

CHINA AND NORTH KOREA: AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP

**Dissertation submitted to Goa University in partial fulfillment of the degree of
Masters of Arts in International Studies**



By

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2021-22.

DECLARATION

I, hereby declare that the Master's Thesis entitled: **“CHINA AND NORTH KOREA: AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP”** submitted by me in the partial fulfillment of the degree in Masters of Arts in International Studies of Goa University, is my original research work.

The dissertation has not been submitted for any other degree either of this or any other university.

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the dissertation entitled: “**CHINA AND NORTH KOREA: AN AMBIVALENT RELATIONSHIP**”, undertaken by the candidate Ms. Parul Trivedi is a record of original work carried out in partial fulfillment of Masters of Arts degree in International Studies from Goa University in the year 2021-2022, and that, it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree elsewhere.

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List of Abbreviations

APEC- Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation

CCP- Chinese Communist Party

CPC- Communist Party of China

CPVA- Chinese People's Voluntary Army

DPRK: Democratic People's Republic of Korea

FDI- Foreign Direct Investment

G20- Group of 20

IAEA- International Atomic Energy Agency

ICBM- Inter Continental Ballistic Missile

KIC- Kaesong Industrial Complex

KPA- Korean People's Army

KWP- Korean Worker's Party

MFA- Ministry of Foreign Affairs

PLA- People's Liberation Army

PRC- People's Republic of China

RFE- Russian Far East

ROK- Republic of Korea

THAAD- Terminal High Altitude Area Defense

U.S- United States

UN- United Nations

UNSC- United Nations Security Council

WFP- World Food Programme

WPK- Worker's Party of Korea

INTRODUCTION

Abstract

In the past, the relationship between China and North Korea has often been referred to as the ‘Lip and Teeth alliance’ seeking to showcase traditional warmth bilateral ties.¹ China is, in general, maintained a double standard attitude towards North Korea as on one hand, it considers it to be its protective shield in the North-East Asian security architecture and on the contrary is wary about North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and proliferation over the Korean peninsula. Therefore, in recent years China has adopted a cautious approach in dealing with North Korea as Beijing fears that if the DPRK creates any chaotic conditions over the Korean peninsula, then it might create security concerns for China over its borders as well as the continuous conflict between the United States and North Korea might even expose off the deep reality of China’s expansionist ambitions in front of the world. Henceforth, Beijing has mixed feelings toward North Korea as Beijing attempts to cooperate with North Korea on variant issues in maintaining the ‘regime stability’ in appearance, but in reality, has been opposing North Korea’s nuclear proliferation through limited international sanctions. Thus, this thesis would explicate various facets of interactions between China and North Korea by developing an analysis of their relationship from the perspective of China’s strategic thinking and thus would highlight the contemporary phases of their enduring relationship.

This thesis in context with the China and North Korea relations also attempts at explicating the Beijing’s approach towards South Korea which becomes an important part of our study as this thesis provides certain glimpses of the burgeoning China and South Korea ties which develop certain implications on North Korea as well as provide a holistic view on the role of China as a constructive mediator in the Inter-Korean affairs to exert and maintain its influence over the Korean peninsula region. In addition, China and North Korean relations had been assessed taking into consideration the different engagement strategies adopted by major powers of the world through their great power status and showcasing the actions and reactions of these players in the changing scenarios over the Korean peninsula region. Thus, these major powers have in present times attempted in changing the power and security structure of the region and have developed

¹ Evans J. Revere. (2019). “Lips and Teeth: Repairing China and North Korea Relations”. *Research report: The Brookings Institution*. URL: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/fp_20191118_china_nk_revere.pdf Accessed on January 10, 2022.

various pressure tactics to regulate the behavior of nuclear North Korea to maintain the balance of power of the region vis-a-vis China.

Academic Rationale of the Research

The research importance of this topic is not only viable for the policymakers dealing with China and North Korea but also becomes important for the policymakers of various other stakeholders involved in this region. Today, these stakeholders are engaged in a tenuous balance of power as China's emerging growth, Japan's possible remilitarization, North Korea's nuclear programs, and South Korea's reunification efforts along with its ally the United States are some of the issues prevailing in this region. In present times, the Korean peninsula is the only region of the world where four major powers of the world: the US, China, Japan, and Russia uneasily meet, and interact where their respective interests coalesce, compete or clash with the changes in the situation over the peninsula. In addition, in this region, North Korea has emerged as a center of attraction as it garners much concern from the major powers of the world due to its aloof attitude, its perplexing moves for aid, and its defiant isolationism and thus motivates these major powers to engage in this region of the world to create peace and stability by maintaining the balance of power of the region favoring their national interests.

Research Objectives

This thesis would aim at:

- Firstly, understanding and identifying various key strands of engagement between China and North Korea highlighting various facets of their present-day partnership.
- Secondly, unveiling the nature of geopolitics between South Korea, North Korea, and China to assess the plausible implications on the prospects of China's role in the region as well as its effects on the China and North Korea relationship.
- Lastly, to unravel the different engagement strategies of major powers of the world in resolving the Korean conundrum.

Research Questions

This thesis seeks to answer the following research questions:

- What are the implications on North Korea with the burgeoning China and South Korea's engagements?
- Does North Korea's belligerent behavior affects the nature of China and South Korea's partnership?

Hypothesis

This thesis is based on the following tentative assumptions:

- China may cooperate with some limited measures in an attempt to exert its influence over North Korea.
- China has a long-standing fear that a unified Korea would be based on the pro- United States model which would marginalize the role of China in the region.

Theoretical Approach

This thesis applies the realist approach to explicate the different security concerns of the actors involved in resolving the Korean conundrum. The realist approach has attempted to analyze the fact that each of the stakeholders involved in this region through their diversified engagement strategies had been hedging against each other to leverage their influence in the region which would result in the serving of their respective national interests. This paradigm has also helped in understanding the nature of great power competition which had been prevailing in this region, especially the US-China strategic competition which has largely affected the power structure of the region. In addition, the nuclear North Korea's behavior had also been explained based on a realist approach as such belligerent behavior of DPRK is the result of securing its position in this hostile world order and had been a consequence of the security dilemma situation created under the overarching lens of the great power rivalries over the Korean peninsula.

Research Methodology

This thesis is based on a qualitative analysis of China and North Korea relations by gathering data from primary sources like Government documents retrieved from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of both the countries and documents retrieved from the embassies of both the countries. Data is collected using secondary sources like Peer-reviewed journals, published dissertations/thesis, books, e-newspapers, and research reports published by various think tanks in general. Such sources have helped in knowing about the evolutionary trends as well as opinions expressed by various scholars in this field had been used to make a point of conclusion and analysis in tune with the objectives outlined in this study. Quantitative analysis has only been used at a minimal level to explain the various economic-related trends existing between China and North Korea from past to present. This analysis had been depicted in the thesis in the forms of graphs to provide a holistic view of the nature of the relationship between the PRC and DPRK.

Synoptic Chapterisation

This thesis consists of a total of five chapters and they are as follows:

- Chapter I entitled: “ **A Historical Review of China-North Korea Alliance**” will be highlighting different evolutionary phases of the China-North Korea relationship taking into account the solidarity partnership during the Korean war in 1950, followed by explicating various trends and factors which resulted in the fluctuations in their relationship between the period 1960s to 1990s highlighting the fault lines between the two and the resultant patch up work done by the two to revamp their relationship.
- Chapter II entitled: “**Decoding China and North Korea Relations in Post-Cold War Era**” will provide a holistic view of the different facets of China and North Korea’s partnership assessing cooperation between the two in the domains of Politico-diplomatic levels, economic and aid cooperation, cooperation and compromises on the process of denuclearization and the reunification processes in accordance with the Chinese underlying goals and aims towards North Korea in contemporary times.
- Chapter III entitled: “**China and the Geopolitics of Korean Peninsula**” will provide an analysis of growing China and South Korea’s ties in present times and would be assessing plausible implications of such a developing partnership with the North Korea.

This chapter would also assess the patterns of Inter-Korean rapprochement and the role of China as a mediator in the Inter-Korean affairs which would again provide an assessment of implications on the prospects of China and North Korea relations.

- Chapter IV entitled: **“China and the Major Powers in the Korean Peninsula: Politics of Great Power Competition”** would unveil the different engagement strategies adopted by major powers of the world like the United States, Russia and Japan which emerged as the major actors in resolving the Korean conundrum and this chapter would clearly indicate the prevalence of great power competition which had existed and which has shaped the present geopolitical scenario of the region.
- Chapter V entitled: **“Summary and Conclusion”** would provide a close analysis of present as well as future trajectories of the relationship between China and North Korea and would highlight the key findings of the nature of relationship between PRC and DPRK along with it will provide the further scope of the additional research as well as limitations of the study, followed by plausible recommendations to the policy makers dealing with the Korean peninsula issue to lay down the policies assessing the strategies of the actors involved in this region.

Survey of the Literature

There had been limited availability of literature on decoding the exact nature of the China and North Korean alliance, nevertheless, the limited amount of literature that becomes available to us had helped out in framing the arguments in this thesis.

With regards to deciphering the evolutionary aspects of China and North Korean relations, Chen Jian in his essay **“Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ Alliance: An Historical Review of Chinese-North Korean Relations”**, argues that history is littered with instances of tension and stress in the relationship. According to him what began as relationship between “big brother” China and “little brother” North Korea came to resemble something akin to bitter sibling rivalry. Beijing lost much of its influence over Pyongyang as China abandoned its revolutionary agenda in favor of economic development, while North Korea chose to languish in the past. Therefore, in today’s crisis, Chen

suggests that Beijing no longer has ideological leverage in influencing the behavior of North Korea.²

Shen Zhihua and Yafeng Xia in their chapter entitled: **“Refuting Two Historical Myths: A New Interpretation of China-North Korean Relations”**, opined that the Sino-North Korean relationship, which has long been hailed by both sides as “forged in blood” and “as close as lips to teeth” exists in name only. The relationship was very tense during and after the Korean War and during China’s Cultural Revolution. Even when the relationship was at its best from 1962 to 1965 and from 1989 to 1992, the DPRK was not truthful to China. They also suggested the fact that with the end of cold war in 1990, Beijing casts aside it’s historical and ideological constraints and treats the new, third-generation, spoiled, and ungrateful ruler in Pyongyang as he deserves. In this regard, Beijing should cooperate with Washington, withdraw its material and political support to Kim Jong-un, and prepare for the eventual meltdown of the DPRK.³

There had been scholars who defined the current aspects of the PRC and DPRK relationship. Gu Guoliang in his chapter entitled: **“China’s Policy toward the DPRK’s Nuclear and Missile Programs”**, he argues that, the key to making progress on denuclearization with North Korea must begin with unilateral changes by the United States and North Korea. The United States must adjust its policy so that North Korea feels secure enough to give up its nuclear program, while North Korea needs to move toward an open-door economic policy and prepare to abide by international norms.⁴

Li Nan in his chapter entitled: **“A Strategic and Emotional Partner: China and Its Food Aid to North Korea in the Twenty-First Century”**, implies that China’s continued policy of support through its food aid diplomacy is self-defeating, as it effectively inhibits the development by

² Chen Jian. (2003). “Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ alliance: A Historical review of Chinese- North Korean relations” *Asia Program Special Report: Woodrow Wilson Centre for International Scholars*. URL: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/uneasy-allies-fifty-years-china-north-korea-relations> accessed on: January 10, 2022.

³ Shen Zhihua and Yafeng Xia. 2015. “Refuting two historical myths: A new interpretation of China- North Korea relations, in Carla P. Freeman (Ed.), *China and North Korea: Strategic Policy Perspectives from a Changing China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers Ltd: 91-94.

⁴ Gu Guoliang. 2015. ““China’s Policy toward the DPRK’s Nuclear and Missile Programs”, in Carla P. Freeman (ed.), *China and North Korea: Strategic Policy Perspectives from a Changing China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 157-174.

establishing North Korea's stabilized and productive domestic system.⁵ Similarly, Li Jinsu in her chapter entitled: **“Evaluating North Korea's Economic Policy in the 2000s Economic Cooperation with China Is an Inevitable Choice”**, provides a detailed look at the development of the North Korean economy over the past few years. Lin paints a picture of a North Korea whose economic policies and goals have become ever more incompatible with its security policies, and argues that this has been a key impetus to the recent growth of China-North Korean economic ties and their relative importance to the North Korean economy. However, she also suggests that China's economic engagement with North Korea is supportive of broader international trade and economic cooperation by that country, with North Korea already seeing an expanding role in its economy for market forces.⁶

Mathieu Duchâtel and Phillip Schell in their policy report paper entitled: **“China's Policy on North Korea”**, opines that China's approach is based on the assumption that the North Korean regime is not going to collapse and that the nuclear issue should be dealt with by the existing regime rather than through regime change. In addition, China has clearly adjusted its economic and trade policy on North Korea, greatly expanding bilateral trade and investment since 2009, while more recently adjusting its views on the strategic utility of sanctions on North Korea in order to more strictly implement UN Security Council resolutions and enforce multilateral sanctions.⁷

Dr. Jagannath P Panda in his chapter entitled: **“Beijing and the House of Cards in the Korean Peninsula”**, opines that China's interests to have a divided Korea in its neighborhood rather than a unified one. A unified Korea will not only alter the balance of power equation in Northeast Asia, but also alter China's political calculations in the broader Indo Pacific region. Therefore, it goes without mentioning that China's role as a resident power in the region will definitely be pivotal in shaping the future of the Korean Peninsula. Since the inception of the Korean War on June 25,

⁵ Li Nan. 2015. “A Strategic and Emotional Partner: China and Its Food Aid to North Korea in the Twenty-First Century”, in Carla P. Freeman (ed.), *China and North Korea: Strategic Policy Perspectives from a Changing China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 189-201.

⁶ Li Jinsu. 2015. “Evaluating North Korea's Economic Policy in the 2000s Economic Cooperation with China Is an Inevitable Choice”, in Carla P. Freeman (ed.), *China and North Korea: Strategic Policy Perspectives from a Changing China*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 205-221.

⁷ Mathieu Duchâtel and Phillip Schell. (2013). “China's Policy on North Korea”. *Policy Brief: Stockholm International Peace Research Institute*. URL: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIPP40.pdf> Accessed on January 11, 2022.

