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Reconciling Realism: DPRK-ROK Co-operation and IR Implications

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In IR discourse, the concept of security is changing. The critical approaches that have emerged to challenge traditional ones in recent decades have earned significant intellectual support. According to Steve Smith [1], a definitive characteristic that binds these critical security schools is their rejection of realism. In security language, critical approaches agree that the state does not deserve the privilege of being the solitary referent object of security studies. Since the end of the Cold War, they claim that the relative power of the state has declined; state sovereignty is a “token of its former self” according to Ken Booth.[2] Far more wars nowadays are fought by rival factions within states, rather than between states themselves.[3] Indeed, there are plenty of examples in today’s world that fail to correspond to dogmatic theories of realism. But what conclusions ought to be drawn from this? This paper analyzes an ongoing case that seems to be incompatible with key tenants of realist theory. On the surface, today’s co-operative ventures between North and South Korea are at clear odds with realism. The DPRK and the ROK, after all, adhere to rival political and economic ideologies, and they have a history of violent conflict. Even more striking about the current ventures between these two states is that they are formally at war with one another. I will argue that while this situation may be unique, a comprehensive look will show that DPRK-ROK co-operation does not conflict with realism’s most important aspects. For IR scholars, it will be shown that a realist framework of analysis remains suitable for analysis of the Korean peninsula.

Many points will be covered in constructing this argument, and my paper is structured as follows. The first section provides an overview of realism’s fundamental tenants and a historical analysis of Cold War relations between the DPRK and the ROK; its aim is to show that realist theory has very little difficulty explaining the Cold War situation on the Korean peninsula. Although this point is well established in existing literature, it provides an important context for my principle argument that follows. The second section examines the co-operative programs that have begun between the DPRK and the ROK since the end of the Cold War. While outlining the three most significant of these inter-state ventures from a historical perspective, I simultaneously make a case for why each government chooses to participate in such a program with a state it is technically at war with. Once these reasons are established, I then shift focus back to an IR perspective to argue my two major points: a realist framework of analysis is still effective, if not superior, when explaining the political climate of the Korean peninsula, and the cross-border initiatives the two countries are currently involved are not contradictory to a realist perspective of IR.

Realism and DPRK-ROK relations during the Cold War

Realist theory, of course, has several variants. This section’s preliminary argument, as well as my main argument that will follow, is dependent on a definition of realism. My purpose in this paper, however, is not to debate the nuances of realist theory; I aim only to show the applicability of realism’s main tenants to DPRK-ROK relations, both during the Cold War and in light of the recent developments that I will discuss. For this purpose, a detailed analysis of inter-paradigm debates and a precise definition of realism is unnecessary. Instead, three fundamental assumptions, present in all forms of realism, will be used as a basis for my points. They are as follows:

1. The international system is anarchic. It matters not to this study whether this condition is due to human nature (classical realism) or to the structural restraints of states (neo-realism).[4]

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1. States are the most important actors in this system; they are self-interested rational actors, and their national security is always an overriding priority.
2. The security dilemma is inherent to the international system. Peace between rival states is maintained by a balance of power.[5]

This section focuses on the Korean peninsula during the Cold War, and it aims to show the applicability of these realist concepts to the situation that manifested post-1953. It is important to emphasize that I am not necessarily arguing the superiority of a realist approach vis-a-vis other paradigms; this, of course, would require a comprehensive analysis and comparison of alternative theories. The point is merely to show that realism has minimal difficulty explaining the political climate that was in fact present during this time. Since the scholarly consensus on this point is quite unanimous, my analysis here is admittedly brief. As I have mentioned, however, it is necessary that I establish this preliminary point to set up my point that key realist concepts remain relevant to the Korean peninsula despite state behavior that, superficially, is to the contrary.

If the realist tenants I have outlined above are indeed applicable to the Korean peninsula, we should expect to see an inter-state relationship that is characterized in its most basic form by military rivalry and antagonism. Realism predicts that since both states will be looking to exploit weakness in the other, an arms race will consequently develop. If the balance of military power between the rival states remains relatively stable, however, it will effectively deter either state from initiating conflict. The first question, therefore, in determining whether realist theory is consistent with the situation that arose on the Korean peninsula after 1953 is to explore whether an arms race did in fact occur. With respect to this point, the evidence is resoundingly convincing. Following the armistice and a border being settled upon, a four-kilometer wide demilitarized zone (DMZ) was mined off, and both countries deployed the lion's share of their military forces along their respective edge of it. As Choi points out, although these forces were heavily depleted following three years of war, they were quickly rebuilt with the help of the DPRK's and the ROK's respective "superpower patrons." [6] By the 1970-s, the US feared that the ROK was "falling behind" in terms of military material. Despite the fact that its servicemen and military resources were becoming increasingly mired in the Vietnam conflict, the US saw the strategic importance of the ROK keeping pace in terms of military capability with its rival to the north. The result was a \$1.5 billion [7] military assistance package to the ROK in 1970 in order to modernize and bolster the state's "ground force and air defense." [8]

