover, the DPRK communicates a **nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation** and has done so relatively consistently and coherently, with few but notable adjustments in terms of authoritativeness and actor diversity, content, packaging, and context specificity (see Section 5.3) across four subcases spanning almost two decades. This aligns with recent scholarship on the DPRK's nuclear strategy that pinpoints a posture of asymmetric escalation (Narang 2014; Kim Dong-hyeon 2019; Panda 2020) but questions assumptions of change from catalytic postures (Narang 2014; Smith 2015) to assured retaliation (Chung et al. 2017; Lee and Alexandrova 2021) or strategic ambiguity (Cho and Petrovics 2022).

Knowledge of the DPRK's nuclear doctrine of assured asymmetric escalation allows for policy recommendations. The United States and its allies in the region, first and foremost the ROK and Japan, seek to **manage the risk of escalation** by the regime in Pyongyang. The **risk of deliberate escalation** can be met by strengthening deterrence and defense capabilities with a view to convincing the regime in Pyongyang that the costs of an attack by the DPRK would outweigh the benefits for the regime. In light of the regime's progress in developing and deploying a diverse arsenal of nuclear forces, there is an urgent need to develop and deploy tailored and diverse capabilities for counter-deterrence and defense. Strengthening the deterrence and defense capabilities of the United States, the ROK, and Japan, however, could fuel the **risk of inadvertent escalation**: more and qualitatively better capabilities and threats of preemptive strikes and of ending the regime are likely to increase the DPRK's threat perceptions and use-or-loose pressures. Heightened concerns about its threat environment, relative military inferiority, and limited situational awareness could drive the regime in Pyongyang to escalate on the basis of misperceptions and miscalculations—e.g. misinterpreting military deployments for training as preparations for attack—and to launch nuclear strikes in order to preempt attempts at regime change. This has been the

longstanding dynamic on the Korean Peninsula, akin to the security dilemma, which seems to intensify with the lack of dialogue and the advancements of weapons programs.

Information can play here a twofold role here: First, the United States and its allies need better and more **coordinated capabilities for intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance, and real-time information sharing** in order to ensure reliable early warning and early response. Second, the United States and its allies in the region could **unilaterally share information about military exercises** and related deployments and could launch notifications of missile systems and other relevant strategic assets. Doing so would equate not to providing the DPRK with a particular advantage but rather to managing the information environment with a view to reducing the risk of inadvertent escalation and deterring deliberate escalation. The strategic sharing of information through tailored public messaging would be worthwhile not only for the regime in Pyongyang but also for the United States, the ROK, and Japan.

7.2 Three Fields for Future Research

Achieving a more comprehensive understanding of the messaging through the lens of the DPRK's nuclear messaging would require additional research. This thesis has focused on one dimension of the regime's nuclear messaging, contributing new knowledge and building the groundwork for future analysis of the following three aspects, which are central to the original case-specific research topic: nuclear messaging prior to the pursuit of nuclear proliferation, the two-level game of messaging, and the three dimensions of messaging.

How does the DPRK's **nuclear messaging before the start of its nuclear weapons development program and during its exploring nuclear proliferation differ** from its nuclear messaging during its pursuit of nuclear weapons? The four phases of nuclear proliferation are as follows: (i) the absence (or reversal) of a nuclear weapons development program, (ii) the initiation of a nuclear weapons development program and subsequent exploration of nuclear proliferation pathways, (iii) the pursuit of nuclear weapons development, and (iii) the acquisition of nuclear weapons (Sobek, Foster and Robison 2012; see Section 2.2). The research design of this thesis set the first subcase as spanning from 2001 to 2003, which covers later stages of exploration and the DPRK's explicit pursuit of nuclear weapons, given the second nuclear crisis and the then Bush administration's revelation of the DPRK's covert uranium enrichment program, as well as the regime's withdrawal from the NPT. Considering additional subcases that cover the period where the DPRK had no nuclear weapons program and early exploration in the 1980s and 1990s would thus be a natural extension of this research. Doing so would require adjusting the research

design, however, due to limited availability of comparable amounts (in terms of quantity and quality) of primary materials.¹²⁸

The existing scholarship on nuclear proliferation assumes that nuclear acquisition entails changes in foreign policy behavior. A nuanced catalogue of non-exclusive foreign policy behavior that nuclear weapons can facilitate includes conventional aggression, the expansion of goals, independence from allies/partners, the bolstering of alliances/partnerships, steadfastness in disputes, and compromise in preexisting disputes (Bell 2021). Yet questions remain about whether and how proliferating states communicate over the course of nuclear proliferation phases prior to nuclear acquisition, whether and how different stages of nuclear exploration and pursuit influence nuclear messaging, and whether the absence of a nuclear weapons program entails the absence of nuclear messaging. For the time being, this thesis has contributed two case-specific takeaways to the scholarship of nuclear proliferation and messaging: First, it has shown that the regime in Pyongyang engaged heavily in **public nuclear messaging during its nuclear pursuit and acquisition phases**, which is contrary to the common assumption, based in part on other case studies, that (potentially) proliferating states shy away from communicating too much in order not to facilitate counter-proliferation measures, including disarming strikes (Fuhrmann and Kreps 2010; Debs and Monteiro 2017; Narang 2017; Whitlark and Mehta 2017, 2019). Second, it has shown that the DPRK's messaging during nuclear proliferation and its alternation between restraint and sprints to increase latency accommodated bargaining with the United States but did not preclude (or significantly impede) **the regime's successful acquisition of nuclear weapons** (Benson and Wen 2011; Mattiacci and Jones 2016; Volpe 2017, 2023; Spaniel 2019; Park and Peh 2020; see Section 2.2).

How do the two levels of **domestic and foreign politics overlap and interact** in public messaging? Ideally, public messages are targeted and tailored to certain audiences and purposes; in reality, public messaging cannot (always or entirely) exclude unintended audiences and may be observed by other audiences—this general fact also pertains to authoritarian regimes that have particular opportunities to control public communication (and a particular interest in doing so). Moreover, messaging can be intended to address multiple audiences at once. These **audience overlaps** presumably relate to internal and external dynamics, but questions remain about the role of domestic and foreign constituencies in internally and externally oriented messaging. Regarding the role of domestic constituencies, assumptions abound concerning how the DPRK's nuclear messaging pertain to internal functions such as securing loyalty and regime support from

¹²⁸ In fact, early drafts of this thesis included a research design with five subcases, the first spanning from 1993 to 1995 in order to cover the first nuclear crisis between the DPRK and the United States, the regime's suspension of cooperation with the IAEA, and the 1994 Agreed framework and first year of implementation. It was very difficult, however, to access the necessary primary materials for a systematic analysis across all five subcases; the website KCNA Watch (see Section 3.2.1) provides access to KCNA texts from 1997 onwards. Devising earlier subcases would thus require archival work and potential adjustments to the corpus in line with the accessibility of primary materials from earlier decades.

the military (Howell 2020). Additionally, the growing diversity of actors in the regime's public nuclear messaging—as outlined in Chapter 5.3—may suggest that domestic constituencies not only play the role of audience but also influence the nature of the DPRK's nuclear messaging.

Analyzing the two-level game at play behind the DPRK's nuclear messaging would require an entirely different research design, however, centered on **within-unit level analysis**. This would be particularly challenging given the lack of reliable primary materials for systematic analysis. Even though notable studies on the regime's domestic constituencies and internal practices have been published (McEachern 2010, 2017; Park and Snyder 2012; Cathcart, Green and Denney 2014; Frank 2022), questions remain about the concrete roles they play in the design and enforcement of public messages, as these are not observable from the outside. Other scholars have noted that there are significant **differences between the Korean-language and the English-language state media texts** (Wit, Poneman and Galucci 2005); such findings offer only limited insight into the internal dynamics, suggesting what the regime wants to hide from its domestic population, while external audiences in the United States, the ROK, Japan, China, and Russia can receive and interpret both Korean- and English-language texts.

How does **interaction influence public messaging**? This thesis has contributed a case study that focuses on the process and first dimension of messaging, shedding light on the sending state and its public nuclear messaging. It did not reflect on whether these messages are received, how they are perceived and interpreted, whether and how the target state responded, whether and how these responses are received, perceived and interpreted by the first messaging state, and how this influences states' messaging. As outlined in Chapters 2 and 3, messaging is an interactive process that includes, at a minimum, two alternating dimensions of messaging and counter- messaging but can also encompass a third dimension of learning and direct interactions. Public messaging, as well as their reception, perception, and response, equate to two sides of the same coin, while the third dimension is the actual interaction between the first and the second dimension.

The existing scholarship on messaging focuses in particular on costliness mechanisms and interaction (Gartzke et al. 2017; see Chapter 2), but this thesis has laid the groundwork for three particular aspects of interaction for the case study of the DPRK's nuclear messaging. **International public debates**, including by scholars and policymakers in the United States, on the DPRK's nuclear messaging may influence the regime's adjustments of its messaging. It can also be assumed that **public and private messaging** interact and that each form of messaging can influence the other; former US negotiators have noted that the DPRK's public messaging has at times undermined its private messaging efforts (Denmark, Hosford and Zubrow 2009). Moreover, emerging nuclear states presumably **learn and "mature"** over time, in correlation with nuclear capability developments and experiences with state interactions as nuclear-armed states (Horowitz 2009, 2010; Gartzke 2010). Chapter 5.3

outlined how the DPRK has adjusted its nuclear messaging, and it would be a natural next step to investigate whether these adjustments have resulted from simple learning (maintaining the same bargaining goals but adjusting tactics; see Pacheco Pardo 2020, 7–9). Studies that pursued this question could follow the approach taken by Robert Jervis in his first two monographs: looking at one side of the coin first (“The Logic of Images in International Relations”, 1970), and then examining the other side, related to interactions and learning (“Perception and Misperception in International Politics”, 1976).

The DPRK is a captivating research object, even though the limits regarding what can be scrutinized can be frustrating. Analyzing how the regime in Pyongyang seeks the limelight, parsing its public communication for strategic nuclear messages, and pinpointing what it communicates about its nuclear weapons (development) program is a worthwhile endeavor and helps to shed light on the puzzle of limited or selective information within abundant state media communication. The three aforementioned fields for future research would be fruitful starting points for further analyzing the puzzle of how the DPRK conducts its public nuclear messaging and which aspects drive the regime to adjust its nuclear messaging vis-à-vis the United States. The DPRK as a theater state clearly raises various puzzles worthy of consideration, but its messaging for nuclear deterrence are the most consequential for regional and international security.

8. List of References

8.1 List of Secondary Literature

- Abrahamian, Andray. 2020. *Being in North Korea*. Stanford University Press.
- Ali, Hager. 2022. *Autocracies with adjectives: we need better typologies of authoritarian regimes*. The Loop. <https://theloop.ecpr.eu/autocracies-with-adjectives-we-need-better-typologies-of-authoritarian-regimes/>.
- Allard, Léonie, Mathieu Duchatel, and Francois Godement. 2017. *Pre-Emptying Defeat: In Search of North Korea's Nuclear Doctrine*. European Council on Foreign Relations. <https://ecfr.eu/wp-content/uploads/ECFR-237-In-search-of-North-Koreas-nuclear-doctrine.pdf>.
- Baldwin, David. 2017. Thinking about threats. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 15(1): 71-78.
- Ballbach, Eric. 2016. North Korea's Emerging Nuclear State Identity: Discursive Construction and Performative Enactment. *The Korean Journal of International Studies* 14-3:, 391-414
- Bearsley, Kyle and Asal, Victor. 2009. Winning with the Bomb. *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(2): 278-301.
- Bell, Mark and Quek, Kai. 2017. Authoritarian Public Opinion and the Democratic Peace. *International Organization* 72: 227-242.
- Bemelmans-Videc, Marie-Louise, Rist-Ray, and Vedung, Evert. 2017. *Carrots, Sticks and Sermons: Policy Instruments and their Evaluation*. Routledge.
- Ben-Ghiat, Ruth. 2021. *Strongmen: Mussolini to the Present*. Blackstone Publishing.
- Benson, Brett and Wen, Quan. 2011. "A bargaining model of nuclear weapons: development and disarmament." In *Causes and Consequences of Nuclear Proliferation*, edited by R. Rauchhaus, M. Kroenig, and E. Gartzke. Routledge.
- Bermudez, Joseph Jr. 1999. *A History of Ballistic Missile Development in the DPRK*. Monterey Institute of International Studies.
- Bernard, Russell, Wutich, Amber and Ryan, Gery. 2017. *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. SAGE.
- Bernstein, Paul and Smith, Shane. 2022. *North Korean Nuclear Command and Control: Alternatives and Implications*. Defense Threat Reduction Agency.
- Brodie, Bernard. 1946. *The Absolute Weapon: Atomic Power and World Order*. Indiana University.
- Boussalis, Constantine, Alexander Dukalskis, and Johannes Gerschewski. 2022. "Why It Matters What Autocrats Say: Assessing Competing Theories of Propaganda." *Problems of Post-Communism*, 1-12.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce and Lalman, David. 1992. *War and Reason: Domestic and International Imperatives*. Yale University Press.

- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce and Smith, Alastair. 2011. *The Dictator's Handbook: Why Bad Behavior is Almost Always Good Politics*. PublicAffairs.
- Bueno de Mesquita, Bruce, Smith, Alastair, Siverson, Randolph, and Morrow, James. 2003. *The Logic of Political Survival*. MIT Press.
- Carlin, Robert and Witt, Joel. 2006. *North Korean Reform: Politics, Economics and Security*. International Institute for Strategic Studies.
- Carson, Austin and Yarhi-Milo, Keren. 2017. "Covert Communication: The Intelligibility and Credibility of Signaling in Secret," *Security Studies* 26(1): 124-156.
- Cathcart, Adam, Green, Christopher and Denney, Steven. 2014. "How Authoritarian Regimes Maintain Domestic Consensus: North Korea's Information Strategies in the Kim Jong-un Era," *The Review of Korean Studies* 17(2): 145-178.
- Cha, John H. and K. J. Sohn. 2012. *Exit Emperor Kim Jong-Il: Notes from His Former Mentor*. Abbott Press.
- Cha, Victor. 2002. "Hawk Engagement and Preventive Defense on the Korean Peninsula," *International Security* 27(1): 40-78.
- Cheon, Myeongguk. 2019. *DPRK'S NC3 System*. Nautilus Institute.
<https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/dprks-nc3-system/>.
- Cho, Hyun-Binn and Petrovics, Ariel. 2022. "North Korea's Strategically Ambiguous Nuclear Posture," *The Washington Quarterly* 45(2): 39-58.
- Choi, Ha-young. 2015. "N.Korea's Emphasis on Technology Continues: Report." *NK News*, November 11. <https://www.nknews.org/2015/11/n-koreas-evolving-science-technology-policy-report/>.
- Crescenzi, Kathman, and Long 2007: Mark J.C. Crescenzi, Jacob D. Kathman, and Stephen B. Long (2007). Reputation, History, and War. *Journal of Peace Research*, 44(6), 651-667.
- CSIS 2019. Database: North Korean Provocations, December 20, 2019.
<https://beyondparallel.csis.org/database-north-korean-provocations/>.
- Cumings, Bruce. 1975. "American Policy and Korean Liberation." In *Without Parallel: The American-Korean Relationship since 1945*, edited by Frank Baldwin, 39-108. Pantheon Books.
- Cumings, Bruce, 1992. *War and Television*. Verso Books.
- Cumings, Bruce, 1997. *Korea's Place in the Sun: A Modern History*. Norton.
- Debs, Alexandre and Weiss, Jessica Chen. 2014. "Circumstances, Domestic Audiences, and Reputational Incentives in International Crisis Bargaining," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 60(3): 403-433.
- Dempsey, Joseph. 2020. *Assessment of the March 9 KN-25 Test Launch*. 38 North, March 10.
- Dowling, Juliana and Hong, Dae Un. 2021. "The Enshrinement of Nuclear Statehood in North Korean Law: Its Implications for Future Denuclearization Talks with North Korea," *University of Illionois Law Review* 2: 48-62.

- Drennan, William. 2003. "Nuclear Weapons and North Korea: Who's Coercing Whom?" In: *The United States and Coercive Diplomacy*, edited by R. Art and P. Croning. United States Institute for Peace Press.
- Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA). 2021. *North Korea Military Power: A Growing Regional and Global Threat*.
- Dukalskis, Alexander and Junhyoung Lee. "Everyday Nationalism and Authoritarian Rule: A Case Study of North Korea." *Nationalities Papers* 48(6): 1052–1068.
- Early, Bryan and Asal, Victor. 2018. "Nuclear weapons, existential threats, and the stability–instability paradox," *The Nonproliferation Review*.
- Fearon, James. 1994. "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *The American Political Science Review* 88(3): 577-592.
- Fearon, James. 1997. "Signaling Foreign Policy Interests: Tying Hands versus Sinking Costs," *The Journal of Conflict Resolution* 41(1): 68-90.
- Fearon, James. 1998. Bargaining, Enforcement, and International Cooperation. *International Organization* 52(2): 269–305.
- Feaver, Peter D. 1992. "Command and Control in Emerging Nuclear Nations." *International Security* 17(3): 160–87.
- Fisher, Roger. 1994. "In Theory. Deter, Compel, or Negotiate?" *Negotiation Journal* 1: 17–32.
- Frank, Rüdiger. 2014. *Nordkorea: Innenansichten Eines Totalitären Staates*. Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt.
- Frank, Rüdiger. 2022. "Not Monolithic: The Need to Better Understand North Korea's Internal Dynamics." *NK Pro Analysis*, January 7. <https://www.nknews.org/pro/not-monolithic-the-need-to-better-understand-north-koreas-internal-dynamics/>.
- Freedman, Lawrence. 2004. *Deterrence*. Polity Press.
- Freedman, Lawrence. 2017. „North Korea and the Science of Death Tolls: How do you estimate casualties that haven't happened?" *The Atlantic*, November 7.
- Fuhrmann, Matthew and Kreps, Sarah. 2010. "Targeting Nuclear Programs in War and Peace: A Quantitative Empirical Analysis, 1941–2000." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 54(6): 831-859.
- Fuhrmann, Matthew and Sechser, Todd. 2019. "Nuclear Blackmail: The Threat from North Korea and Iran." In: *America's Nuclear Crossroads: A Forward-Looking Anthology*, edited by C. Dorminey and E. Gomez. CATO Institute, 69-80.
- Gabroussenko, Tatiana. 2020. "Mad Scientists, DPRK-Style: Geniuses on the North Korean Screen." *NK News*, April 8. <https://www.nknews.org/2020/04/mad-scientists-dprk-style-geniuses-on-the-north-korean-screen/>.
- García, Ángel. 2022. "The Camera Can Lie: How North Korean State Media Fakes Photographs." *NK Pro Analysis*, December 22. <https://www.nknews.org/2022/12/the-camera-can-lie-how-north-korean-state-media-fakes-photographs/>.