1950, China's role has always been the most important factor not only in dividing North and South Korea but also in leading the non-Western bloc in global affairs.⁸

In Jingdong Yuan's article entitled: **"China's Core Interests and Critical Role in North Korea's Denuclearization"**, stated that: "China sees South Korea as a critical part of its effort to establish its preeminence in Northeast Asia. South Korea's status in the U.S. alliance architecture as the "linchpin" and its central role regarding North Korea issues, as well as its geographic proximity and economic dynamism, have underscored the country's importance to China's regional strategy. This strategy is driven by a desire to weaken Washington's alliance relationships, increase Beijing's influence on Korean Peninsula affairs, including North Korea denuclearization, and shape the region to be more amenable to supporting its preferences".⁹

Laura Renner in her Master's thesis entitled: **"The Growing Relationship between South Korea and China: Consequences for North Korea"**, points out the fact that with the growing ties between PRC and ROK North Korea is likely to benefit by extracting economic aid from both the countries and henceforth would marginalize the role of US towards DPRK in the Korean peninsula.¹⁰ Xiaoming Zhang in his article entitled: **"China and Inter Korean Relations"**, believed in the fact that China desires of promoting the stability in the Inter-Korean relations as both ROK and DPRK are the most important parties which are capable of shaping the future trajectories of the Korean peninsula and China being a constructive player can only support the efforts of these two countries in the process of reunification and henceforth Beijing maintains a balanced relationship with both the Koreas to create and stability over the Korean peninsula.¹¹

Titli Basu in her chapter entitled: **"Introduction: Mapping the Korean Conundrum"**, has highlighted different competing interests of the major powers in the Korean peninsula where US-China strategic rivalry came into forefront where The US lays emphasis on eliminating the threat

⁸ Jagannath P Panda. 2019. "Beijing and the House of Cards in the Korean Peninsula", in Titli Basu (ed.) *Major Powers and the Korean Peninsula: Politics, Policies and Perspectives*. New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 181-183.

⁹ Jindong Yuan. (2019). "China's Core Interests and Critical Role in North Korea's Denuclearization". *East Asian Policy*. 11(3): pp. 25-38. URL: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/wsi/eapxxx/v11y2019i03ns1793930519000242.html> Accessed on January 11, 2022.

¹⁰ Laura Renner. (2006). "The Growing Relationship between South Korea and China: Consequences for North Korea" (Master's Thesis). URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA445560.pdf> Accessed on January 11, 2022.

¹¹ Xiaoming Zhang. (2002). "China and Inter Korean Relations". *Asian Perspective*. 26(3): pp. 131-144. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42704377?seq=1> Accessed on January 12, 2022.

posed by Pyongyang's nuclear weapons and missile programme, reassuring the regional allies of US commitment and deny using the North Korean issue to advance its larger strategic ambitions. While China supports the goal of denuclearization but does not consider Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programme as a direct threat. In the meantime, North Korea has played into the US-China strategic competition as it seeks to revive China-North Korea political and economic relations while engaging with the US directly for negotiating denuclearization and sanctions. North Korea engages in maximizing its gains by taking advantage of the differences among major regional powers. For instance, North Korea has engaged in trilateral talks with China and Russia while furthering its top priority of easing sanctions. The trilateral talks have called for 'reciprocity, and parallel, synchronous and gradual steps', and have argued that denuclearization in the Korean Peninsula should follow the Russian-Chinese roadmap. Both China and Russia are mindful of upholding regime stability in North Korea in the context of tight economic sanctions. Regime collapse would have adverse effects on both China and Russia as they share borders with North Korea. Even Russia engages with North Korea to realize its economic projects in the RFE region. Also, the North Korean nuclear programme has emerged as a key variable, testing the resilience of Japan's post-war security orientation. Considerable advancement in North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile programme has raised fierce policy debates in Japan on how to evolve a better alliance management mechanism, and balance the US's extended deterrence commitment versus the intensification of alliance de-coupling concerns.¹²

¹² Titli Basu. 2019. "Introduction: Mapping the Korean Conundrum", in Titli Basu (ed.) *Major Powers and the Korean Peninsula: Politics, Policies and Perspectives*. New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 10-15.

Chapter I

A Historical Review of China-North Korea Alliance

Introduction

The China-North Korean relationship can be traced back to the historical concept of ‘**Huayilon**’¹³ which represented China’s centrality (**Sino- Centrism**)¹⁴ in the East Asian region. Under this concept, China was the ‘**hua**’ (center of civilization), whereas it’s peripheral countries were ‘**yi**’ (the backward ones). Under such a system, the bilateral tributary system between China and its periphery was formed by peripheral countries becoming part of the Chinese empire in this tributary system.¹⁵

Historically, Korea had long been China’s tributary state and under this system, Korea’s Chosun dynasty (1392-1910) willingly accepted Sino centrism, Chinese history, Confucianism and Chinese literature, and Confucian culture.¹⁶ In general, this tributary relationship overwhelmed the minds of PRC (People’s Republic of China) leaders which became one of the paramount factors in the China- DPRK (Democratic People’s Republic of Korea) relationship. In this age-old relationship, China played the role of a ‘Big Brother’ and shared common bonds with DPRK based on common communist ideology and sharing of common historical sentiments of anti-U.S. and anti-Japanese thoughts. Secondly, their relationship had been evolved from the CCP- KWP (Chinese Communist Party- Korean Worker’s Party) relationship and henceforth showcased the congenial relationship between the socialist bloc countries. This Big Brother- Little Brother relationship became imminent even during the Korean War in 1950 and this relationship was

¹³ The system of Huayilon served the purpose of maintaining the relationship between China and its peripheries through diplomacy with the weak periphery serving the powerful Middle Kingdom in the return for assurance in maintaining peace and stability among neighbors.

¹⁴ Refers to dominance and centrality of Confucian thought and Confucian utopian world order. It emerged as a norm that defined relationship between the sovereign and the controlled subject in the East Asian civilizational network, however with the course of changing world order under Western impact this system of network came into decline.

¹⁵ Young Seo Paik. (2005). *East Asian Regional Order*. Seoul: Changbi Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 79-120.

¹⁶ Hwa Yong Chang. 2005. “Sino- centric tributary system from the periphery: Chosun dynasty’s recognition and utilization of the tributary system”, in Young Seo Paik (ed.) *East Asian Regional Order*. Seoul: Changbi Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 79-120.

facilitated by the then leader of the Chinese Communist revolution Mao Zedong to evoke public support for the war efforts despite facing the diffidence of other Chinese leaders.¹⁷

Since 1949, the relationship between PRC and DPRK had been described by various expressions such as “as close as lips and teeth”, and “sharing weal and woe”; the traditional relationship was forged with fresh blood and tested in war” and so on.¹⁸ However, it could be reinstated that in reality in the past, the relationship between the two had been in a state of ambiguity and the inheritance of the uneasy history of the China- DPRK relationship had been reflected in the complexities of relations of PRC- DPRK today unraveling the limitedness of Beijing’s influence over Pyongyang’s belligerent attitudes and policies. Therefore, this chapter seeks to review and assess the evolutionary historical aspects of the PRC- DPRK relationship under different phases highlighting the metamorphic nature of Chinese policies towards North Korea till the end of the cold war in the 1990s.

Early contacts between PRC and DPRK: Formation of revolutionary friendship

The contemporary PRC- North Korean relationship had originated from the revolutions in which both countries fought side by side against their common enemies and formed a revolutionary alliance to consolidate their political power. Throughout their history, they had been facing the Japanese aggressive militarism and expansionism. In the 1930s Korean communists developed good relations with Chinese communists by supporting each other in guerrilla warfare against Japan and in the late 1930s, the Korean communists joined China’s war of resistance against Japan by integrating themselves into the CCP army.¹⁹ During the Chinese civil war between CCP and Nationalists in the 1940s, North Korea served as a strategic support base for CCP in Manchuria and approximately 100,000 Korean residents in China supported the Chinese communist forces

¹⁷ Andrew Scobell. (2004). “China and North Korea: From comrades- in arms to allies at arm’s length”. *Research Report: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College*. URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11269?seq=2#metadata_info_tab_contents Accessed on March 6, 2022.

¹⁸ Zhihua and Xia. See n 3.

¹⁹ Shen Xihua. (2017). “Sharing a similar fate: The historical process of the Korean Communists merger with Chinese Communist Party (1919-1936)”. *Journal of Modern Chinese history*. 2 (1): pp: 1-28. URL: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/17535654.2017.1298934> Accessed on March 6, 2022.

and the 156th, 164th, and 166th best combat units of PLA(People's Liberation Army) mainly composed of ethnic Korean soldiers.²⁰

With the outbreak of war in 1937, various ethnic Korean soldiers accepted the leadership of China's Eighth Route Army and the CCP. In order to consolidate political power, in June 1941, the North China branch of the Korean Volunteers Corps was established under the auspices of the Eighth Route Army. In July 1942, with the back support of the CCP, the Korean Independence League was formed under the leadership of Kim Tu-bong and Ch'oe Ch'ang-ik, and also the North China branch of the Korean Volunteer Corps was expanded and reorganized into the Korean Volunteers Army with Mu Chŏng as commander in chief and Pak-Hyo-sam and Pak Il-u as his deputies.²¹

With the advent of decolonization after World War II, there had been an upsurge in the Communist-led revolutions all around Asia. In this backdrop, both the Chinese and the Koreans attempted to establish a close relationship with each other on the basis of common revolutionary ideals and this political factor paved the new way for defining the alliance as 'lips and teeth' between China and North Korea that traditionally was based solely upon the geographical factor. This proximity between the two was quite visible during certain episodes of post-World War II when in July 1946, the CCP North East Bureau opened an office in Pyongyang and appointed Zhu Lizhi as a plenipotentiary. Thus, this led to the development of contact between CCP and Korean leaders.²²

According to the reports of the CCP North East Bureau, North Korean genuinely helped Chinese communists by offering them shelter, food aid, and medicine as Kim Il Sung was highly determined to support CCP and according to Zhu Lizhi, North Korea served as a bridge which paved the way for opening supply lines to Chinese communists and North Korea had become an absolute rearguard base providing tremendous support to Chinese PLA.²³ In the year 1947-48 more than 52,000 tons of goods belonging to CCP were transshipped via North Korea facilitating trade

²⁰ Jian. See n.2. pp. 4-10.

²¹ Yuanhua Xi. (2000). *A history of the Chinese Communist Party's assistance to the Korean independence movement (1921-1945)*. Beijing: No Publisher mentioned.

²² Shen Zhihua and Yafeng Xia. (2020). "Victory and expansion of the revolution in China and North Korea: 1949-1950", in Shen Zhihua and Yafeng Xia (eds.) *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong; Kim IL Sung and Sino-North Korean relations*. New York: Columbia University Press: 17.

²³ Ibid. p.19.

between the two countries and similarly, approximately, 8,685 Chinese passengers passed through the Tumen- Namyang port in 1948.²⁴ Many diplomatic visits by overseas Chinese representatives including Li Jishen, Shen Junru, Zhang Lu, and Cai Tingkai attended meetings of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference used to travel from Hong Kong to China via North Korea.²⁵



Figure 1: New China-North Korean Tumen- Namyang Road Bridge constructed in 2019

Source: <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/new-china-north-korea-tumen-road-bridge-nears-completion/>

The CCP too reciprocated North Korea by providing it with 30,000 tons of grain as food aid as well as helping North Korea in building its army comprising of ethnic Koreans who served in the former Korean Volunteers Army. With the establishment of the Korean People's Army (KPA) on February 8, 1947, the returnees from China were a part of KPA'S first division unit, however, due to the unavailability of statistical data, it was only speculated that between 1946-49 approximately 800 ethnic Korean military cadres and military school students returned back to North Korea and thus such returnees were to become the backbone of KPA.²⁶

²⁴ Tumen- Namyang Road Bridge had been recently constructed in 2019 connecting North Hamgyong province in North Korea with China signifying the major port of entry for China and North Korea economic interactions. This crossing consists of both the Tumen railroad bridge (*Tumen-gyo*) and, 600 meters to the northeast, the Tumen Road Bridge (*Tumen-taegyo*). These bridges connect the small North Korean city of Namyang to the much larger Chinese city of Tumen. For more details visit: <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/new-china-north-korea-tumen-road-bridge-nears-completion/>

²⁵ Zhihua and Xia. See n 22. pp. 19-20.

²⁶ Ibid. p.20.

Therefore, it can be reiterated that both Mao and Kim Il Sung understood the necessity of building a formal alliance between two in order to establish their political regimes and it was rightly stated by Kim Il Sung once that: “It is the lofty, internationalist obligation of the Korean Communists and people to aid the revolutionary cause of the Chinese people.” He also believed that the victory of the Chinese revolution could be beneficial for Korea’s security and development. Similarly, Mao supporting the notion of revolutionary internationalism showcased a readiness in maintaining its relations with North Korea, however, the pathway to building up a formal alliance between the two countries was disrupted by the adventurist nature of Kim paving the way for the Korean War in 1950.²⁷

Decoding the relationship prior to and after Korean War: (1949-1960)

In October 1949, with the Chinese Communist revolution gaining worldwide victory and with the establishment of the PRC, the North Korean leader Kim IL Sung was desirous of waging a war against South and Korean communists hoped that their Chinese counterparts would support them in this legitimate decision of waging a war. However, sharp contradictions were visible between the leaders of both China and North Korea and significant problems emerged between Chinese and Korean communists.

The first problematic issue was that before waging a war against the South, Kim IL Sung did not consult Beijing about his adventurist plans and did not indicate the exact schedule of the war to Mao despite his dismissal of the idea of war. The second issue that came to the forefront related to the fact that when in October 1950, the Chinese entered the Korean War, China only aimed at supporting the Kim IL Sung regime and to bear upon the responsibility as a leader of the Asian revolution.²⁸ To support DPRK in the war China transferred 50,000 to 70,000 ethnic Korean soldiers in the PLA with their weapons back to Korea.²⁹ But the relationship between the two were plagued by distrust as Kim disliked the reluctance of China in supporting DPRK in invading the South despite DPRK’s unending support to the Chinese communist revolutions, whereas Mao believed in prioritizing the unification of Tibet and Taiwan over the issue of Korean unification.³⁰

²⁷ Ibid. p.21.

²⁸ Zhihua and Xia. See n.3. p.97.

²⁹ Jian. See n2. p.5.

³⁰ Lee Dongchan. (2015). *A study on the PRC-DPRK Alliance: Focusing on historical development of Alliance* (Master’s thesis). URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/citations/ADA624095> Accessed on March 7, 2022.

