

With Whom to Share? Pakistan, North Korea, and Chinese Sensitive Nuclear Assistance*

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Despite the fact that both Pakistan and North Korea approached China for sensitive nuclear assistance, China helped only Pakistan. Why did China share nuclear technologies with Pakistan but refused to do the same with North Korea? This paper argues that Chinese decisions resulted from a different degree of entrapment risk. In the case of Pakistan, the risk of entrapment for China was low. China, therefore, supplied assistance to Pakistan with little worries of being dragged into Pakistani conflicts which China wished to avoid. By contrast, the risk of entrapment for China was high in the North Korean case. Fears about being entrapped into North Korean provocations prevented China from providing the assistance to North Korea.

Keywords: China, Pakistan, North Korea, Sensitive Nuclear Assistance, Entrapment

INTRODUCTION

Nuclear weapons are the most exclusive arsenals. Developing nuclear weapons by nonnuclear states are strictly prohibited by existing nuclear states. This is because nuclear states want to enjoy their global power-projection capability, which could be reduced by spread of nuclear weapons (Kroenig, 2010).

Despite the concern, China supplied sensitive nuclear assistance to Pakistan. China helped Pakistan's nuclear weapons development from 1981 to 1986. Although both states insist that nuclear cooperation between them was for peaceful purpose, it has been a widely accepted fact that China was actively engaged in Pakistan's nuclear weapons development (Monterey Institute of International Studies, 1999; Paul, 2003; Medeiro, 2007; Dwivedi, 2011; Schofield 2014). China provided Pakistan with a design for a 20-kiloton nuclear warhead and sufficient HEU for two explosive nuclear devices (Schofield, 2014). With Chinese help, Pakistan conducted a cold test of its warhead at Sargodha in 1983 and allegedly detonated it at Lop Nor, China (Schofield, 2014). China also trained Pakistani physicists and assisted to produce weapons-grade uranium (Monterey Institute of International Studies, 1999).

Chinese assistance with sensitive nuclear technology to Pakistan was even more puzzling because China refused to provide the technology to North Korea. North Korea asked Chinese for sensitive nuclear assistance twice, but China turned down both requests. In 1964, shortly after China successfully conducted its first nuclear weapons test, Kim Il Sung wrote a letter to Mao Zedong saying that North Korea and China, "who shared fighting and dying on the battlefield," should also share nuclear secrets (Oberdorfer, 2001: 252). Mao rejected this offer

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by replying that a small country such as North Korea did not need to have nuclear weapons. North Korea approached China again in 1974 when South Korea began in earnest to develop nuclear weapons. China denied helping North Korea again. This decision was contradictory to a Chinese government statement saying that “the greater the number of socialist countries possessing nuclear weapons the better the guarantees for world peace (Beijing Review, 1963).”

Although both Pakistan and North Korea approached China for help, China shared sensitive nuclear weapons technologies only with Pakistan and denied the North Korean requests. Why did China share nuclear technologies with Pakistan but refused to do with North Korea? To answer this question, this paper presents an argument focusing on the risk of entrapment which was determined by the cost and probability. China provided sensitive nuclear assistance to Pakistan because the risk of entrapment was minimal. The cost of entrapment was low because China and Pakistan had similar interests and China had a superior military capability than India, Pakistan’s primary opponent. The probability of entrapment was also trivial because there was no formal agreement between the two states and China pursued conciliatory policies toward India. On the other hand, China did not supply sensitive nuclear assistance to North Korea due to the high risk of entrapment. The Chinese entrapment cost was enormous since China and North Korea had different perspectives about their major enemy and the U.S., a North Korea’s biggest security threat, was much stronger than China. In terms of the probability, China was prone to be entrapped by North Korea because 1) China provided strong security commitments to North Korea, 2) China was a more dependent state on the Sino-North Korean alliance, and 3) North Korea did not stop military provocations against the U.S. despite the Chinese rapprochement with the U.S.

This paper compares Pakistani and North Korean cases by using the method of difference. The two cases are appropriate for the method since they are similar in many aspects. First, being contiguous to strong enemies, both states were heavily motivated to develop nuclear weapons – Pakistan against India and North Korea against the U.S.-ROK alliance. To establish military superiority over their adversaries, Pakistan and North Korea were eager to build nuclear arsenals of their own. Second, both Islamabad and Pyongyang approached Beijing for help. Having the only one supplier in each case enables to examine validity of the paper’s main arguments, by controlling a lot of variables that could possibly affect decisions about providing sensitive nuclear assistance, such as the supplier’s geopolitical conditions or domestic political situations.

This paper makes an academic contribution by expanding the literature on the supply side of nuclear proliferation. Although nuclear proliferation by existing nuclear states is a puzzling phenomenon since it inflicts damages on their own power-projection capability, there have been relatively little studies on this issue. Thus far, most of scholarly attention had paid to other aspects of nuclear proliferation such as demands, restraints, and outcomes (Sagan, 1997; Sagan and Waltz, 2003; Gerzhoy, 2015; Lanoszka, 2018; Miller, 2018).