- García, Ángel. 2023a. "Inside the Shadowy Team of Elite North Korean Photographers Covering Kim Jong Un." *NK Pro Analysis*, January 25. <https://www.nknews.org/pro/inside-the-shadowy-team-of-elite-north-korean-photographers-covering-kim-jong-un/>.
- García, Ángel. 2023b. "Less Is More? How North Korea's Evolving Photo Tactics Reflect Regime Priorities." *NK Pro Analysis*, May 2. <https://www.nknews.org/pro/less-is-more-how-north-koreas-evolving-photo-tactics-reflect-regime-priorities/>.
- Garlauskas, Markus, Rachel Minyoung Lee, and Jonathan Corrado. 2023. "How to Avoid A Bad Take on a Hard Target: Analyzing North Korea the Right Way." *War on the Rocks*, May 11 <https://warontherocks.com/2023/05/how-to-avoid-a-bad-take-on-a-hard-target-analyzing-north-korea-the-right-way/>.
- Gartzke, Erik and Kroenig, Matthew 2014. "Nuclear Posture, Nonproliferation Policy, and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58(3): 395-401.
- Gartzke, Erik and Jo, Dong-Joon. 2007. "Bargaining, Nuclear Proliferation, and Interstate Disputes," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(2): 209–233.
- Gartzke, Erik, Kaplow, Jeffrey and Mehta, Rupta. 2014. "The Determinants of Nuclear Force Structure." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 58(3): 481–508.
- Gartzke, Erik, Carcelli, Shannon, Gannon, Andreas and Zhang, Jiakun Jack. 2017. *Signaling in Foreign Policy*. Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics.
- Gavin, Francis. 2018. "Rethinking the Bomb: Nuclear Weapons and American Grand Strategy," *Texas National Security Review* 2(1).
- Gerring, John. 2004. "Causation: A Unified Framework for the Social Sciences," *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 17(2): 163-198.
- Gerring, John. 2007. *Case Study Research: Principles and Practices*. Cambridge University Press.
- Gibbons, Rebecca Davis and Kroenig, Matthew. 2016. "Reconceptualizing nuclear risks: Bringing deliberate nuclear use back in." *Comparative Strategy* 35(5): 407-422.
- Glaser, Charles. 2010. *Rational Theory of International Politics: The Logic of Competition and Cooperation*. Princeton University Press.
- Goldsmith, Benjamine, Chalup, Stephan and Quinlan, Michael. 2008. "Regime Type and International Conflict: Towards a General Model," *Journal of Peace Research* 45(6): 743-763.
- Grimmer, Justin and Stewart, Brandon. 2013. "Text as Data: The Promise and Pitfalls of Automatic Content Analysis Methods for Political Texts." *Political Analysis* 21(3): 267-297.
- Habib, Benjamin. 2011. "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Programme and the Maintenance of the Songun System." *The Pacific Review* 24(1): 43–64.
- Haggard, Stephan, Herman, Luke and Ryu, Jaesung. "Political Change in North Korea: Mapping the Succession." *Asian Survey* 54(4): 773–800.

- Haichin, Mark. 2020. *Domestic Politics and the Bomb: The Influence of State Regime Type on Nuclear Deterrence*. Carleton University, Dissertation Thesis.
- Hassig, Ralph and Oh, Kongdan. 2009. *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Hayes, Peter. 2021. *Nuclear Command, Control, and Communications (NC3) in Asia-Pacific*. Nautilus Institute, September 21, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/nuclear-command-control-and-communications-nc3-in-asia-pacific/>
- Hayes, Peter and Bruce, Scott. 2014. "Translating North Korea's Nuclear Threats into Constrained Operational Reality." In: *North Korean Nuclear Operationality: Regional Security and Nonproliferation*, edited by G. Moore. Johns Hopkins University Press, 15-31.
- Hayes, Peter and Cavazos, Roger. 2015. *North Korea's nuclear force roadmap: hard choices*. Nautilus Institute, March 02, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/north-koreas-nuclear-force-roadmap-hard-choices/>.
- Haynes, Kyle. 2019. "A Question of Costliness: Time Horizons and Interstate Signaling." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63(8): 1939-1964.
- Hecker, Siegfried. 2023. *Hinge Points: An Inside Look at North Korea's Nuclear Program*. Stanford University Press.
- Hellmann, Olli. 2020. "The Dictator's Screenplay: Collective Memory Narratives and the Legitimacy of Communist Rule in East Asia." *Democratization* 28(4): 659-83.
- Henderson, Gregory. 1968. *Korea: The Politics of Vortex*. Harvard University Press.
- Howell, Edward. 2020. "The Juche H-Bomb? North Korea, Nuclear Weapons and Regime-State Survival." *International Affairs* 96(4): 1051-1068.
- Horowitz, Michael. 2009. "The Spread of Nuclear Weapons and International Conflict Does Experience Matter?" *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 53(2): 234-257.
- Horowitz, Michael. 2010. *The Diffusion of Military Power*. Princeton University Press.
- Horowitz, Michael. 2017. "How Surprising is North Korea's Nuclear Success? Picking Up Where Proliferation Theories Leave Off," *War on the Rocks*, Sept. 6, <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/how-surprising-is-north-koreas-nuclear-success-picking-up-where-proliferation-theories-leave-off>.
- Hyde, Susan and Saunders, Elizabeth. 2020. "Recapturing Regime Type in International Relations: Leaders, Institutions, and Agency Space." *International Organization* 74(2):363-395.
- Hymans, Jacques. 2006. *The Psychology of Nuclear Proliferation: Identity, Emotions and Foreign Policy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Hymans, Jacques. 2012. *Achieving Nuclear Ambitions: Scientists, Politicians, and Proliferation*. Cambridge University Press.
- Jackson, Van. 2018. *On the Brink: Trump, Kim, and the Threat of Nuclear War*. Cambridge University Press.

- Janusch, Holger. 2018. "The Interaction Effects of Bargaining Power: The Interplay between Veto Power, Asymmetric Interdependence, Reputation, and Audience Costs." *Negotiation Journal* 34(3): 219-241.
- Jervis, Robert. 1970. *The Logic of Images in International Relations*. Princeton University Press.
- Jervis, Robert. 1976. *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Jervis, Robert. 1989. "Perceiving and Coping with Threat." In: *Psychology and Deterrence*, edited by R. Jervis, R. Lebow, J. Gross Stein. John Hopkins University Press, 13-33.
- Jervis, Robert. 2017. *How Statesmen Think: The Psychology of International Politics*. Princeton University Press.
- Ji, Dagyum. 2019. "Kim Jong Un Promotes 103 Scientists for Achievements in 'National Defense': KCNA." *NK News*, August 13. <https://www.nknews.org/2019/08/kim-jong-un-promotes-103-scientists-for-achievements-in-national-defense-kcna/>.
- Kang, Jin Woong. 2019. "Political Uses of Confucianism in North Korea." *Journal of Korean Studies* 16(1): 63-87.
- Kelly, Robert. 2023. "Why North Korea May Use Nuclear Weapons First, and Why Current US Policy toward Pyongyang Is Unsustainable." *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, November 21. <https://thebulletin.org/2023/11/why-north-korea-may-use-nuclear-weapons-first-and-why-current-us-policy-toward-pyongyang-is-unsustainable/>.
- Kertzer, Joshua. 2017. "Resolve, Time, and Risk." *International Organization* 71: S109-S136.
- Kertzer, Joshua and Butger, Ryan. 2016. "Decomposing Audience Costs: Bringing the Audience Back into Audience Cost Theory," *American Journal of Political Science* 60(1): 234-249.
- Kim, Taewoo. 2012. "Limited War, Unlimited Targets." *Critical Asian Studies* 44(3).
- Kitano, Mitsuru. 2016. "Opaque nuclear proliferation revisited: determinants, dynamism, and policy implications." *The Nonproliferation Review* 23(3-4): 459-479.
- Kristensen, Hans and Norris, Robert. 2017. "A History of US Nuclear Weapons in South Korea." *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 73(6): 349-57.
- Krippendorff, Klaus. 2004. *Content Analysis: An Introduction to its Methodology*. SAGE.
- Kroenig, Matthew. 2010. *Exporting the Bomb. Technology Transfer and the Spread of Nuclear Weapons*. Cornell University Press.
- Kroenig, Matthew. 2013. "Nuclear Superiority and the Balance of Resolve: Explaining Nuclear Crisis Outcomes." *International Organization* 67: 141-171.
- Kroenig, Matthew. 2018. *The Logic of American Nuclear Strategy: Why Strategic Superiority Matters*. Oxford University Press.
- Kurowska, Xymena and Bliesemann de Guevara, Berit. 2020. "Interpretative Approaches in Political Science and International Relations." In: *SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, edited by L. Curini and R. Franzese.

- Kwon, Heonik, and Byung-Ho Chung. 2012. *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Kydd, Andrew. 2005. *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*. Princeton University Press.
- Lake, David. 2008. "The State and International Relations." In: *Oxford Handbook of International Relations*, edited by C. Reus-Smit and D. Snidal.
- Lake, David and Powell, Robert, eds. 1999. *Strategic Choice and International Relations*. Princeton University Press.
- Lantis, Jeffrey and Beasley, Ryan. 2018. "Comparative Foreign Policy Analysis." In: *Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis*, edited by C. Thies. Oxford University Press, 185-207.
- Lebow, Richard Ned. 1985. "The Deterrence Deadlock: Is there a Way Out?" In "Psychology and Deterrence," Jervis, Robert, Lebow, Richard Ned and Stein, Janice Gross. John Hopkins University Press.
- Lee, Jae-Bong. 2009. "US Deployment of Nuclear Weapons in 1950s South Korea and North Korea's Nuclear Development: Toward Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula." *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 7(8): 1-17.
- Lee, Rachel Minyoung. 2021. "North Korea's Party Personnel Shuffles: A Reality Check." *38 North*, July 23. <https://www.38north.org/2021/07/north-koreas-party-personnel-shuffles-a-reality-check/>.
- Lee, Rachel Minyoung. 2022. *Understanding North Korea's Public Messaging: An Introduction*. 38 North.
- Lee, Soon Ho. 2011. "Military Transformation on the Korean Peninsula: Technology Versus Geography." Dissertation. Hull, United Kingdom.
- Lee, Soon Ho. 2013. "Contemporary American Military Technology and North Korea's Hard and Deeply Buried Targets (HDBTs)." *Comparative Strategy* 32, no. 5 (2013): 387-401.
- Lee, Dong Sun and Alexandrova, Iordanka. 2021. "North Korean nuclear strategy: envisioning assured retaliation." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 21(3): 371-400.
- Levite, Ariel. 2002. Never Say Never Again: Nuclear Reversal Revisited. *International Security* 27(3): 59-88.
- Levy, Jack. 2008. "Deterrence and Coercive Diplomacy: The Contributions of Alexander George." *Political Psychology* 29(4): 537-553.
- Levy, Jack. 2012. "Coercive Threats, Audience Costs, and Case Studies." *Security Studies* 21(3): 383-390.
- Lewis, Jeffrey and Schultz, Kenneth. 2003. "Revealing Preferences: Empirical Estimation of a Crisis Bargaining Game with Incomplete Information." *Political Analysis* 11: 345-367.
- Lieber, Keir and Press, Daryl. 2017. The New Era of Counterforce. Technological Change and the Future of Nuclear Deterrence. *International Security* 41(4): 9-49.

- Lupton, Danielle. 2020. *Reputation for Resolve: How Leaders Signal Determination in International Politics*. Cornell University Press.
- Mattiacci, Eleonora and Jones, Benjamin. 2016. "(Nuclear) Change of Plans: What Explains Nuclear Reversals?" *International Interactions* 42(3): 530-558.
- Mansourov, Alexandre. 2014. *Kim Jong Un's Nuclear Doctrine and Strategy: What Everyone Needs to Know*. Nautilus Institute, <https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-special-reports/kim-jong-uns-nuclear-doctrine-and-strategy-what-everyone-needs-to-know/>
- McAllister, James and Labrosse, Diane, eds. 2014. *What We Talk About When We Talk About Nuclear Weapons*. H-Diplo/ISSF Forum No. 2. <http://issforum.org/ISSF/PDF/ISSF-Forum-2.pdf>.
- McEachern, Patrick. 2010. *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Post-Totalitarian Politics*. Columbia University Press.
- McEachern, Patrick. 2018. "Comparative Authoritarian Institutionalism, Regime Evolution, and Stability in North Korea." *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 3(4): 367-85.
- McKibben, Heather. 2015. *State Strategies in International Bargaining: Play by the Rules or Change Them?* Cambridge University Press.
- McManus, Roseanne and Yarhi-Milo, Keren. 2017. "The Logic of "Offstage" Signaling: Domestic Politics, Regime Type, and Major Power-Protégé Relations." *International Organization* 71: 701-733.
- Mearsheimer, John. 2009. "Reckless States and Realism." *International Relations* 23(2): 241-256.
- Mercer, Jonathan. 2013. "Emotion and Strategy in the Korean War." *International Organization* 67: 221-252.
- Miller, Nicholas and Narang, Vipin. 2018. "North Korea Defied the Theoretical Odds: What Can We Learn from its Successful Nuclearization?" *Texas National Security Review* 1(2).
- Morrow, James. 1999. "The Strategic Setting of Choices: Signaling, Commitment, and Negotiation in International Politics." In: *Strategic Choice and International Relations*, edited by D. Lake and R. Powell. Princeton University Press.
- Müller, Harald. 2012. "Security Cooperation." In: *The SAGE Handbook of International Relations*, edited by W. Carlsnaes, T. Risse, B. Simmons. SAGE.
- Myers, Brian. 2010. *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters: A Briefing on North Korea*. Melville House.
- Myers, Robert. 2001. *Korea in the Cross Currents: A Century of Struggle and the Crisis of Reunification*. Palgrave.
- Narang, Vipin. 2014. *Nuclear Strategy in the Modern Era: Regional Powers and International Conflict*. Princeton University Press.
- Narang, Vipin. 2017. "Why Kim Jong Un Wouldn't Be Irrational to Use a Nuclear Weapon First." *Washington Post*, September 8.

- Narang, Vipin and Panda, Ankit. 2017. "Command and Control in North Korea: What a Nuclear Launch Might Look Like." *War on the Rocks*, September 15. <https://warontherocks.com/2017/09/command-and-control-in-north-korea-what-a-nuclearlaunch- might-look-like/>.
- Narizny, Kevin. 2017. "On Systemic Paradigms and Domestic Politics: A Critique of the Newest Realism." *International Security* 42(2): 155–190.
- Nitze, Paul. 1956. "Atoms, Strategy, and Policy." *Foreign Affairs* 35(1).
- Oberdorfer, Don and Carlin, Robert. 2014. *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. Third Edition. Basic Books.
- Ochmanek, David and Schwartz, Lowell. 2008. "The Challenge of Nuclear-Armed Regional Adversaries." RAND.
- Oh, Gyeong-Seob. 2023. "North Korea's 4th Generation Succession and Kim Ju-Ae." Korea Institute for National Unification.
- Oh, Kongdan and Hassig, Ralph. 2000. *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Özyurt, Selcuk. 2014. "Audience costs and reputation in crisis bargaining." *Games and Economic Behavior* 88: 250-259.
- Panda, Ankit. 2020. *Kim Jong Un and the Bomb: Survival and Deterrence in North Korea*. Hurst Publisher.
- Panda, Ankit. 2021. "A Call to Arms: Kim Jong Un and the Tactical Bomb." *The Washington Quarterly* 44(3): 7-24.
- Panda, Ankit. 2022. "North Korea's 8-Missile Salvo Likely a Test of Command and Control Systems." *NK Pro*, June 7. <https://www.nknews.org/pro/north-koreas-8-missile-salvo-likely-a-test-of-command-and-control-systems/>.
- Parachini, John V., Scott W. Harold, Gian Gentile, Derek Grossmann, Leah Heejin Kim, Logan Ma, Michael J. Mazarr, and Linda Robinson. 2020. *North Korean Decisionmaking: Economic Opening, Conventional Deterrence Breakdown, and Nuclear Use*. RAND Report.
- Park, Soul and Peh, Kimberly. 2020. "Leveraging towards restraint: Nuclear hedging and North Korea's shifting reference points during the agreed framework and the Six-Party Talks." *European Journal of International Security* 5(1):94-114.
- Park, Kyung-ae, and Scott Snyder, eds. 2012. *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Peceny, Mark and Butler, Christopher. 2004. "The Conflict Behaviour of Authoritarian Regimes," *International Politics* 41(4): 565-581.
- Peceny, Mark, Beer, Caroline and Sanchez-Terry, Shannon. 2002. "Dictatorial Peace?" *American Political Science Review* 96(1): 15–26.
- Powell, Robert. 2006. "War as a Commitment Problem." *International Organization* 60: 169-203.