Despite this ever increasingly militarization, inter-state war did not brake out on the Korean peninsula during the Cold War. A second question, thus, spurs from the first: was a balance of military power responsible for the peace? The realist concept of deterrence offers a convincing explanation for this case. It is quite clear that DPRK, historically the more aggressive of the two states, seriously considered launching a full-scale invasion of its neighbor more than one occasion. [9] ROK authorities have discovered four "infiltration" tunnels built underneath the DMZ, hypothetically constructed by the DPRK in order to facilitate a surprise attack. The third such tunnel, found in 1978, certainly gives credence to this idea. Discovered two kilometers short of a major military base, experts claim that it is large enough to allow 30 000 fully-equipped troops to pass through it in a single hour. [10] Deterrence theory suggests that the DPRK opted not invade because it had no distinct military advantage over the ROK. In the previous paragraph, I have shown that the US government placed significant importance on the ROK keeping pace with the DPRK in terms of military capability. This same point applies here: in order to continue deterring the DPRK from launching an attack, the US was concerned with maintaining the balance of power on the Korean peninsula. While according to Choi's research the DPRK forces held the overall advantage up until 1980, the presence of American soldiers (up to 100 000 at certain times) and war material was effectively able to the maintain a stable balance of power between the opposing countries. Citing realist theory, he predicts that this *status quo* would "continue into the 1980-s" and quite possibly beyond. [11] For this paper's intents and purposes, he was correct. The argument for deterrence applies to the ROK as well. Despite 394 military-related deaths of ROK soldiers along the DMZ since its creation, South Korea too was restrained by the logic of deterrence created by a balance of power; without a sufficient military advantage, the ROK was equally hesitant to initiate inter-state conflict with the DPRK. [12]

As I have mentioned, there is nothing novel about these points. There is widespread scholarly agreement on the utility of realist theory in explaining the Cold War situation on the Korean peninsula. In a retrospective analysis of northeast Asian security, for example, Calder states that the Cold War created a "static, stable, and oddly

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comfortable world.” While relations between several states in the region were antagonistic to say the least, the motivations for actions and behavior was nevertheless predictable by using a realist framework.[13] Kang echoes this point, stating that “given the tension” between the DPRK and the ROK, “small events had the potential to spiral out of control, yet [they were] managed with care on both sides...deterrence has been clear and unambiguous.”[14] Also consistent with realism is the character of inter-governmental relations between the DPRK and the ROK during this period. Between the end of the Korean War and the late 1980-s, there were no sustained relations between Seoul and Pyongyang. Even in times when provocations along the DMZ or elsewhere raised the specter of war, minimal inter-governmental communication was documented between the DPRK and the ROK.[15] It is reasonable to hypothesize that because of the international political climate, any sort of co-operation, if at all desired, was impossible. When viewed from a realist perspective, there is nothing odd at all about the overall situation and the stability of the Korean peninsula during the Cold War.

Co-operative Developments in the Post-Cold War Era

While the greater history of interaction between the DPRK and the ROK has been admirably consistent with realist theory, three significant co-operative programs have developed between the two states during the 1990-s. In this section, I will discuss North Korean tourism, family reunions between citizens of the DPRK and the ROK, and the establishment of the Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC). My analysis will be primarily from a historical perspective, but I draw important conclusions in this section with respect to state behavior and the motivations for it. This approach will prepare the way for my later analysis of how a realist perspective is in fact reconcilable with these developments.

Tourism in North Korea

The reclusive DPRK state embarked on a program to encourage tourism in the mid 1980-s. The reasons behind this sudden initiative cannot be confirmed; the DPRK has never explicitly stated why it chose this policy at this time. After examining the circumstances, however, it seems clear that this policy shift was in response to external pressures. As the DPRK's economy hit rock bottom in the 1990-s, tourism became an important source of income for the regime.[16] As I will explain, when the high reward-low risk benefits of tourism were realized by DPRK leadership, it continued to grow as an institution. Its dimensions are currently at the point where I suggest that it is now indispensable to the regime's survival.

The first indications of a policy shift with respect to tourism was in 1986. It was reported in the western press that the DPRK was not only seeking new air links with Europe, Asia, and Africa, but that it was also planning to rapidly boost accommodation capacity in Pyongyang.[17] Two reasons for this development were speculated. The first suggested that the move was directly related to the upcoming Summer Olympics in Seoul. Pyongyang had demanded on several occasions to co-host the Games since they had been awarded to Seoul in 1981, and journalists hypothesized that North Korea's new tourism policy was a last ditch effort to secure some role in their administration.[18] They did not, after all, want the international prestige of hosting the games going to entirely their political rival.[19] The second explanation was significantly bleaker in its origin. The DPRK's economy was in sharp decline by this point, and the regime, it was speculated, was under increasing pressure from its Soviet and Chinese allies to improve economic performance immediately. An influx of tourism seemed the fastest and surest way for the DPRK to bolster its dwindling foreign currency reserves to the satisfaction of its allies.[20] Both explanations are plausible here, and the DPRK's actual motivation to expand tourism was likely a combination of these two factors.

