

Nuclear Weapons as Ideology: The Formation of North Korean Nuclear Independence, 1962–1964

Do Jein

Previous studies have primarily attributed North Korea's nuclear ambitions to post-Cold war developments, citing the loss of Soviet patronage, the American nuclear monopoly, and the politics of power succession. However, focusing on the post-1990s overlooks the fact that North Korean nuclear independence has older theoretical and ideological roots, specifically dating back to the Sino-Soviet split from 1962–1964. During this time, Pyongyang established nuclear independence as an inalienable sovereign right and indispensable ideological imperative as a reaction to the parallel intensification of Soviet-American nuclear cooperation and the Sino-Soviet nuclear fallout. As the former culminated in the Limited Test Ban Treaty (1963) and the latter rendered the intramural split irreversible, North Korea launched an unprecedented public attack against the Soviet push for peaceful coexistence and openly sided with Chinese advocacy of nuclear independence for all socialist states. Made inevitable by Soviet "revisionism," fueled by unmitigated anti-Americanism, and inspired by an ambiguous ally in Beijing, North Korean nuclear independence progressively became the centerpiece of its exclusive ideological correctness underpinning the accelerated promotion of self-reliance (*juch'e chuch'e*) in the 1960s. The uniqueness and intractability of the North Korean nuclear problem is defined as much by its ideological association during the Cold War as by its post-Cold War military necessity.

Keywords: Nuclear independence, Kim Il Sung, Sino-Soviet split, Chinese nuclear test, peaceful coexistence

Do Jein (jeando1966@gmail.com) is a post-doctoral research fellow at the Institute of Social Sciences, Sogang University.

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