- Powell, Robert. 2015. "Nuclear Brinkmanship, Limited War, and Military Power." *International Organization* 69: 589–626.
- Petersen, Walter. 1986. "Deterrence and Compellence: A Critical Assessment of Conventional Wisdom." *International Studies Quarterly* 30: 269-294.
- Price, Owen. 2007. "Preparing for the Inevitable: Nuclear Signaling for Regional Nuclear Crises." *Comparative Strategy* 26(2): 103-115.
- Rathbun, Brian. 2007. "Uncertain about Uncertainty: Understanding the Multiple Meanings of a Crucial Concept in International Relations Theory." *International Studies Quarterly* 51: 533–557.
- Reinhardt, Jason. 2018. *A Probabilistic Analysis of the Risk of Nuclear Deterrence Failure*. Stanford University, Dissertation Thesis.
- Reiter, Dan and Stam, Allan C. 1998. "Democracy, War Initiation, and Victory," *American Political Science Review* 92(2): 378-379.
- Reiter, Dan. 2003. 'Exploring the Bargaining Model of War', *Perspectives on Politics* 1(1): 27–43.
- Reiter, Dan. 2006. "Preventive attacks against nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons programs: the track record." In: *Hitting First: Preventive Force in US Security Strategy*, edited by WW Keller William and GR Mitchell. Pittsburgh Univ. Press
- Rich, Timothy. 2012. "Deciphering North Korea's Nuclear Rhetoric: An Automated Content Analysis of KCNA News." *Asian Affairs: An American Review* 39(2): 73–89.
- Rich, Timothy. 2014a. "Propaganda with Purpose: Uncovering Patterns in North Korean Nuclear Coverage, 1997-2012." *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 14(3): 427–53.
- Rich, Timothy. 2014b. "Introducing the Great Successor." *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 47(2): 127–36.
- Roberts, Brad. 2016. *The Case for U.S. Nuclear Weapons in the 21st Century*. Stanford University Press.
- Roberts, Brad. 2020. *Living With a Nuclear-Arming North Korea: Deterrence Decisions in a Deteriorating Threat Environment*. 38 North.
- Roehrig, Terence. 2012. "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program: Motivations, Strategy, and Doctrine." In: *Strategy in the Second Nuclear Age: Power, Ambition, and the Ultimate Weapon*, edited by Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes. Georgetown University Press, , 81–98.
- Rose, Gideon. 1998. "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy." *World Politics* 51: 144-172.
- Ruffa, Chiara. 2020. "Case Study Methods: Case Selection and Case Analysis." In: *The SAGE Handbook of Research Methods in Political Science and International Relations*, edited by L. Curini and R. Franzese.
- Ryang, Sonia. 1997. *North Koreans in Japan: Language, Ideology, and Identity*. Westview Press.

- Ryang, Sonia. 2021. *Language and Truth in North Korea*. University of Hawai'i Press.
- Sagan, Scott. 1997. "Why Do States Build Nuclear Weapons? Three Models in Search of a Bomb." *International Security* 21(3): 54-86.
- Sagan, Scott. 2011. "The Causes of Nuclear Weapons Proliferation." *Annual Review of Political Science* 14(1): 225-244.
- Sagan, Scott and Waltz, Kenneth. 1995. *The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate*. W.W. Norton & Company.
- Saunders, Elizabeth. 2019. "The Domestic Politics of Nuclear Choices—A Review Essay." *International Security* 44(2): 146–184.
- Schäfer, Thomas. 2021. *Von Kim Jong Il zu Kim Jong Un: Wie die Hardliner sich durchsetzten. Zur politischen Geschichte Nordkoreas (2007 – 2020)*.
- Schelling, Thomas. 1960. *The Strategy of Conflict*. Harvard University Press.
- Schelling, Thomas. 1966. *Arms and Influence*. Yale University Press.
- Schelling, Thomas. 1973. "The Diplomacy of Violence." In: *International politics: anarchy, force, political economy, and decision-making*, edited by R. Art and R. Jervis. Little, Brown and Company.
- Schneider, Jonas. 2020. "The Study of Leaders in Nuclear Proliferation and How to Reinvent It." *International Studies Review* 22(1): 1–25.
- Schultz, Kenneth. 2001. "Looking for Audience Costs." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45(1): 32–60.
- Schultz, Kenneth. 2012. "Why We Needed Audience Costs and What We Need Now." *Security Studies* 21(3): 369-375.
- Sechser, Matthew. (2012). Splitting Atoms: Why Do Countries Build Nuclear Power Plants? *International Interactions*, 38(1), 29–57
- Sechser, Todd. 2018: "A Bargaining Theory of Coercion." In: *Coercion: The Power to Hurt in International Politics*, edited by K. Greenhill and P. Krause. Oxford University Press.
- Sechser, Todd and Fuhrmann, Matthew. 2013. "Crisis Bargaining and Nuclear Blackmail," *International Organization* 67: 173-195.
- Sechser, Todd and Fuhrmann, Matthew. 2017. *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy*. Cambridge University Press.
- Skylar Mastro, Oriana. 2011. "Signaling and Military Provocation in Chinese National Security Strategy: A Closer Look at the Impeccable Incident." *Journal of Strategic Studies* 34(2): 219-244.
- Shin, Gi-Wook. 2006. *Ethnic Nationalism in Korea: Genealogy, Politics, and Legacy*. Stanford University Press.
- Shin, Soon-Ok. 2022. "Arm, to Disarm: North Korea's Cold War Anti-Nuclearism, The Pacific Review." *The Pacific Review*.

- Slantchev, Branislav. 2005. "Military Coercion in Interstate Crises." *American Political Science Review* 99(4): 533-547.
- Slantchev, Branislav. 2010. "Feigning Weakness." *International Organization* 64: 357–388.
- Smith, Hazel. 2000. "Bad, mad, sad or rational actor? Why the 'securitization' paradigm makes for poor policy analysis of north Korea." *International Affairs* 76(3): 593-617.
- Smith, Shane. 2015. *North Korea's Evolving Nuclear Strategy*. John Hopkins University.
- Smith, Joe. 2024. "North Korean Store Hawks New Fireworks Modeled on Its Mightiest Missile." *NK News*. <https://www.nknews.org/2024/05/north-korean-store-hawks-new-fireworks-modeled-on-its-mightiest-missile/>.
- Spaniel, William. 2019. *Bargaining over the Bomb. The Successes and Failures of Nuclear Negotiations*. Cambridge University Press.
- Snyder, Jack and Borghard, Erica. 2011. "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, Not a Pound." *American Political Science Review* 105(3): 437-456.
- Snyder, Glenn and Diesing, Paul. 1977. *Conflict Among Nations. Bargaining, Decision Making, and System Structure in International Crises*. Princeton University Press.
- Sobek, David, Foster, Dennis and Robison, Samuel. 2012. "Conventional wisdom? The effect of nuclear proliferation on armed conflict, 1945–2001." *International Studies Quarterly* 56(1):149–162.
- Stallard, Katie. 2022. *Dancing on Bones: History and Power in China, Russia and North Korea*. Oxford University Press.
- Suh, Dae-Sook. 1967. *The Korean Communist Movement 1918-1948*. Princeton University Press.
- Suh, Dae-Sook. 1988. *Kim Il Sung: The North Korean Leader*. Columbia University Press.
- Suh, Elisabeth. 2023. "Pyongyang and Its Nuclear Weapons Programme: A Credible Threat?", *Italian Institute for Political Studies (ISPI)*, August 4. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/pyongyang-and-its-nuclear-weapons-programme-a-credible-threat-138078>.
- Sukin, Lauren. 2020. "Credible Nuclear Security Commitments Can Backfire: Explaining Domestic Support for Nuclear Weapons Acquisition in South Korea." *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64(6): 1011-1042.
- Sukin, Lauren. 2022. Why "cheap" threats are meaningful: Threat perception and resolve in North Korean propaganda. *International Interactions*, 48(5), 936–967. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050629.2022.2068542>
- Sukin, Lauren. 2023. "Rattling the Nuclear Saber: What Russia's Nuclear Threats Really Mean." *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, May 4.
- Szalontai, Balazs and Radchenko, Sergey. 2006. "North Korea's Efforts to Acquire Nuclear Technology and Nuclear Weapons: Evidence from Russian and Hungarian Archives." *Cold War International History Project Working Paper* 53.

- https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/WP53_web_final.pdf.
- Tellis, Ashley. 2022. *Striking Asymmetries: Nuclear Transitions in Southern Asia*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/files/202207-Tellis Striking Asymmetries-final.pdf>.
- Tertitskiy, Fyodor. 2023a. *The North Korean Army: History, Structure, Daily Life*. Routledge.
- Tertitskiy, Fyodor. 2023b. "Kim Jong Un's Steady Campaign to Undercut His Father's Legacy." *NK News*, April 4. <https://www.nknews.org/2023/04/kim-jong-uns-steady-campaign-to-undercut-his-fathers-legacy/>.
- Trachtenberg, Marc. 2012. "Audience Costs: An Historical Analysis." *Security Studies* 21(1): 3-42.
- Trager, Robert. 2011. "Multidimensional Diplomacy." *International Organization* 65: 469-506.
- Volpe, Tristan. 2017. "Atomic Leverage: Compellence with Nuclear Latency." *Security Studies* 26(3): 517-544.
- Volpe 2023: *Leveraging Latency: How the Weak Compel the Strong With Nuclear Technology*. Oxford University Press Inc
- Walt, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*. Waveland Press.
- Wampler, Robert. 2010. *How Do You Solve A Problem Like Korea? New Archive Document Collection Sheds Light on Nixon's Frustrating Search for Military Options*. National Security Archive Electronic Briefing Book. <https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB322/index.htm>.
- Way, Christopher and Weeks, Jessica. 2014. "Making It Personal: Regime Type and Nuclear Proliferation." *American Journal of Political Science* 58(3): 705-719.
- Wang, Taehee, Lammbrau, Michael and Joo, Hyung-min. 2017. "Talking to Whom? The Changing Audience of North Korean Nuclear Tests: Changing Audiences for North Korean Nuclear Tests." *Social Science Quarterly* 98(3): 976-992. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12441>.
- Weeks, Jessica. 2008. "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization* 62(1): 35-64.
- Weeks, Jessica. 2012. "Strongmen and Straw Men: Authoritarian Regimes and the Initiation of International Conflict." *American Political Science Review* 106(2): 330-335.
- Weeks, Jessica. 2014. *Dictators at War and Peace*. Cornell University Press.
- Weeks, Jessica and Crunkilton, Cody. 2018. "Domestic Constraints on Foreign Policy in Authoritarian Systems." In: *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Foreign Policy Analysis*, edited by C. Thies, 416-431.
- Weinberger, Seth. 2003. "Institutional Signaling and the Origins of the Cold War." *Security Studies*, 12:4, 80-115,

- Weiser, Martin. 2016. "On Reading North Korean Media: The Curse of the Web." *Sino NK*, October 31. <https://sinonk.com/2016/10/31/on-reading-north-korean-media-the-curse-of-the-web/>.
- Weiser, Martin. 2017a. "Unstable Rhetoric: Few Additions, Some Changes, Lots of Omissions." *Sino NK*, February 23. <https://sinonk.com/2017/02/23/unstable-rhetoric-few-additions-some-changes-lots-of-omissions/>.
- Weiser, Martin. 2017b. "Translation in Isolation: The Rare, the Bad, and the Weird." *Sino NK*, July 06. <https://sinonk.com/2017/07/06/translation-in-isolation-the-rare-the-bad-and-the-weird/>.
- Weiser, Martin. 2022. "North Korea's sweeping leadership reshuffle could signal policy changes to come." *NK News*, May 07. <https://www.nknews.org/pro/north-koreas-sweeping-leadership-reshuffle-could-signal-policy-changes-to-come/>.
- Weiss, Jessica Chen. 2013. "Authoritarian Signaling, Mass Audiences, and Nationalist Protest in China." *International Organization* 67(1): 1-35.
- Wright, David and Kadyshev, Timur. 1994. "An Analysis of the North Korean Nodong Missile." *Science & Global Security* 4: 129-160.
- Yarhi-Milo, Keren. 2014. *Knowing the Adversary. Leaders, Intelligence, and Assessment of Intentions in International Relations*. Princeton University Press.
- Yonhap News Agency. 2002. *North Korea Handbook*. Taylor & Francis Ltd.
- Young, Benjamin R. 2021. *Guns, Guerillas, and the Great Leader: North Korea and the Third World*. Stanford University Press.
- Zegart, Amy. 2012. *The Cuban Missile Crisis as Intelligence Failure: Fifty years of reluctance to draw an unwelcome conclusion*. Hoover Institution, October 2. <https://www.hoover.org/research/cuban-missile-crisis-intelligence-failure>.
- Zartman, William and Rubin, Jeffrey, eds. 2000. *Power and Negotiation*. University of Michigan Press.
- Zwetsloot, Jacco. 2021. "The Biggest North Korea Stories of 2021." *NK News Podcast*. <https://www.nknews.org/category/north-korea-news-podcast/older-podcasts/the-biggest-north-korea-stories-of-2021-nknews-podcast-ep-215/909125/>.
- Zwetsloot, Jacco. 2022. "The Bumpy Road Ahead for Inter-Korean Relations." *NK News Podcast*. <https://www.nknews.org/category/north-korea-news-podcast/latest/the-bumpy-road-ahead-for-inter-korean-relations-ep-288/927817>.

8.2 List of Primary Materials

Coats, Daniel. 2017. "Hearing before the Committee on Armed Services", *United States Senate, One Hundred Fifteenth Congress, First Session, May 23*. <https://www.govinfo.gov/content/pkg/CHRG-115shrg34013/html/CHRG-115shrg34013.htm>.

North Atlantic Treaty Organization. 2007. "Nuclear Terms and Definitions in English," Glossary Part 1. https://www.nato.int/docu/glossary/eng-nuclear/nuc_glos-e.pdf.

The following materials for analysis were retrieved from KCNA Watch (both the DPRK- and the Japan-hosted KCNA websites, as described in Chapter 3.2.1)¹²⁹

| Subcase 1: 2001-2003 | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Semi-high level | 2001-01-01 Joint New Year editorial of newspapers |
| | 2001-01-01 Joint New Year editorial of newspapers |
| | 2001-10-02 Delegate's speech at 56th session of UN General Asse |
| | 2001-10-24 Delegate at 56th session of UN General Assembly |
| | 2002-01-01 Joint editorial on New Year published in DPRK |
| | 2002-10-12 Delegate calls for end to U.S. hostile policy toward |
| | 2002-11-03 Delegate U.S. demand for DPRK's scrapping of its nuclear |
| | 2003-01-01 Delegate Nuclear issue on Korean Peninsula should be |
| | 2003-04-08 Delegate Fair settlement of nuclear issue called for |
| | 2003-10-22 Delegate on Settlement of Nuclear Issue |
| High-level | 2001-05-16 Report on delay in construction of light-water react |
| | 2001-07-05 Choe Thae Bok meets goodwill visiting group of CPC |
| | 2001-07-10 FM Paek Nam Sun Greetings to Chinese FM |
| | 2001-11-05 Choe Thae Bok meets Chinese party delegation |
| | 2002-06-30 FM Paek Nam Sun Greetings to Chinese foreign minister |
| | 2002-07-20 Choe Thae Bok meets Chinese delegation |
| | 2002-08-02 FM Paek Nam Sun on security in Northeast Asia |
| | 2002-08-03 FM Paek Nam Sun meets Chinese FM |
| | 2002-09-30 FM Paek Nam Sun Greetings to Chinese FM |
| | 2002-10-15 Report Reception given in honor of DPRK delegation _ |
| | 2002-10-17 Report Senior Chinese officials meet DPRK delegation |
| | 2002-11-04 Kim Il Chol meets Chinese visiting group _ KCNA Watc |
| | 2002-11-22 KPA navy command on S. Korean military's provocation |
| | 2002-12-05 FM Paek Nam Sun DPRK's principled stand on nuclear i |

¹²⁹ Due to the length of their titles, documents are listed by publication date (year-month-date), addressor (often abbreviated) and shortened original title.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| | 2002-12-16 Report Government IAEA urged to remove monitoring |
| | 2002-12-20 REPORT Chinese Ambassador on Sino-DPRK friendly |
| | 2002-12-25 KCNA DPRK ready to punish Yankees in singlehearted unity |
| | 2002-12-25 REPORT Nat'l meeting marks anniversary of Kim Jong Il |
| | 2002-12-28 REPORT DPRK Government decides to order IAEA inspectors |
| | 2003-01-10 FM Paek Nam Sun sends letter to UNSC president |
| | 2003-01-10 REPORT Statement of DPRK Government on its withdrawal |
| | 2003-02-18 KPA Panmunjom Spokesman issues statement |
| | 2003-03-17 REPORT Greetings to Hu Jintao and Wu Bangguo |
| | 2003-03-18 REPORT Joint meeting of DPRK Government, political p |
| | 2003-04-08 KPA Chief of General Staff on confrontation with U.S |
| | 2003-04-21 Jo Myong Rok's sojourn in Beijing |
| | 2003-04-21 WPK Central Committee calls issued |
| | 2003-04-22 REPORT Chinese President meets Jo Myong Rok |
| | 2003-06-02 REPORT SPA Chairman meets delegation of U.S. congressmen |
| | 2003-06-04 KPA navy command denounces S. Korean warships |
| | 2003-06-04 KPA navy command warns S. Korean military |
| | 2003-06-30 FM Paek Nam Sun sends letter to president of UNSC |
| | 2003-07-01 KPA Panmunjom mission Chief |
| | 2003-07-16 REPORT Special envoy of Chinese government sojourns |
| | 2003-07-23 KPA Panmunjom mission issues memorandum |
| | 2003-08-08 REPORT DPRK and China Exchange Views on Six-Party Talks |
| | 2003-08-19 Jo Myong Rok Meets Chinese Military Delegation |
| | 2003-08-30 REPORT Keynote Speeches Made at Six-way Talks |
| | 2003-09-04 REORT SPA Approves Measures Taken by Foreign Ministry |
| | 2003-09-10 KPA General Staff Chief DPRK to Steadily Increase It |
| | 2003-10-04 Head of DPRK Delegation Addresses U.N. General Assembly |
| | 2003-10-30 REPORT Wu Bangguo Refers to His Visit to DPRK |
| | 2003-10-31 REPORT DPRK and China Discuss Nuclear Issue |
| | 2003-11-26 REPORT DPRK Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs Meets C |
| Mid-level | 2001-02-22 FM Spokesman on new U.S. administration's policy tow |
| | 2001-03-03 FM spokesman on its principled stand toward DPRK-U.S |
| | 2001-03-26 WPK CC IntDep Spokesman Statement |
| | 2001-06-18 FM Spokesman on Bush's statement on resuming negotia |
| | 2001-09-06 FM Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry |
| | 2001-09-10 FM spokesman on Japan's rocket test-fire |
| | 2001-09-13 CPRF Spokesman on resumption of inter-Korean ministe |
| | 2001-09-28 Spokesman for Korean Anti-Nuke Peace Committee |