The end of the Cold War saw the DPRK take another step forward with respect to its tourist program. King points out that the DPRK “moderated its usual strident rhetoric” and militant behaviour towards the US, Japan, and the ROK in the early 1990-s. He hypothesizes that this was due to heightened insecurity of North Korean leadership following the sudden collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe.[21] Indeed, dialogue between the DPRK and the ROK was increasing frequent and cordial during this time. This may have been a factor in the DPRK's 1992 decision to allow South Korean citizens living abroad to join approved tour programs, a privilege that was previously unavailable to them.[22] But if the DPRK's attitude following the Cold War was a deviation from the norm, the 1994 nuclear crisis certainly saw a return to the *status quo* of anti-Western rhetoric and provocative saber-rattling. It is interesting to

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note, however, that as tensions escalated in and around the Korean peninsula during this time, the DPRK did not diverge from its policy of encouraging tourism.[23] The logical explanation for this contradictory behavior is simple: by this point, revenues from tourism (which I will explore in greater depth later) had taken on an important role in sustaining the impoverished regime. As long as the authorities could control exactly what visitors did and saw while in the DPRK, as well as who saw and interacted with the tourists, it represented only positive, perhaps even vital, gains for the state itself.

Since the mid 1990-s, a distinct pattern has emerged concerning tourism in the DPRK: despite the odd setback here and there, its dimensions and importance have continued to expand. It is at this point as well that we see formal engagement between the DPRK and the ROK with respect to tourism. By 1998, South Korean citizens (now including those living in the ROK) could be taken to the North by ferry and then bused to the culturally significant Kumgang mountain range. The tour was so successful that tour operators from Hyundai began to press for an overland route to the Kumgang mountains through the DMZ.[24] Given the obvious security implications, negotiations between the DPRK and the ROK were rather tedious, and it was four years before the first bus load of tourists drove across the DMZ in February of 2003.[25] The DPRK introduced yet another expansion of its tourism program in 2005 when it opened up the southern city of Kaesong for day tours; by this point, over 1000 tourists were crossing the DMZ every day. Currently, in the Kumgang Mountain Resort Area, Hyundai is currently building a wide variety of tourist attractions and lodgings capable of handling half a million tourists from the ROK per year.[26]

Theoretically, of course, the DPRK can pull the plug on tourism at any time. I question, however, if it could in reality when the state's well-documented economic condition is considered. The CIA estimates that the DPRK's GDP is roughly \$26 billion. Last year, *The Korea Times* reported that the DPRK made over \$10 million from the entry fee paid by tourists entering the Kumgang mountain area last year.[27] An exact amount of revenue generated by the DPRK via tourism is impossible to find. However, it is possible to estimate its importance by placing this entry fee in perspective. The figure mentioned does not include, presumably, money spent by tourists in the resort area itself, and the royalty payments paid by the Hyundai corporation for the right to conduct business in the DPRK. Moreover, it certainly does not include revenue generated by tourism in Pyongyang, in Kaesong, or in other destinations opened to Chinese tourists along the DPRK's northern frontier. I have made the point that tourism should be viewed as something that was imposed upon the DPRK unwillingly. While the DPRK still espouses the same *juche* ideals the regime was founded upon, I purpose that the economic challenges it currently faces renders tourism at least somewhat indispensable. If the DPRK's internal economic conditions were sufficient to ensure regime survival, it is almost certain that the state would bar foreigners from visiting the country the way it did for so many years. This, however, is simply not the case. Tourism provides a major source of income to DPRK's sputtering economy, and it quite plausible that the regime's survival now, at least partially, depends on revenues generated from it. Historical indications, moreover, are that tourism as an institution will continue to expand. Insofar as DPRK authorities can control who interacts with tourists while they are in North Korea, the regime's security *risk* is minimal. Its *reward* for hosting visitors, I have hypothesized, has reached the proportions where it is too vital to be rejected.

I need not go into the same depth when speculating about why the ROK allows its citizens to take part in the DPRK's tourist programs. As I have indicated, tourism in North Korea is meticulously controlled by the state. South Koreans, moreover, are not oblivious to the fact that what they are seeing is a highly distorted version of the DPRK at its best. Because the DPRK does not want significant numbers of its citizens mingling with healthy, well-dressed, camera-toting South Koreans, any concerns of the ROK might have in this regard have already been taken care of by DPRK authorities. In terms of security implications for the ROK, the incredible measures taken by the North to minimize unsupervised contact between their citizens and tourists effectively neutralizes any concerns the state might have.

Family Reunions between North and South Koreans

The 1953 armistice divided the Korean peninsula not only in terms of geography, but it divided countless families within it. Official rhetoric from both sides claims that the reunification of families is the primary reason why reunification of Korea as a whole must be vigilantly pursued. Estimates are that roughly than 10 million Koreans (roughly 1 in 6) have known relatives living on either side of the DMZ.[28] I will argue here that the motivations for the South Korean government in pursuing family reunions is simple: it represents a democratic state responding to the

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demands of the people it is accountable to. As for the DPRK, I will show that financial concerns are once again the driving force behind participation in this cross-border initiative.