During the war period other major disputes emerged between the two countries where firstly there was a lack of a unified command during the war, as on one hand Kim IL Sung intended to combine both the Chinese and the Korean command posts and desired for taking over the control and command of the CPVA (Chinese People's Volunteer Army)³¹ but on the contrary, Kim IL Sung's nationalist pride was blemished as he was reluctant to give up its command of the North Korea troops to China with the assumption of China's position over as the chief of command of the CPVA.³² The second major dispute was regarding the question of the movement of Chinese and North Korean troops along the 38th parallel where CPVA Commander in Chief Peng Duhai was reluctant to move beyond the 38th parallel due to badly affected supply lines whereas North Korean leaders considered such an act to be dubious in nature which created an indirect hiccup in their relationship during the war.³³ The third major conflict between the two was based on the control of the North Korean railroad wherein the control of the rail transportation system was given to China. This issue affected North Korea's domestic affairs and was considered by North Koreans as an interference in the sovereignty of their land and in their domestic affairs.³⁴ The last major issue was that in May 1951, PRC decided to "adopt 'strategy of negotiating while fighting' and striving for solutions through negotiations".³⁵ However, Kim IL Sung opposed this policy of China and henceforth demanded launching a final offensive against the South, but unfortunately, with the interventions of Stalin, Kim accepted the proposal of peace negotiations.

In general, these disputes showcase that throughout the history of the war, China and Korea had maintained a suzerain-vassal relationship³⁶ (zongfan guanxi, 宗主關係)³⁷. It was rightly stated by the historian Chen Jian: Mao believed that to send Chinese troops to Korea was not for such an

³¹ CPVA is the Chinese People Volunteer Army. China named its army which is deployed to North Korea to help it fight the UN forces as a volunteer army in order to avoid international criticism and make it look less formal.

³² Ibid. pp. 24-25.

³³ Chen Jian. (1996). *China's road to Korean War: The making of Sino-American confrontation*. New York: Columbia University Press: p.205.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Shen Zhihua. (2008). "Alliance of 'Tooth and Lips' or Marriage of Convenience? The origins and development of the Sino-North Korea alliance, 1946-1958". *Working Paper: US-Korean Institute at SAIS*. URL: <https://vdocument.in/tooth-and-lips-or-marriage-of-convenience.html> accessed on March 7, 2022.

³⁶ Zhihua and Xia. See n 22. p.79.

³⁷ The feature of this relationship was that China required submission but never aimed at undermining the sovereignty of the vassal state. In general, Korea was considered to be as the 'Outer Vassal' state of China and Korea as a vassal state in the past used to pay tribute to China three times every year during the Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and four times every year during Qing dynasty (1644-1912).

‘inferior’ purpose as pursuing China’s directly political and economic control over North Korea but was for the purpose of, among other aims, achieving the Korean Communists’ inner acceptance of China’s morally superior position in directing the ‘revolutions in the East.’³⁸

However, despite certain disputes between the two during wartime they both somehow managed to sign an armistice agreement with UN Command on July 27, 1953. For the purpose of post-war reconstruction of the DPRK economy, on November 23, 1953, China and North Korea signed certain agreements like the PRC-DPRK technology cooperation agreement and PRC-DPRK economic and cultural cooperation agreement.³⁹ China also provided aid to North Korea with a debt relief of 729 million Chinese yuan (\$364.5 million) and a gift of 800 million Chinese yuan (\$400 million) in aid for the 1954–1957 period. From 1954 to 1956, China also supported 22,735 Korean refugee children. So, the question arises as to what could be the plausible reason for China’s economic commitments to North Korea. The simple logic behind this fact could be that China had alienated North Korea during wartime. The historical legacy of aspirations of Mao’s China to be the torchbearer of the Asian revolution had compelled China to keep up with its commitments to North Korea to maintain its balanced influence over its vassal state. It was even reinstated by Zhou Enlai that: “Chinese assistance and Sino– Korean Economic and Cultural Cooperation Agreement would “regularize the traditional friendship and cooperation” between the two countries”.⁴⁰

Unfortunately, in 1955 the rosy hopes of developing a positive relationship between PRC and DPRK were short-lived as Kim became dictatorial in his leadership and dismissed the idea of living under the auspices of China, and became diffident in tolerating any pro- foreign faction within his party and under such circumstances he introduced the idea of ‘Juche’ ideology

³⁸ Chen Jian. (2011). ““Reorienting the cold war: The implications of China’s early cold war experience. Taking Korea as a central test case”, in Tsuyoshi Hasegawa (ed.) *The Cold war in East Asia: 1945-1991*. California: Stanford University Press: 88.

³⁹ These documents are retrieved from the Wilson Centre Digital Archives under the titles: “AGREEMENT ON KOREAN TECHNICAL PERSONNEL RECEIVING TRAINING IN CHINA AND CHINESE TECHNICAL PERSONNEL WORKING IN KOREA MADE BY THE GOVERNMENTS OF THE PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF CHINA AND THE DEMOCRATIC PEOPLE’S REPUBLIC OF KOREA” and “MAO ZEDONG’S REMARKS AT THE BANQUET FOR THE NORTH KOREAN GOVERNMENT DELEGATION”; URL: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114168> ; <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/114167> accessed on: 28th Feb 2022.

⁴⁰ Zhihua and Xia. See.n 22. pp.82-83.

emphasizing that the self-reliance must be achieved in all spheres in a Korean way.⁴¹ Henceforth, in the context of this backdrop series of episodic crises erupted between Pyongyang and Beijing in 1956 resulting in the expulsion of top party leaders of the Yan'an faction⁴² like Yun Kong Hum (Minister of Commerce), So Hwi (Chairman of Trade Unions), Yi Pil Guy (Minister of Construction Materials), and Kim Kang. In addition, two top party leaders, Choi Chang Ik (head of the Yan'an faction after Pak IL Yu's purge) and Pak Chang Ok (head of the pro-Soviet faction) were both expelled from the party and arrested. Hiccups also erupted between Mao and Kim IL Sung with the purges of the top party leaders of August factionists, as Kim established a monolithic political structure with himself as North Korea's undisputable paramount leader.⁴³

Another major confrontation between the leaders of the two countries took place in November 1957 when both Mao and Kim attended the meeting of leaders of Communist and Workers' Parties from socialist countries in Moscow. It was here that DPRK demanded PRC of sending back Korean traitors from China to Korea but Mao turned down the demands of the Kim and thus, in doing so Mao was expressing his disagreements over Kim's ferocious purges within the KWP⁴⁴ and therefore, the ambition of creating a strong base in their relationship faded away soon and made the leaders of both the countries to feel uneasy at their ends.

A bumpy relationship: Period from 1960 to 1990

In the early 1960s with the emergence of a great polemic debate concerning the true nature of communism erupted between China and the Soviet Union, North Koreans maintained neutrality from their part in appearance, but in reality, it was much more supportive of Beijing due to Kim's resentment against Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign and condemnation of Stalin's personality cult which widened the Sino- Soviet split. As a consequence, China was compelled to gain leverage over its allies and so as a result chose to support North Korea. Both Kim IL Sung and Mao made friendly gestures and speeches and Kim in one of his speeches in 1958 stated that: "the socialist camp led by the Soviet Union and China," and

⁴¹ Zhihua. See n35. p.14.

⁴² Yan'an faction is a group of pro-Chinese communists within the KWP. They were members of the CCP and spent some time in CCP headquarter in Yan'an China.

⁴³ Jian. See n.2. p.6.

⁴⁴ Ibid. p.7.

praised China for its unmistakable strength and tremendous role in resolving international conflicts”.⁴⁵ China and North Korea also emphasized the fact that the Korean issue is to be solved through Korean solutions based on negotiations without any foreign interference.⁴⁶

Although in the past China’s stance on North Korea has always remained ambiguous, however, later China in order to boost its ties with North Korea concluded an alliance “Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation” on 21 March 1960. Article II of the treaty states that:

The Contracting Parties undertake jointly to adopt all measures to prevent aggression against either of the Contracting Parties by any state. In the event of one of the Contracting Parties being subjected to the armed attack by any state or several states jointly and thus being involved in a state of war, the other Contracting Party shall immediately render military and other assistance by all means at its disposal.⁴⁷

Article VI signifies Beijing’s stance on reunification of Korean peninsula and states that:

“The Contracting Parties hold that the unification of Korea must be realized along peaceful and democratic lines and that such a solution accords exactly with the national interests of the Korean people and the aim of preserving peace in the Far East.”⁴⁸

With the purpose of executing the treaty in a practical sense, China furthermore extended its economic aid to North Korea solidifying the base of their relationship by extending credit of 105 million dollars to North Korea for use over the 1961 to 1964 period.⁴⁹ Despite positive attempts made from both sides, their relationship sunk down deep in 1966 with the eruption of the Chinese ‘Proletariat Cultural Revolution’ which made the relationship reach its lowest ebb from 1967-to 1969, and with the escalation of the propaganda war in 1968 from both sides, North Korea criticizing China for its ‘superpower chauvinism’⁵⁰ and Chinese Red

⁴⁵ Zhihua See. n 35. p.22.

⁴⁶ Lee. See n.30. p.34.

⁴⁷ B. Max and B. Mike. (1961). “Treaty of Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance between the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea”. *Peking Review*. 4 (28): p.5. URL: https://www.marxists.org/subject/china/documents/china_dprk.htm , accessed on: March 8, 2022.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Office of Intelligence Research, Intelligence Report, *Report on the Korean Problems*, vol. 5 (Seoul: National Institute of Korean History, 2003), 455-456.

⁵⁰ Schaefer Bernd. (2004). “North Korean “Adventurism” and China’s Long Shadow, 1966 -1972”. *Working Paper: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*.URL:

Guards criticizing North Korea of active like a ‘revisionist power’.⁵¹ Now again the question arises as to why the relationship between the two deteriorated despite the conclusion of the treaty alliance. The plausible reason for analyzing this fact could be that with the emergence of the Cultural Revolution China isolated itself from the international community. It became really very challenging for North Korea to extract any sort of gains from the PRC. Thus, DPRK turned itself towards the Soviets for aid in order to build up its ammunition factories in 1967-68, and thus abandoning China for the time being became the best option for DPRK. However, despite deep strains existing in between their ties during this period, they both brought back their relationship on track in January 1968, when China supported North Korea in the incident of seizure of U.S. intelligence Pueblo vessel by DPRK. Further, for the purpose of improving China-North Korea relations Beijing on the eve of the 20th anniversary of PRC establishment on September 30, 1969, invited the North Korean delegation. On this anniversary Mao met his counterpart atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace, stating to him that “the relations between our two countries are special and our aims are identical, so we should improve our relations.”⁵²

In the period of early 1970s, China changed its stance towards North Korea and began undertaking patch-up work in relations with North Korea with the beginning of Zhou Enlai’s visit to Pyongyang in 1970. During this visit, the “militant friendship cemented by fresh blood” was constantly stressed by Chinese leaders.⁵³ Apart from diplomatic visits, China also concluded numerous agreements such as Mutual Supplying Goods Agreement and Free Military Assistance Agreement were signed. In 1976, the Chinese-Korean Friendship Oil Pipeline was opened to convey crude oil to North Korea at a preferential price, making China the biggest and most stable oil supplier for North Korea.⁵⁴ Another important turning point in this period was the 1972 PRC U.S. rapprochement where Beijing signed the ‘Shanghai

https://www.wilsoncenter.org/sites/default/files/media/documents/publication/Working_Paper_442.pdf Accessed on March 8, 2022.

⁵¹ Andrei Lankov. (2007). “Balancing Between 2 Communist Powers”. *The Korea Times*, URL: https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/12/166_15196.html Accessed on March 8, 2022.

⁵² Jian. See n. 2. p.7.

⁵³ Jin Gyuangyao and Fang Xiuyu. (2005). “China’s Policy towards North Korea: Historical Review and Present Challenge”. *Research Report: Sogang IIAS Research Series on International Affairs*. URL: http://rs2.riss4u.net/search/detail/DetailView.do?p_mat_type=1a0202e37d52c72d&control_no=d19721f3d93e0034&keyword= Accessed on March 8, 2022.

⁵⁴ Lee. See n.30. p.44.

Communiqué’ signed by Nixon and Zhou Enlai. This emphasizes China’s firm support for the eight-point program for the peaceful unification of Korea put forward by the Government of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea on April 12, 1971. The stand for the abolition of the “U.N. Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea.”⁵⁵ In fact, even after Mao’s death in 1983 Deng Xiaoping during a conversation with U.S. Secretary of Defense Casper Weinberger, Deng emphasized that ‘Beijing and Washington should work together toward peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula’.⁵⁶

However, in the 1980s, different pressures and opportunities prevailed, which motivated China to take up a more active stance in Korean affairs, especially after the incidents of the hijacking of a Chinese aircraft in South Korea in May 1983 and the Rangoon bombing in October. There were numerous strains between the two from 1979- to 1980 as North Korea was disheartened by Deng’s policies of de- maoification by reforming and opening up its economy with the alarming Chinese rapprochement with Japan in August 1978 and United States in 1979 and such Chinese policies were against the North Korean interests. Later, again things start to make a positive change in December 1981, when diplomatic visits were made by Zhao Ziyang in December 1981, Deng Xiaoping, and Hu Yaobang in April 1982. In 1982, there was a new development in the Chinese policy towards North Korea as China supplied North Korea with a total of 20 A-5 fighter planes, a Chinese model of the MIG-21, crude oil, AN-2 planes, and T -62 tanks. There were fears that excessive military strength might prompt North Korea to make adventurous moves. China extended economic aid amounting to \$100 million to Pyongyang in August 1982.⁵⁷ Such actions of Beijing exhibit the fact that China strongly wanted to maintain peace and stability over the peninsula and devoted its resources to economic reconstruction.

Assessing the PRC policy towards North Korea between 1985-88 it could be noted that China adopted a ‘carrot and stick policy’ towards North Korea and with such a double-standard approach, China attempted to positively influence DPRK. On the contrary, also tried to maintain its economic and unofficial ties with ROK. In this era, Chinese leaders provided

⁵⁵ “Joint Communiqué of the United States of America and the People’s Republic of China. (1972). *Wilson Center Digital Archive*. URL: <https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/121325> Accessed on March 9, 2022.

⁵⁶ Don Oberdorfer. (1997). *The two Koreas: A contemporary history*. New York: Perseus Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 144.

⁵⁷ Park Hung Bon. (2003). *China’s policy towards the Korean peninsula from 1978-2000” (Doctoral thesis)*. URL: <http://etheses.dur.ac.uk/3710/> Accessed on March 9, 2022.

some carrots to North Korea by acting as a broker between the U.S. and North Korea and China became instrumental in initiating North Korea-U.S. rapprochement to prevent North Korean adventurist actions on the peninsula. Kim was asked to look out for cross negotiation options with a tripartite proposal calling for talks involving the United States and the two Koreas while echoing Pyongyang's assertions of its "peaceful" intentions.⁵⁸ In between 1986-88 China had also pursued its hardline approach toward DPRK by limiting its economic aid. China decided to further limit its crude oil supplies as well as decided to further reduce its arms supplies and cut electricity supplies to DPRK. These actions were followed after when Deng demanded North Korea of reforming and opening up its economy which made the DPRK upset with the unilateral decisions made by the PRC.