| |
|---|
| 2001-11-06 FM Spokesman on Japan's step for overseas aggression |
| 2002-01-31 FM Spokesman slams Bush's accusations |
| 2002-03-18 FM Spokesman on U.S.-S. Korea joint military exercis |
| 2002-04-04 FM spokesman on U.S. administration's decision |
| 2002-06-13 FM Spokesman on resumption of DPRK-U.S. dialogue |
| 2002-06-30 Spokesman KPA Navy S. Korean military to blame for a |
| 2002-08-13 FM spokesman on nuclear inspection |
| 2002-08-20 FM Spokesman assails joint military exercise in S. K |
| 2002-08-31 FM Spokesman U.S. state undersecretary's anti-DPRK r |
| 2002-10-07 FM Spokesman on DPRK visit of special envoy of U.S. |
| 2002-10-25 FM Spokesman Conclusion of non-aggression treaty bet |
| 2002-11-02 FM spokesman rejects U.S. claim |
| 2002-11-05 FM spokesman on talks for normalization of DPRK-Japa |
| 2002-11-09 FM Spokesman Statement on Internet Homepage |
| 2002-11-22 FM spokesman on U.S. decision to stop supplying heav |
| 2002-12-13 FM Spokesman DPRK Gov't to immediately resume operat |
| 2002-12-13 FM Spokesman Operation and building of nuclear facil |
| 2002-12-17 Spokesman U.S. denounced for its interference in int |
| 2002-12-30 CPRF Spokesman U.S. hindrance to inter-Korean reconc |
| 2003-01-15 FM spokesman on U.S. rumor about dialogue |
| 2003-01-25 FM spokesman on _multi-party talks |
| 2003-01-30 FM spokesman on Powell's remarks |
| 2003-02-26 FM Spokesman Projected U.S.-S. Korean joint military |
| 2003-03-19 FM Spokesman on rumor about its possible missile lau |
| 2003-04-06 FM Spokesman blasts UNSC's discussion of Korean nucl |
| 2003-04-12 FM Spokesman on peaceful solution to nuclear issue _ |
| 2003-04-19 FM Spokesman on expected DPRK-U.S. talks |
| 2003-04-26 FM spokesman on U.S. attitude toward DPRK-U.S. talks |
| 2003-04-30 FM spokesman accuses U.S. of derailing denuclearizat |
| 2003-05-07 FM Spokesman on impounding of cargo ship _Pongsu_ _ |
| 2003-06-02 FM Spokesman on Korea visit of del. of U.S. congress |
| 2003-06-07 FM Spokesman on declaration adopted at G-8 summit _ |
| 2003-06-19 FM Spokesman blasts U.S. publicized _flesh traffic_ |
| 2003-06-19 FM Spokesman DPRK to put spurs to increasing its nuc |
| 2003-07-03 Panmunjom Mission Spokesman DPRK side responds to U. |
| 2003-08-01 CPRF Spokesman DPRK ready for dialogue and total war |
| 2003-08-01 FM Spokesman on Recent DPRK-U.S. Contact |
| 2003-08-04 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. Mandarin's Invective |

| | |
|--|---|
| | 2003-08-05 FM Spokesman on Six-Party Talks |
| | 2003-08-14 FM Spokesman DPRK's Stand on Six-party Talks Clarified |
| | 2003-08-30 FM Spokesman on Six-way Talks |
| | 2003-09-10 FM Spokesman on U.S. Sleight of Hand |
| | 2003-09-16 FM Spokesman Attempt to Politicize UN Organizations' |
| | 2003-09-30 FM Spokesman Urges U.S. to Drop Its Hostile Policy t |
| | 2003-10-02 FM Spokesman U.S. Much Publicized Efforts for _Peace |
| | 2003-10-03 FM Spokesman DPRK to Continue Increasing Its Nuclear |
| | 2003-10-17 FM Spokesman on U.S. Rumour over Nuclear Issue |
| | 2003-10-20 FM Spokesman on Its Nuclear Deterrent Force |
| | 2003-10-27 FM Spokesman on U.S.-Proposed Written Assurances of |
| | 2003-11-04 Spokesman for KPA Navy Command Refutes S. Korean Mil |
| | 2003-11-12 FM Spokesman DPRK Not to Allow U.S. to Take out Equipment |
| | 2003-11-17 FM Spokesman on Next Round of Six-way Talks |
| | 2003-12-10 FM Spokesman on Issue of Resumption of Six-Way Talks |
| | 2003-12-29 FM Spokesman 31st Anniversary of DPRK's Constitution |
| Low level | 2001-06-28 KCNA on U.S.-proposed resumption of DPRK-U.S. negotiations |
| | 2001-07-16 KCNA slams IAEA's attempt to shift responsibility on |
| | 2001-08-02 KCNA on sophism of U.S. State Secretary |
| | 2001-08-22 KCNA DPRK government's consistent foreign policy |
| | 2001-08-23 KCNA on U.S. call for resumption of dialogue with DPRK |
| | 2001-08-28 KCNA on Kim Jong Il's Russia visit |
| | 2001-09-29 KCNA urges IAEA to be impartial |
| | 2001-10-26 KCNA Bush's remarks under fire |
| | 2001-10-26 KCNA on U.S. contradictory and shameless argument |
| | 2001-04-03 KCNA on appointment of new U.S. deputy secretary |
| | 2001-06-21 KCNA urges IAEA to abide by its principle of neutral |
| | 2002-12-11 KCNA accuses IAEA of speaking for U.S. |
| | 2002-12-14 KCNA on U.S. anti-DPRK nuclear campaign |
| | 2002-12-14 Rodong U.S. chiefly to blame for violating DPRK-U.S. |
| | 2002-12-23 KCNA Work of removing seals and monitoring cameras |
| | 2002-12-23 Rodong No one can find fault with DPRK lifting |
| | 2002-12-28 KCNA blasts U.S. warmongers' outbursts |
| | 2002-02-11 KCNA on CIA chief's remarks |
| | 2002-03-13 KCNA DPRK ready to take countermeasure against U.S. |
| | 2002-06-15 KCNA on U.S. nuclear moves |
| 2002-08-19 KCNA holds U.S. fully accountable for loss of electricity | |

| |
|--|
| 2002-08-31 KCNA on U.S. call for sanctions against DPRK companies |
| 2002-09-16 Media U.S. mock trainings for nuclear attacks on DPR |
| 2002-09-26 Rodong DPRK's policy of national defence is for self |
| 2002-11-25 KCNA assails U.S. State Secretary's anti-DPRK remark |
| 2002-11-25 KCNA blames U.S. for violating AF |
| 2002-12-03 KCNA assails U.S. development of new types of nukes |
| 2002-12-09 Institute U.S. accused of standing in way of Korea's |
| 2003-01-22 KCNA Detailed Report Explains NPT Withdrawal |
| 2003-10-18 KCNA on U.S. Talk about _Peaceful Solution to Nuclear Issue |
| 2003-10-27 KCNA Report on U.S. Cancellation of Plan to Send Con |
| 2003-10-29 KCNA Raps IAEA |
| 2003-12-12 KCNA DPRK Emerges Victorious in Confrontation with U.S. |
| 2003-01-15 KCNA holds U.S. chiefly responsible for nuclear proliferation |
| 2003-01-16 KCNA on unjust behavior of IAEA |
| 2003-01-17 KCNA urges U.S. to sincerely approach dialogue |
| 2003-01-19 KCNA DPRK to react to unreasonable _countermeasure_ |
| 2003-01-22 KCNA Detailed Report Explains NPT Withdrawal |
| 2003-01-22 KCNA detailed report on circumstances of DPRK's with |
| 2003-01-22 KCNA IAEA urged not to follow U.S. anti-DPRK policy |
| 2003-01-25 KCNA dismisses proposed _exchange of statements or l |
| 2003-01-27 KCNA refutes IAEA general director's remarks |
| 2003-01-28 KCNA Report of Korean Central News Agency |
| 2003-02-03 KCNA terms Bush's state of union address declaration |
| 2003-02-06 Rodong No U.S. sanctions and blockade will work on D |
| 2003-02-08 KCNA urges U.S. to respond to direct talks with DPRK |
| 2003-02-15 KCNA blasts IAEA's irresponsible decision |
| 2003-02-21 KCNA on U.S. hostile policy toward DPRK |
| 2003-03-08 KCNA refutes Bush's bellicose remarks |
| 2003-03-24 KCNA DPRK fully ready to retaliate against any U.S. |
| 2003-03-24 KCNA on only solution to nuclear issue of Korean Pen |
| 2003-04-24 KCNA urges U.S. to approach DPRK-U.S. talks from sin |
| 2003-04-26 KCNA KPA foils ceaseless U.S. military provocations |
| 2003-04-30 KCNA on recent DPRK-U.S. talks |
| 2003-06-03 Rodong Sinmun on DPRK's war deterrent force |
| 2003-06-10 KCNA on DPRK's nuclear deterrent force |
| 2003-07-22 KCNA on U.S. moves for preemptive attack on DPRK |
| 2003-07-30 KCNA flails U.S. strategy for preemptive strike |
| 2003-08-06 KCNA on DPRK-U.S. Talks |

| |
|---|
| 2003-08-12 KCNA Blasts Remarks of U.S. Undersecretary of State |
| 2003-08-20 KCNA on Main Way for Settlement of Nuclear Issue |
| 2003-08-21 KCNA Slams U.S. Talk about _Early Inspection |
| 2003-09-03 KCNA on Six-way Talks and DPRK's Principled Stand _ |
| 2003-09-10 KCNA Refutes U.S. Brigandish Demand |
| 2003-09-24 KCNA Dismisses Resolution of IAEA Meeting |
| 2003-10-04 KCNA Report on Nuclear Activities in DPRK |
| 2001-01-21 KJI pays unofficial visit to China |
| 2001-03-22 KJI meets CPC delegation |
| 2001-04-17 KJI inspects artillery battalion of KPA unit no. 342 |
| 2001-04-18 KJI inspects KPA units nos. 841 and 998 |
| 2001-06-30 KJI greets Jiang Zemin |
| 2001-07-27 KJI Answers given by Kim Jong Il to questions raised |
| 2001-08-16 KJI greets Jiang Zemin |
| 2001-08-29 KJI inspects frontline posts of KPA |
| 2001-09-04 KJI greets Jiang Zemin at airport |
| 2001-09-04 KJI Speech of Chairman Kim Jong Il at banquet |
| 2001-09-04 KJI Talks between Kim Jong Il and Jiang Zemin held _ |
| 2001-09-05 KJI sees off President Jiang Zemin |
| 2001-09-06 REPORT on President Jiang Zemin's official goodwill |
| 2001-09-16 KJI inspects KPA unit no. 194 honored with title of |
| 2002-02-02 KJI inspects KPA unit no. 1200 |
| 2002-02-16 KJI Congratulatory message to Kim Jong Il from C.C. |
| 2002-03-02 KJI inspects KPA unit no. 891 |
| 2002-03-12 KJI sees servicepersons in training |
| 2002-05-10 KJI receives CPC delegation |
| 2002-08-13 KJI Message of sympathy to Kim Jong Il |
| 2002-08-24 KJI visits warship of Pacific Fleet |
| 2002-08-26 KJI Detailed report on Kim Jong Il's visit to Far East |
| 2002-09-09 KJI Congratulatory message from Chinese leaders |
| 2002-11-15 KJI congratulates Hu Jintao |
| 2002-11-15 KJI congratulates Jiang Zemin |
| 2002-12-09 Report Chinese leaders on friendly relations with DPRK |
| 2002-12-20 KJI inspects KPA unit |
| 2003-01-24 Kim Jong Il inspects KPA unit |
| 2003-02-04 Kim Jong Il inspects KPA navy unit |
| 2003-03-17 REPORT Congratulations to Hu Jintao |
| 2003-04-07 Kim Jong Il inspects KPA units |

| |
|--|
| 2003-04-27 KJI inspects KPA unit |
| 2003-04-28 KJI inspects KPA unit 318 |
| 2003-08-01 KJI inspects KPA unit on frontline |
| 2003-09-05 KJI Congratulations to Kim Jong Il from Hu Jintao |
| 2003-09-05 KJI Congratulations to Kim Jong Il from Jiang Zemin |
| 2003-10-30 KJI Supreme Commander Kim Jong Il Inspects KPA Unit |
| 2003-10-31 KJI Receives Chinese State Delegation |
| 2003-11-01 KJI Message of Thanks from Wu Bangguo |

| Subcase 2: 2006-2008 | |
|--|--|
| Semi-high level | 2006-03-13 Delegate DPRK's Stance on Nuclear Disarmament Clarified |
| | 2006-04-22 DPRK Delegate Denounces U.S. Nuclear Doctrine |
| | 2006-09-20 REPORT Peaceful Solution to Nuclear Issue on Korean |
| | 2006-09-26 VFM Choe Su Hon UNGA |
| | 2006-09-30 Delegation Reiterates DPRK's Stand on Denuclearizati |
| | 2006-10-10 REPORT DPRK Successfully Conducts Underground Nuclea |
| | 2006-12-18 REPORT DPRK Delegation Leaves for Six-Party Talks |
| | 2007-01-01 Joint New Year Editorial Issued |
| | 2007-04-19 Delegate Denounces U.S. Moves to Escalate Arms Race |
| | 2007-10-02 VFM Choe Su Hon UNGA |
| | 2007-10-23 Delegate DPRK Will Make All Efforts for Korea |
| | 2008-01-01 Joint New Year Editorial of Leading Newspapers in DPRK |
| | 2008-03-31 REPORT Notice Sent to Chief Delegate of South Side |
| | 2008-04-04 KPA Side Vehemently Refutes Stand of South side |
| | 2008-08-11 KPA Sends Message to S. Korean Side _ KCNA Watch |
| | 2008-09-27 VFM Pak Kil Yon UNGA |
| | 2008-10-17 Delegate DPRK's Stand on All Forms of Terrorism |
| 2008-10-29 Delegate DPRK's Stand on S. Korean Puppets' Anti-DPRK | |
| 2008-11-24 KPA Notifies S. Korean Puppet Authorities of Crucial | |
| 2008-11-26 Delegate on Reforms of UNSC | |
| High level | 2006-03-15 KPA Panmunjom Mission Hits U.S.-S. Korea Joint Military |
| | 2006-04-15 Kim Yong Nam To Increase Military Deterrent Is DPRK |
| | 2006-06-01 REPORT Talks between DPRK and Chinese FMs |
| | 2006-07-18 FM Paek Nam Sun Greetings to Chinese FM |
| | 2006-07-27 PAF Minister Kim Il Chol Calls for Bolstering War Deterrent |
| | 2006-08-23 KPA Panmunjom Mission Terms _Ulji Focus Lens_ War Act |
| | 2006-08-24 KPA General Staff Chief DPRK Will Bolster War Deterrence |

| | |
|------------------|---|
| | 2006-09-09 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Terms Hostile Forces' Wild Ambitions |
| | 2006-09-26 VFM Choe Su Hon UNGA |
| | 2007-02-05 REPORT Choe Thae Bok on DPRK's Contribution to Global |
| | 2007-02-14 REPORT Third Phase of Fifth Round of Six-Party Talks |
| | 2007-02-16 REPORT Choe Thae Bok DPRK Watches U.S. Moves |
| | 2007-04-12 REPORT 5th Session of 11th SPA of DPRK Held |
| | 2007-04-21 Director of DPRK GDAE Sends Message to Director-General |
| | 2007-06-08 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Meets CPC Delegation |
| | 2007-06-18 REPORT IAEA Working-level Delegation Invited to Visit |
| | 2007-07-14 KPA Panmunjom Mission Proposes Talks |
| | 2007-07-25 REPORT Inter-Korean General-Level Military Talks Open |
| | 2007-08-11 KPA Panmunjom Mission Issues Statement |
| | 2007-08-25 Chief of KPA General Staff on Tense Situation on Korean |
| | 2007-08-25 REPORT National Meeting Marks Anniversary of Kim Jong Un |
| | 2007-10-02 VFM Choe Su Hon UNGA |
| | 2007-10-06 REPORT Sixth Session of Second Phase of Six-party Talks |
| | 2007-11-30 REPORT Second North-South Defence Minister-Level Talks |
| | 2007-12-01 REPORT KCNA Report on Visit to Area of Nyongbyon |
| | 2007-12-24 Chief of KPA General Staff on Tense Situation on Korea |
| | 2008-03-03 KPA to Counter with Its Positive Retaliatory Blows |
| | 2008-03-15 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Congratulations to Chinese Statement |
| | 2008-03-17 REPORT KJI Congratulations to Chinese Premier |
| | 2008-03-29 Spokesman for KPA Navy Command Issues Statement |
| | 2008-04-28 REPORT Talks between Foreign Ministers of DPRK and China |
| | 2008-08-02 Kim Yong Nam Meets CPC Delegation |
| | 2008-08-09 Kim Yong Nam Pays Courtesy Call on Hu Jintao |
| | 2008-08-09 KPA Panmunjom Mission Issues Detailed Report |
| | 2008-08-11 Kim Yong Nam Meets Chinese Vice-President |
| | 2008-09-27 VFM Pak Kil Yon UNGA |
| Mid-level | 2006-01-09 FM Spokesman Urges U.S. to Lift Financial Sanctions |
| | 2006-02-10 FM Spokesman Urges U.S. to Make Policy Switchover |
| | 2006-03-01 FM Spokesman Urges U.S. to Lift Financial Sanctions |
| | 2006-03-22 FM Spokesman Assails U.S. Cry for Preemptive Attack |
| | 2006-03-24 FM Spokesman Assails Projected U.S.-S. Korea Joint |
| | 2006-06-02 FM Spokesman DPRK's Stand on Six-Party Talks |
| | 2006-07-07 FM Spokesman on Its Missile Launches |