After nearly a decade of sporadic negotiations mediated by the Red Cross, the first family reunion between North and South Koreans took place in 1985. The optimism created from this case, however, quickly deteriorated, and plans for future reunions were scrapped because of several military incidents.[29] But corresponding to the DPRK's less hostile attitude towards the ROK that I have mentioned in the preceding section, the early 1990-s saw a regeneration in intergovernmental talks about family reunions. This second round of talks, however, was derailed by the nuclear issue in 1994, and ended up yielding no results. Reunions did not become a prominent issue again until Kim Dae-Jung's election in 1998. The *Sunshine Policy*[30] that would later earn him a Nobel Peace Prize was generally successful in terms of strengthening ties between the DPRK and ROK. At a historic summit between Kim Jong-Il and Kim Dae-Jung in June 2000, reunions were a key issue on the agenda. Under a new agreement, the first reunion since 1985 took place the following August of the same year. In September, athletes from the DPRK and the ROK marched under the same flag at the Sydney Olympics in a move that was highly symbolic of state relations between Seoul and Pyongyang at the time. The pendulum has, of course, swung back and forth since then, and the North has canceled planned reunions on short notice. Nevertheless, the point to be taken is that reunions have become an established norm in the last decade. Since 2000, *The Korea Times* reports that 16 family reunions have been held, and over 16 000 Koreans have had face to face contact with their relatives on the other side of the border.[31]

What motivates these states in allowing some of their citizens to participate in periodic family reunions? The ROK is a pluralist democracy, and again, I need not go into much detail on the reason why its government has pursued the institutionalization of family reunions with the North; the initiative can be adequately summarized as a government response to popular demand. Pursuit of increased inter-Korean family reunions, for example, was an important aspect of Roh Moo Hyun's successful presidential campaign in 2002.[32] The DPRK's motivation requires further investigation, and I argue that the answer is, once again, strictly financial. Jae Jean Suh argues that DPRK leaders are hesitant to allow cross-border reunions *en masse* for fear of the impacts that the exposure of its citizens to the outside world may potentially have.[33] This conclusion is rather obvious, given the well-known fact that the state generally does not allow its citizens any contact with the outside world. However, Suh also answers the question of why the DPRK allows *any* reunions whatsoever. He concludes that they do so because of the economic benefits it reaps.[34] Referring back to Kim Dae-Jung's *Sunshine Policy*, critics have long denounced it on the basis that it is checkbook diplomacy. There is, in fact, considerable evidence to support this claim. Upon Kim Dae-Jung's election, South Korean aid to the North increased considerably.[35] In fact, the 2000 summit was in large part secured by an unconditional cash payment of \$100 million from the ROK to the DPRK.[36] Financial perks and unconditional aid to the DPRK were recognized by opposition leaders in the ROK as key aspects underlying the *Sunshine Policy* as well. Some even went so far to accuse Kim of intentionally "propping up" the DPRK regime and saving it from immanent collapse for political purposes.[37] Fundamental flaws in the policy which allowed the DPRK to take advantage of the ROK are noted by scholars as well.[38] Regardless, when examining the DPRK's motivations for acquiescing to ROK-initiated family reunions, there is no plausible explanation other than money. The government of the DPRK is not, of course, accountable to its people, and I have already established that it is extremely weary of its citizens interacting with individuals and acquiring information about the outside world. Family reunions, therefore, can be summarized as a South Korean initiative, granted occasionally by Pyongyang in order to gain revenues.

The Kaesong Industrial Complex

The final development of interest with respect to inter-Korean relations in the last decade is the Kaesong Industrial Complex. Whereas the motivations of the DPRK and the ROK regarding tourism and family reunions may have been unclear at first, the KIC is a different case. Here, it is obvious that both countries have a shared economic interest in the establishment, operation, and expansion of the KIC. Dong points out the logic of economic cooperation between the two states in the most simplistic of terms; the ROK has a vast advantage in terms of capital and technology, while the DPRK has an abundance of land and labour.[39] This is the one cross-border development where both states have the potential to acquire significant economic gains. As may be expected when considering these points, a historical analysis shows that indeed the development of the KIC has been relatively less tumultuous when compared

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to other intergovernmental ventures. Despite setbacks in the last year, I argue that operations at the KIC are likely not only to continue, but to continue expanding as well.

Special economic zones (SEZs) are areas that have two distinct characteristics: their economic regulations that are more liberal than the other areas of the country, and they are aimed at promoting foreign direct investment within said country. The roots of SEZs in the DPRK date back to the early 1990-s. As hypocritical it may be for *juche*-inspired DPRK leaders to allow such institutions on their soil, a major Chinese-funded SEZ was established near their shared border in 1992.[40] I have already established the uncertainty thrust upon the DPRK regime by the sudden end of the Cold War, and with this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that the Rajin-Songbong SEZ was not something that was desired, but was instead a concession made to their now even more important Chinese ally. Even prior to this, Hyundai's Chung Ju-Yung had begun a proposal exploring the possibility of an SEZ in the DPRK for ROK firms in 1989.[41] When DPRK-ROK relations were at their strongest in the summer of 2000, an agreement was reached between Kim Jong-Il and Hyundai executives to construct such an industrial park near the city of Kaesong.[42] Consistent with the *Sunshine Policy*, this initiative had the support of the ROK government, and it quickly moved to negotiate the political framework of the deal with the DPRK.