Apparently, in the 1990s, China had an ambiguous stance toward the Korean peninsula with the normalization of its relations with South Korea in 1992. After the death of Kim IL Sung in 1994 China-North Korea relations sunk down with the end of the cold war. With the PRC-ROK normalization, even Pyongyang developed interest in establishing its relation with Taiwan. During mid-1990s, the economic relations between PRC and DPRK were affected by the abolition of the barter system in 1992. The value of the Chinese–North Korean trade reduced from \$899 million in 1993 to \$370 million in 1999.⁵⁹ In fact, the pace of their relationship retarded as the relations between the top leaders of both countries was no longer operative. However, despite such issues, Beijing desired of maintaining its ‘Traditional Relationship’ with Pyongyang as Beijing took into strategic consideration of DPRK being the buffer state. PRC too realized the fact that the political and economic collapse of North Korea could prove to be detrimental to China’s interests.

Based on the historical assessment of the PRC-DPRK relations it could be analyzed that during the heydays of the Cold war era the essence of their relationship was more of a ‘political marriage’ and an alliance was formed out of considerations of interests on both sides. The congruence of the alliance was based upon political concerns from the side of the PRC as it had the fear of geopolitical implications with the collapse of DPRK whereas, economic aid from China to North Korea is another consideration that was important for DPRK to maintain

⁵⁸ Norman D. Levin. (1988). “Evolving Chinese and Soviet Policies toward the Korean Peninsula”, *Defense Technical Information Center*. URL: <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA216646.pdf> Accessed on March 9, 2022.

⁵⁹ Jian. See n.2. p.9.

its domestic stability. Many contradictions, as well as fault lines between the two countries, existed in the past. However, such divergences were not at all exposed directly to the world as they had the fear of losing the legitimacy of their alliance. From the economic point of view, in the past trends it could be observed that despite certain strains in their relationship, China still supported DPRK economically. However, in reality, such proximity in their relationship does not showcase that Beijing had effective influential leverage on North Korea or it could not be bluntly predicted that Beijing is in a position to impose its will on the major domestic policies of DPRK. Beijing still faces the dilemma of whether playing only the economic aid card against North Korea would be a viable option for the PRC to maintain stability over the Korean peninsula. Henceforth in the next section of this dissertation, we would demystify the various facets of the China-North Korea relationship where Beijing has acted both in a cautious as well as a stern manner towards DPRK to create a stable strategy to overcome its ambiguity and dilemma in Korea related affairs to cope up with Korean conundrum in general.

Chapter II

Decoding China and North Korean Relations in the Post-Cold War Era

Introduction

As we have assessed the historical aspects of China-North Korea relations in the previous chapter it had been observed that China being a resident power in the North-East Asian region has always attempted to influence the Korean peninsula, especially when dealing with North Korea Beijing had been desirous of maintaining its strategic relations with its buffer state and stressed upon the importance of maintaining ‘Traditional Ties’ with its ally. Evaluating the contemporary importance of North Korea to China it was very well quoted during the President Xi’s informal meeting with Kim Jong Un on March 28, 2018: “China will carry forward the traditional friendship between the two sides and Beijing aims at playing a ‘Constructive Role’ in the peace and stability in the Korean peninsula”.⁶⁰ Thus, this chapter aims at analyzing the Chinese preferences for North Korea and will be highlighting various facets of their contemporary relationship in the post-cold war era which has shaped over time since the past and thus would seek to decipher the plausible future trajectories of their evolving strategic relationship.

North Korea’s Significance to China

With the end of the cold war era, although the Korean peninsula has witnessed deep-sea changes, North Korea had always been significant to China as firstly, the deep-rooted ideological affinities between the CPC (Communist Party of China) and WPK (Worker’s Party of Korea) matters a lot for China which is desirous of ‘sustaining the political regime’ and this was reinstated even in the Xi’s remarks on Chinese national security in the first meeting of the National Security Commission of the Communist Party of China on April 15,

⁶⁰ “Xi Jinping, Kim Jong UN hold talks In Beijing”. (2018). *China Daily*, Beijing. URL: <https://www.chinadaily.com.cn/a/201806/19/WS5b28f692a3104bcf48c1558a.html> . Accessed on: March 29, 2022.

2014.⁶¹ It was even mentioned by the scholar Andrew Scobell that with the collapse of the Soviet Union, CPC to maintain its legitimacy needs North Korea as one of the few remaining communist countries to provide legitimacy to CPC authorities.⁶²

However, looking into the present scenario one could infer the fact that the ideological factor has a limited role to play in their relationship as today Beijing had adopted a pragmatic approach in both economic as well as security matters when it comes to resolving the Korean conundrum. It was very well said by David Lampton that: “Maintaining good relations with North Korea, for example, is more important to China’s Korean War veterans than it is to younger Chinese, who often view Pyongyang as a retrograde, ungrateful drag on China’s quest for modernity, respect, and security.”⁶³ Second is the geopolitical factor which comes into play where Beijing is still much concerned about this buffer state of DPRK as the collapse of its ally would create strategic chaos over the Korean peninsula with the United States consolidating power over the region.

However, even this notion of a buffer state in the present times seems to be fading away with the development of advanced strategic weapons systems and this has declined the geopolitical importance of DPRK. Thirdly in the recent times, although the traditional emotional friendship had been diluted with the fewer people to people contact as well as forgotten wartime experiences, still it holds importance in their relationship and this factor had been emphasized in 2013 by China’s Vice President Li Yuanchao led Chinese delegation to the DPRK to commemorate the 60th anniversary of the Korean war armistice.⁶⁴ Lastly, the economic factor could also be taken into consideration however this is much more important to DPRK as it extracts benefits from Chinese aid flows but looking into the current status of their economic relationship, with DPRK’S consistent nuclear proliferation and reinforcement of UN economic sanctions has gradually changed the nature of their economic partnership.

⁶¹ Yu Tiejun, Ren Yuanzhe et al. (2016). “Chinese Perspectives Towards the Korean Peninsula: In the Aftermath of North Korea’s Fourth Nuclear Test”, *Research Report: The Stimson Center*. URL: <https://www.stimson.org/wp-content/files/file-attachments/Chinese-Perspectives-Korea.pdf> . Accessed on: March 29, 2022.

⁶² Scobell. See n.17. p.2.

⁶³ David M. Lampton. (2008). *The Three Faces of Chinese Power*. Los Angeles: University of California Press: 167.

⁶⁴ Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (2013). *China and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea*. Beijing: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2701_663406/ Accessed on: March 29, 2022.

Therefore, the current multifaceted relationship between PRC and DPRK has been affected to some extent by the above-mentioned factors in present times, and henceforth, in the following section based on mentioned parameters we will be discussing the multidimensional aspects of their relationship in contemporary times.

Multidimensional Nature of China-North Korean Relationship

In recent years, especially in the late 1990s, China had been perceiving DPRK as a source of vulnerability as North Korea's nuclear ambitions overlap with the Chinese idea of maintaining stability over the peninsula. The relationship between the two was fraught with suspicion as North Korea considered that China had betrayed the DPRK by normalizing its ties with South Korea in 1992 and this was rightly stated by Shen Zhihua and Yafeng Xia: "With China's normalization with South Korea, North Korea's primary rival 'cut the last cord in the brotherly political foundation of Sino- North Korean ties, and with this move, the strategic, economic and political foundations of Sino- North Korean special relationship collapsed completely'.⁶⁵ Another major trend that was visible during this period was that North Korea in the late 1990s also started focusing on reinvigorating its ties with the United States at the expense of China to retain its strategic autonomy and as rightly stated by the Washington Post journalists Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin that "In 1990s the North Korean regime already decided that normalizing relations with the United States was a strategic imperative to counter potential threats from China and Russia."⁶⁶ Despite strains in their relationship, both China and North Korea managed to engage with each other on multidimensional aspects which will be discussed in the following section assessing the ambivalent and mercurial nature of their relationship in present times.

Beijing and its Politico-Diplomatic Vigor towards North Korea

The political relationship has transformed in the current times as North Korea has given up the idea of considering China to be an absolute communist state with its opening up of its economy and similarly, China too has understated the ideological affinities with DPRK and

⁶⁵ Shen Zhihua and Yafeng Xia. (2018). *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il Sung and Sino- North Korean Relations (1949-1976)*. New York: Columbia University Press: 240.

⁶⁶ Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin. (2013). *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*. New York: Basic Books Private Ltd.: 186.

since the 1990s it had been focusing upon the ‘normal state-to-state ties’. This normal state-to-state relationship had been stated by a Chinese analyst: “We should make it clear to the DPRK that we can work together when our interests are aligned, but when we differ, the DPRK has to take China’s interests into consideration”.⁶⁷ But despite such a normal state of ties as well as strains, still, politico diplomatic ties were special in late 2000 under the Kim Jong Il regime as North Korea revamped its political ties with China with the Kim Jong Il paying a visit to China in 2001 which symbolized the restoration of the party to party contacts as well as positive comments were made by the DPRK leader about China with the recognition of Chinese model of economic reforms to be adopted by the North Korea without bringing upon into further political reforms.⁶⁸

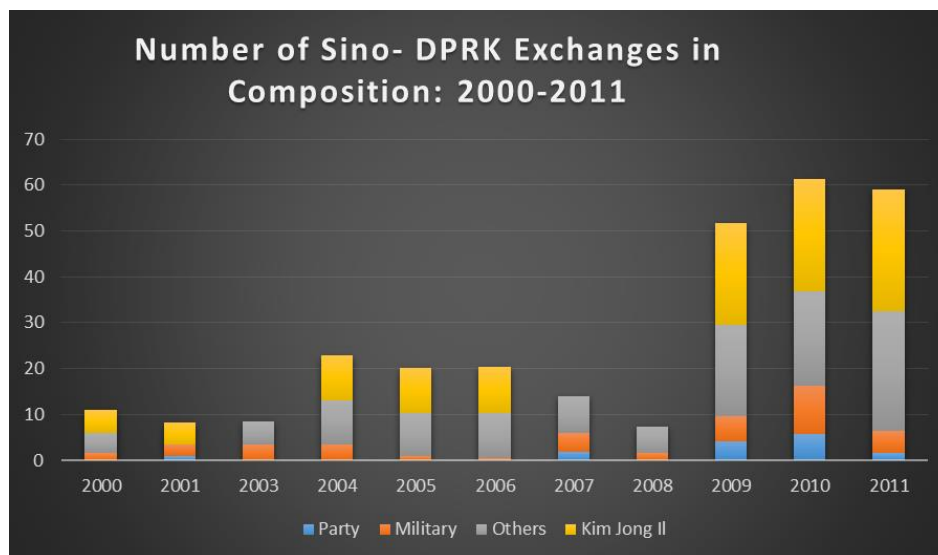


Figure 2: Number of Sino- DPRK Exchanges in Composition: 2000-2011. Source: A Report of the CSIS Freeman Chair in China Studies.⁶⁹ **Note:** There were no exchanges in 2002.

⁶⁷ International Crisis Group. (2013). “Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close”, *Research Report: International Crisis Group*. URL: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/175544/254-fire-on-the-city-gate-why-china-keeps-north-korea-close.pdf>. Accessed on March 30, 2022.

⁶⁸ Scott Snyder. (2000). “Beijing at Center Stage or Upstaged by the Two Kims?” *Comparative Connections*. 2(2): pp. 82-88. URL: https://cc.pacforum.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/0002qchina_korea.pdf Accessed on March 30, 2022.

⁶⁹ Bonnie S Glaser, Brittany Billingsley et al. (2012). “Reordering Chinese Priorities on the Korean Peninsula”, *Research Report: Center for Strategic and International Studies*. URL: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/121217_Glaser_ReOrderingChinese_web.pdf Accessed on March 30, 2022.

Assessing the politico diplomatic trends between 2000-and 2003, one could observe that DPRK had attempted to revamp its ties with China to reengage China on inter-Korean matters. Following the inter-Korean summit, the first visit was made by Kim Jong IL to Shanghai in 2001, however, one could state the fact that China was passive in maintaining its reciprocity with its Korean counterparts and except for Jiang Zemin's visit to Pyongyang in 2001, there were few high-level exchanges between the leaders of the two countries highlighting the least of the party- to party, government to government and military- to- military exchanges.

As showcased in Figure 2, analyzing the political trends between the year 2003-and 2006, China stepped up as an important player in politically negotiating with DPRK with regards to its facilitation in multilateral talks with the United States. In 2003, before a trilateral talk between the United States, China, and DPRK, China actively hosted the North Korean military delegation led by National Defense Commission vice Chairman Cho Myong Rok who met with Chinese counterparts Gen. Xu Caihou and Col. Gen. Xiong Guangkai and Vice-minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi⁷⁰ and such military level meetings signaled the resumption of diplomatic negotiations. Apart from high-level exchanges in the year 2005, China used its economic leverage to bring DPRK to the six-party talk negotiating table where China constructed a \$24 billion glass factory on Hu Jintao's visit in October 2005 and it was rightly stated by one of the Chinese scholars that: Although the gift of the glass factory was a carrot to lure North Korea to continue to participate in the six-party talks, it also had a long-term objective. China had to stabilize the North Korean economy. The construction of a glass factory was a boost to Kim Jong IL's reputation and status there.⁷¹

However, it has to be noted that such economic assistance was not the necessary factor in the stabilization of their relationship and the talks got stalled failing the negotiation process. As depicted in Figure 2 one could infer that after the North Korea's first nuclear test in 2006, the China-North Korean relationship transformed from a special relationship to a normal state the relationship as China during this tumultuous period attempted to use the instrument of political

⁷⁰“Sino-North Korean Military Relations: Comrades- in Arms- Forever?” (2004). *Research Report: RUSI*. URL: <https://rusi.org/publication/sino-north-korean-military-relations-comrades-arms-forever> Accessed on March 30, 2022.

⁷¹ Yoichi Funbashi. (2007). *The Peninsula Question: A Chronicle of the Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis*. Washington D.C: Brookings Institution Press: 320-321. URL: <https://muse.jhu.edu/book/29347> Accessed on: March 30, 2022.

high-level exchanges in dealing with the nuclear crisis and for this dispatched its Councilor Tang Jiaxuan as a special envoy to U.S, Russia, and DPRK for further consultations, but despite such efforts, it could be noted that the frequency of high-level visits decreased consistently after 2006 and such deterioration of the relationship was showcased China's ignorance and ambiguity towards DPRK with its increasing alignment with the United States and it was rightly mentioned by Shi Yinhong that: China was lowering its central position as the indispensable mediator, negotiator, and leading settlement promoter and China needed to strengthen its relations with DPRK not only to shore up that country's stability but also to gain strategic leverage with Pyongyang as well as with the United States and South Korea.⁷²

Following the North Korean nuclear test in 2009, China developed strategic interests in stabilizing North Korea by perpetuating its status quo over the Korean peninsula and therefore resorted to strategic engagements and developed certain measures to deepen its ties with DPRK with the doubling of the high-level exchanges between the leaders of the two countries and as shown in Figure 2, the exchanges got doubled in 2009, with 21 exchanges as compared to 10 exchanges in 2006. It could also be observed that from 2009-to 2011, such intensification of institutional ties would shortly guide Chinese motives towards DPRK as well as would prevent further North Korean provocations over the peninsula.