| |
|---|
| 2006-07-17 FM Refutes _Resolution of UN Security Council |
| 2006-08-28 FM Spokesman Demands U.S. Lift of Financial Sanction |
| 2006-10-04 FM Clarifies Stand on New Measure to Bolster War Deterrent |
| 2006-10-12 FM Spokesman on U.S. Moves Concerning Its Nuclear |
| 2006-10-18 FM Spokesman Totally Refutes UNSC _Resolution |
| 2006-11-02 FM Spokesman on Resumption of Six-Party Talks |
| 2006-11-06 FM Spokesman on Japan's Attitude toward Resumption |
| 2007-01-15 Spokesman for CPRF Raps U.S. for Introducing Stealth |
| 2007-01-20 FM Spokesman on Results of DPRK-U.S. Talks |
| 2007-03-23 FM Spokesman Assails Projected S. Korea-U.S. Joint M |
| 2007-04-14 FM Spokesman DPRK to Move Only When Lifting of Financial |
| 2007-05-16 FM Spokesman on Issue of Remittance of De-frozen Funds |
| 2007-06-16 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. Establishment of MD |
| 2007-06-26 FM Spokesman on Solution to Issue of Frozen Funds |
| 2007-07-07 FM Spokesman on Issue of Implementation of February |
| 2007-07-16 FM Spokesman Full Implementation of February 13 |
| 2007-07-16 KNPC Spokesman U.S. Urged to Prove Its Intention not |
| 2007-08-22 FM Spokesman Blasts _Ulji Focus Lens |
| 2007-09-04 FM Spokesman on Recent DPRK-U.S. Talks |
| 2007-09-06 FM Spokesman on Emergency Aid to DPRK |
| 2007-09-19 FM Spokesman Rumor about _Secret Nuclear Cooperation |
| 2008-01-05 FM Spokesman on Issue of Implementation of October 3 |
| 2008-03-04 FM Spokesman Lambastes Joint Military Exercises |
| 2008-03-18 REPORT FM Congratulations to Chinese Foreign Minister |
| 2008-03-28 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. Delaying Tactics in Solution |
| 2008-04-10 FM Spokesman on DPRK-U.S. Talks |
| 2008-04-25 FM Spokesman on Pyongyang Visit by U.S. Nuclear Experts |
| 2008-06-02 FM Spokesman Condemns U.S. for Slandering DPRK |
| 2008-06-13 FM Spokesman on DPRK-U.S. Experts Negotiations |
| 2008-06-28 FM Spokesman on U.S. Lifting of Major Economic Sanctions |
| 2008-07-05 FM Spokesman on Implementation of Agreement Adopted |
| 2008-08-21 FM Spokesman Assails U.S.-S. Korea Joint Military Experts |
| 2008-09-20 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. for Putting on Hold |
| 2008-10-02 KNPC Spokesman Condemns South Korea-U.S. _Mutual Def |
| 2008-10-13 FM Spokesman on DPRK's Will to Cooperate in Verification |
| 2008-11-08 KNPC Withdrawal of U.S. Forces from S. Korea Demanded |
| 2008-11-13 FM Spokesman Holds Some Forces Accountable for Delay |
| 2008-12-06 FM Spokesman DPRK Will Not Regard Japan as Party to |

| | |
|---|---|
| Low level | 2006-01-18 KCNA Urges U.S. to Lift Sanctions against DPRK |
| | 2007-01-12 KCNA Invariable Foreign Policy of DPRK |
| | 2007-01-29 RODONG Sinmun Deals with Role of KPA |
| | 2007-04-09 REPORT National Meeting Marks Kim Jong Il's Election |
| | 2007-08-23 KCNA DPRK Full of Spirit of Attaching Importance to |
| | 2007-09-06 KCNA Blasts U.S. Justification of Its Forces' Presence |
| | 2007-09-26 RODONG U.S. Hit for Its Unreasonable Nuclear Policy |
| | 2007-10-13 KCNA Blasts Some Congressmen for Standing in Way of |
| | 2007-10-15 RODONG Sinmun on Basic Idea of DPRK's Foreign Policy |
| | 2007-12-06 KCNA Blasts U.S. Conservative Hard-liners' Moves to |
| | 2008-02-16 KCNA Kim Jong Il, Songun Commander with Unparalleled |
| | 2008-04-25 REPORT National Meeting Held to Mark 76th Anniversary |
| | 2008-07-28 KCNA Calls for Replacement of Armistice Agreement |
| | 2008-11-17 RODONG U.S. Reckless Nuclear Policy Flaied |
| | 2008-11-24 KCNA Dismisses Misinformation about Verification Issue |
| | 2008-12-10 KCNA U.S. Recognizes DPRK as Nuclear Weapons State _ |
| | 2008-12-17 KCNA Lively Response to U.S. Recognition of DPRK as |
| | 2008-12-23 KCNA Anniversary of Kim Jong Il's Assumption |
| | 2006-01-19 REPORT Speech of Hu Jintao at Banquet |
| | 2006-01-30 REPORT NDC of DPRK Hosts Banquet |
| | 2006-03-02 REPORT KJI Inspects KPA Unit 1522 |
| | 2006-03-20 REPORT KJI Inspects Forward Commanding Post of KPA Unit |
| | 2006-03-22 REPORT KJI Inspects Women's Sub-Unit of KPA Unit |
| | 2006-06-07 REPORT KJI Inspects KPA Air Force Unit |
| | 2006-07-13 REPORT Hu Jintao on Sino-DPRK Friendship |
| | 2006-07-24 REPORT Message of Sympathy to Kim Jong Il from Hu Jintao |
| | 2006-07-28 REPORT Kim Jong Il Replies to Hu Jintao |
| | 2006-09-11 REPORT Greetings to Kim Jong Il, Kim Yong Nam |
| | 2006-09-13 REPORT KJI Kim Jong Il Inspects Company of KPA Unit |
| | 2006-10-02 REPORT KJI Greets Chinese Party and State Leaders |
| | 2006-10-20 REPORT KJI Kim Jong Il Receives Special Envoy of China |
| | 2006-12-04 REPORT KJI Kim Jong Il Inspects Drill Ground of KPA |
| | 2006-12-06 REPORT KJI Kim Jong Il Inspects KPA Sub-Unit |
| | 2007-01-16 REPORT KJI Inspects Command of KPA Combined Unit 593 |
| | 2007-02-17 REPORT CPC Congratulatory Message to Kim Jong Il fro |
| | 2007-03-05 REPORT KJI Visits Chinese Embassy in Pyongyang |
| 2007-04-23 REPORT KJI Inspects KPA Unit 1637 | |
| 2007-06-04 REPORT KJI Sends Message of Condolences to Hu Jintao | |

| |
|---|
| 2007-08-04 REPORT KJI Inspects Command of KPA Unit |
| 2007-08-20 REPORT Hu Jintao Message of Sympathy to Kim Jong Il |
| 2007-08-23 REPORT KJI Sends Reply Message to Hu Jintao |
| 2007-09-10 REPOR Hu Jintao Greetings from Chinese Leaders |
| 2007-10-23 REPORT KJI Congratulates Hu Jintao |
| 2007-10-30 REPORT KJI Kim Jong Il Meets Senior Official of CPC |
| 2007-11-23 REPORT KJI Kim Jong Il Inspects KPA Air Force Unit _ |
| 2008-03-17 REPORT KJI Extends Congratulations to Hu Jintao |
| 2008-04-11 REPORT KJI Inspects Command of KPA Combined Unit |
| 2008-04-24 REPORT Chinese Defence Minister Meets KPA Delegation |
| 2008-05-01 REPORT KJI Sends Message of Sympathy to Hu Jintao |
| 2008-05-06 REPORT KJI Inspects KPA Unit |
| 2008-05-13 REPORT KJI Sends Message of Sympathy to Hu Jintao |
| 2008-05-27 REPORT KJI Inspects KPA Unit 1727 for Training Committee |
| 2008-06-19 REPORT KJI Receives Chinese Vice-President Xi Jinping |
| 2008-07-11 REPORT KJI Inspects KPA Unit _ KCNA Watch |
| 2008-08-05 REPORT KJI Inspects KPA Unit 1366 _ KCNA Watch |
| 2008-09-10 REPORT Congratulatory Message to Kim Jong Il from China |
| 2008-10-01 REPORT KJI Sends Message of Greetings to State Leader |
| 2008-11-05 REPORT KJI Inspects Drill Ground of Sub-Unit of KPA |
| 2008-12-16 REPORT KJI New Year Card to Kim Jong Il from Hu Jintao |
| 2008-12-27 REPORT KJI Inspects Command of KPA Unit 323 |

| Subcase 3: 2011-2013 | |
|---|--|
| Supreme level | 2011-08-27 KJI Sends Message of Thanks to Hu Jintao |
| | 2012-04-20 KJU treatise to mark KIS centary birthday |
| | 2013-01-01 KJU_New_Years |
| | 2013-03-31 KJU Plenary Meeting Central Committee WPK |
| | 2013-08-25 KJU Talk Day of Songun |
| Semi-high level | 2011-01-01 KCNA_Joint_New_Years_Editorial |
| | 2011-02-23 NDC Inspection Group Reveals Truth behind Yonphyong |
| | 2011-03-15 Delegate on His Country's Stand on Elimination of |
| | 2011-03-31 NDC Inspection Group Spokesman Re-clarifies |
| | 2011-05-27 Delegate DPRK's Will to Remain True to Idea and |
| | 2011-06-03 KPA to Take Thousand-fold Revenge on Lee Myung Bak |
| | 2011-09-27 VFM Pak Kil Yon UNGA |
| | 2012-01-01 KCNA_Joint_Editorial |
| 2012-01-01 MEDIA Joint New Year Editorial on DPRK's Foreign | |

| |
|---|
| 2012-01-01 MEDIA Joint New Year Editorial on National |
| 2012-01-02 MEDIA China and DPRK, States with Traditional Good |
| 2012-02-02 NDC Policy Department Officials Interviewed |
| 2012-02-02 NDC Policy Department Open Questionnaire |
| 2012-02-19 KPA Command of Forces in Western Sector of Front Issu |
| 2012-03-02 NDC Policy Department Holds Press Conference |
| 2012-03-16 Spokesman KCST Launch of Kwangmyongsong-3 Will Be |
| 2012-03-16 Spokesman KCST Satellite Launch to Display National |
| 2012-04-10 REPORT WPK 19th Anniversary of Kim Jong Il's Election |
| 2012-04-19 REPORT KCST DPRK's Satellites for Peaceful Purposes |
| 2012-04-22 REPORT WPK Strategic Dialogue between WPK and CPC |
| 2012-04-23 Special Group KPA Supreme Command Warns Lee |
| 2012-04-25 REPORT KJU Feats for Army Building |
| 2012-07-30 REPORT WPK Talks between Delegations of WPK and CPC |
| 2012-08-18 REPORT Hu Jintao Receives DPRK Delegation |
| 2012-09-25 REPORT SPA Sixth Session of 12th SPA Held |
| 2012-10-20 Spokesman NDC PolDep There Exists Only Maritime |
| 2012-11-29 REPORT Talks Held between WPK and CPC Delegations _ |
| 2012-12-12 REPORT KCNA Releases Report on Satellite Launch |
| 2013-02-12 Political Bureau of WPK Central Committee Meets |
| 2013-02-12 REPORT KCNA on Successful 3rd Underground Nuclear |
| 2013-04-01 REPORT SPA Decides to Set Up State Space Development |
| 2013-04-01 REPORT SPA Seventh Session of 12th SPA of DPRK Held |
| 2013-04-02 REPORT WPK New Strategic Line, Succession of Line of |
| 2013-04-06 Delegate DPRK Clarifies Its Principled Stand on Nucler |
| 2013-04-18 NDC Policy Department Issues Statement _ KCNA Watch |
| 2013-04-25 REPORT Government Order for Commemorating 60th |
| 2013-04-26 Spokesman NDC Policy Department Threatens to Take Fi |
| 2013-06-26 PermRep at UN Demands Dismantlement of _UN Forces Co |
| 2013-07-14 PermRep DPRK Permanent Representative Refers to |
| 2013-08-29 Spokesman NDC Policy Department Warns U.S., S. Korea |
| 2013-10-04 Spokesman NDC Policy Department Slams Park Geun Hye' |
| 2013-11-11 REPORT Head of WPK Delegation Addresses Int'l Meeting |
| 2013-11-13 REPORT High-level National Meeting of Scientists |
| 2013-11-14 Spokesman NDC Policy Department of DPRK Slams Park |
| 2013-11-15 Spokesman for DPRK NDC Policy Department Condemns |
| 2013-11-15 Spokesman NDC Policy Department Warns Park Geun Hye |
| 2013-11-23 REPORT Chinese Ambassador Gives Reception |

| | |
|--|--|
| | 2013-11-24 REPORT Reception Given at DPRK Embassy in Beijing _ |
| | 2013-12-11 REPORT KJI Praised by Russian Political Party Leader |
| | 2013-12-16 REPORT KPA Service Personnel Swear Their Loyalty to |
| High level | 2011-02-27 KPA Mission Statement on US-S. Korea Joint Military |
| | 2011-02-27 KPA Warning to S. Korean Military for Psywar |
| | 2011-05-30 NDC Spokesman DPRK Will Not Deal with Lee Myung Bak |
| | 2011-06-01 KPA Spokesman Lee Myung Bak Group Can Never Evade |
| | 2011-06-29 KPA Supreme Command Lee Myung Bak Group's Hideous |
| | 2011-09-21 REPORT DPRK Insists on Six-party Talks without |
| | 2011-09-30 REPORT FM Greetings to Chinese FM |
| | 2011-11-24 KPA Supreme Command Warns S. Korean Military Not to |
| | 2012-02-25 Spokesman NDC No Limit to Striking Intensity and |
| | 2012-05-11 FM Pak Ui Chun Slams UN's Application of Double Standards |
| | 2012-07-29 Spokesman NDC Clarifies Its Principled Stand to U.S. |
| | 2012-08-16 Spokesman NDC Derides Lee Myung Bak's _Commemoration |
| | 2012-08-21 KPA Panmunjom Mission Clarifies Its Stand to Not |
| | 2012-08-31 DPRK Foreign Ministry Memo on Hostility |
| | 2012-08-31 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Makes Speech at 16th NAM Summit |
| | 2012-10-01 VFM Pak Kil Yon UNGA |
| | 2012-10-09 Spokesman NDC Reiterates Its Stand to Fight It Out a |
| | 2012-11-04 REPORT on Enlarged Meeting of Political Bureau of WP |
| | 2012-12-30 REPORT Another Grand Banquet Given for Conquerors of |
| | 2013-01-24 NDC Issues Statement Refuting UNSC Resolution |
| | 2013-01-24 NDC Vows to Launch All-Out Action to Defend |
| | 2013-02-23 Chief of KPA Panmunjom Mission Sends Telephone |
| | 2013-03-05 Spokesman for Supreme Command of KPA Clarifies |
| | 2013-03-21 Spokesman U.S. Nuclear Blackmail Will Be Foiled with |
| | 2013-03-26 KPA Supreme Command DPRK Will Show Its Will for |
| | 2013-03-31 REPORT WPK CC Report on Plenary Meeting of WPK |
| | 2013-04-04 Spokesman KPA General Staff U.S. Should Ponder over |
| | 2013-04-25 REPORT Government KPA Ceremony Marks Founding |
| | 2013-05-07 KPA Command in Southwestern Sector of Front Issues |
| | 2013-06-19 REPORT VFM Kim Kye Gwan DPRK-China Strategic Dialogue |
| | 2013-07-03 FM Pak Ui Chun Speaks at Ministerial Meeting of Asia |
| | 2013-07-25 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Meets Chinese Delegation |
| 2013-07-27 REPORT Gov Victorious Fatherland Liberation War Muse | |
| 2013-07-27 REPORT Government Receptions Given on War Victory Day | |
| 2013-08-06 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Returns from IRAN Home | |

| | |
|---|---|
| | 2013-10-01 VFM Pak Kil Yon UNGA |
| | 2013-10-03 VFM Pak Kil Yon DPRK Will Work for Stable Situation |
| | 2013-10-12 Spokesman NDC of DPRK Clarifies Principled Stand on |
| | 2013-11-22 Spokesman KPA Command in Southwestern Sector of |
| | 2013-12-09 REPORT WPK Enlarged Meeting of Political Bureau of |
| Mid-level | 2011-01-26 FM Spokesman DPRK Stand on Denuclearization of Korea |
| | 2011-03-01 FM Spokesman on DPRK Ready for Both Dialogue and Con |
| | 2011-03-15 FM Spokesman on Russian Vice-Foreign Minister's Visit |
| | 2011-03-22 FM Spokesman Denounces US Military Attack on Libya _ |
| | 2011-08-17 FM Spokesman for DPRK Foreign Ministry Slams Ulji |
| | 2011-10-19 FM Spokesman Rebukes U.S. Dream of _System Collapse |
| | 2012-01-11 Spokesman FM DPRK Will Follow U.S. Moves |
| | 2012-01-12 CPRK Secretariat Issues White Paper Slamming Lee |
| | 2012-02-27 Spokesman FM DPRK Is Fully Ready for Dialogue and |
| | 2012-02-29 Spokesman FM on Issue of DPRK-U.S. Talks |
| | 2012-03-04 Spokesman FM Any Slight Attempt to Patronize Lee |
| | 2012-03-23 Spokesman CPRK Lee Myung Bak's Plot to Turn Seoul |
| | 2012-03-23 Spokesman FM on Launch of Working Satellite |
| | 2012-03-31 FM Spokesman on U.S. Announcement of Suspension of F |
| | 2012-04-17 FM UNSC's Act to Violate DPRK's Legitimate Right to |
| | 2012-04-22 Spokesman FM Warns Lee Myung Bak of Its Extreme |
| | 2012-04-23 Spokesman FM Slams US Undisguised Double Standards |
| | 2012-05-06 Spokesman FM Anti-DPRK _Joint Statement_ of UNSC Reb |
| | 2012-06-09 Spokesman FM Slams Lee Myung Bak Group's Defamation |
| | 2012-06-17 Spokesman FM Blasts U.S. Secretary of State's Reckless |
| | 2012-06-18 Spokesman FM Slams U.S. Arms Buildup against DPRK |
| | 2012-06-24 Spokesman FM Denounces U.S. Military Provocation |
| | 2012-06-25 Spokesman FM U.S. Hit for Pulling Up DPRK over |
| | 2012-07-02 Spokesman FM Refers to Russian Roving Ambassador's |
| | 2012-07-20 Spokesman FM Denounces U.S. Hostile Act |
| | 2012-07-25 Spokesman FM Calls for Peace on Korean Peninsula |
| | 2012-07-30 FM Spokesman Slashes at U.S. Authorities' Anti-DPRK |
| | 2012-08-20 Spokesman FM Slams Ulji Freedom Guardian |
| | 2012-08-24 Spokesman for Korean Anti-Nuke Peace Committee Terms |
| | 2012-09-05 Spokesman FM Clarifies the DPRK's Stand on DPRK-Japan |
| | 2012-09-05 Spokesman FM Denounces U.S. and IAEA for Pulling Up |
| 2012-09-07 Spokesman FM U.S. Forces' Presence in S. Korea Is | |
| 2012-09-13 Delegate Nuclear Weapons Should Be Completely Remove | |