The reality of a SEZ near Kaesong would be dependent on the ability to move people, capital, and manufactured goods across the DMZ.[43] As I mentioned earlier, tourists had been crossing the border on the Eastern side of the DMZ since 2003. The new route from the ROK to the proposed KIC, however, would be required to accommodate much higher volumes of traffic. It seems the prospect of economic benefits for both sides ensured the success of the negotiations. By 2004, roads across the western half of the DMZ had been repaired, and operations began at the KIC. Since then, more than 1600 companies have contacted Hyundai, the ROK government's appointed subcontractor, with desire to invest in the KIC.[44] While labor is cheap (North Korean employees earn about \$62 per month) and plentiful for South Korean companies, the economic benefits generated by the DPRK are too lucrative for them to pass up.[45] At the beginning of 2008, ROK firms in the KIC employed 100 000 North Koreans. If current expansion continues at the anticipated pace, that figure could possibly reach 300 000 by the end of 2012.[46] In this case, the park would be netting the DPRK over \$500 million per year.[47] This figure would comprise a massive portion of the state's GDP, and would certainly play an important role in the regime's continuing survival.

The KIC has not been without setbacks, but like other cross-border initiatives I have examined, evidence suggests that it too is here to stay. Inter-governmental relations have declined since the election of Lee Myung-Bak in 2008. In December of last year, Pyongyang's attitude soured when it became clear that the ROK's new administration would not pursue a *Sunshine*-style policy with respect to the DPRK. Troubles continued earlier this year when a Hyundai employee was detained for allegedly criticizing the DPRK regime and trying to convince a female worker to defect. When ROK authorities were denied access to the employee, some analysts suspected the framework of the KIC as it stood was unworkable, and that the initiative's entire future was in doubt.[48] Operations at the KIC were indeed shut down for several months, but true to pattern, negotiations to re-open the park were successful this past summer. Tait makes a point implying that the KIC and other inter-Korean economic ventures will continue despite unstable DPRK-ROK relations. His research shows that ROK firms operating in the KIC are often frustrated with DPRK officials' lack of knowledge with respect to market economics. Many companies, moreover, are not making the profits they anticipated when they began operations themselves there. His conclusion is that the DPRK regime is either going to have to embrace widespread economic reform, which he deems highly unlikely, or at the minimum, learn to play by the rules of international market capitalism in order to survive. He believes that this fact has been recognized by DPRK leadership, who sent 430 students abroad to get MBA degrees in 2001 alone.[49] Again theoretically speaking, the DPRK could shut down operations in the KIC at anytime and expropriate everything in it. But once again, the likelihood that they could actually afford to do this is highly questionable. The fact that the ROK government insures companies that operate there of nearly 90% what they stand to lose is further evidence to illustrate a sudden shutdown is unlikely.[50] The future is never certain, but mutual economic benefits are a good reason to hypothesize the continued operation and expansion of the KIC.

Realism on the Korean Peninsula after the Cold War: A Viable Explanation?

As I have established, realism predicts an antagonistic relationship between the DPRK and the ROK. In light of the

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co-operative inter-Korean developments that I have detailed, is it possible for realist principles be reconciled with the post-Cold War political situation on the Korean peninsula? This section argues that realism has not lost its ability to explain the DPRK-ROK relationship in a commendable fashion. Whether this argument is valid or not is contingent on two criteria being met. The first stems from my earlier comparison of realist theory to the Cold War era. If a realist framework is to remain suitable for describing inter-Korean relations today, the same expectations that were applied to the Cold War situation must be met. In other words, are realist assumptions of an arms race and a balance of power still applicable to the Korean peninsula? I aim to show that if this is not indeed the case, there remains nothing that conflicts with a realist explanation. The second set of criterion involves whether or not the co-operative ventures between the DPRK and the ROK can be reconciled with realist expectations of self-interest and national security. When the motivations for inter-Korean initiatives and state behavior are considered, I show that the current developments, while unique, do not conflict with realism's principle tenants.

With respect to the first requirement, it is certainly clear when military expenditure data is analyzed that the DPRK and the ROK are still mired in an never-ceasing arms race. According to *Global Security*, the ROK saw its military expenditures hit the \$10 billion mark in 1990. Although military spending decreased as a percentage of GDP during the early 1990-s, this should not be misinterpreted as a decrease in military spending by the ROK. Spending reached \$15.7 billion in 1996, 21.1 billion in 2003, and because of the DPRK's pursuit of nuclear weapons, indications are it will continue to rise under Lee-Myung Bak's conservative government.[51] Accurate figures for the DPRK are harder to come by, but the US Department of State estimates that an incredible 25% of GDP is consumed by military expenditures. In an article published in 2000, Waltz points out that despite the end of the Cold War, the Korean peninsula still has "more military forces per square kilometer than any other portion of the globe." [52] We see that despite the end of the Cold War and the establishment of formal relations between the DPRK and the ROK, the security dilemma of realism has not been compromised, and the arms race has not ceased whatsoever.