The remaining of this research proceeds as follows. First, it reviews two alternative explanations on sensitive nuclear assistance from existing nuclear states to nonnuclear states. Second, it analyzes factors affecting the risk of entrapment based on Glenn Snyder’s work. Then, it compares and analyzes the Chinese entrapment risk in each case. Finally, it provides summary of main findings and further implications in the conclusion.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATION

Power-projection Capability Explanation

Matthew Kroenig (2010) argues that China supplied sensitive nuclear assistance to Pakistan since the former had no power-projection capability over the latter. Since China lacked the ability to fight a total ground war on the Pakistani territory, Pakistani nuclear development did not constrain Chinese conventional military power. Thus, China provided the nuclear assistance to Pakistan. In contrast, China did not provide sensitive nuclear assistance to North Korea out of concern for losing its power-projection capability. If North Korea had acquired nuclear weapons, China would not have been able to project its conventional military power over North Korea as it had done in the Korean War.

Despite its great contribution to the literature, Kroenig's analysis on Chinese power-projection capability over Pakistan is not valid. Kroenig contends that the Himalayas Mountains were great obstacles for China to project its conventional military power. The Sino-India War in 1962, however, demonstrates that China was able to send large troops across the Himalayas and still win the war. Given that India was a stronger power than Pakistan, it is plausible to contend that China had power-projection capability over Pakistan as well.

Nuclear Domino Effects Explanation

Henrik Hiim (2018) argues that different decisions on supplying sensitive nuclear assistance were determined by Chinese concerns over nuclear domino effects.¹ In the case of Pakistan, during the transfer of sensitive nuclear assistance, Chinese leadership had little reason to worry about nuclear domino effects. It was because India, a state which would be easily provoked by Pakistani nuclear proliferation, did already cross nuclear threshold. In contrast, China refused to provide sensitive nuclear technology to North Korea because China feared that nuclear North Korea might prompt potential proliferators in the region including South Korea, Japan and Taiwan.

Hiim's argument, however, has following shortcomings. First, Chinese nuclear assistance started in 1980s, not in the 1970s. Thus, it is inaccurate to argue that China helped in earnest Pakistani nuclear weapons development in the mid-1970s. Second, the nuclear domino effects argument does not explain a time gap between India's first nuclear test and Chinese sensitive nuclear assistance. According to Hiim, China should have provided sensitive nuclear technology to Pakistan in the mid-1970s because China did not have to be concerned about the nuclear domino effects due to the Indian nuclear test in 1974. In fact, however, China supplied the assistance in 1981, six years after the test. Hiim does not present an appropriate explanation about why China refrained from helping Pakistan.

¹ This article changes Hiim's 'nuclear cascade effects' to 'nuclear domino effects,' which is more widely used in academia.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Risk of Entrapment

According to Snyder (1987, 1994), alliance security dilemma arises when states manage alliances. It is about how states firmly commit themselves to their allies and how much support they will gain from the allies. Concerns about the former are referred to as the fear of entrapment, while the concerns about the latter are referred to the fear of abandonment. While abandonment is defection from the allies, entrapment is defined as “being dragged by one’s commitment into a war over interests of the ally that one does not share (Snyder, 1997: 181).” Since this paper presumes that the level of entrapment fear mainly drives a nuclear state’s decision to supply sensitive nuclear assistance to nonnuclear states, what determines entrapment and when the fear of entrapment is most likely to be severe needs to be examined.

According to Snyder, entrapment is a function of the prospective cost and the probability of being entrapped (Snyder, 1997). The cost of entrapment means the cost that an entrapped ally should bear to defend its partner’s interests. The cost is influenced by two factors. One is the similarity of interests between the allied states. If allies are threatened by different adversaries or threatened by the same adversary with different conflicts, it is hard to say that they have similar interests. The less the allies have common interests, the more the cost the entrapped ally should pay. It is because the entrapped ally would gain little from conflicts even if they win. If the allied states share a high portion of interests, then the cost of the entrapped state would be minimal since it fights for its own interests as well as the partners’ even if it is dragged into its partner’s conflicts.

The other is the military capability of its partner’s opponent. If the opponent is too strong, the entrapped ally is more likely to lose the war or has to fully mobilize its resources to win. This will cause huge losses to the entrapped state even if it wins the war. By contrast, if the opponent does not have powerful military capability, the entrapped ally is more likely to defeat the opponent with little expenses.