| |
|---|
| 2012-09-20 Spokesman FM Accuses U.S. of Its Move to Build New |
| 2012-09-28 Spokesman FM Censures US for Urging Myanmar to Break |
| 2012-10-02 Delegate FM Meeting of G-77 on Ways for Enhancing |
| 2012-10-04 Delegate DPRK Will Join UN Member Nations in |
| 2012-10-10 Spokesman CPRK Denounces S. Korea's _Missile Policy |
| 2012-10-10 Spokesman FM Denounces U.S. for Sparking New Missile |
| 2012-10-17 Delegate Calls for End to History of Individual |
| 2012-10-18 Delegate Calls for Nuclear Disarmament |
| 2012-10-25 FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. Official's Anti-DPRK |
| 2012-10-26 Delegate It Is Legitimate Right of Sovereign State |
| 2012-11-22 Delegate to UN General Assembly on UNSC Reform |
| 2012-12-12 Spokesman FM on Satellite Launch |
| 2013-01-14 FM Issues Memorandum |
| 2013-02-02 Spokesman FM Blasts U.S. Double Standards over Satellite |
| 2013-02-12 Spokesman FM Urges U.S. to Choose between Two Option |
| 2013-02-23 Delegate Makes Speech at UN Special Committee Session |
| 2013-03-07 Spokesman FM Second Korean War Is Unavoidable_ DPRK |
| 2013-03-08 CPRK Important Measures to Defend Nation's Sovereign |
| 2013-03-08 NPCK Memorandum Discloses U.S. History of Nuclear Threat |
| 2013-03-14 Spokesman FM Hits Out at US for Contending AA Can't |
| 2013-03-14 Spokesman FM Slams UN Secretary General _ KCNA Watch |
| 2013-03-20 Spokesman FM Accuses U.S. of Strategic Bomber's Sort |
| 2013-03-21 Spokesman CPRK Nuclear War Provocateurs Are Bound to |
| 2013-03-23 CPRK Secretariat Threatens Warmongers with |
| 2013-03-26 Spokesman CPRK Those Who Hurt Dignity of DPRK's |
| 2013-03-26 Spokesman FM DPRK Informs UNSC of Impending Danger |
| 2013-03-27 Spokesman CPRK S. Korean Chief Executive's Invective |
| 2013-03-28 CPRK Spokesman Issues Statement |
| 2013-03-29 Secretariat CPRK Army and People of DPRK Pledge Reve |
| 2013-03-31 Spokesman NPCK Arms Buildup of U.S. Forces in South |
| 2013-04-03 Secretariat CPRK U.S. Chemical Battalion's Redeployment |
| 2013-04-04 Spokesman for NPCK Urges U.S. and S. Korean Warmongers |
| 2013-04-04 Spokesman GFTUK Supports New Revolutionary Line Laid |
| 2013-04-14 Spokesman CPRK Those Who Hurt Dignity of DPRK's |
| 2013-04-16 Spokesman FM Dismisses U.S. Talk about Dialogue as R |
| 2013-04-18 MEDIA DPRK's Principled Stand on Inter-Korean Dialog |
| 2013-04-20 CPRK Secretariat Blasts S. Korea for Cyber-attack on |
| 2013-04-24 CPRK Secretariat Blasts Foal Eagle Joint Military Ex |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| | 2013-05-10 CPRK Spokesman Assails S. Korean Chief Executive's A |
| | 2013-05-10 Spokesman FM DPRK Accuses U.S. President of Evading |
| | 2013-05-20 CPRK U.S. and S. Korea's Groundless Accusation over |
| | 2013-05-22 Spokesman FM U.S. Accused of Calling DPRK _State of |
| | 2013-05-28 Spokesman CPRK Urges S. Korean Authorities to Face |
| | 2013-07-01 Spokesman CPRK Accuses S. Korean Chief Executive of |
| | 2013-08-20 CPRK Denounces S. Korean Chief Executive's Agitation |
| | 2013-08-31 Spokesman FM Accuses U.S. of Spoiling Atmosphere for |
| | 2013-10-07 CPRK Spokesman Denounces U.S.-S. Korea Military |
| | 2013-10-09 Spokesman FM Blasts U.S.-Japan-S. Korea Joint Naval |
| | 2013-10-11 CPRK Secretariat Slams U.S., S. Korea for Their DPRK |
| | 2013-10-14 CPRK Spokesman Urges Park Geun Hye to Have Right Opt |
| | 2013-10-17 CPRK Secretariat Slams S. Korean IS Director's Anti- |
| | 2013-10-21 CPRK Secretariat Slams ROK Army for Joining Human |
| | 2013-10-23 Spokesman FM Blames U.S. for Posing Nuclear Threat t |
| | 2013-10-25 Spokesman FM Refutes International Financial Body's |
| | 2013-10-28 Delegate Re-clarifies Its Will to Continue Launching |
| | 2013-10-31 Spokesman FM Blasts U.S. State Secretary's Invective |
| | 2013-10-31 Spokesman NPKC U.S., S. Korean Moves to Establish |
| | 2013-11-06 Spokesman CPRK Slams Park Geun Hye for Hurting DPRK |
| | 2013-11-08 Spokesman CPRK Raps S. Korean Authorities' Anti-DPRK |
| Low level | 2011-09-05 FM Institute S. Korean Authorities Urged to Drop Ambition |
| | 2012-02-15 FM Institute Report on Kim Jong Il's Contribution to |
| | 2012-03-19 MEDIA DPRK's Satellite Launch Not Contradictory to D |
| | 2012-03-21 MEDIA DPRK Will Regard Any Provocation as Declaration |
| | 2012-04-08 REPORT KPA Sino-DPRK Friendship Will Be in Fuller |
| | 2013-02-04 MEDIA _Sanctions_ Will Not Work on DPRK_ Rodong Sinmun |
| | 2013-02-14 MEDIA DPRK's Nuclear Test Is Just Counteraction to C |
| | 2013-03-04 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun Observes First Anniversary of Ki |
| | 2013-03-25 MEDIA AA Nullification Is Bold Decision to Terminate |
| | 2013-03-26 MEDIA AA Nullification Is Bold Decision to Terminate |
| | 2013-04-05 MEDIA WPK's New Line Guarantees Peace in Asia-Pacific |
| | 2013-04-08 MEDIA Meeting Marks 20th Anniversary of Kim Jong Il |
| | 2013-05-16 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun Military Analyst Censures US Rec |
| | 2013-05-22 MEDIA U.S, S. Korea Accused of Taking Issue with KPA |
| | 2013-05-26 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun Discloses U.S. Aim in Building M |
| | 2013-06-01 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun on Kim Jong Il's Exploits in Dev |
| | 2013-06-19 MEDIA DPRK's Nuclear Deterrence Is to Deter War and |

| |
|--|
| 2013-07-11 MEDIA Unbreakable DPRK-China Friendship_ |
| 2013-09-11 MEDIA Ensuring Peace in Korea Urgent for World Peace |
| 2013-09-11 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun on Proud History of DPRK for |
| 2013-09-13 MEDIA DPRK Directs Big Efforts to Science Development |
| 2013-11-03 MEDIA U.S. Structure of Hegemony Has Come to End_ Ro |
| 2013-11-13 MEDIA U.S. Is to Blame for Escalating Tensions on |
| 2013-11-14 MEDIA U.S. Economic Sanctions Are Breach of |
| 2013-11-18 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun Accuses U.S. of Slandering DPRK |
| 2013-11-20 MEDIA U.S. Talk about _Threat from North Korea_ |
| 2013-11-23 MEDIA Papers Call for Boosting Friendly, Cooperative |
| 2013-11-26 MEDIA Science and Technology Are Mainstay for State |
| 2013-12-01 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun Calls for Successfully Implement |
| 2013-12-02 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun Dismisses U.S. Initiative to |
| 2013-12-03 MEDIA DPRK's Nuclear Force Is Treasured Sword for |
| 2013-12-08 MEDIA Peace on Korean Peninsula Is Prerequisite to |
| 2013-12-13 MEDIA Situation of Korean Peninsula and U.S. Anti-DPRK |
| 2011-02-16 REPORT Chinese Minister of Public Security on Sino-DPRK |
| 2011-02-17 REPORT Hu Jintao on Boosting China-DPRK Relations |
| 2011-04-08 REPORT KJI Meeting Marks Anniversary of Kim Jong Il' |
| 2011-05-27 KJI Returns Home after Paying Unofficial Visit to China |
| 2011-05-27 KJI Speech of Hu Jintao at Banquet |
| 2011-06-10 REPORT Strategic Dialogue between Party Delegations |
| 2011-06-11 REPORT WPK Central Committee Hosts Reception for CPC |
| 2011-06-14 REPORT Head of CPC Delegation on Sino-DPRK Relations |
| 2011-07-07 KJI Reply to Kim Jong Il from Hu Jintao _ KCNA Watch |
| 2011-07-25 KJI Inspects Command of KPA Navy _ KCNA Watch |
| 2011-07-31 KJI Message of Sympathy to Kim Jong Il from Hu Jintao |
| 2011-10-24 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Meets with Chinese Vice- Premier |
| 2011-10-25 REPORT Sino-DPRK Friendship, Treasure Common to Two |
| 2011-11-02 KJI REPORT Inspects Combined Unit of KPA Air Force |
| 2011-11-15 REPORT Head of CPLA Delegation's Arrival Speech |
| 2011-11-15 REPORT Talks between Military Delegations of DPRK |
| 2011-11-25 KJU REPORT Inspects KPA Large Combined Unit Command |
| 2011-12-03 KJI REPORT Commands Flying Exercises of KPA Air Force |
| 2011-12-13 KJI REPORT Commands Firing Drill of KPA Large Combine |
| 2011-12-16 REPORT Vice-Premier of China on Inheriting Sino-DPRK |
| 2011-12-19 REPORT Chinese FM Mourns Demise of Kim Jong Il |
| 2011-12-20 REPORT KJI Senior Party and State Leaders of China M |

| |
|--|
| 2011-12-31 KJU REPORT New Year Greeting from Chinese President |
| 2011-12-31 REPORT Meeting of Political Bureau of C.C., WPK |
| 2012-01-24 REPORT KJU Visits Mangyongdae Revolutionary School |
| 2012-01-30 REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Air Force Unit 1017 |
| 2012-02-02 REPORT KJU Receives New Year Cards from Foreign Part |
| 2012-02-25 REPORT KJU Inspects Units under Command of KPA 4th |
| 2012-03-02 REPORT KJU Inspects Strategic Rocket Force Command |
| 2012-03-14 REPORT KJU Guides Combined Strike Drill of KPA Three |
| 2012-04-05 REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Navy Unit 155 |
| 2012-04-12 REPORT KJU Receives Congratulations from Hu Jintao |
| 2012-04-23 REPORT KJU Sends Reply Message to Hu Jintao |
| 2012-04-27 REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Combined Unit 655 |
| 2012-08-02 REPORT KJU Meets CPC Delegation |
| 2012-08-03 REPORT KJU Clarifies Essence of Kim Jong Il's |
| 2012-08-18 REPORT KJU Inspects Island Defence Detachments of KPA |
| 2012-08-25 REPORT KJU Clarifies WPK's Firm Will to Build |
| 2012-08-28 REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Unit 318 |
| 2012-09-08 REPORT KJU Greetings to Kim Jong Un from Hu Jintao |
| 2012-10-01 REPORT KJU Greets Chinese Party, State Leaders |
| 2012-10-12 REPORT KJU Receives Message from Chinese Leaders |
| 2012-10-13 REPORT KJU Clarifies Responsibilities, Duties of |
| 2012-11-19 REPORT KJU Inspects Training Ground of Horse Riding |
| 2012-11-23 REPORT KJU Sends Congratulations to All People's |
| 2012-11-30 REPORT KJU Meets CPC Delegation |
| 2012-12-13 REPORT KJU Observes Satellite Launch Processes |
| 2012-12-17 REPORT KJU Pays Respects to Kim Jong Il |
| 2012-12-21 REPORT KJU Congratulates Those Who Demonstrated |
| 2012-12-24 REPORT KJU Sends Congratulatory Message to Hu Jintao |
| 2012-12-28 REPORT KJU New Year Card to Kim Jong Un from Xi Jinping |
| 2012-12-29 REPORT KJU New Year Cards to Kim Jong Un from Hu Jintao |
| 2013-01-26 REPORT KJU Guides Consultative Meeting of Officials |
| 2013-01-28 REPORT KJU Makes Opening Address at Fourth Meeting |
| 2013-02-03 REPORT KJU Enlarged Meeting of Central Military |
| 2013-02-20 REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Unit _ KCNA Watch |
| 2013-02-21 REPORT KJU Guides Tactical Exercise for Attack |
| 2013-02-22 REPORT KJU Guides Military Exercise |
| 2013-02-25 REPORT KJU Inspects Artillery Firing Drill of KPA |
| 2013-02-26 REPORT KJU Sends Gifts to Contributors to Successful |

| | |
|------------|--|
| 2013-02-27 | REPORT KJU Has Photo Session with Contributors to Su |
| 2013-03-07 | REPORT KJU Inspects Island Defence Detachments of KPA |
| 2013-03-11 | REPORT KJU Inspects Islet Defence Detachment |
| 2013-03-11 | REPORT KJU Inspects Long-range Artillery Sub-unit of |
| 2013-03-14 | REPORT KJU Un Greets Chinese President |
| 2013-03-20 | REPORT KJU Guides Drone Attack, Self-Propelled Flak |
| 2013-03-21 | REPORT KJU Reply Message to Kim Jong Un from Xi Jinping |
| 2013-03-22 | REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Unit 1973 _ KCNA Watch |
| 2013-03-23 | REPORT KJU Inspects Battalion under KPA Unit _ KCNA |
| 2013-03-24 | REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Unit 1501 _ KCNA Watch |
| 2013-03-25 | REPORT KJU Guides Landing and Anti-landing Drills of |
| 2013-03-28 | REPORT KJU Has Photo Session with Participants in Me |
| 2013-03-29 | REPORT KJU Convenes Operation Meeting, Finally |
| 2013-03-31 | REPORT WPK CC Report on Plenary Meeting of WPK |
| 2013-05-01 | REPORT KJU Visits Ministry of People's Security |
| 2013-06-05 | REPORT KJU Sends Appeal to All Service Personnel |
| 2013-06-18 | REPORT KJU Guides Flight Drills of Unit 1017 of KPA |
| 2013-06-19 | REPORT KJU Receives Reply Message from Chinese President |
| 2013-07-25 | REPORT KJU Meets Delegation of PRC _ KCNA Watch |
| 2013-07-27 | REPORT KJU Military Parade, Mass Demonstration Mark |
| 2013-07-29 | REPORT KJU Visits Songhung Revolutionary Site |
| 2013-09-08 | REPORT KJU Greetings to Kim Jong Un from Chinese Par |
| 2013-09-30 | REPORT KJU Sends Congratulatory Message to Chinese |
| 2013-10-10 | REPORT KJU Receives Reply Message from Chinese Party |
| 2013-10-20 | REPORT KJU Visits Mirim Riding Club |
| 2013-10-29 | REPORT KJU Guides Shooting Contest of Participants |
| 2013-10-30 | REPORT KJU Watches Firepower Strike Drill of KPA |
| 2013-11-12 | REPORT KJU Has Photo Session with Active Service Per |
| 2013-11-12 | REPORT KJU Provides Field Guidance to November 2 |
| 2013-11-30 | REPORT KJU Visits Samjiyon Revolutionary Battle Site |
| 2013-12-14 | REPORT KJU Gives Field Guidance to KPA Designing |
| 2013-12-26 | REPORT KJU New Year Card to Kim Jong Un from Xi Jinping |
| 2013-12-27 | REPORT KJU Attends Ceremony of Awarding Commendation |

| | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Subcase 4: 2016-2018 | |
| Supreme level | 2016-01-01 KJU New Year Address |
| | 2016-05-06~09 KJU_Speeches_7th_WPK Congress |
| | 2016-05-07 KJU Makes Report on Work of WPK Central Committee at |

| | |
|------------------------|---|
| | 2016-05-08 KJU Makes Conclusion on Review of Work of WPK |
| | 2016-05-10 KJU Makes Closing Address at Seventh Congress of WPK |
| | 2017-01-01 KJU New_Years_Address NCNK |
| | 2017-06-07 KJU Speech at the Eighth KCU Congress |
| | 2017-09-22 KJU Statement after Trump |
| | 2017-12-22 KJU Makes Opening Address at 5th Conference of Cell |
| | 2017-12-24 KJU Makes Closing Address at 5th Conference of Cell |
| | 2018-01-01 KJU New Year's Address Kim JongUn |
| | 2018-02-08 KJU Speech of the 70th Founding Anniversa |
| | 2018-03-28 KJU speech in Beijing |
| Semi-high level | 2016-02-07 National Aerospace Development Administration Released |
| | 2016-02-23 KPA Supreme Command Crucial Statement |
| | 2016-03-07 NDC statement Warns of Military Counter-action for P |
| | 2016-03-12 KPA General Staff Will Go over to Preemptive Retaliation |
| | 2016-09-09 Nuclear Weapons Institute Succeeds in Nuclear Warhead |
| | 2016-10-20 NADA Spokesman DPRK's Juche Satellites Will Continue |
| | 2017-09-25 REPORT Open Letter to Parliaments of Different Count |
| | 2018-05-25 Nuclear Weapons Institute Statement of Nuclear Weapons |
| High level | 2016-03-29 FM Ri Su Yong Interviewed by TASS Foreign News Edition |
| | 2016-04-23 FM Ri Su Yong Delivers Speech at UN Senior Forum _ K |
| | 2016-06-01 REPORT WPK Delegation Meets Head of International Li |
| | 2016-06-02 REPORT WPK Delegation Meets General Secretary of CPC |
| | 2016-06-09 Minister of People's Armed Forces on Nuclear Deterrence |
| | 2016-06-29 Deputy Pak Pong Ju Calls for Thoroughly Carrying out |
| | 2016-07-26 FM Ri Yong Ho Statement at ASEAN Regional Forum _ KC |
| | 2016-09-16 FM Ri Yong Ho DPRK Government Will Struggle for |
| | 2016-09-19 SPA Kim Yong Nam Refers to Stand of DPRK Government |
| | 2016-09-23 FM Ri Yong Ho UNGA |
| | 2016-09-24 FM Ri Yong Ho Speaks at General Debate of 71st UN Ge |
| | 2016-12-06 Delegate PermRep DPRK Permanent Representative to UN |
| | 2017-01-06 UN Rep Letter to UN Secretary-General by DPRK |
| | 2017-03-23 UN Rep Sends Letter to UN Secretary General |
| | 2017-04-08 FM Ri Yong Ho Sends Letter to Secretary General of A |
| | 2017-04-27 UN Rep Press Statement of DPRK Permanent Mission to |
| | 2017-05-13 UN Rep Issues Press Statement |
| | 2017-05-26 Vice FM Pak Myong Guk Snipes at U.S. and Its Allies' |
| | 2017-05-30 UN Rep Deputy Permanent Representative of DPRK Mission |
| | 2017-08-09 FM Ri Yong Ho Makes Speech at Ministerial Meeting of |