The question of whether peace between the DPRK and the ROK still rests on a balance of power is more complex. There are two possible answers here depending on the DPRK's actual military capability, and I seek to demonstrate that both are consistent with realist principles. The first plausible answer is a straightforward "yes," although I find it speculative in a critical respect. Arthur , for example, states that although the US has been downsizing the number of servicemen it stations in the ROK, the fundamental aspect of the US-ROK alliance will be to "ensure regional security" through a continued balance of power.[53] This analysis, however, fails to consider strong indications that the DPRK's military capability has significantly weakened in comparison to the ROK during the 1990-s. This is Kang's argument, and it leads to the more probable second answer. According to him, most of the DPRK's military equipment is obsolete, and that regardless of US support, the ROK could defeat its northern rival on its own if conflict were to break out.[54] Assuming that Kang is correct and the ROK has a significant military advantage over the DPRK, what deters it from invasion? A convincing explanation does not conflict with realist theory. One of the well-known democratic peace theory's causal mechanisms is that democracies are inherently less likely to initiate wars since the costs are overwhelmingly borne by civilians themselves.[55] In terms of IR, this is a decidedly liberal argument. In this case, however, it is not at odds with realism if there is grounds to believe that a rational analysis of invasion has been taken (and rejected) by the ROK. This is, in fact, quite probable. Acting in accordance with realism's self-interest principle, most scholars and political elites agree that the ROK is not in favor of rapid reunification with the DPRK, whether through invasion or regime collapse in the North. The Korea Development Institute, the ROK's leading political and economic think tank, for example, argues that the consequences of sudden Korean reunification would be "a disaster" for national economic goals and interests.[56] Eberstadt expands this point to a multinational level, stating that, "whatever their differences," administrations in Seoul, Beijing, Moscow, Tokyo, and Washington agree that "rapid reunification...would run contrary to their interests [as individual states]." [57] Thus, while a balance of power may not necessarily be what is sustaining peace on the Korean peninsula, realist tenants of rational self-interest still underlie the actual explanation of why war has not broken out. If conquering the DPRK did not present such a long-term economic burden to the prosperous ROK, it is probable that it would in the absence of a sufficient balance of power.

With the criteria that was applied to DPRK-ROK relations during the Cold War holding firm, the task of reconciling realism with the inter-Korean initiatives remains. A brief review my conclusions with respect to these co-operative programs thus far will prove helpful before proceeding. First, I have established that the DPRK encourages foreign

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tourism and allows South Korean companies to conduct business in the KIC because of the financial benefits it reaps. Until Lee Myung-Bak abandoned the strategy of his predecessors in 2008, monetary reasons were also behind the DPRK's acquiescent acceptance of cross-border family reunions. I have argued that the regime's very survival is, at least in large part, dependent on these three institutions. On the other hand, we must view the ROK's motives for participating in these initiatives on different terms. The ROK is a pluralist democracy whose government is, at least in theory, responsible to the will of its citizens. Seoul "allowing" (if restrictions would even be tolerated by South Korean citizens or its judiciary) its citizens to visit the DPRK as tourists presents a negligible security risk. I have furthermore concluded that the ROK and its business class share the DPRK's economic motive for co-operation with respect to the KIC. With the motives for state behavior established, the final question is whether or not these motives are reconcilable with realist theory. Although not clearly apparent at first glance, I argue that no contradiction exists for several reasons. First and foremost, national security remains an overriding priority, and it will prove conducive to discuss both states simultaneously while making this point. In making subsequent points, I discuss the DPRK and the ROK separately.

On this first point, I posit that if either state does not feel secure in its co-operative arrangements with the other, the arrangements do not happen. With reference to the establishment of the KIC, Dong would disagree. His claim is that political and military concerns are often second to economic ones if the reward is good enough.[58] In other words, the economic benefit that the KIC presented for both sides was so great, security (re: military) concerns took a backseat. When actual evidence is concerned, this is simply false. Although I have hypothesized that the establishment of the KIC went smoother than the other cross-border initiatives due to the presence of mutual economic benefits, the KIC only exists because the DPRK and the ROK have deemed its existence to be non-threatening to their national security. From the ROK's perspective, goods returning across the border can be screened meticulously. With respect to the DPRK, the KIC provides a significant portion of the revenue it needs to survive. If inter-personal exchanges between North and South Koreans could not be highly regulated, the DPRK would most likely shut down operations at Kaesong. The events of earlier this year I have mentioned show how fragile the framework of the KIC is, and how the national security of both states is an overriding priority. This perspective, moreover, can be easily applied to tourism and family reunions as well: they are only possible after both states have carefully considered their respective security implications.

For the ROK specifically, reasons for participating in cross-border initiatives with the DPRK do not contradict realist tenants either. The ROK's policy towards the DPRK has always been one of security-first, and it has not changed despite entering into co-operative engagements.[59] Consider the Lee Myung-Bak administration's DPRK policy. According to Park, the separation of political and security issues from economic ones were "hallmarks" of Seoul's two previous leaders (Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo Hyun). Their respective policies both "tried to expand economic co-operation in the midst of continuing military tensions." [60] The new strategy, on the other hand, is based on reciprocity: aid and assistance to the DPRK will be contingent on the ROK achieving its policy goals as well; the primary one being denuclearization.[61] In other words, the Lee government sees to re-link economic and political/security concerns as a means of increasing its bargaining position vis-a-vis the DPRK. As speculated by Park, Lee Myung-Bak's administration is in favor of applying "any and all possible levers at their disposal" in order to achieve their goals with respect to the DPRK – the first of which is state security.[62] Clearly apparent in the new policy is realist notions of power politics: the DPRK regime is not to be granted free life-support at the behest of the ROK.