The probability of entrapment implies how likely one state would be entrapped by its partner. It is affected by three factors. First, the probability of entrapment will be increased if the allies are mutually dependent to each other. In this symmetrical alliance, it is difficult for each ally to refuse support to its partner because the refusal might prompt the partner to defect from the alliance. On the other hand, in an asymmetrical alliance where one ally is more dependent on the other, the less dependent partner will feel the fear of entrapment more intensively than the more dependent one. The less dependent one would not worry much about its partner’s defection because it would not be suffered greatly from being abandoned. By contrast, the more dependent one would make great efforts to keep its partner in the alliance for its own security interests.

Second, the probability of entrapment is also driven by the degree of one’s commitment to its partner. When states are bounded by explicit agreements, they are more likely to be dragged into their partner’s conflicts, thus increasing the risk of entrapment.² It would be hard for the allies not to provide certain assistance which is already specified in the agreements.

² Snyder notes that the entrapment risk needs to be thoroughly examined. States that are loosely allied might still feel the fear of entrapment in order to prove their loyalty to the alliance. Conversely, states that are firmly allied might feel less the entrapment since they could easily abstain in contingencies not explicitly mentioned in the agreement. For details, see (Snyder, 1997: 188-189).

By contrast, the probability of entrapment would be much lower if there is no agreement between the allies or if the agreement is vague or ambiguous. With the unclear agreements, the allied state could make plausible excuses for their disloyalty to its partner. Therefore, the risk of entrapment would be low.

Third, the probability of entrapment is affected by one's strategy toward its partner's adversary. If a state stands firm toward the adversary, the probability of entrapment increases because the strong stance tends to reassure the partner of the ally's strong commitments and strengthen confidence that the ally would provide assistance in a crisis. The greater certainty of the ally's commitment will encourage the partner to stand more firmly against its enemy and be more inclined to risk a war. The probability of entrapment, however, decreases if a state chooses a conciliatory policy toward the partner's opponent. The partner, observing the ally's improving relations with the enemy, will be greatly restrained in dealing with the enemy since it does not have confidence that the ally would support the partner in contingencies.

Entrapment Risk and Sensitive Nuclear Assistance

How does the risk of entrapment affect nuclear states' decisions to provide sensitive nuclear assistance to nonnuclear states? This paper argues that the high risk of entrapment is more likely to lead nuclear states to be reluctant to help their allies' nuclear weapons development. It is because nuclear states worry that nuclear proliferation by allies would increase the number and intensity of unwanted conflicts.³ It would inflict huge costs to nuclear states with little gains. To avoid such enormous damages, therefore, nuclear states are less likely to supply sensitive nuclear assistance to their allies, which could ironically accelerate allies' nuclear weapons development.

PAKISTAN: LOW ENTRAPMENT RISK AND SENSITIVE NUCLEAR ASSISTANCE

Pakistan and China established an official diplomatic relationship in 1950. Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize China and support Beijing to succeed the Chinese seat in the United Nation Security Council. In the beginning years, however, the Pakistani friendly moves did not evoke response from China (Barnds, 1975; Boni, 2020).

The bilateral relations between the two states began strengthening since the early 1960s. The key factor which led Pakistan and China to cooperate was the enmity of both countries vis-à-vis India. Pakistan had hostile relations with India since its establishment, and Chinese relations with India rapidly deteriorated after the Sino-Indian War in 1962. Since then, the two states consistently strengthened political, military, and economic cooperation, labeling the relations as the "all-weather friendship." At a press conference in 1983, Chinese Foreign Minister Wu Xueqian publicly mentioned that "[i]f there is a war and Pakistan suffers foreign armed attack, the Chinese government and people will, of course, stand on the side of Pakistan (Renmin Ribao, 1983)."

This paper argues that China supplied sensitive nuclear assistance to Pakistan because the Chinese risk of entrapment was low. The cost of entrapment was minimal since 1) China and

³ Despite the dominant position of nuclear optimism in academic literature, nuclear pessimism has been prevalent among policymakers. For nuclear pessimism in the policy arena, see (Carus, 2016).

Pakistan shared a high portion of security interests and 2) India, a Pakistani principal enemy, was weaker than China. Also, the probability of entrapment was insignificant because 1) China provided weak security commitments to Pakistan and China made conciliatory moves toward India.

Chinese Low Risk of Entrapment

Low costs of Chinese entrapment

The Chinese cost for entrapment was not so grave because China and Pakistan had a high portion of common interests, mostly enmity toward India. Thus, even if China were dragged into Pakistan's war against India, Chinese costs would have not been tremendous because China would fight for its own interests as well as Pakistan's.

The main cause of their enmity toward India was territorial conflicts over the Kashmir region. In 1962, China and India clashed because of the completely divergent views on their border line in the region. India claimed that the McMahon Line, recognized by the British India and Tibet, should be the border line between them. China refuted this argument and contended that the traditional demarcation line before the British India should be restored.