After a thorough assessment of Political relations during the Kim Jong IL era, there had been a drastic policy change of China towards DPRK during the Kim Jong UN era, as despite DPRK's 'intransigence on the matters of denuclearization China under Xi Jinping, managed to maintain its institutional ties with DPRK and this was showcased in July 2013 with the Vice President Li Yuanchao visiting Pyongyang to convince the DPRK leader to rejoin the Six-party talks as well as to make further peace deals over the Korean affairs and such a high-level visit signaled as to how the relations were at repair.⁷³ Similarly, another remarkable diplomatic event took place with Choe Ryong Hae, director of the General Political Bureau of the Korean

⁷² Shi Yinhong. (2009). "China and the North Korean Nuclear Issue: Competing Interests and Persistent Policy Dilemmas". *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*. 21(1): pp. 33-47. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/10163270902745620>

⁷³ Embassy of People's Republic of China in Cooperative Republic of Guyana. (2013). "Kim Jong UN meets VP Li Yuanchao". Guyana: Embassy of PRC in Cooperative Republic of Guyana. URL: <https://www.mfa.gov.cn/ce/cegy/eng/zgyw/t1062374.htm> Accessed on March 30, 2022.

People's Army (KPA) of North Korea visiting China but the talks did not reap any positive results due to North Korea's reluctance of abandoning its nuclear program ambitions.⁷⁴

Further, between 2015-and 2016, the ties between the two countries frayed away with Beijing's budding romance with Seoul as the Chinese leader Xi Jinping hosted ROK President Park Geun-Hye for a state visit in 2013 and reciprocated by traveling to Seoul for a state visit a year later. President Park was also a guest of honor at a 2015 military parade in Beijing celebrating the 70th anniversary of the end of World War II.⁷⁵ Later, a turning phase changed the whole scenario of the relationship between Beijing with Pyongyang in 2017 as DPRK launched the Pukguksong-1 (also called the KN-11), a submarine-launched missile that infuriated China and a stark response came from China's side and it was quoted in The Global Times: China 'can no longer stand the continuous escalation of the North Korean nuclear issue at its doorstep.' The paper, published by the People's Daily, the official organ of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), cautioned North Korea to "avoid making mistakes" and warned, "If the North makes another provocative move, the Chinese society will be willing to see the (U.N. Security Council) adopt severe restrictive measures that have never been seen before, such as restricting oil imports to the North."⁷⁶

Despite China playing its sanctions card against DPRK in 2017 China could not completely withdraw itself from DPRK with its longstanding fear of regime collapse, so to maintain its influence over the Pyongyang, Beijing continued providing food aid assistance in the form of oil to DPRK in an apparent violation of UNSC sanctions.⁷⁷ In the following year with the conclusion of Trump Kim Summit in 2018, China wanted to reassert its influence back in the Korean peninsula and thus China resorted to its diplomatic initiative by inviting Kim Jong-

⁷⁴ Benjamin Kang Lim. (2013). "China tried to convince North Korea to Give up Nuclear Tests". *Reuters*, Beijing. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-north-china-idUSBRE95305H20130604> Accessed on: April 1, 2022.

⁷⁵ Jonathan D. Pollack. (2015). "Park in Beijing: The Political Transformation of North East Asia", *The Brookings Institution*. URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2015/09/04/park-in-beijing-the-political-transformation-of-northeast-asia/> Accessed on April 1, 2022.

⁷⁶ Reuters. (2017). "A Chinese State Run Tabloid Has Warned North Korea against More Nuclear Tests". *The Time*. Beijing. URL: <https://time.com/4735649/china-north-korea-nuclear-test/> Accessed on April 2, 2022.

⁷⁷ Edith M Lederer. (2017). "UN Approves Watered Down New Sanctions against North Korea", *The Associated Press*. URL: <https://apnews.com/c6b1c79765df4ce1bc15f6abd9c2c6ad> Accessed on April 1, 2022. See also: Matthew Pennington and Catherine Lucey. (2017). "Trump Says China Caught Red Handed Selling Oil to North Korea", *The PBS News Hour*. Washington D.C. URL: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-says-china-caught-red-handed-selling-oil-to-north-korea> Accessed on April 1, 2022.

Un to visit PRC and subsequently leading to the Xi Kim summits in 2018 and 2019 respectively signaling out the warm comradeship and a quick repair in their relationship.

Similarly, another high-level visit was made by the Foreign Minister of PRC Wang Yi to Pyongyang in September 2019, where it was rightly mentioned by Wang that: China and the DPRK should communicate more, exchange more, understand each other, trust each other, support each other, and safeguard common interests and legitimate rights and interests.” Wang reportedly assured the North Koreans that China will always stand on the road as comrades and friends of the DPRK.⁷⁸

In the most recent times, in July 2021, their political relationship got a boost by renewing the 60th anniversary of their friendship pact of 1961, and such an initiative showcase that despite the unprecedented complicated relationship between the two in the past few years the comradely trust and militant friendship between the DPRK and China got stronger day by day. Henceforth we could assess the fact that it is a marriage of convenience between the two where despite the existence of an atmosphere of mistrust both need each other in the current scenario with the worsening US-China ties as well as to thwart the influence of United States over the Korean peninsula affairs.⁷⁹ Thus, looking into many ups and downs in their relationship in the past few decades one could infer a contradictory conclusion where at one end of the ledger it is quite unusual whether China and DPRK could sustain their relationship for a prolonged period, but based on the convergence of their mutual interests it would be unlikely that their relationship would be broken until and unless any political changes take place in any of the country.⁸⁰

China and its Aid and Assistance diplomacy towards North Korea - An Emotional Partnership

⁷⁸ Oliver Hotham. (2019). “Chinese FM Meets Party Officials, Tours Factory on Final Day of Pyongyang visit”, *North Korean News*. URL: <https://www.nknews.org/2019/09/chinese-fm-meets-party-officials-tours-factory-on-final-day-of-pyongyang-visit/> Accessed on April1, 2022.

⁷⁹ “China, North Korean Leaders Vow to Strengthen Ties”, *NDTV*, Seoul. URL: <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/china-north-korea-leaders-xi-jinping-kim-jong-un-vow-to-strengthen-ties-report-2483958> Accessed on April1, 2022.

⁸⁰ Daniel Wertz. (2019). “China- North Korea Relations”, *Issue Brief: The National Committee on North Korea*. URL: [https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/issue-briefs/Issue Brief China NK Nov2019.pdf](https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/issue-briefs/Issue%20Brief%20China%20NK%20Nov2019.pdf) Accessed on April 1, 2022.

China in past had been interested in getting itself involved in the DPRK's natural disasters as well as famines as China to maintain its influence over the region required to maintain stability within the region and this short-term goal triggers China to assist its ally and China's search for creating parity between the regional stability and North Korean economic reforms is reflected in its policy of food aid and humanitarian assistance towards DPRK. China has both strategic as well as emotional considerations towards DPRK as China believes that it has the 'special responsibility' of respecting the North Korean regime and its actions demonstrate the legitimacy of the DPRK government making all of its policies towards Korean peninsula affairs consistent with this stance.

In the 21st century, the notion of a traditional alliance between PRC and DPRK has been transformed into a 'bilateral, strategic and cooperative partnership' as firstly, China's primary reason to assist DPRK is to secure the regime of the nation, and secondly, China believes in the fact that supporting North Korea could lead to China's economic development as it could bring great benefits to the underdeveloped regions of China. China's support for DPRK was so preeminent during the end of the cold war that North Korea was so reliant on China for aid that 40 percent of its food and more than 80 percent of its energy were provided by China.⁸¹ As data on the Chinese aid to North Korea is scarce and fragmented in this section, we will be discussing the main events which might provide a basic understanding of Chinese aid diplomacy towards DPRK.

With the end of the cold war, in 1994 China provided a free food aid of approximately 100,000 tons and in May 1996, Chinese Premier Li Peng and North Korean Vice-premier Hong Song-Nam signed the "Sino-DPRK Economic and Technological Agreement," whereby China committed to provide North Korea with 500,000 tons of grain annually, 120 million tons of oil and 1.5 million tons of coal.⁸² In addition to this in 1994-95, China's unreported bilateral assistance tolerated "illegal" shipments from its ethnic Korean population, and accepted the presence of up to 300,000 DPRK refugees in Northeast China.⁸³ At the outset of the 21st century, especially in 2004, Chinese aid towards North Korea was aimed at achieving

⁸¹ Nan. See. n.5. p.197.

⁸² Ibid, see n.23, p. 198.

⁸³ James Reilly. (2014). "The Curious Case of China's Aid to North Korea". *Asian Survey*. 54(6): pp. 1158-1183. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1525/as.2014.54.6.1158> Accessed on April 2, 2022.

denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and also creating a stable environment for China's economic development and with this regard, China constructed the Taean Friendship Glass Factory, shared its glass technology with the DPRK government, and provided training for factory workers.⁸⁴ Such assisted strategy of China was very well introduced in October 2005 by Vice Premier Wu Yi which guided China's economic motives based on: 'government guidance with companies in the lead; market-based operations and mutual benefit.'⁸⁵

Specifically assessing the normal food flows from China to DPRK, China apart from its assistance provides aid to DPRK through World Food Programme and other international organizations. In 2005, according to the UN agency WFP donations from China totaled 577,000 metric tons and were mostly directed to the Democratic People's Republic of Korea⁸⁶, however, China has provided food aid directly to DPRK rather than through a third party.⁸⁷ However, the food aid fluctuated and decreased in 2006 after DPRK's nuclear test to 250,000 tons and later got increased in 2008 with the amount of 300, 00 tons⁸⁸ and in 2009 China contributed only 120,000 tons of food aid to the DPRK.⁸⁹ A goodwill gesture was also depicted with Kim Jong IL's visit in 2012 leading to China contributing 240,074 tons of food aid to the DPRK.⁹⁰ Apart from the food aid assistance, China's aid assistance consists of providing disaster relief. For instance, in 2004 China provided approximately \$1.2 million to DPRK and worth \$ 50,000 in 2007 as a part of a broader package including additional aid materials and relief teams from China.⁹¹

Training assistance programs have also been one of the components of China's aid policy. For instance, with Wen Jiabao's 2009 visit, two sides committed to the exchange of their students' delegations along with that China decided to provide scholarships for both

⁸⁴ Nan, see n.5, p. 198.

⁸⁵ Reilly, see n. 83, p. 1164.

⁸⁶ United Nations News. (2006). "China Emerges as World's Third Largest Food Aid Donor". New York: United Nations Retrieved from: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2006/07/186362-china-emerges-worlds-third-largest-food-aid-donor-un-agency-says#:~:text=In%20the%20same%20year%20it,System%2C%20the%20agency%20said%20today>. Accessed on April 1, 2022.

⁸⁷ Prof. Jin Qiang. (2013). Interview by Li Nan. China: Yanbian University.

⁸⁸ The Hankyoreh. (2008). "China Suspends Food Exports to North Korea". URL: http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/261246.html Accessed on April 2, 2022.

⁸⁹ Nan, see n.5, p. 200.

⁹⁰ Reality Check Team. (2019). "North Korea: Who is Sending Aid?" *BBC News*. URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-48637518> Accessed on April 2, 2022.

⁹¹ Reilly, see n.83, p. 1167.

undergraduates and postgraduates and also to provide study materials in the Chinese language to be propagated in the DPRK. Similarly, On September 27, 2019, the Confucius Institute Headquarters, Liaodong University, University of International Business and Economics, and Pyongyang University of Foreign Studies signed an agreement to establish the first Chinese language centers in Pyongyang.⁹² China has also expanded its economic training programs, and some of the quintessential examples are: In 2012, China trained over 20 experts in the two-month training program in Tianjin focusing on taxation, finance, and economic aspects of the program.⁹³ Jilin University alone has hosted 27 training programs for DPRK experts, all funded under China's aid budget.⁹⁴

In the field of technical assistance, since 2002, the exchanges between the academies of sciences of China and the DPRK, as well as the earthquake, meteorology, hydrology, oceanography, information software industry, environmental protection, agriculture, construction, and other industries and scientific research units have become increasingly active. Moreover, a new round of scientific and technological cooperation agreements with counterpart departments have been signed successively and both sides have carried out various forms of extensive cooperation in data exchange, scientific and technological information research, document retrieval, data processing, analysis, and forecasting, as well as scientist exchanges, academic exchanges, and technical personnel training, and have achieved good results of mutual benefit and win-win results.⁹⁵ Some recent examples depict the technical assistance provided by China to DPRK wherein in 2015 Chinese experts held lectures on

⁹² Embassy of People's Republic of China in Democratic Republic of Korea. (2019). *Brief Introduction of Educational Exchanges between China and North Korea*. Pyongyang: Embassy of PRC in DPRK. URL: <http://kp.china-embassy.org/chn/zcgx/jyjil/jyjilk/> Accessed on April 3, 2022.

⁹³ Chris Green. (2012). "20 North Korean Officials Getting Schooled in Tianjin". *Daily NK*. URL: <https://www.dailynk.com/english/20-nk-officials-getting-schooled-i/> Accessed on April 3, 2022.

⁹⁴ James Reilly. (2015). *UNESCO Programme Document: The Role of China as an Education Aid Donor*. Paris: UNESCO. URL: <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000232475> Accessed on April 3, 2022.