The DPRK's motivations and actions for inter-state co-operation credit my conclusions as well. There is almost unanimous scholarly consensus the DPRK regime has teetered on the brink of collapse since the end of the Cold War. Survival dominates the thoughts of Kim Jong-Il and other North Korean political elites.[63] The regime continues to struggle onwards only because it has come to terms with its limited economic policy opinions. Calder, for example, argues that the DPRK is exercising greater economic pragmatism nowadays, and has coined the term "*juche*-twilight" in reference to the current situation. He claims that "Kim Jong-Il's government tolerates, and even promotes, economic interdependence with other nations (re: South Korea) at levels low enough not to threaten political stability at home" because of simple desire to survive.[64] Tait sees the DPRK's desperate situation along the same terms:

"whether it chooses to 'muddle through,' or to generously accept broad economic reform, or to risk collapse

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because of an unwillingness to choose, sooner or later North Korea, or what is left of it, will have to learn to play by the rules of international market capitalism in order to survive. [65]

The ideas and conclusions I have referenced here reinforce my own: DPRK participation in ventures with ROK is contingent on the economic gains it can acquire without compromising its national security, which is very much linked to its internal stability. The survival of the regime is the major priority of DPRK leadership, and they have had to bend their ideological principles to keep their heads afloat thus far. Times have changed, and the DPRK has been forced to adapt in order to survive.[66]

A potential objection to my overall argument may be that my definition of realism is reductionist. It could be said that there are still many contradictions between a true realist analysis and inter-state co-operation between enemies in wartime. I maintain, however, that I omit no major points in constructing this paper's definition of realism, at least not any that are sufficient enough to weaken my argument. When Linklater points out faults of neo-realism in practice, he admits that the paradigm is able to be somewhat flexible in its explanations.[67] It could also be claimed that in my analysis of the DPRK I have implied that external events influence foreign policy. While this is, of course, more applicable to a liberal theory of IR, Waltz's neo-realism could account for this problem – after all, a theory of IR and a theory of foreign policy are not the same.[68] While I could not uncover any research exploring the current situation on the Korean peninsula from a critical security perspective, I am willing to hypothesize that if inter-Korean co-operation continues to grow, attempts will be made. In a somewhat relevant study, Hazel Smith argues against using the 'securitization' paradigm of the Copenhagen school when analyzing the DPRK in the sense that it shapes perceptions of the state in such a way that it limits the policy opinions available to the international community.[69] While her analysis is confined to the threat, real or contrived, that is presented by the DPRK to other states, her conclusion is encouraging to my study: she recommends "a new research agenda" for the DPRK should borrow heavily from "classical security studies literature." [70] My study suggests something similar: that future research concerning DPRK-ROK relations from critical perspectives will encounter significant difficulty in discounting the continued relevance of realism. Finally, my argument could potentially raise another important question: are different areas of the world better suited to different perspectives of IR? If northeast Asia or the Korean peninsula, for example, is best suited to a realist framework, is Europe perhaps best suited to a liberal one? Would a constructivist or critical theory best apply to modern Africa? I do not mean to suggest this at all. I do not take a position here on what IR theory is in fact "the truth." This study is concerned only with reconciling key tenants of realism with the contemporary situation on the Korean peninsula.

Conclusion

The recent co-operative engagements between the DPRK and the ROK are quite unprecedented. I have covered many points in this paper, but my contentions are clear and simple. The DPRK-ROK relationship throughout the Cold-War era was as "cold" as can be. Yet by the late 1990-s, these two states were participating in three co-operative ventures. When reminded that DPRK and the ROK are formally at war, I have shown the various motivations for such peculiar state actions: the ROK's are dependent on the nature of the initiative, the DPRK's is always financial. Through an IR lens, the Cold War situation between on the Korean peninsula can be admirably described by a realist theoretical approach. The post-Cold War situation, given the inter-governmental co-operation, seems slightly more questionable. I argue, however, that the co-operative ventures do not affect the applicability of realist theory to the Korean peninsula for two reasons. The first is that there has been no decline in militarization or war-preparedness on the Korean peninsula despite these initiatives, and second, as we have seen in so many instances, national security/regime survival never wavers from being the top priority of the DPRK and the ROK respectively. Both government's participation in the cross-border programs I have analyzed can be reconciled with these conclusions. Finally, while I have not uncovered an alternative approach to studying IR on the Korean peninsula, I am skeptical that a system of assumptions superior to those of realism could be better applicable to the actual situation we see today.

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[3] Jacob Bercovitch and Richard Jackson, *International Conflict: A Chronological Encyclopedia of Conflicts and Their Management 1945-1995* (Washington DC: Congressional Quarterly, 1997), 11.

[4] See Andrew Linklater, "Neo-realism in Theory and Practice," *International Relations Theory Today*, eds. Ken Booth and Steve Smith (University Park PA: Pennsylvania State University, 1995), 242-243.

[5] For a detailed explanation of the "security dilemma," see Waltz 1979, 187-88.

[6] Choi Chang-Yoon, "Korea: Strategy and Strategic Issues," *Asian Survey* 20 (1980), 1123.

[7] All monetary amounts used in this study are in US dollars.

[8] Choi, 1136.

[9] David Kang, "International Relations Theory and the Second Korean War," *International Studies Quarterly* 47 (2003), 303.