The conflicts between Pakistan and India dated back to 1947 when the Kashmir, the largest princely state, was acceded to India. Pakistan kept arguing that the region, having a predominant Muslim population, should be acceded to Pakistan due to the self-determination rights of people in the area. By contrast, India considered the Kashmir as its own integral part since Kashmiri leadership, mostly Hindus, decided to be part of India.

Based on shared hostility against India, China and Pakistan cooperated and supported each other on the Kashmir issue. In the 1964 joint communiqué, the two states "expressed the hope that the Kashmir dispute would be resolved in accord with the wishes of the people of Kashmir as pledged to them by the people of India and Pakistan (The China Quarterly, 1965)." By referring the Kashmir people's will, Beijing and Islamabad emphasized the pro-Pakistani stance.

For China and Pakistan, the Kashmir region was too important to be left to India. Pakistan, "the self-professed homeland for an oppressed and threatened Muslim minority in the subcontinent," founded it difficult to accept a Hindu-majority state governing a Muslim-majority region (Cohen, 2002: 46). China, on the other hand, worried that Pakistani defeat by India might lead to the transfer of Hunza and/or Gilgit to Indian sovereignty. It implied that the Karakoram highway, constructed by China and Pakistan and connecting Xinjiang and Punjab, would be under control of India. In this case, China might lose its overland access to Pakistan and eventually access to the Indian Ocean (Garver, 2004).

Based on the cooperation over the Kashmir, China and Pakistan had pursued the strategic partnership with each other in order to contain Indian power in South Asia. Pakistan desired to be the only one regional power in South Asia. China's foreign policy was designed to curb the Indian influence in the region, "making it merely a sub-regional power (Dwivedi, 2011: 65)."

The Chinese costs of entrapment were also minimal since China possessed a superior military capability than India (Chambers, 2005). With its superior military capability and experience of defeating India, China had less reasons to worry about the prospective costs of fighting with India. During the Chinese sensitive nuclear assistance to Pakistan, China greatly surpassed India in military expenditure, military personnel, and iron and steel production as seen in the <Table 1>.

Table 1. China's Military Superiority over India
(unit: million US dollars (current), thousand men, thousand tons)

		1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Military Expenditure	China	30,500	33,000	34,500	23,850	6,350	5,830
	India	5,022	5,278	5,682	6,907	6,330	7,970
Military Personnel	China	4,750	4,350	4,100	4,100	4,100	4,030
	India	1,104	1,120	1,104	1,120	1,260	1,260
Iron & Steel Production	China	35,600	37,160	40,020	43,470	46,790	52,200
	India	10,697	10,920	10,139	10,348	11,187	11,058

*Source: Correlates of War Project, National Material Capabilities Data Documentation, version 5.0, February 2017.

As briefly mentioned earlier, China defeated India in the Sino-Indian War in 1962. During the war, China deployed 35,000 soldiers over the Himalayan Mountains and advanced 160km crossing the Indian borders in only 7 days. India did not only fail to recover its disputed territories but was also suffered by high casualties from the battles.⁴

Low Probability of Chinese Entrapment

In the Sino-Pakistani relations, China was less dependent on the Sino-Pakistani alliance than Pakistan was. As examined earlier, China, a militarily superior state to India, was able to fight alone with India. Beijing's weak dependence on Islamabad, therefore, reduced the former's probability of entrapment.

By contrast, Pakistan was not able to fight alone with India. Pakistan was defeated in all three major wars with India – 1947, 1965 and 1971.⁵ In the 1947 war, India acquired the two thirds of the Kashmir region, including most of the contested territory such as the Kashmir valley, Jammu, and Ladakh, whereas Pakistan gained only the remaining one third. In the second war, Pakistan was also severely defeated by India and lost about 720 square miles of territory while India conceded only 300 square miles of territory. In the third war of 1971, which brought the most severe damage of the three conflicts, Pakistan not only lost East Pakistan but also lost half of its population in the area and a significant portion of its economy. The defeat was especially humiliating to Pakistan since it “suffered setbacks to its geopolitical role in South Asia while India emerged as the dominant power on the subcontinent (Wolpert, 2010).”

Since there was no official security agreement between China and Pakistan, China was less obliged to provide security assistance to Pakistan in a crisis, another factor reducing Chinese probability of entrapment. In fact, China had never militarily intervened in any of the three major wars or a number of lower-level conflicts between Pakistan and India.

Before the conflicts, China reiterated its support to Pakistan against potential Indian aggressions. When Henry Kissinger secretly visited China in 1971, Zhou Enlai said that “if

⁴ For details about the Sino-Indian War and its results, see (Seo, 2013).

⁵ The first two wars were directly caused by the Kashmir issue. The third war started due to an internal crisis within Pakistan but eventually led to Indian intervention.