⁹⁵ Embassy of People's Republic of China in Democratic Republic of Korea. (2007). *An Overview of China- DPRK Scientific and Technological Cooperation and Exchanges*. Pyongyang: Embassy of PRC in DPRK. URL: http://kp.china-embassy.org/chn/zcgx/zckjil/200701/t20070112_1336815.htm Accessed on April 3, 2022.

agricultural technology⁹⁶ in North Korea and even trained the North Korean experts by holding lectures on natural energy technology in 2016.⁹⁷

Some of the infrastructural projects too consist of China's aid to DPRK and since 2005, such projects had been undertaken by PRC to ensure economic benefits to Chinese local firms. One such example is the completed construction of the new China-DPRK Friendship Bridge linking Dandong to Shinuiju and another was the road-port project linking Yanbian Prefecture just north of the border to the DPRK port of Rason, one of the northernmost ice-free ports in Northeast Asia.⁹⁸ In 2009, China's State Grid Corporation invested RMB 159 million to refurbish the Shuifeng Dam, a hydropower station built on the Yalu River in 1937. In June 2011, the dam began operations and China turned operations of the sluice gates over to North Korea⁹⁹ and the electricity generated was to be sold back to the Chinese grid or else be made available for Chinese mining projects in the area.¹⁰⁰

In the recent times also, despite a breakdown of the relationship between the two in 2017, still in 2019-20 China managed to provide crude oil to DPRK and in 2020 China aided DPRK with 500, 000 to 600, 000 food along with fertilizers¹⁰¹ and such a bailout despite no signs of progress in the matters of denuclearization depicts that China always wanted to keep North Korea around its corners and till date such assistance did not guarantee positive results from DPRK but has to a limited extent created an environment of stability in and around the Northeastern regions of China, as the domestic stability of DPRK is of utmost importance for PRC to prevent further chaotic situation over the peninsula.

⁹⁶ Embassy of People's Republic of China in Democratic Republic of Korea. (2015). *Chinese experts hold lectures on agricultural practical technology in North Korea*. Pyongyang: Embassy of PRC in DPRK. URL: https://kp-china--embassy-org.translate.google.com/chn/zcgx/zckjil/201511/t20151119_1336919.htm?x_tr_sl=zh-CN&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=sc&x_tr_sch=http Accessed on April 3, 2022.

⁹⁷ Embassy of People's Republic of China in Democratic Republic of Korea. (2016). *Chinese experts hold lectures on natural energy technology in North Korea*. Pyongyang: Embassy of PRC in DPRK. URL: https://kp-china--embassy-org.translate.google.com/chn/zcgx/zckjil/201605/t20160519_1336922.htm?x_tr_sl=zh-CN&x_tr_tl=en&x_tr_hl=en&x_tr_pto=sc&x_tr_sch=http Accessed on April 3, 2022.

⁹⁸ John Ruwitch. (2013). "China's Freeway to North Korea: A Road to Nowhere". *Reuters*, Yanji, China. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-north-china-idUSBRE95305H20130604> Accessed on April 3, 2022.

⁹⁹ Reilly, see n83. p. 1170.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Takeshi Kamiya and Yoshikazu Hirai. (2020). "China Bailout to North Korea: Massive Food and Fertilizer Aid". *The Asahi Shimbun*, Seoul and Shenyang. URL: <https://www.asahi.com/ajw/articles/13897237> Accessed on April 4, 2022.

Glimpses of Economic Interaction between China and North Korea

China has always adopted a two-pronged strategy toward DPRK in changing its behavior as on one end of the ledger China believes in providing economic incentives to moderate the target state's behavior and another strategy is to provide economic inducements in the form of trade, investments, and aid to have a transformative effect of the economy, polity and foreign policy of the target state. This strategy of China has always aimed at persuading DPRK to move down to a more market-oriented path. However, in the recent times, the economic interaction between the two countries had been fluctuating since the imposition of UNSC sanctions on North Korea, but such sanctions have not necessarily impacted the economic partnership of both the countries, as China through its uninterrupted economic interactions with DPRK has realized twin benefits for itself, where firstly, supporting the DPRK economy could lead to stability of both the regime as well as the state itself and secondly economic investments could provide incentives for China to help develop out its underdeveloped regions of North Eastern part of China. Henceforth in the following section, we will briefly discuss the nature of trade and investments between China and North Korea and will analyze simultaneously the impact of sanctions on the economic partnership between the two.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1990s, the China-North Korean trade was characterized by the decentralized cross border barter exchange system which spread across various arrays of economic goods and actors and such marketization led to the expanded trade between the two countries undeterred by the sanctions imposed upon DPRK on the event of the nuclear crisis. As depicted in Figure 3, one could infer from the data provided below that during the period of 1990s China sought to trade with Pyongyang on a market basis rather than extended its previous patterns of bartering, concessions, and loans, ultimately resulting in far lower trade levels.¹⁰² During 2000, China had a steady economic influence on DPRK which was a result of the weakened economy as well as imposed sanctions on Pyongyang which made DPRK dependent on China's trade and economic investments. If we look at Figure 4, it could be easily assessed that North Korea's belligerent behavior had worsened its relations with its neighbors which further motivated China to maintain a share of the DPRK'S goods trade. Although the first nuclear test conducted by DPRK in 2006, resulting in the

¹⁰² Wertz, see n.80 and also refer Reilly, see n.83.

support of China for UNSC sanctions somewhat freeze the flow of luxury goods as well as other financial resources, but still according to the data depicted in the figure below showcase that despite such stringent sanctions China-North Korean bilateral trade tripled from \$ 1.7 billion in 2006 and \$ 6 billion in 2012.¹⁰³ Even in Figure 4, Chinese shares of the North Korean trade accounted for 40% in 2006 and 70% in 2012 respectively¹⁰⁴, and such a growth in the share was observed with the severing of Inter-Korean ties after the Cheonan incident and also worsened ties with its neighbors like Japan which grew concerned about DPRK's rising nuclear capabilities.

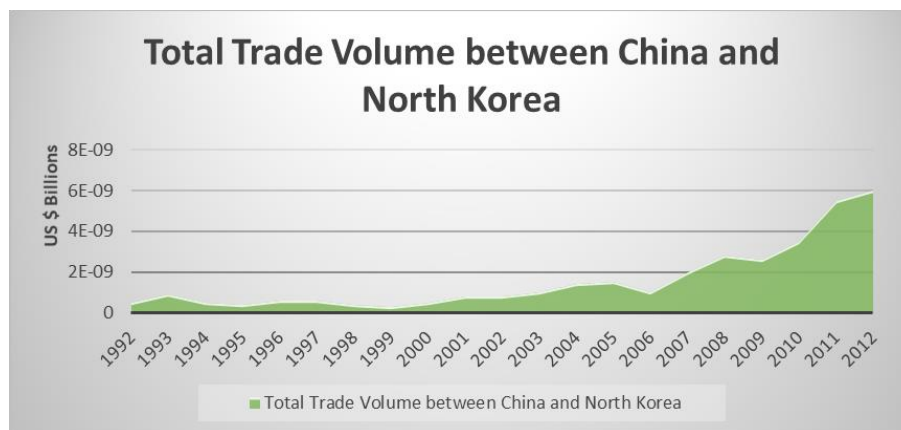


Figure 3: A Graph depicting total China and North Korean Trade Volume (1992-2012).

Source: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰³ North Korea in the World. (2020). "China- DPRK Merchandise Trade Volume". *Data Report: The East West Center*. URL: <https://www.northkoreaintheworld.org/china-dprk/total-trade> Accessed on April 3, 2022.

¹⁰⁴ William Browns. (2018). "North Korea Shackled Economy". *Special Report: The National Committee on North Korea*. URL: https://www.ncnk.org/sites/default/files/issue-briefs/NCNK_William_Brown_NK_Shackled_Economy_Report.pdf Accessed on April 4, 2022.

¹⁰⁵ Ben Frohman, Emma Rafaelof et al. (2022). "The China- North Korea Strategic Rift: Background and Implications for the United States. *Staff Research Report: U.S. China Economic and Security Review Commission*. URL: https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/2022-01/China-North_Korea_Strategic_Rift.pdf Accessed on April 3, 2022.

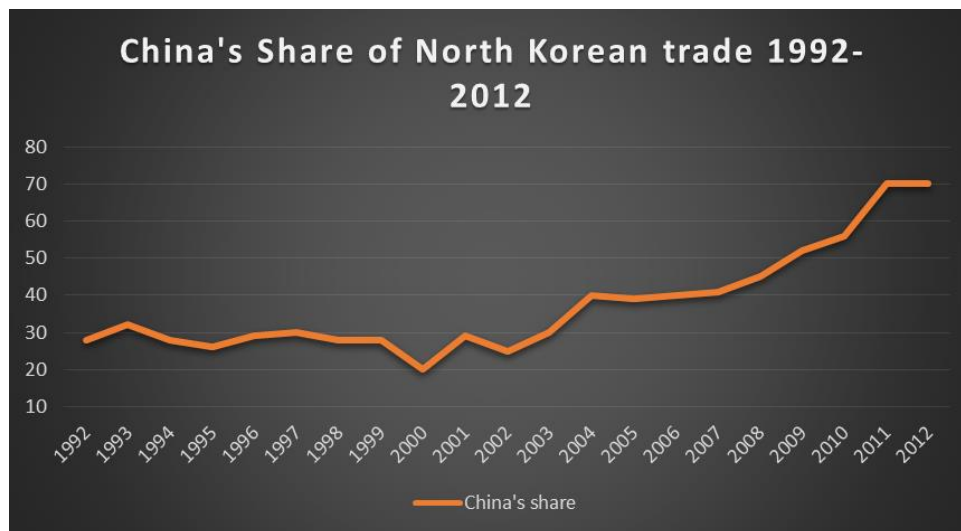


Figure 4: China's Share of North Korean Trade 1992-2012 Note: Y Axis figures are in %.
Source: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission¹⁰⁶

Deciphering the China-North Korea economic relationship under the Kim Jong UN leadership one could reiterate the fact that their relationship entered into a low ebb and their bilateral ties soon got reverted into the pattern of 'coldhearted smiles in public and expressions of thinly disguised contempt behind the scenes' with the changes in their political leadership.¹⁰⁷ As depicted in Figure 5, one could look at the trend that the Chinese FDI flows to North Korea had been minimal during the early period of the 1990s and 2000, but a stark change could be observed in 2006 with Chinese FDI flows of \$ 11.06 million which got an increase in 2007 with 18.40 million and \$41.23 million in 2008, which showcase the fact that investments flow increased steadily despite the imposition of UNSC sanctions. But if we look at the period of the Kim Jong UN era, since 2012, there had been a steady decline in the Chinese investment flows towards DPRK until 2016¹⁰⁸, but Beijing remained to be the primary source of DPRK'S FDI.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Oberdorfer and Carlin. See n.66. p. 346.

¹⁰⁸ Data available until the period of 2016. There has been a non-availability of data from 2017-2020.

¹⁰⁹ Jai S. Mah. (2021). "The Sino- North Korea International Economic Relationship and the Economic Development of North Korea". *World Economy*. 44(2): pp. 586-600. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1111/twec.12903>

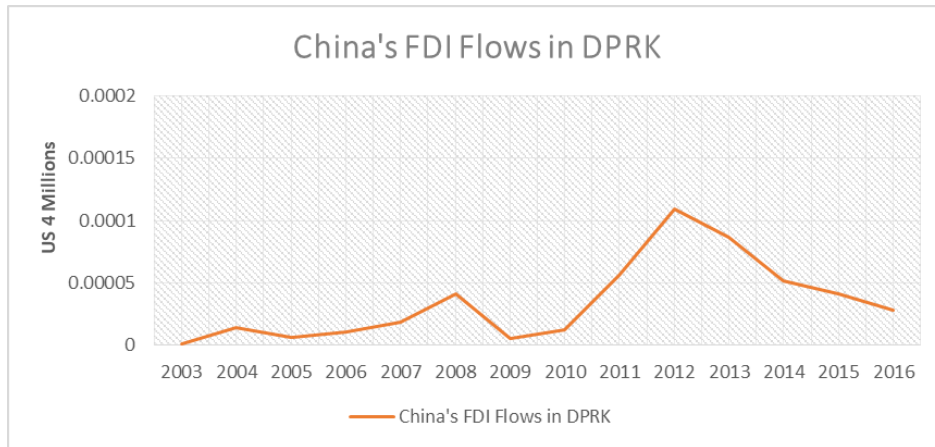


Figure 5: Chinese FDI Flows in DPRK. Source: Data Report created by The East-West Center in association with the National Committee on North Korea.¹¹⁰

Another notable point that could be assessed from the perspective of North Korea is that in 2016 when Kim Jong-Un used the opportunity of the regime's Seventh Party Congress platform to promote diversification from China criticizing the Chinese model of reforms and opening up¹¹¹, nevertheless China had a good amount of share in the North Korean trade of 64% in 2015 to 88% in of its trade-in 2016. (Figure 6). Even if we look at the total China-North Korean trade since 2012, one could look at the trend that from 2012 until 2017, there has been a steady amount of exchange of trade goods between the two, but the trade volume got deteriorated after 2016 with China's compliance with the UNSC sanctions with a drop of 87.6% of Chinese imports from North Korea¹¹², China's total trade with North Korea declined by 13.2 percent to a value of \$5.3 billion in 2017 and shrank more dramatically by 48.2 percent to a value of \$2.7 billion in 2018¹¹³, China's trade even plummeted around 90% in 2021 from 2019 during the pandemic period accounting for the drop in the level of trade of \$ 318

¹¹⁰ See n. 104. URL: <https://www.northkoreaintheworld.org/china-dprk/chinese-foreign-direct-investment-north-korea> Accessed on April 5, 2022.

¹¹¹ Ruediger Frank. (2016). "The 7th Party Congress in North Korea: A Return to Normal". *38 North*. URL: <https://www.38north.org/2016/05/rfrank052016/> Accessed on April 5, 2022.

¹¹² See n.104; refer also: Kyoochul Kim. (2020). "Finding Loopholes in Sanctions: Effects of Sanctions on North Korea: Refined Oil Prices". *KDI Journal of Economic Policy*. 42(4): pp. 1-25. URL: https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3749841 Accessed on April 5, 2022; Neil Watts. (2020). "Watching Through the Lens of a Long Telescope". *Working Paper: GW Institute for Korean Studies North Korea Economic Forum*. URL: https://cpb-us-e1.wpmucdn.com/blogs.gwu.edu/dist/8/416/files/2021/02/4-Neil-Watts_Final.pdf Accessed on April 5, 2022.

¹¹³ See n.104.

million.¹¹⁴ However, the Chinese share in the North Korean Trade had accounted for 95% both in 2017 and 2018 despite tense situations over the Korean peninsula.