| | |
|------------------|--|
| | 2017-08-12 UN Rep Press Statement of DPRK Permanent Mission to |
| | 2017-08-27 UN Rep DPRK Sends Letter to UNSC President |
| | 2017-09-03 REPORT DPRK Nuclear Weapons Institute on Successful |
| | 2017-09-23 REPORT Government Meeting of Headquarters of C.C., W |
| | 2017-09-23 UN General Assembly Yi Rongho |
| | 2017-09-24 FM Ri Yong Ho DPRK Foreign Minister on DPRK Government |
| | 2017-09-25 REPORT Open Letter of WPK Central Committee to Foreign |
| | 2017-09-26 FM Ri Yong Ho DPRK Will Do Its Best for Unity of G77 |
| | 2017-10-21 UN Rep DPRK Permanent Representative to UN Sends Letter |
| | 2017-10-27 UN Rep DPRK Permanent Representative at UN Sends Letter |
| | 2017-11-05 UN Rep Press Release of DPRK Mission on Sanctions |
| | 2017-11-15 UN Rep Press Statement of DPRK Permanent Mission to |
| | 2017-11-16 UN Rep Letter to UN Secretary-General |
| | 2017-12-12 UN Rep Press Statement of Permanent Mission of DPRK |
| | 2018-01-26 PermRep U.S. Urged to Completely Stop Joint Military |
| | 2018-02-01 FM Ri Yong Ho Sends Letter to UN Secretary General _ |
| | 2018-03-03 PermRep It Is Legitimate Right to Increase National |
| | 2018-03-20 REPORT Kim Yong Nam Congratulations to Chairman |
| | 2018-03-20 REPORT Pak Pong Ju Congratulations to Premier of China |
| | 2018-05-03 REPORT FM Talks between DPRK and Chinese Foreign |
| | 2018-05-15 VFM Kim Kyegwan statement on Trump-Kim summit |
| | 2018-05-16 VFM Kim Kye Gwan Press Statement by First Vice-Minis |
| | 2018-05-17 CPRC Ri Son Gwon Direction of Future North-South Tie |
| | 2018-05-17 PermRep Speech of DPRK Permanent Representative at |
| | 2018-05-17 WPK Friendship Visiting Group Meets Xi Jinping |
| | 2018-05-23 VFM Choe Son Hui |
| | 2018-05-24 VFM Choe Son Hui Press Statement by Vice-Minister of |
| | 2018-05-25 VFM Kim Kye Gwan Statement of DPRK First Vice-Minister |
| | 2018-07-25 REPORT Talks Held between Vice Foreign Ministers of |
| | 2018-07-26 REPORT FM Ri Yong Ho Meets Chinese Delegation |
| | 2018-09-30 FM Ri Yong Ho Calls for thoroughly Implementing DPRK |
| | 2018-10-06 VFM Choe Son Hui DPRK-China Negotiation Held |
| | 2018-12-09 FM Ri Yong Ho Government Delegation |
| | 2018-12-09 FM Ri Yong Ho Talks between Foreign Ministers of |
| Mid-level | 2016-01-15 FM Spokesman U.S. Should Be Accustomed to Status of |
| | 2016-02-20 FM Spokesman U.S. Anti-DPRK Sanctions Denounced |
| | 2016-03-04 FM Spokesman Rejects UNSC _Resolution on Sanctions_ |
| | 2016-03-06 FM Spokesman U.S. Will Be Responsible for Outbreak o |

| |
|--|
| 2016-03-07 CPRK Spokesman Provokers Will Have to Pay High Price |
| 2016-03-31 FM Spokesman Blames U.S. for Escalating Tension on K |
| 2016-04-02 FM Spokesman Accuses UNSC of Ignoring Complaint |
| 2016-04-03 NDC Spokesman Nobody Can Block DPRK's Advance |
| 2016-04-04 FM Spokesman Slams _Nuclear Security Summit |
| 2016-04-12 FM Spokesman Refutes Absurd Story about Dialogue |
| 2016-04-26 FM Spokesman DPRK's Test-fire of SLBM Is Just_ |
| 2016-04-27 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. New _Sanctions Doctrine_ _ |
| 2016-04-30 FM Spokesman DPRK Will Counter Enemy's Threat of |
| 2016-05-04 KPA Panmunjom Mission Discloses U.S. Criminal War Moves |
| 2016-05-24 Delegate PermRep at UN Sends Letter to UN Secretary |
| 2016-05-25 NDC Policy Department Urges U.S. to Roll back Its An |
| 2016-05-28 FM Spokesman on DPRK's Bolstering of Nuclear Force _ |
| 2016-06-04 Spokesman for DPRK National Coordination Committee |
| 2016-06-15 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. Plan for _Precision Air Rai |
| 2016-06-16 FM Spokesman of DPRK Assails Entry of U.S. Nuclear S |
| 2016-06-19 NDC Spokesman Warns U.S. of Nuclear Counter-action _ |
| 2016-06-23 FM Spokesman Assails U.S. for Instigating UN Secretary |
| 2016-06-24 FM Spokesman Rejects UNSC Press Statement |
| 2016-06-25 NDC Policy Department Blasts U.S., S. Korea for Turn |
| 2016-06-25 PerMission at UN Sends Notice to U.S. Department of |
| 2016-06-27 NCC Spokesman DPRK Blasts U.S. for Moving to Tighten |
| 2016-06-29 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. for Its Moves to Create |
| 2016-06-30 Spokesman for Committee for Peaceful Reunification U |
| 2016-07-01 FM Spokesman Accuses U.S. of Stirring up Atmosphere |
| 2016-07-05 KPA Panmunjom Mission on Gravity of Military |
| 2016-07-07 FM Hits U.S. for Its Hideous Crime _ KCNA Watch |
| 2016-07-11 FM Spokesman Warns U.S. of Its Moves for Nuclear War |
| 2016-07-11 KPA General Staff Artillery Bureau Warns against U.S |
| 2016-07-15 FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. Introduction of Nuclear |
| 2016-07-18 FM Spokesman Hits Presidential Statement of Asia-Europe |
| 2016-07-19 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. Ambassador for Flying above |
| 2016-07-21 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. for Finding Fault with DPRK' |
| 2016-07-25 FM Spokesman U.S. Will Meet Doom If It Ignites Second |
| 2016-07-28 FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. Secretary of State's Rec |
| 2016-07-28 NPCK Spokesman Calls for Struggle for Pullback of U. |
| 2016-08-17 FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. Nuclear Arms Buildup |
| 2016-08-18 KPA Panmunjom Mission Only Miserable End Awaits |

| |
|---|
| 2016-08-21 CPRC Spokesman Slashes U.S.-S. Korea Projected Ulji |
| 2016-08-22 FM Spokesman Lashes at Ulji Freedom Guardian |
| 2016-08-22 KPA Spokesman General Staff Clarifies Principled |
| 2016-08-26 FM Spokesman Raps Hostile Forces' Moves to Ratchet |
| 2016-08-28 FM Spokesman Categorically Rejects UNSC Press |
| 2016-09-01 FM Spokesman Slashes at U.S. Persistent Sanctions ag |
| 2016-09-02 KPA Panmunjom Mission Exposes Adventurous Nature of |
| 2016-09-03 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. Arms Buildup around Korean |
| 2016-09-07 FM Spokesman Demands Pullout of U.S. Forces from S. |
| 2016-09-07 FM Spokesman Rejects UN Security Council's Press Release |
| 2016-09-08 FM Spokesman Slams Obama's Reckless Remarks |
| 2016-09-11 FM Spokesman Refutes Obama's _Statement_ against Nuc |
| 2016-09-13 KAPPC Spokesman Warns Hostile Forces against |
| 2016-09-20 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. Accusations over Its Measure |
| 2016-09-20 FM Spokesman U.S. Air Attack on Base of Syrian |
| 2016-09-22 KPA Spokesman General Staff Clarifies Its Stand to R |
| 2016-10-06 FM Spokesman Blasts Obama Group's Racket for Sanctions |
| 2016-10-15 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. Official's Remarks Hurting |
| 2016-10-20 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. Official for Talking about |
| 2016-10-22 FM Spokesman Censures U.S.-Japan-S. Korea Joint |
| 2016-10-24 Delegate PerMission DPRK Permanent Mission to UN |
| 2016-10-26 NCC Spokesman DPRK Rejects Anti-DPRK _Open Statement |
| 2016-11-02 FM Spokesman Slams Anti-DPRK Remarks of U.S. Deputy |
| 2016-11-21 FM Memorandum of DPRK Foreign Ministry |
| 2016-11-22 FM Spokesman Blasts Obama for Pulling up DPRK |
| 2016-11-25 FM Spokesman Japan-S. Korea Agreement on Protecting |
| 2016-12-01 FM Spokesman Hits out at UNSC _Sanctions Resolution_ |
| 2016-12-02 KAPPC Statement Lashes out at UNSC _Sanctions Resolution |
| 2016-12-27 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S.-S. Korea Discussion on |
| 2017-01-08 FM Spokesman DPRK's ICBM Development Is to Cope |
| 2017-01-19 FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. State Secretary's Remark |
| 2017-02-15 FM Spokesman of DPRK Slams U.S. and Vassal Forces |
| 2017-03-02 KPA General Staff Warns Aggressors of Merciless Nuclear |
| 2017-03-04 Delegate Calls on NAM to Pay Attention to Situation |
| 2017-03-04 FM Spokesman DPRK Will Deal Merciless Retaliatory St |
| 2017-03-08 FM Spokesman Rejects Press Statement of UNSC |
| 2017-03-09 KPA Spokesman Ballistic Rocket Launching Drill Is |
| 2017-03-10 NPCK Spokesman THAAD Deployment Will Bring Catastrophe |

| |
|---|
| 2017-03-24 FM Spokesman DPPK Will Not Take Part in UN Conference |
| 2017-03-26 KPA General Staff Warns U.S., S. Korean Forces of |
| 2017-03-30 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. Racket of Tightening |
| 2017-03-30 FM Spokesman U.S. Will be Held Accountable for |
| 2017-03-31 KAPPC Spokesman Slams U.S. for Scheme to Keep Its |
| 2017-04-03 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. Sanctions Racket |
| 2017-04-07 Delegate's Speech at UN Disarmament Commission Meeting |
| 2017-04-09 FM Spokesman U.S. Missile Attack on Syria Unpardonable |
| 2017-04-11 KPA General Staff Blasts U.S. Double Standards |
| 2017-04-14 U.S. KPA General Staff Provocative Option Will Meet |
| 2017-04-21 KAPPC Spokesman DPRK Will Not Rule out Any Option |
| 2017-04-22 FM Spokesman U.S. Muscle-flexing Can Never Browbeat |
| 2017-04-25 FM Spokesman U.S.-led International Pressure Can Never |
| 2017-04-26 FM Spokesman Hits out at UNSC's Partiality |
| 2017-05-01 FM Spokesman DPRK Will Bolster Nuclear Deterrence at |
| 2017-05-12 DPRK SPA Foreign Affairs Committee's Letter of |
| 2017-05-16 FM Spokesman Rejects Press Statement of UNSC |
| 2017-05-18 KAPPC Spokesman Those Faulting DPRK's Measure for |
| 2017-05-20 FM Spokesman Hits Behavior of U.S. and Its Vassal Forces |
| 2017-05-23 FM Spokesman Refutes U.S. Act of Faulting DPRK's Test |
| 2017-05-24 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. and Vassal Forces for Fault |
| 2017-05-24 KAPPC Spokesman Hits U.S. and Its Followers for Fault |
| 2017-05-25 KPA General Staff Spokesman Hits out at S. Korean Forces |
| 2017-05-30 FM Spokesman Refutes G-7 Summit Joint Statement |
| 2017-06-01 Delegate DPRK Delegation Declares Stand on Rocket Test |
| 2017-06-03 KPA Spokesman on U.S Mock ICBM Interception Test |
| 2017-06-04 FM Spokesman Slashes at Another UN _Sanctions Resolution |
| 2017-06-08 Delegate Slashes UNSC's _Sanctions Resolution |
| 2017-06-09 FM Spokesman of DPRK Flays Tillerson's Reckless Remature |
| 2017-06-10 KAPPC Spokesman Urges U.S. to Stop Sanctions and |
| 2017-06-16 Delegate DPRK Will Continue to Bolster up National |
| 2017-06-22 DPRK FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. War Hysteria |
| 2017-06-29 NNWC Spokesman Military Pressure Will Only Precipitate |
| 2017-07-07 FM Spokesman Statement of DPRK Foreign Ministry |
| 2017-07-14 FM Spokesman on UNSC _Resolution on Sanctions |
| 2017-07-25 FM Spokesman Slams U.S. CIA Director's Remarks |
| 2017-07-30 FM Spokesman Warns U.S. to Wake up from Foolish Dreams |
| 2017-08-02 KAPPC Spokesman Urges U.S. to Pay Heed to DPRK's War |

| |
|---|
| 2017-08-03 FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. Reckless Moves |
| 2017-08-03 FM Spokesman Slashes at U.S. Independent Sanctions a |
| 2017-08-08 KAPPC Spokesman Rejects Anti-DPRK _Sanctions Resolution |
| 2017-08-09 KPA Spokesman U.S. Should Be Prudent under Present A |
| 2017-08-09 KPA Spokesman U.S. War Hysteria Will Only Bring Misery |
| 2017-08-10 KPA Will Take Practical Action_ Commander of Strategy |
| 2017-08-19 FM Spokesman Flails UN Secretary General for Mislead |
| 2017-08-19 FM Spokesman Hits U.S. Vice-President's Reckless Act |
| 2017-08-22 PKA Panmunjom Mission U.S. Will be to Blame for Cons |
| 2017-08-24 NPCK Spokesman Intolerable Is Fools' Play with Fire_ |
| 2017-08-25 Delegate DPRK Delegation Clarifies Its Stand at |
| 2017-08-31 Delegate U.S. Is Chiefly to Blame for Tense Situation |
| 2017-08-31 FM Spokesman Rejects _Presidential Statement_ of UNS |
| 2017-09-02 Delegate Rejects UNSC _Presidential Statement_ |
| 2017-09-05 FM Spokesman Denounces U.S. for Trying to Impose Add |
| 2017-09-07 KAPPC Spokesman Clarifies Stand on Hostile Forces' M |
| 2017-09-08 Delegate DPRK Will Not Flinch Even Inch from Road of |
| 2017-09-08 FM Spokesman Gives Briefing on Situation |
| 2017-09-11 FM Spokesman Warns U.S. Frantic to Fabricate Harshes |
| 2017-09-13 FM Spokesman Categorically Rejects Harshest-ever UNS |
| 2017-09-14 KAPPC Spokesman on DPRK Stand toward UNSC _Sanctions |
| 2017-09-18 FM Spokesman Discloses U.S. Intention of Claiming |
| 2017-09-23 Delegate Affirms DPRK's Stand on NAM _ KCNA Watch |
| 2017-09-24 KAPPC Spokesman U.S. Maniacs Will Be Tamed with Fire |
| 2017-09-30 KAPPC Spokesman Trump Will Face Bitterer Disgrace an |
| 2017-10-07 Delegate DPRK Will Not Flinch from Bolstering Nuclear |
| 2017-10-19 Delegate DPRK Delegate's Speech at Fourth Committee |
| 2017-10-19 Delegate Speech of Head of DPRK Delegation at IPU Se |
| 2017-11-11 FM Spokesman Trump's Visit Is Business Trip_ DPRK FM |
| 2017-11-22 FM Spokesman Blasts U.S. for Re-listing DPRK as |
| 2017-12-02 FM Spokesman on Planned Joint Aerial Drill by U.S. a |
| 2017-12-06 FM Spokesman Blasts American High-level Politicians |
| 2017-12-14 FM Spokesman Press Statement of DPRK Foreign Ministry |
| 2017-12-14 FM Spokesman Warns U.S. and Its Followers against Se |
| 2017-12-21 FM Spokesman Flails U.S. Anti-DPRK Moves over Cyber |
| 2017-12-22 FM Spokesman Snipes at U.S. Report on _National Security |
| 2017-12-24 FM Spokesman Statement of DPRK Foreign Ministry |
| 2017-12-25 KAPPC Spokesman U.S. Sanctions and Pressure Racket W |