India commits aggression, we will support Pakistan (Bass, 2013: 173).” When Zulfikar Ali Bhutto visited Beijing in November, shortly before the third war started, the Chinese Acting Minister of Foreign Affairs Chi Peng-fei also publicly reassured that China would “resolutely support” the Pakistani government (Peking Review, 1971). When the war began, however, China was reluctant to intervene. The U.S. encouraged China to mobilize its armies along its border with India to discourage the Indian assault, but China did not make any move (Bush, 1971).⁶

Samuel Burke analyzes that Chinese reluctance was resulting from two considerations (Burke, 1975). One was about the Soviet Union’s position on the matter. Since the Soviet Union did not seem to have a neutral stance as it did in the 1965 conflict, China worried that Chinese intervention might also prompt the Soviet Union to step in, thus creating conflict with one of the superpowers. The other concern was about the self-determination. As the conflict in East Pakistan had begun as a *de facto* civil war, China refrained from intervening because the struggle “was not the kind of confrontation in which outside powers would normally wish to take a direct action” out of worries that it might bring negative implications for China’s involvement in Tibet (Burke, 1975: 404).

Instead of directly intervening in the conflicts, the Chinese supported Pakistan as the biggest military supplier. China had provided various weapons, such as anti-aircraft guns, T-59 tanks, F-6 combat aircrafts, MiG-19, and IL28 bombers (Singh, 1999; Deepak, 2006; Jetly, 2012). The Chinese arms supplies to Pakistan from 1964 to 1987 were a total of USD 4.3 billion worth, ranked as the number one state out of 33 recipients (SIPRI, 2019). In addition to supplying arms, China played a crucial role in the modernization of Pakistan’s military capability. China made critical investment and technological support to build the Heavy Mechanical Complex, a tank repair factory at Taxila, and an air force repair factory at nearby Kamra (Talbot, 1998).

In the Sino-Pakistan relations, China was satisfied with its role as the military supplier and refused to develop its tie further with Pakistan. Islamabad was interested in a military pact with Beijing. China, however, did not provide any assertive response to its ally. Blank explains that the Chinese refusal to make an official alliance with Pakistan was mainly due to its historic aversion to the alliance (Blank, 2015). According to him, China did not have pleasant experience with its “official” allies in the past. The Sino-Soviet alliance was dissolved only after 11 years. In addition, China fought with Vietnam in 1979. As explained in the following chapter, China was strongly bound to North Korea with a high risk of entrapment. The bad memories of the alliances seemed to prevent China from making any formal agreements with Pakistan.

Chinese conciliatory moves toward India also contributed to decrease chances of China being entrapped. In the 1970s, the relations between China and India had been dramatically improved. After a landmark visit of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, the Indian Minister of External Affairs, to Beijing, both states officially re-established diplomatic relations in 1979. The Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs Huang Hua made a return visit to India in 1981.

⁶ Despite the insufficient support from China, Pakistan was not disappointed. President Zulfikar Ali Bhutto of Pakistan interviewed with the BBC in February 1972 and was asked about insufficient Chinese support for Pakistan during the conflicts. He replied that “within the limitations China did what she could” and that “whatever has been China’s participation we have not lost confidence in China’s friendship or in China’s word.” For the interview, see (Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, 1972).

By the time of the reciprocal visits, China seemed to modify its pro-Pakistan stance and instead pursue conciliatory policies toward India. For example, China expressed a neutral position on the Kashmir issue. In 1980, Deng Xiaoping publicly announced that the Kashmir issue was a bilateral problem left over from history between India and Pakistan and should be settled peacefully (Garver, 2001). This statement embodied a slight nod toward India since Pakistan had long asked for international involvement to settle the dispute, whereas India advocated that the dispute should be resolved through the bilateral talks (Garver, 2004).

China improved its relations with India for its economic development. After Deng came in power, China decided to open its market to the outside world and “shift the nation’s central task to one of speeding up economic development (Hongyu, 1995: 549).” Deng believed that the poverty of the Chinese people was caused by the antagonistic foreign policies of Mao Zedong (Garver, 2004). The Chinese government considered that the improvement of the relations with India could improve the Chinese economic conditions. In fact, bilateral trade between China and India dramatically increased from US\$25 million in 1977 to US\$62 million in 1984 (Hongyu, 1995).

Low Risk of Entrapment and Sensitive Nuclear Assistance to Pakistan

Unfortunately, there is little direct evidence available to indicate how Chinese low risk of entrapment affected its decision to supply sensitive nuclear assistance to Pakistan. Most scholars, however, see that China did not fear that Pakistan having nuclear weapons would drag China into unwanted conflicts. According to the studies, China expected that Pakistani nuclear weapons would check Indian nuclear proliferation and bring the stability in the region (Holslag, 2010; Small, 2015; Hiim, 2018). It implies that Chinese risk of entrapment was minimal when China provided sensitive nuclear technology assistance to Pakistan.