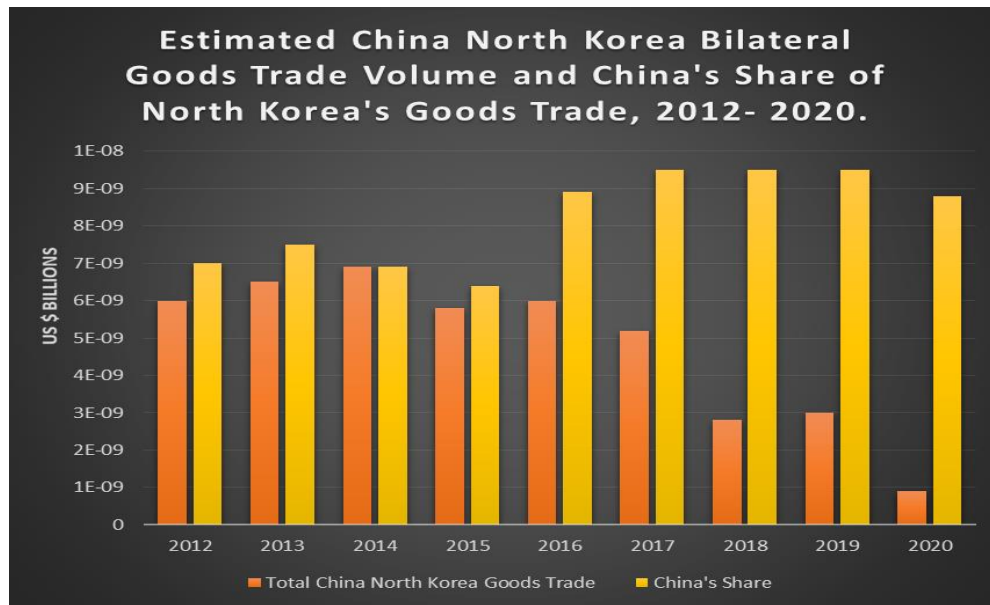


Figure 6: Estimated China-North Korea Bilateral Goods Trade Volume and China's Share of North Korea's Goods Trade, 2012–2020. Source: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission¹¹⁵

In conclusion in this section, one could analyze the fact that China to rebrand its image in the eyes of the international community has always committed itself to support UNSC sanctions against belligerent North Korea but looking into the realities of the facts mentioned in this section one could also infer from the fact that China has always maintained leniency towards DPRK despite imposing sanctions on North Korea, as it is China's inherent strategy to loosen up its sanctions regime against DPRK as China could not risk out the domestic instability of North Korea which could eventually lead to a chaotic condition caused by the regime collapse in North Korea which would hinder the Chinese interests on the Korean peninsula.

¹¹⁴ "China North Korea Trade in 2021 Down 90% Before Pandemic. (2022). *Nikkei Asia*. Beijing: Kyodo. URL: <https://asia.nikkei.com/Economy/Trade/China-North-Korea-trade-in-2021-down-90-from-before-pandemic> Accessed on April 5, 2022. Also see: Christian Davies. (2021). "North Korea- China Trade Hits Highest Level since Start of Pandemic". *The Financial Times*. Seoul: South Korea. URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/a8f270ae-5cce-4ef3-a179-244b3d40311b> Accessed on April 5, 2022.

¹¹⁵ Frohman, Rafaelof et al. See n.105. p. 9.

Chinese Strategy to Stimulate the Denuclearization of North Korea

In the 21st century, when creating opinions about North Korea's nuclear ambitions, China had been empathetic toward such ambitions based on the logic of hostile US policies as well as the lack of security guarantees that have been provided to North Korea.¹¹⁶ But at the same time, China has been highly frustrated with the belligerent actions of North Korea and believes in the fact that such nuclear proliferation in tandem with aggressive policies of the state could be an invitation for the coercive responses from different countries within the East Asian region and the Korean peninsula as a whole which might in hindering Chinese influence over the Korean affairs. In addition to such strategic considerations, the Chinese also believe that there has been a preeminent role of domestic as well as an ideological factor behind the North Korea's nuclear ambitions as possession of nuclear weapons is an indicator of the national strength and capacity and according to Chinese view, it is also an indicator for consolidation of the absolute authority of the leadership.¹¹⁷ Based on such perception today Chinese scholars point to the reality that the acquisition of nuclear capability is a strategic necessity for North Korea.

Today China's stance towards North Korea's nuclear ambitions has been changed as such weapons procurement activities of DPRK threaten the security environment of China in general. It has also been alleged by China that proliferations have been exacerbated by the development of hostile US policies towards North Korea¹¹⁸ and as a result, achieving denuclearization and preventing proliferation on the Korean Peninsula has become important for Chinese interests and has been less important than maintaining peace and stability of the region.¹¹⁹ Henceforth, with regards to promoting denuclearization, Chinese foreign policy is based on mainly three strategic principles of logic: 'no war, no instability, no nuclear weapons',¹²⁰ and such policy priorities are incremental steps in reengaging North Korea on the nuclear disarmament issues.

¹¹⁶Duchâtel and Schell. (2013). See. n. 7. pp.41-53.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 42.

¹¹⁸ Lora Salmaan. (2013). "Why Beijing Stands by Pyongyang". *Wall Street Journal*. New York. URL: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323549204578315681375464450> Accessed on April 6, 2022.

¹¹⁹ Duchâtel and Schell. See n.57. p.44.

¹²⁰ Stephanie Kleine Ahlbrandt. (2012). "The Diminishing Returns of China's North Korea Policy". 38 *North. Beijing*. URL: <https://www.38north.org/2012/08/skahlbrandt081612/> Accessed on April 7, 2022.

Since 2003, China has been actively propagating the idea of resolving the issue of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula through dialogue and consultation within the context of Six-Party Talks.¹²¹ The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) has been playing a pivotal role in restarting the six-party Talks after it fails in 2009 by keeping close communication with its neighbor for restarting dialogue and consultation.¹²² China has also been pressurizing the U.S. to relax its conditions for re-joining the Six-Party Talks, however, the U.S. was reluctant to make conditions under the basis that North Korea should commit itself to denuclearizing itself completely.¹²³

With regards to the implementation of sanctions, China has always been rhetoric that sanctions must be complemented with dialogue and negotiations policy on sanctions, as described in a note verbale to the UN Security Council Sanctions Committee on North Korea, is that ‘the implementation of the resolution should not influence the national development of [North Korea], its normal external contacts or the normal lives of its people.’¹²⁴ After the adoption of Resolution 2094 in March 2013, the Chinese MFA has also been stating that sanctions were not the only options for the renewed negotiations while urging calm and restraint from sides.¹²⁵ Similarly, in 2017 China supported UNSC sanctions in response to Pyongyang’s missile tests but these sanctions were moderate as, despite such imposition of sanctions on DPRK, China continued with its transfer of oil to North Korea in apparent violation of UNSC restrictions.¹²⁶ Recently, China again demanded of ending certain sanctions on North Korea despite the repetitive testing of ballistic missiles in January 2022, as it stressed the economic difficulties

¹²¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of PRC. (2003). *Vice FM Wang Yi, Head of Chinese Delegation to the Six Party Talks Gives a Press Conference*. Beijing. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2701_663406/2705_663414/200308/t20030830_511788.html Accessed on April 7, 2022.

¹²² Geoffrey Cain. (2013). “North Korea Plays Phone Tag”. *CNBC*. URL: <https://www.cnbc.com/2013/06/18/north-korea-plays-phone-tag.html> Accessed on April 8, 2022.

¹²³ Choe Sang-Hun. (2013). “North Korea Proposes High-Level Talks with U.S.”. *New York Times*. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2013/06/16/world/asia/north-korea-proposes-talks-with-us.html>. Accessed on April 10, 2022.

¹²⁴ United Nations Security Council. (2006). *Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718 (2006)*. New York: U.N Press. URL: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718> Accessed on April 10, 2022.

¹²⁵ Duchâtel and Schell. See n. 7. p.55.

¹²⁶ Lederer. See n. 77. : Matthew Pennington and Catherine Lucey. (2017) “Trump says ‘China caught red-handed’ selling oil to North Korea,” *The Associated Press/PBS News Hour*. URL: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/trump-says-china-caught-red-handed-selling-oil-to-north-korea> Accessed on April 10, 2022.

in North Korea and reiterated that sanctions should be lifted "with the intent of enhancing the livelihood of the civilian population."¹²⁷

As we have discussed in detail about the economic cooperation between China and North Korea, even the Chinese argue that economic engagement serves the goal of denuclearization as firstly, trade and investments issues had always been an element of insecurity for DPRK as North Korea's nuclear program is the only element which provides leverage to DPRK against South Korea whose economy is four times larger than DPRK. Secondly, trade and economic relations revamp the hope of China in re-engaging with North Korea to persuade it incrementally to resolve its nuclear crisis. Lastly, China's approach is motivated by its quest for strategic influence over the Korean peninsula affairs as China has a long-standing fear that North Korea would tilt toward the U.S. if China interrupts its economic aid flows or exert any sort of external pressure on the DPRK and thus would hinder the Chinese interests over the Korean peninsula in general.¹²⁸

In sum, it can be assessed that China's stance on denuclearization is aimed toward achieving complete denuclearization by moving towards the process in a phase-by-phase manner as Beijing does not want to allow the U.S to dictate terms over North Korea and China would like to take good advantage of the complex political environment of the Korean peninsula and visualizes a greater role to be played by China in the denuclearization debate and looking into the economic support of China to North Korea, it seems that North Korea would be more likely in taking into confidence the Chinese actions in the denuclearization debate between the major powers.

China's Stance on Reunification of the Korean Peninsula

Officially, China's stance on the reunification of the Korean peninsula is a complicated chapter, and much is concerned about the Chinese national interests. Although China wants the reunification of the Korean peninsula through peaceful dialogue, such a reunification is to be based on a North Korean-centered reunification process. China has already outlined its

¹²⁷ "Russia and China block new UN sanctions on 5 North Korean officials". (2022). *The Business Standard*. URL: https://www.business-standard.com/article/international/russia-and-china-block-new-un-sanctions-on-5-north-korean-officials-122012100108_1.html Accessed on April 11, 2022.

¹²⁸ Duchâtel and Schell. See n.57. p.53.

desire for reunification in the Article VI of the 1961 treaty China officially endorses reunification of the Korean peninsula, “The Contracting Parties hold that the unification of Korea must be realized along peaceful and democratic lines and that such a solution accords exactly with the national interests of the Korean people and the aim of preserving peace in the Far East.”¹²⁹ Presently China has made a delicate stance on this reunification issue as Pyongyang presents as a buffer against Western-style democracies’ which becomes useful for China.¹³⁰ Beijing strongly believes in the fact that any chance of reunification would lead to a Western-led peninsula which would be detrimental to China’s interests.¹³¹

China has always been vigilant when commenting upon the issue of reunification of the Korean peninsula and this became evident during the Intern Korean Summit 2018 which officially stated that the summit had a ‘positive outcome’ which would be beneficial for enhancing ‘reconciliation’ and ‘cooperation’ between the two Koreas. Stating that North Korea and South Korea ‘belong to the same nation’, China was vocal in supporting the dialogue between the two countries and expressed hope in envisaging a peaceful political settlement of the Korean Peninsula.¹³² Such public statements of China had underlying goals hidden behind them such as: firstly, Beijing is desirous of a unified Korea which is pro-Chinese rather than pro-western. Even China relies on the historical subtext for its current stance on the reunification debate, wherein Korean unification was noted in the secret cable communication drafted by the East German Embassy in Pyongyang on March 28, 1973, which stated: ‘China will support Korean unification only when it is confident that a unified Korea will be pro-Chinese’.¹³³ Such historical subtexts have even become relevant in present times, as based on such claims China still wants to dictate its terms on the Korean peninsula and henceforth wants to maintain its status quo over the peninsula. Secondly, to consistently influence matters on the Korean peninsula, Beijing has developed its ties with South Korea

¹²⁹ See n 47.

¹³⁰ Robert E. Kelly. (2018) “Chinas Support for North Korea Kills Any Chance for Unification”, *The National Interest*. URL: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/chinas-support-north-korea-kills-any-chance-unification-20227> Accessed on April 12, 2022.

¹³¹ Todd Rosenblum. (2017). “How to persuade China to abandon North Korea’ *Politico*. URL: <https://www.politico.com/agenda/story/2017/07/> Accessed on April 12, 2022.

¹³² “China welcomes inter-Korean summit, extends congratulations”. (2018). *China Daily*. URL: http://m.china.org.cn/orgdoc/doc_1_29302_748824 Accessed on April 12, 2022.

¹³³ Kim, Heung-Kyu. (2014). “China’s Position on Korean Unification and ROK-PRC Relations”. *Research Paper: The 2nd KRIS-Brookings Joint Conference*. URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/04/Kim-Heung-Kyu-paper.pdf> Accessed on April 12, 2022.

while maintaining its balanced ties with North Korea. Beijing has also revamped its influence by actively participating in the Inter- Korean process without losing North Korea's confidence resulting in an increased Beijing influence over Korean affairs.

Another point that could be taken into consideration is that behind the Korean reunification politics China has a political purpose that is to be served in near future and i.e. under Xi Jinping Beijing had been aiming at reunifying Taiwan with the Chinese mainland and so to serve this purpose it might be possible that China might support the peaceful settlement of Korean peninsula reunification as this might encourage Taiwan to reunify with Chinese mainland at some point of time.¹³⁴

Assessing the above-mentioned arguments, it could be summed up that most probably China's interest is basically to have a divided Korea rather than a unified one as a unified Korea will only alter the balance of power in the North-East Asian region as well as would also affect the Chinese political calculations over the region. Henceforth, it is to be noted that China has and will always be the resident power in the region and will be pivotal in shaping the future of the Korean peninsula as even history is evident that since the inception of the Korean war in 1950 China has always been the most important factor not only in dividing North and South Korea but also in leading the non-Western bloc in global affairs. Therefore, China would most likely be pursuing a more watchful approach toward the developments of the Korean peninsula and its politics in near future.

To conclude this chapter, we could assess the fact that in the current times China had adopted a balancing strategy while dealing with North Korea on all matters: politico-diplomatic, economic and in the Korean peninsula affairs, as China under Xi Jinping is more concerned about maintaining a status quo over the peninsula and is much more interested in leveraging out its economic influence over the Pyongyang in order to keep North Korea leaning towards the Chinese side which could provide China with an advantage to influence over the Korean peninsula affairs and by limiting its support for the imposition of sanctions regime on North Korea, China has attempted to repair its relationship with Pyongyang which deteriorated much in 2017 and 2018 as China fears out the inclination of North Korea towards U.S. which might

¹³⁴ Ibid. pp. 236-237.

be detrimental for Chinese interests over the region and thus even the fear of reunification of the Korean peninsula based on the pro-western model is against Chinese interests in general. Also, China would most likely be supportive of North Korea's regime and domestic stability and thus supports a moderate sanctions regime to be imposed upon North Korea as China is much risk-averse about the collapse of the DPRK regime which might exacerbate the chaotic situation over the peninsula triggering stark U.S. response which again would create an unstable situation for Chinese influence over the Korean related issues.