| | |
|--|--|
| | 2018-01-27 FM Spokesman Another Unilateral Anti-DPRK Sanctions |
| | 2018-01-28 KNPC Spokesman Calls for Foiling U.S. Nuclear War Mo |
| | 2018-02-04 FM Spokesperson Blasts Trump _ KCNA Watch |
| | 2018-02-10 KAPPC Spokesman U.S. _2018 Nuclear Posture Review_ B |
| | 2018-02-16 PerMission Press Statement of DPRK Permanent Mission |
| | 2018-02-22 KNPC Spokesman Blasts U.S.-Japan War Drills _ KCNA W |
| | 2018-02-25 FM Spokesman U.S. Hit for Bringing Clouds of War to |
| | 2018-02-26 PerMissionPress Statement of DPRK Permanent Mission |
| | 2018-02-27 NCCAC Spokesman Anti-DPRK _Public Statement_ of Inte |
| | 2018-03-03 FM Spokesman on DPRK-U.S. Dialogue _ KCNA Watch |
| | 2018-05-03 PerMission Press Statement of Permanent Mission of D |
| | 2018-05-06 FM Spokesman Flays U.S. Increased Pressure against D |
| | 2018-05-26 FM Briefs on Dismantlement of Northern Nuclear Test |
| | 2018-07-07 FM Spokesman on DPRK-U.S. High-level Talks _ KCNA Wa |
| | 2018-08-05 KAPPC on Extension of U.S.-Japan Atomic Energy Agree |
| | 2018-08-09 FM Spokesman Press Statement of Spokesperson for DPR |
| | 2018-08-11 PerMission Press Statement of DPRK Permanent Mission |
| Low level | 2012-08-31 FM Memorandum Terms U.S. Hostile Policy towards DPRK |
| | 2012-09-09 MEDIA DPRK Turns to Be Socialist Power _ KCNA Watch |
| | 2012-09-12 FM Institute DPRK Censures U.S. for Strong-arm Policy |
| | 2012-12-17 MEDIA Kim Jong Il's Songun Politics Brings About War |
| | 2012-12-24 MEDIA Kim Jong Il Leads DPRK to Victory in Nuclear S |
| | 2012-12-29 MEDIA Rodong DPRK's Peaceful Space Development, |
| | 2016-01-14 Korean Jurists Committee Accuses U.S. of Sidestepping |
| | 2016-02-08 MEDIA KPA, Elite Armed Forces Displaying Tradition o |
| | 2016-03-24 Spokesman for Korean Jurists Committee Slams Hostile |
| | 2016-04-12 MEDIA Kim Jong Un, Songun Brilliant Commander |
| | 2016-04-14 FM Spokesman U.S. State Secretary Accused of Trying |
| | 2016-04-17 FM Institute of International Political Studies of D |
| | 2016-04-26 MEDIA Commentary Nuclear Arms Race Hot among Big Pow |
| | 2016-05-06 MEDIA Greetings to WPK Seventh Congress from CPC Cen |
| | 2016-06-24 FM Dep US Affairs Clarifies Stand of DPRK at |
| | 2016-06-28 FM Institute Disarmament and Peace Spokesman U.S.-Ja |
| | 2016-07-06 FM Institute of American Studies Spokesman U.S. |
| | 2016-07-11 FM Informs Asian Diplomatic Envoys of Current Situation |
| | 2016-07-17 FM Spokesman Slams U.S.-S. Korea-Japan Confab _ KCNA |
| | 2016-07-28 Report FM Director General of Department of U.S. |
| 2016-08-05 MEDIA Commentary China News Service Denounces THAAD | |

| |
|---|
| 2016-08-15 Report FM Institute for International Studies U.S. I |
| 2016-09-09 FM Spokesman Blasts Anti-DPRK Invective of U.S. Official |
| 2016-09-14 FM Briefs Asian Diplomatic Envoys on Situation _ KCN |
| 2016-09-26 FM Institute of International Studies Exposes U.S. N |
| 2016-10-18 FM Institute of International Studies Criminal |
| 2016-11-06 MEDIA KCNA White Paper U.S. Collapse Is Its Fate in |
| 2016-12-05 FM Institute Vice Director U.S. Sanctions on DPRK Wi |
| 2016-12-22 FM Statement UNSC _Resolution on Sanctions_ 2321 |
| 2016-12-29 MEDIA KCNA Releases Detailed Report on DPRK's Victor |
| 2017-04-09 Report of FM Institute for Disarmament and Peace _ K |
| 2017-05-05 Report FM Institute for American Studies of DPRK For |
| 2017-05-05 Report Ministry of State Security DPRK Warns U.S., S |
| 2017-05-05 Report of FM Institute Disarmament and Peace on Vali |
| 2017-06-22 Report Researcher of DPRK Institute for International |
| 2017-09-28 Report FM Institute for American Studies on Anti-DPR |
| 2017-11-24 Report FM Institute American Studies U.S. Introduction |
| 2017-11-28 Report FM Institute American Studies Statement by Di |
| 2017-12-30 REPORT KCNA No Force Can Prevail over Independence a |
| 2018-01-18 FM Institute U.S. Accused of Convening FMs' Meeting |
| 2018-01-27 MEDIA KCNA Discloses Motive of U.S. Story about |
| 2018-02-06 FM Institute Answer of Spokesman for Institute for A |
| 2018-02-08 MEDIA Chinese Media Slashed for Arrogantly Meddling |
| 2018-02-15 FM Institute Statement by Director of Press, |
| 2018-02-15 FM Institute U.S. Condemned for Obstructing |
| 2018-02-26 MEDIA Resumption of Military Exercises Is Challenge |
| 2018-03-01 FM Institute Statement of Policy Research Director a |
| 2018-05-16 MEDIA KCNA Blasts U.S. and S. Korea for Staging Large |
| 2018-05-25 MEDIA Northern Nuclear Test Ground of DPRK Dismantle |
| 2018-07-19 MEDIA Panmunjom Declaration Should Be Honestly Imple |
| 2018-08-06 MEDIA U.S. Will Get Nothing with Its _Pressure Diplo |
| 2018-09-06 MEDIA Dialogue and Pressure Can Never Go Together |
| 2018-10-25 MEDIA Rodong Sinmun on DPRK-China Friendship |
| 2018-11-05 MEDIA Inter-Korean Joint Events Held in Mt Kumgang _ |
| 2018-11-27 MEDIA 4th Meeting of DPRK-China Border Joint Commission |
| 2018-12-16 FM Institute Press Statement of Policy Research Dire |
| 2016-01-05 REPORT KJU Watches Firing Contest of KPA Artillery U |
| 2016-01-06 REPORT Government Statement DPRK Proves Successful i |
| 2016-01-10 REPORT KJU Visits Ministry of People's Armed Forces |

| | |
|------------|---|
| 2016-01-11 | REPORT KJU Has Photo Session with Contributors to H- |
| 2016-02-21 | REPORT KJU Guides Actual Maneuvers of KPA Large Combat |
| 2016-02-21 | REPORT KJU Watches Flight Drill of KPA Fighter Pilot |
| 2016-03-04 | REPORT KJU Guides Test-fire of New Multiple Launch R |
| 2016-03-09 | REPORT KJU Guides Work for Mounting Nuclear Warheads |
| 2016-03-11 | REPORT KJU Watches Ballistic Rocket Launch Drill of |
| 2016-03-11 | REPORT KJU Watches KPA Tank Crews' Competition-2016 |
| 2016-03-15 | REPORT KJU Guides Ballistic Rocket's Reentry Environ |
| 2016-03-20 | REPORT KJU Guides Landing and Anti-landing Drills of |
| 2016-03-25 | REPORT KJU Guides Large-scale Intensive Striking Drill |
| 2016-04-09 | REPORT KJU Guides Ground Jet Test of New-type High-P |
| 2016-04-24 | REPORT KJU Guides Underwater Test-fire of Strategic |
| 2016-05-08 | REPORT KJU Decision of Seventh Congress of WPK Adopt |
| 2016-05-10 | REPORT KJU Receives Congratulatory Message from Xi J |
| 2016-06-23 | REPORT KJU Guides Test-fire of Hwasong-10 _ KCNA Wat |
| 2016-06-29 | REPORT KJU Fourth Session of 13th SPA Held in DPRK i |
| 2016-07-01 | REPORT KJU Sends Congratulatory Message to Xi Jinping |
| 2016-07-02 | REPORT KJU Congratulations to Kim Jong Un from Chine |
| 2016-07-11 | REPORT KJU Congratulates Xi Jinping _ KCNA Watch |
| 2016-07-11 | REPORT KJU Greetings to Kim Jong Un from Xi Jinping |
| 2016-07-20 | REPORT KJU Guides Drill for Ballistic Rocket Fire _ |
| 2016-08-25 | REPORT KJU Guides Strategic Submarine Underwater Bal |
| 2016-09-06 | REPORT KJU Guides Fire Drill of Ballistic Rockets _ |
| 2016-09-20 | REPORT KJU Guides Ground Jet Test of New-type High-P |
| 2016-09-22 | REPORT KJU Has Photo Session with Contributors to Su |
| 2016-11-04 | REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Special Operation Battalion |
| 2016-11-11 | REPORT KJU Inspects Islet Defence Detachment in West |
| 2016-11-25 | REPORT KJU Inspects Headquarters of Large Combined U |
| 2016-11-26 | REPORT KJU Guides Skiing Training of Mountain Infant |
| 2016-12-02 | REPORT KJU Guides Intensive Striking Drill of KPA Army |
| 2016-12-04 | REPORT KJU Guides Combat Flight Contest among Command |
| 2016-12-21 | REPORT KJU Guides Night Assault Combat Flight Drill |
| 2016-12-24 | REPORT KJU Makes Opening Address at First Conference |
| 2017-01-01 | REPORT KJU DPRK Will Defend Peace and Security of St |
| 2017-01-01 | REPORT KJU Kim Jong Un Reviews Achievements Made Las |
| 2017-01-28 | REPORT KJU Guides Attack Tactical Drills |
| 2017-02-13 | REPORT KJU Guides Test-fire of Surface-to -surface M |
| 2017-03-07 | REPORT KJU Supervises Ballistic Rocket Launching Drills |

| |
|---|
| 2017-03-31 REPORT Government's Memorandum on Kim Jong Un 's Exp |
| 2017-04-07 REPORT on Anniversary of Kim Jong Un 's Assumption o |
| 2017-04-09 REPORT Government National Meeting Marks Anniversary |
| 2017-04-13 REPORT KJU Guides Dropping and Target-striking Conte |
| 2017-04-16 REPORT Government Military Parade, Public Procession |
| 2017-04-26 REPORT KJU Supervises Combined Fire Demonstration of |
| 2017-05-03 REPORT Commentary on DPRK-China Relations |
| 2017-05-15 REPORT KJU Guides Test-Fire of New Rocket |
| 2017-05-17 REPORT KJU Has Photo Session with Developers of |
| 2017-05-22 REPORT KJU Supervises Test-fire of Ballistic Missile |
| 2017-07-05 REPORT KJU Supervises Test-launch of Inter-continent |
| 2017-07-11 REPORT KJU Reception Given to Celebrate Successful T |
| 2017-07-13 REPORT KJU Kim Jong Un Has Photo Session with |
| 2017-07-29 REPORT KJU Guides Second Test-fire of ICBM Hwasong-1 |
| 2017-08-07 REPORT Government Statement of DPRK Government |
| 2017-08-15 REPORT KJU Inspects KPA Strategic Force Command |
| 2017-08-26 REPORT KJU Guides Target-striking Contest of KPA |
| 2017-08-30 REPORT KJU Guides Strategic Ballistic Rocket Launching |
| 2017-09-03 REPORT KJU Gives Guidance to Nuclear Weaponization _ |
| 2017-09-03 REPORT Presidium of Political Bureau of C.C., WPK He |
| 2017-09-10 REPORT KJU Has Photo Session with Contributors to Su |
| 2017-09-10 REPORT KJU Nuclear Scientists and Technicians Feted |
| 2017-09-16 REPORT KJU Guides Hwasong-12 Launching Drill Again _ |
| 2017-09-24 REPORT Government Rally of SPA Presidium, Cabinet, M |
| 2017-10-08 REPORT Government Second Plenum of Seventh WPK Centr |
| 2017-11-02 REPORT KJU Reply Message to Xi Jinping |
| 2017-11-29 REPORT Government Statement on Successful Test-fire |
| 2017-11-29 REPORT KJU Guides Test-fire of ICBM Hwasong-15 |
| 2017-12-09 REPORT KJU Climbs Mt Paektu |
| 2017-12-09 REPORT on UN Under-Secretary General's Visit to DPRK |
| 2017-12-13 REPORT KJU Commendations Awarded to Contributors to |
| 2018-01-01 REPORT KJU Makes New Year Address |
| 2018-01-01 REPORT KJU on DPRK's Foreign Policy |
| 2018-01-02 REPORT KJU on Successes Achieved Last Year |
| 2018-01-12 REPORT KJU Inspects State Academy of Sciences |
| 2018-03-18 REPORT KJU Congratulates Xi Jinping |
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Ceremony Welcoming Kim Jong Un Held at |
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Kim Jong Un Has Talks with Xi Jinping |

| |
|--|
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Kim Jong Un Invited to Luncheon Hosted by |
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Kim Jong Un 's Speech at Banquet |
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Kim Jong Un Sends Message of Thanks to Xi |
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Pays Unofficial Visit to China |
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Xi Jinping Hosts Banquet for Kim Jong Un |
| 2018-03-28 REPORT KJU Xi Jinping's Speech at Banquet |
| 2018-04-05 REPORT KJU Reply Message to Kim Jong Un from Xi Jinping |
| 2018-04-15 REPORT KJU Meets Song Tao |
| 2018-04-18 REPORT KJU Meets Song Tao Again |
| 2018-04-21 REPORT KJU 3rd Plenary Meeting of 7th C.C., WPK Held |
| 2018-04-21 REPORT KJU Third Plenary Meeting 7th Central Committee |
| 2018-05-04 REPORT KJU Meets FM of China |
| 2018-05-09 REPORT KJU Sends Letter of Thanks to Xi Jinping _ KC |
| 2018-05-10 REPORT KJU Kim Jong Un Meets U.S. Secretary of State |
| 2018-06-01 REPORT KJU Receives Russian FM |
| 2018-06-11 REPORT KJU Leaves for Singapore |
| 2018-06-13 REPORT KJU Historic First DPRK-U.S. Summit Meeting a |
| 2018-06-13 REPORT KJU Joint Statement from Kim Jong Un and Trump |
| 2018-06-16 REPORT KJU Sends Congratulatory Letter and Floral Ba |
| 2018-06-20 REPORT KJU Visits China _ KCNA Watch |
| 2018-09-06 REPORT KJU Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un Meets Special |
| 2018-09-09 REPORT Government Reception Given for Chinese Party |
| 2018-09-09 REPORT KJU Congratulatory Letter to Supreme Leader K |
| 2018-09-10 REPORT KJU Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un Meets Li |
| 2018-09-16 REPORT KJU Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un Sends Reply |
| 2018-09-20 REPORT KJU Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un and President |
| 2018-10-08 REPORT KJU Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un Meets U.S. Sec |

9. Appendices

9.1 Coding Scheme

Research Question for Coding: What information does North Korea convey in selected public state media communication?

| Macro-level codes | Micro-level codes |
|---------------------------------|---|
| Conflict definition | Definition of issue |
| | Self-image |
| | Enemy image |
| | Nuclear proliferation, reciprocity and counter-balancing |
| | Nuclear proliferation, compellence |
| | Nuclear proliferation, path-dependency |
| | Nuclear proliferation, empowerment and out-balancing |
| | Denuclearization, negotiated settlement |
| Knowledge about target audience | Knowledge about target audience's capabilities |
| | Knowledge about target audience's motives |
| | Knowledge about target audience's knowledge levels |
| | Knowledge about counterforce targets |
| | Knowledge about countervalue targets |
| | Miscellaneous – general knowledge about target audience |
| Target audience's knowledge | Knowledge about one's own capabilities |
| | Knowledge about one's own motives |
| | Knowledge about one's own knowledge levels |
| | Miscellaneous – public knowledge about oneself |
| Authority | Attribution to supreme levels of authority |
| | Attribution to semi-high levels of authority |
| | Attribution to high levels of authority |
| | Attribution to mid-levels of authority |
| | Attribution to low levels of authority |
| Content | Nuclear capabilities, fissile material and militarization |

| | |
|---------------|---|
| | Nuclear capabilities, delivery vehicles and launch platforms |
| | Nuclear capabilities, concealment |
| | Nuclear capabilities, reliability and survivability |
| | Nuclear command and control structures |
| | Capabilities miscellaneous – intelligence, surveillance, reconnaissance |
| | Stakes involved |
| | Contingency planning |
| | Purpose of nuclear weapons program, deterrence and status quo |
| | Purpose of nuclear weapons program, beyond deterrence and status quo |
| | Miscellaneous – contradictory content |
| Packaging | Negative inducement – solo |
| | Positive inducement – solo |
| | Negative and positive inducements – combination |
| | Miscellaneous – contradictory framing |
| Context | Moment of crisis, subcase 1 |
| | Moment of cooperation, subcase 1 |
| | Miscellaneous – relevant event, subcase 1 |
| | Moment of crisis, subcase 2 |
| | Moment of cooperation, subcase 2 |
| | Miscellaneous – relevant event, subcase 2 |
| | Moment of crisis, subcase 3 |
| | Moment of cooperation, subcase 3 |
| | Miscellaneous – relevant event, subcase 3 |
| | Moment of crisis, subcase 4 |
| | Moment of cooperation, subcase 4 |
| | Miscellaneous – relevant event, subcase 4 |
| Miscellaneous | Consistency, coherence, stability |
| | Responsibility, transparency |
| | US “hostile policy” |
| | Inter-Korean conflict |

9.2 List of Related Publications

Following § 6 Paragraph 7 of the relevant regulations (Promotionsordnung der Fakultät für Wirtschafts- und Sozialwissenschaften vom 18. Januar 2017), the following short pieces of publication drew from parts of this thesis research:

- Suh, Elisabeth. 2023. "Pyongyang and Its Nuclear Weapons Programme: A Credible Threat?", *Italian Institute for Political Studies (ISPI)*, August 4. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/pyongyang-and-its-nuclear-weapons-programme-a-credible-threat-138078>.
- Suh, Elisabeth. 2022. "North Korea's Recent Missile Tests Illustrate Its Nuclear Tactics", *9DASHLINE*, June 30. <https://www.9dashline.com/article/north-koreas-recent-missile-tests-illustrate-its-nuclear-tactics>.
- Suh, Elisabeth. 2022. "Pyongyang's Momentum: Moving its Nuclear Weapons and Missile Programs Forward", *CSIS PONI Analysis*, April 4. <https://nuclearnetwork.csis.org/pyongyangs-momentum-moving-its-nuclear-weapons-and-missile-programs-forward/>.
- Suh, Elisabeth. 2021. "Strategic Signals Versus Noisy Signals: The DPRK's Deterrence Posture", *The 2021 UK PONI Papers*, November. https://static.rusi.org/304_2021_PONI_Papers_0.pdf.
- Suh, Elisabeth. 2020. "Inferring from signaling: North Korea's deterrence strategy and bargaining tactic", *CSIS Next Generation Nuclear Network*, August 7. <https://nuclearnetwork.csis.org/inferring-from-signaling-north-koreas-deterrence-strategy-and-bargaining-tactic/>.