NORTH KOREA: HIGH ENTRAPMENT RISK AND NO SENSITIVE NUCLEAR ASSISTANCE

The relations between China and North Korea, often described as “lips and teeth,” had a long history. Since the establishment of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in 1948, China had been North Korea’s good friend and an important supplier of food and energy. After the Korean War, the two sides “forged a comrade-plus-brother relationship (Xiaohe, 2015: 119).” China and North Korea made their relations official by signing a formal military alliance, *the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance*, on July 11, 1961.

This section shows that Chinese refusals to provide sensitive nuclear assistance to North Korea were mostly affected by high risks of Chinese entrapment. The costs of entrapment were enormous because 1) China and North Korea did not share a lot of interests and 2) the U.S., a primary opponent of North Korea, was much stronger than China. The probability of entrapment was also significant because 1) China provided strong security commitments to North Korea, 2) China was more dependent on the Sino-North Korean alliance, and 3) North Korea continuously provoked the U.S. despite the Chinese rapprochement with the U.S. Since there was a high probability that China would be dragged into North Korea’s conflicts, China seemed to be opposed to the supply of sensitive nuclear assistance, which could arouse North Korean belligerence.

Chinese High Entrapment Risks

High Costs of Chinese Entrapment

Contrary to the common view that China and North Korea shared a large portion of security interests (McVadon, 2001), there were significant discrepancies in their threat perceptions, contributing to Chinese costs of entrapment (Lee, 2011; Chung and Choi, 2013).⁷ The differences were mainly two folds, First, China and North Korea had contrasting perceptions about the Soviet Union. While the Soviet Union was regarded as a principal threat to the Chinese security, it was considered as a necessary patron for North Korea. In fact, North Korea thought its major enemy was the U.S. (Yang, 2002) As explained below, China formed the alliance with North Korea in order to counter the Soviet Union. North Korea, however, had to rely on the Soviet Union’s economic and military assistance (Radchenko, 2005; Lee, 2011).

Second, the two sides adopted different stances on Korean reunification issue. North Korea had eagerly aspired to reunified Korea. In April 1975, Kim Il Sung said to the Chinese leadership that “this is a golden opportunity to carry out national unification by the use of military force (Xinhua, 1975a).” Mao, however, firmly refused Kim’s request. Zhou also discouraged Kim by saying that “[t]his is not the right time. We do not agree with an idea of unifying the Korean peninsula by the use of military force (Xinhua, 1975b).”

Since China and North Korea had pursued different national interests, China would have to pay huge costs and gain little in case of entrapment. The potential costs of entrapment became greater for the Chinese side as the discrepancies of threat perception and national interests between the two states became glaring.

Another reason for Chinese high costs of entrapment was that North Korea targeted the U.S. as its major threat. It implied that China would pay huge costs in case of a war with Washington. The U.S., as one of the superpowers in the Cold War era, possessed superior military capability in terms of nuclear capability as well as conventional one. Fighting with

Table 2. U.S. Military Superiority over China
(unit: million US dollars (current), thousand men, thousand tons)

		1964	1966	1968	1970	1972	1974
Military Expenditure	China	12,851	15,931	17,856	23,775	22,500	26,800
	the U.S.	51,213	67,572	80,732	77,827	77,639	85,906
Military Personnel	China	2,750	2,600	2,800	2,850	3,040	4,300
	the U.S.	2,687	3,090	3,550	3,070	2,323	2,146
Iron & Steel Production	China	9,640	15,320	9,040	17,790	23,380	21,120
	the U.S.	115,281	121,655	119,262	119,309	120,875	132,196

*Source: Correlates of War Project, National Material Capabilities Data Documentation, version 5.0, February 2017.

⁷ According to the joint statement between the two sides on June 23, 1963, both sides agreed to include the U.S., Japan, and South Korea as their common adversaries. For the text of the joint statement, see Peking Review, June 28, 1963, pp.8-12.

the U.S. would definitely incur a lot of costs for the Chinese side, which would severely increase the risk of entrapment. <Table 2> shows military capability gap between the U.S. and China from 1964 to 1974.

High Probability of Chinese Entrapment

In the Sino-North Korean relations, China seemed to be more dependent on North Korea than North Korea did. This dependence was partly responsible for the high probability of Chinese entrapment. The Chinese reliance on North Korea was resulted from deteriorating Sino-Soviet conflicts. The split between the two sides was initially prompted by the Soviet criticism on the Great Leap Forward in 1958 (Lüthi, 2012). Mao hoped the Soviet Union would recognize the economic development plan so as to strengthen the Chinese leadership in the communist bloc (Zhihua and Yafeng, 2011). Contrary to Chinese expectation, the Soviet Union condemned the campaign. Nikita Khrushchev criticized that “Mao Zedong had started down a wrong path that would lead to the collapse of his economy and, consequently, the failure of his policies (Khrushchev, 1993: 153).”

