

# Could a new North Korean submarine alter the regional balance? | Aggies GO

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A “Sang-O” North Korean submarine, one of few images of North Korean submarine technology.

This model differs from the supposedly nuclear-enabled design, however.

Jonah Carlson – North Korea continues to flex its military might, this time with rhetoric, claiming last week that its submarine “Hero Kim Kun Ok” had been armed with nuclear capabilities. While many are skeptical of Pyongyang’s remarks, they still raised eyebrows within states and organizations in the Western world. Kim Tong-Hyung explores the potential of the submarine [in a recent article](#) with the Associated Press.

[Previously](#), we contemplated the influence of Kim Jong Un’s ideological power on both North Korean and international perceptions of his regime. Now, we turn to [material power](#), which traditionally is much more tangible, measuring the countable elements of a state’s force – its economy, the number of missiles it has, etc. However, the extent of North Korea’s material power in this instance is not clear. What is clear is that North Korean has a submarine known as the “Hero Kim Kun Ok,” based on Soviet designs from the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century according to expert Ankit Panda, whom the author quotes. Also clear is that North Korea has previously tested nuclear weapons, with the last confirmed test in [2017](#). Pyongyang’s announcement asserts that they have managed to combine these two technologies to produce a submarine with “nuclear attack capabilities,” a claim which officials from South Korea contest. If the new technology

proves credible, it will supply North Korea with a new angle from which to pressure South Korean defense systems, further raising tensions on the peninsula.

While a conflict is unlikely to explode on the Korean peninsula in the coming days, North Korea has found another place to put its weapons to use: the Ukrainian battlefield. After meeting with President Vladimir Putin in Russia, Kim Jong Un has promised Russia [the “full and unconditional support” of North Korea](#) in their war efforts, opening a route to donate its weaponry to Moscow. The move demonstrates the unique [relational power](#) of North Korea: though almost entirely isolated from the West, the Kim dynasty still holds “friends” in high places that can impact the global balance of power.

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