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- [10] Dick K. Nanto, "North Korea: Chronology of Provocations, 1950-2003" *Congressional Research Service:Library of Congress*, March 18 2003, 7.
- [11] Choi, 1138-39.
- [12] Victor Cha and David Kang, "The Korea Crisis," *Foreign Policy* 136 (2003), 24.
- [13] Kent E. Calder, "The New Face of Northeast Asia" *Foreign Affairs* 80 (2001), 112.
- [14] Kang 2003, 304.
- [15] Bercovitch and Jackson, 126-127, 157, 222, 258.
- [16] Kang 2003, 313.
- [17] John Gittings, "N. Korea Opens the Door to Tourists," *The Guardian* (London), 14 April 1986.
- [18] Nicholas D. Kristof, "North Korean Tourism Signals Openness," *The New York Times*, 20 September 1987.
- [19] The possibility of Pyongyang hosting up to five Olympic events was remarkably still being considered until late 1987. When no compromise could be reached between the parties involved, North Korea announced its boycott of the Seoul Games on January 12, 1988.
- [20] C.S. Eliot King, "North Korea's International Relations: The Successful Failure?" in *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed Samuel S Kim (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), 286.
- [21] Ibid, 288.
- [22] "North Korea to Admit Tourists from the South" *BBC Summary of World Broadcasts*, 14 March 1992.
- [23] Glyn Ford, *North Korea on the Brink: Struggle for Survival* (London: Pluto Press, 2008), 174-75.
- [24] Hyundai co-founder and former CEO Chung Ju-Yung was born in what is now North Korea during the Japanese occupation. As noted by Tait (310), he first proposed the Mt. Kumgang project in 1989. He is very highly regarded amongst South Koreans, and prior to his death in 2001, he consistently advocated peaceful reunification.
- [25] Hyun-Jin Seo, "Second Road Linking the Koreas Opens Today," *The Korea Herald*, 21 February 2003.
- [26] James Brooke, "Crossing the Line to Korean Detente ; Traffic through the DMZ Indicates a Step Toward Integration," *The International Herald Tribune*, 25 October 2005, 8.
- [27] *The Korea Times*, 24 August 2009.
- [28] Ford, 44.
- [29] See Nanto, 10.
- [30] According to Richard Tait, the *sunshine policy* was formulated around three central concepts: "(1) no armed provocation by North Korea would be tolerated, (2) a takeover or absorption of North Korea would not be attempted, and (3) reconciliation and cooperation would be broadened." In other words, Scott Snyder has claimed that the *sunshine policy* "defers the issue of Korean reunification (and, by extension, appears to ignore the prospect of regime collapse in the DPRK) in favor of enhanced dialogue, exchanges, cooperation, and peaceful coexistence" (522).

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[31] The Korea Times, 27 August 2009.

[32] The Korea Times, 31 December 2001.

[33] Jae Jean Suh, "The Reunion of Separated Families Under the Kim Dae-Jung Government," *Journal of East Asian Affairs* 16 (2002), 352-356.

[34] Ibid, 356.

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[36] Jin D. Kim, "Split by Silence," *The Globe and Mail (Canada)*, 19 July 2003.

[37] Bryan Walsh, "The Cost of Sunshine" *Time Magazine*, 3 February 2003

[38] Park, 41.

[39] Yeung Sueng Dong, "The Present and Future of the Kaesong Industrial Complex." *North Korea: 2005 and Beyond*, eds. Philip W. Yun and Gi-Wook Shin (Stanford: Shorenstein, APARC), 79.

[40] Ford, 2007.

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[42] Dong, 84.

[43] Ibid, 75.

[44] Christopher Hale, "Real Reform In North Korea: The Aftermath of the July 2002 Economic Measures," *Asian Survey* 45 (2005): 840.

[45] Ford, 3.

[46] Ibid, 3.

[47] Moon Ihlwan, "Hands Across the DMZ; North Korea has what South Korea Wants," *Business Week* 20 March 2006, 48.

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[50] Dong, 90.

[51] Park, 49-50.

[52] Kenneth Waltz, "Structural Realism After the Cold War," *International Organization* 25 (2000), 33.

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[54] Kang, 307.

[55] Paul Midford, "Challenging the Democratic Peace? Historical Memory and the Security Relationship between Japan and South Korea," *Pacific Focus* 23 (2008), 192.

[56] Nicholas Eberstadt, "Hastening Korean Reunification," *Foreign Affairs* 76 (1997), 77.

[57] Ibid, 77.

[58] Dong, 94.

[59] At a recent conference I attended, I had the opportunity to listen to Hong Ji-In from the Korean Consulate in Toronto give a talk on Lee Myung-Bak's North Korea policy, officially called "The Policy of Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity." When asked about the security implications of this new policy, Hong stated that South Korean priorities are consistent with the goals of Seoul's foreign policy as a whole, with national security atop the list.

[60] Park, 43.

[61] Ibid, 40-42.

[62] Ibid, 43.

[63] See Ford, 199-218, and Synder, 524.

[64] Ibid, 112.

[65] Tait, 328.

[66] Scott Synder, "North Korea's Challenge of Regime Survival: Internal Problems and Implications for the Future," *Pacific Affairs* 73 (2000-2001), 527.

[67] Linklater, 259.

[68] Linklater, 245.

[69] Hazel Smith, "Bad, Mad, Sad, or Rational Actor? Why the 'Securitization' Paradigm Makes for Poor Policy Analysis of North Korea," *International Affairs* 76 (2000), 594.

[70] Ibid, 615.

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