In response to the Soviet offensive reaction, China strongly felt the necessity to make a new alliance system with neighboring Communist states in Asia (Lee, 2011; Lee, 2014). In 1960, the Chinese leadership concluded that “new initiatives should be adopted vigorously in order to create a new situation in diplomacy (Wu, 1999: 248).” To construct the new alliance system, China considered North Korea as the number one candidate (Han, 2004).

North Korea was dependent on China and its assistance, but the degree of reliance was much lower than that of Chinese because North Korea had an alliance with the Soviet Union. In 1961, the Soviet Union and North Korea concluded an alliance treaty, which was almost identical one with China. In addition, the Soviet Union was the greatest arms supplier. From 1964 to 1973, North Korea imported about three-quarters of its arsenals from the Soviet Union (Joo and Kwak, 2001).

In addition, North Korea treated the treaty with the Soviet Union with higher priority than the one with China. The reasons were mainly two folds. First, North Korea preferred the Soviet security guarantee to the Chinese one especially in terms of the provision of a nuclear umbrella (Lee, 2011). Second, Kim Il Sung feared that the alliance with China would strengthen the power of the Yan’an Faction, a group of North Korean politicians having strong connections with the Chinese leadership (Nobuo, 2004).

Given that China was more dependent on North Korea in the bilateral relations, China would have been more likely to become involved in North Korean conflicts and provide assistance to its ally. The dependency, therefore, tended to greatly contribute to increase the risk of Chinese entrapment.

Chinese strong security commitments to North Korea also affected to increase the probability of entrapment. According to Article 2 of *the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance*, each party should undertake all necessary measures to help the other if attacked.⁸ Due to this point, the treaty was evaluated as “a more direct and categorical commitment” as compared to other formal alliance agreements (Lee, 1996: 59). Considering that North Korean military assistance would be merely helpful to China, this treaty seems to be more beneficial to the North Korean side, thus contributing to increase the Chinese risk of entrapment.

China, however, intentionally provided more compelling commitments in the treaty to co-

⁸ For a full text of the treaty, see Peking Review, Vol.4 No.28, July 1961, p.5.

opt North Korea into its camp (Lee, 2011). As mentioned earlier, China was in desperately in need of North Korean support in the context of the Sino-Soviet conflicts. In the early phase of the alliance formation, however, North Korea was reluctant to sign the treaty with China because, as explained above, Pyongyang had a strong desire to conclude the alliance treaty with Moscow, not Beijing.

To make substantial progress of the formal Sino-North Korean alliance, China decided to take a more proactive stance toward the Sino-North Korean alliance. On March 21, 1960, therefore, Mao ordered the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) to scrutinize the probability of signing the alliance treaty with North Korea. And he stated that "[i]f North Korea ... want to conclude alliance treaty, including an article about Chinese military aid, I think that it will be practicable (Mao, 1960)." China also made a significant economic aid of 105 million dollars to its neighbor apparently to attract North Korean attentions to the treaty. By doing this, Mao expected that it could exert its influence on North Korea, thus keeping Pyongyang away from Moscow.

Since China valued the alliance more than North Korea did in the beginning stages of the alliance formation, the treaty was designed to reflect the Chinese eagerness by promising strong commitment to North Korea in a crisis. The treaty, therefore, had greatly contributed to increase the Chinese risk of entrapment in the aspect of the probability of entrapment.

Third factor increasing Chinese chance of being entrapped was North Korea's continuous provocation even during the period of U.S.-Chinese rapprochement. Since the late 1960s, the U.S. had shown its interests in improved relations by easing the restrictions on the travel and trade against China. Throughout intermittent talks, the two governments reached an agreement to reopen them in 1969. The rapprochement had dramatic progress in the 1970s. Following the fraternal table tennis games between the U.S. and China, President Richard Nixon made a historical visit to China in 1972. Near the end of the trip, the two sides issued the Shanghai Communiqué, endorsing the "One China" policy.

The rapprochement was possible for following reasons. From the U.S. perspective, improving relations with Communist states in Asia was necessary with the expectation that a rapprochement policy "might lessen future conflict, undermine alliances between Communist countries, diplomatically isolate North Vietnam, and increase U.S. leverage against the Soviet Union (U.S. Department of State)." As for the Chinese willingness, Sino-Soviet tension contributed to the Chinese government's decision for a rapprochement with the U.S.

As mentioned earlier, the split between the two sides became extremely aggravated in the late 1960s. Mao stated that "we must have friendly relations either with the United States or the Soviet Union. We should not make operations on two fronts. ... The U.S. is a security threat to China, but not an imminent threat like the Soviet Union (Cao, 1994: 181-192)." Based on this completely different view about its major enemy, China sought to a reconciliation with the U.S.

Contrary to our expectation that the conciliatory moves between the U.S. and China would abstain the North Korean aggression, North Korea did not stop the pursuit of aggressive assaults. Rather, Pyongyang's belligerence in this period was severely intensified not only against South Korea but also against the U.S. In 1968, for example, North Korea attacked and seized the U.S. intelligence ship *Pueblo* and sent a commando team in an attempt to kill President Park Chung Hee. In the 1970s, Pyongyang's military provocation was directly targeting the U.S. The notable example of it was the Korean axe murder incident in 1976. This incident led U.S. government to dispatch the aircraft carrier and strategic bombers to the East Sea, dramatically increasing the military tensions in the Korean Peninsula.

Despite the Chinese rapprochement with the U.S., North Korean military provocations was not abated and rather intensified, thus increasing the Chinese risk of entrapment. In contrast to Snyder's arguments, the improved relations between China and the U.S. did not seem to affect the North Korean belligerence in this period. In the *Pueblo* incident, for example, Pyongyang forced Beijing to clarify whether it was on the united front against 'American Imperialists.' China unwillingly made a statement on the side of North Korea against the U.S. (Li, 2006). Considering that China was secretly negotiating the rapprochement with the U.S. at this time, however, Chinese support was an action to give it a face (Garver, 1993; Chen, 2000).

Mao, however, was not fully in agreement with the North Korean leadership. The anti-American postures of North Korea continued in the 1970s when China and the U.S. were building up rapprochement in earnest. Kim Il Sung states that "[r]egardless of the kind of relationship American imperialists get to establish with China, it is evident that we [North Korean] cannot have friendly relations with Washington (Kim, 1974: 109)."

The sudden increase of the North Korean provocations could be explained by political transition inside North Korea. In the 1970s, Kim Jong Il was designated as a successor of the North Korea regime by his father Kim Il Sung. He brought about a series of aggression in order to strengthen his weak military credentials (Lee, 2012). Also, North Korea believed that the military aggression against U.S. armies in South Korea would lead the U.S. to eventually withdraw its forces in the Peninsula (Lee, 2014).

High Risk of Entrapment and No Sensitive Nuclear Assistance

Again, there is no direct evidence available to show the causal relation between Chinese high risk of entrapment and its decision not to provide sensitive nuclear assistance to North Korea. It is, however, plausible to argue that China had good reasons to believe that North Korean belligerence would be aroused by its nuclear capability, thus raising the risk of entrapment. According to a memorandum by the Hungarian foreign ministry, North Korea prepared for a nuclear war with South Korea in the mid-1970s. North Korean leadership believed that peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula was hardly likely to happen and that a future war with South Korea would be waged with nuclear weapons (Garajski, 1976). This memorandum is a good indication showing that North Korea's belligerence would be highly increased after possessing nuclear capability.

CONCLUSION

This paper argues that contrasting choices on supplying sensitive nuclear technology assistance to Pakistan and North Korea were caused due to the different degree of Chinese entrapment risk. In the case of Pakistan, China supplied sensitive nuclear assistance to Pakistan because the risk of Chinese entrapment was low. Since China and Pakistan pursued similar interests and China was able to defeat India, Pakistan's major security threat, prospective costs of entrapment for China were not so great. Furthermore, China was less likely to be dragged into potential Pakistan conflicts due to Chinese weak commitment and dependence on the Sino-Pakistan alliance. Chinese conciliatory policies toward India in the 1970s also contributed to lower the probability of entrapment by preventing Pakistani military provocations.

By contrast, the Chinese entrapment risk was high in its relations with North Korea, thus China did not provide sensitive nuclear assistance to its ally. China would have paid enormous costs when entrapped into North Korean conflicts because the two sides did not have a high portion of common interests. Also, confronting the U.S., a superpower as well as North Korea's principal opponent, was too burdensome for China. In addition to the high costs, the probability was also great. According to the bilateral security agreement, China should automatically intervene in North Korean contingencies. Besides, China was more reliant on North Korea because it was in need of North Korean support due to the decay of the Sino-Soviet relations. Lastly, North Korea continuously committed military provocations against the U.S., despite U.S.-Chinese rapprochement in the 1970s, thus the possibility of entrapment was greater than ever.

The arguments of this paper are applicable to explain other cases of sensitive nuclear assistance. Israel, for example, asked the U.S. to help Israel nuclear development, but the U.S. denied supplying the assistance to Israel (The Geneva Conference on the Peaceful Use of Atomic Energy, 1955). It could be argued that U.S. refusal was due to the high risk of entrapment. Since Israel had been in a series of military confrontations with Arab states since the late 1940s. The American leadership believed that the 'nuclear' Israel could destabilize the region, possibility dragging the U.S. into a costly conflict. The CIA report predicted that "Israel's policy toward its neighbors would become more rather than less tough. ... it would probably feel freer than it does not to take vigorous retaliatory action against border harassments when they did occur (CIA, 1963)."

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