As China has developed its ties with South Korea and has been much interested in actively participating in the Inter-Korean matters to get a leverage in the consultative institutional mechanisms and henceforth in the next chapter we will be dealing with the geopolitics of the triangular relationship between China, North Korea, and South Korea and how such a triangular relationship would in near future shape the politics of Korean peninsula and especially we will be also looking at as to how China has been playing a pivotal role in the Inter-Korean related affairs affecting geopolitics of Korean peninsula.

Chapter III

China and the Geopolitics of Korean Peninsula

Introduction

As we have discussed in the previous chapter about contemporary China and North Korea relationship which gave us a glimpse of the nature of the ambivalent relationship between the two, this chapter deals with two main aspects: firstly, the China's engagement with South Korea which is aimed at leveraging out its influence in the Korean peninsula affairs as a whole highlighting certain implications over the North Korea and the second aspect discusses the role of China in maintaining a balance between both the two Koreas to exert its influence over the region.

Today Korean peninsula has become a strategic geopolitical area in the North East region and in present times this region had been witnessing tumultuous changes in its political environment with the belligerency of North Korea as well as the involvement of major powers in the world like the U.S., China, Japan, South Korea, and Russia which has changed the whole balance of power structure of the region. But from the perspective of our study, we will be discussing the geopolitics between China, North Korea, and South Korea in the region. Such an interplay has metamorphosed the region's security dynamics as a whole.

Geopolitical Relationship between South Korea and China

Before assessing the comprehensive nature of the relationship between South Korea and China, let us look at why China wants to develop stronger ties with South Korea. The logic behind such a burgeoning relationship can be analyzed from the two perspectives one from the liberal perspective and the second from the realist perspective. Assessing the liberalist motives of China, we could analyze the fact that China's rapprochement with ROK (South Korea) in 1992 helped China to push South Korea to cut ties with Taiwan which fulfills the political goals of Mainland China's reunification with Taiwan. As rightly believed that: China's expansion of business ties with South Korea will induce the Taiwanese to compete

with South Koreans in the Chinese market, and China can use economic incentives to encourage a peaceful change in the PRC-Taiwan relationship.¹³⁵

The second inherent reason is that engaging with ROK would bring economic prospects which might support the developmental goals of China within its economy.¹³⁶ Assessing from the realist perspective, China wants to develop ties with both the Koreas to demonstrate Beijing's growing political power; it creates a "source of pride in Beijing's diplomatic prowess."¹³⁷ Additionally, Beijing pursues a relationship with Seoul to wean it off the United States' support. A break in the military alliance would "weaken what China views as an important link in the U.S. 'encirclement' of China."¹³⁸ Assessing from the South Korean perspective engaging with China provides ample opportunities for South Korean companies to expand their businesses in China and the second reason might be that through multilateral initiatives Seoul wants to include Beijing in the multilateral institutions of the North-East Asian region to resolve the Nuclear crisis of North Korea as well as to stabilize the situation of the peninsula in general.

China's Approach towards South Korea: Implications on North Korea

South Korea is one of the critical parts of China's Korean peninsula strategy as South Korea's status in the U.S. alliance structure, its geographical proximity and economic dynamism have motivated China to engage with ROK to weaken the US alliance system to increase Beijing's influence in Korean peninsula affairs and thus to leverage the Beijing's influence and shaping the environment of the region to be more compliant to supporting its preferences.¹³⁹ Since the normalization of their diplomatic ties in 1992, Beijing has always pushed for economic cooperation as well as cultural cooperation and thus highlighting its role as a 'good neighbor'. However, the relationship between the two deteriorated when Beijing for the first time adopted

¹³⁵ Hong Liu. (1993). "The Sino-South Korean Normalization: A Triangular Explanation". *Asian Survey*. 33(11): pp. 1089-1090. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.2307/2645001>.

¹³⁶ Ibid. pp.1093-94.

¹³⁷ Renner. See n. 10.

¹³⁸ Dick K. Nanto and Emma Chanlett-Avery. (2006). "The Rise of China and Its Effect on Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea: U.S. Policy Choices". *Research Report: Congressional research Report*. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/RL32882.pdf> Accessed on April 14, 2022.

¹³⁹ Yuan Jingdong. (2019). "China's Core Interests and Critical Role in North Korea's Denuclearization." *East Asian Policy*. 11(3): pp.25-38. URL: <https://ideas.repec.org/a/wsi/eapxxx/v11y2019i03ns1793930519000242.html> Accessed on April 13, 2022.

a confrontation approach against the ROK with the event of the THAAD issue in 2016.¹⁴⁰ Therefore in the following section, we will be discussing different phases of the China-South Korea relationship in the context of the Korean peninsula region. Henceforth, according to Min Ye, China and South Korean ties developed into multiple phases: to “friendly cooperative relationship” in 1992; a “collaborative partnership for the 21st century” in 1998; a “comprehensive cooperative partnership” in 2003; “strategic cooperative partnership” in 2008; and “enriched strategic cooperative partnership” in 2014.¹⁴¹

There was an upward trajectory in their relationship which was depicted by their trade as well as cultural ties, in 1992 the total trade was \$ 6 billion¹⁴² but it got increased in 2003 to \$ 63 billion¹⁴³ and twenty years after the normalization of their relationship the trade between the two countries was \$215 billion.¹⁴⁴ Bilateral ties between the two in 2008-2012 were much cooler as Seoul under the Lee Myung Bak administration drew closer to the U.S. as after the Cheonan incident in 2010, Beijing consistently shielded North Korea from the repercussions of its actions and Seoul lost its enthusiasm in developing further close ties with Beijing. Even Beijing lamented that the 2010 incidents made South Korea exasperated with China’s North Korea policy and more dependent on the U.S. for security.¹⁴⁵ However, despite such disruptions in their relationship Seoul developed strategic ties with Beijing and acknowledged Beijing’s role in bringing out a resolution for the divided peninsula.

With the ascendance of Xi Jinping and South Korean President Park Geun Hye in 2013, South Korea welcomed China’s dream of integrating its neighboring countries into the Sino Centric

¹⁴⁰ Choe Sang-Hun. (2016) “South Korea and U.S. Agree to Deploy Missile Defense System.” *The New York Times*. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/08/world/asia/south-korea-and-us-agree-to-deploy-missile-defense-system.html> Accessed on April 14, 2022.

¹⁴¹ Jaeho Hwang. (2014). “The ROK’s China Policy under Park Geun-hye: A New Model of ROK-PRC Relations,” *Research Report: The Brookings Institution*. URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/research/the-roks-china-policy-under-park-geun-hye-a-new-model-of-rok-prc-relations/> Accessed on April 14, 2022.

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Mark Manyin, Emma Chanlett Avery et al. (2017). “U.S.- South Korea Relations”. *Research Report: Congressional Research Service*. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R41481.pdf> Accessed on April 16, 2022.

¹⁴⁴ Shannon Tiezzi. (2015). “It’s Official: China, South Korea Sign Free Trade Agreement”. *The Diplomat*. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2015/06/its-official-china-south-korea-sign-free-trade-agreement/> Accessed on April 17, 2022.

¹⁴⁵ Wang Weimin and Xin Hua. (2012). “Redefinition of the ROK-U.S. Alliance and Implications for Sino-ROK Relations: A Chinese Perspective. *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*. 24(3): pp. 285-302. URL: https://kida.re.kr/data/kjda/01_Wang%20Weimin.pdf Accessed on April 17, 2022.

network of economic, political, cultural, and security relations.¹⁴⁶ The convergence between the two was visible with the intense flurry in the high-level political visits between the leaders of the countries, like in Xi visited Seoul in 2014 which constituted an ‘Enriched Strategic Cooperative Partnership’.¹⁴⁷ However, the dreams of converging on common mutual issues of the Korean peninsula were being faded away during the North Korea’s conduct of its fourth nuclear test in 2016 resulting in Beijing’s ambiguous stance by XI reiterating that: “The Peninsula cannot have nuclear weapons as well as wars and chaos,” and said that all parties should maintain “peace and stability on the Peninsula to calmly deal with the current situation”.¹⁴⁸ Such ambiguous assertions clarified the fact that China’s ultimate dream was not to integrate with the South Korean dream, instead it depicted the reality that there had been deep differences between Beijing’s as well as Seoul’s respective strategic goals regarding the Korean conundrum.

There had been a drastic turn in the bilateral relationship between the two in the year 2016 after the deployment of THAAD which aimed at countering North Korea’s increasing nuclear capabilities which infuriated China and therefore contended that it was a threat to China’s national security and as a result, it retaliated with coercive economic response against South Korea.¹⁴⁹ According to Hyundai Research Institute, the economic repercussions on South Korea estimated approximately a loss of \$ 7.5 billion¹⁵⁰ as China adopted the sophisticated form of economic coercion where according to South Korean scholar Sohn, Chinese leaders selected South Korean economic targets that would not harm Chinese businesses that relied on South Korean firms, while harming those that compete with them, and used “selective

¹⁴⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC. (2014). “Xi Jinping Meets with President Park Geun-hye of the Republic of Korea (ROK)”. URL: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/yzs_663350/gjlb_663354/2767_663538/2769_663542/201411/t20141112_522427.html Accessed on April 18, 2022.

¹⁴⁷ Ji Young Lee. (2020). “The Geopolitics of South Korea–China Relations: Implications for U.S. Policy in the Indo-Pacific. *Policy Perspective: RAND Corporation*. URL: <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA524-1.html> Accessed on April 18, 2022.

¹⁴⁸ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC. (2016). “Xi Jinping Holds Telephone Talks with President Park Geun-hye of the ROK”. URL: <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/ceindo/eng/xwdt/t1340371.htm> Accessed on April 18, 2022.

¹⁴⁹ Bonnie S. Glaser, Daniel G. Sofio, and David A. Parker. (2017). “The Good, the THAAD and the Ugly”. *The Foreign Affairs*. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2017-02-15/good-thaad-and-ugly> Accessed on April 19, 2022.

¹⁵⁰ Jane Perlez, Mark Landler et al. (2017). “China blinks on South Korea, making nice after a year of Hostilities”. *The New York Times*. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/11/01/world/asia/china-south-korea-thaad.html> Accessed on April 19, 2022.

implementation of domestic regulations, including customs inspections or sanitary check” and “extralegal measures.”¹⁵¹

Assessing Beijing’s actions towards Seoul, it could be inferred that Beijing had limited success in its partnership with South Korea, and rather than persuading South Korea in its efforts to counter U.S. influence in the region China through its unilateral coercive economic actions damaged its reputation with South Korea as a whole.

With the assumption of power by the Moon Jae In in South Korea in 2017, the bilateral relationship between the two revamped and stabilized with the Moon meeting Xi for the first time at the Asia Pacific Economic Forum (APEC) summit in Vietnam where Moon decided in following its strategy of three no’s: no additional THAAD deployment, no agreement to join a U.S. anti-missile system, and no military alliance with the U.S. and Japan which raised alarming indications in Washington.¹⁵² It was also argued by many scholars that: Beijing’s willingness to restore normal bilateral ties despite Seoul’s refusal to remove THAAD suggests that China’s coercive gambit failed,” but acknowledged that it was too soon to declare it a “total flop,” given that Beijing plays the long game and that the trajectory of the future relationship depended on Seoul’s “willingness to take additional steps to bolster South Korea’s security.”¹⁵³

In 2019 during the Moon era, another fact is notable where South Korea is observed to be balancing its interests between Washington and Beijing wherein the South Korean President pledged in improving bilateral economic ties with China by stating that: “South Koreans may feel a momentary sense of regret towards each other, but our two countries can never become estranged.”¹⁵⁴ Such South Korean friendly rhetoric emerged contradictory to its actions when

¹⁵¹ Yul Sohn. (2019). “South Korea under the United States–China rivalry: dynamics of the economic-security nexus in trade policymaking”. *The Pacific Review*. 32 (6): pp. 1019-1040. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1080/09512748.2019.1617770>

¹⁵² David Josef Volodsko. (2017). “China wins its war against South Korea’s US THAAD missile shield – without firing a shot”. *The South China Morning Post*. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/geopolitics/article/2120452/china-wins-its-war-against-south-koreas-us-thaad-missile> Accessed on April 19, 2022.

¹⁵³ Bonnie S. Glaser and Lisa Collins. (2017). “China’s Rapprochement With South Korea Who Won the THAAD Dispute?” *The Foreign Affairs*. URL: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2017-11-07/chinas-rapprochement-south-korea> Accessed on April 19, 2022.

¹⁵⁴ Moon Jae In. (2019). “Opening Remarks by President Moon Jae-in at Republic of Korea-People’s Republic of China Summit”. URL: <https://english1.president.go.kr/BriefingSpeeches/Speeches/731> Accessed on April 20, 2022.

in the 2019 bilateral summit of the United States and South Korea, Seoul decided in participating in the United States strategy of Indo Pacific taking a drastic turn in its previously mentioned stance of Seoul not taking any sides to antagonize China.¹⁵⁵ It was rightly stated by Yun Sun that Moon's "three no's" and cautious support for the Indo-Pacific Strategy aimed to chart a middle path, "the end result is that both Washington and Beijing are perturbed by the perceived damage to their interests."¹⁵⁶ Thus, South Korea under Moon Jae In's presidency adopted an equilibrium approach to maintaining equitable independence from the influence of neighboring great powers.

So, in context with the contemporary United States and China strategic competition, it is more likely the possibility that such strategic rivalry might create pressure on Seoul in choosing either of the sides, and Beijing in near future is most probably going to adopt a strategy of both carrot and sticks in influencing South Korea's decisions with relations to the Korean peninsula region and such an approach is aimed at downgrading the United States influence in the region. Even under the newly elected President of South Korea, Yoon Suk Yeoul who after winning the South Korean Presidential elections 2022, has already reiterated advancing its ties with its democratic allies like the United States,¹⁵⁷ however, looking into the reality of the situation shifting South Korean economic and political preferences away from China would be challenging for the current administration, however, viable options could have opted from the South Korean side wherefrom the economic perspective short term economic arrangements can be made where South Korean critical industries could be relocated from China but again such a viable option might create repercussions on Seoul if Beijing uses its coercive economic might. Also, with regards to the reunification process, today both China as well as South Korea have differing perspectives on reunifying the two Koreas, as on one end of the ledger China is most likely to support the divided peninsula to prevent reunification

¹⁵⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Republic of Korea. (2019). "Opening Remarks by President Moon Jae-in at Joint Press Conference Following Korea-U.S. Summit". URL: https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=319902 Accessed on April 20, 2022.

¹⁵⁶ Jung H. Pak. (2020). "Trying to Loosen the Linchpin: China's Approach to South Korea". *Research Report: The Brookings Institution*. URL: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/FP_20200606_china_south_korea_pak_v2.pdf Accessed on April, 20, 2022.

¹⁵⁷ Niklas Swanström. (2022). "South Korea's Relations with China and the US under President-elect Yoon". *The Diplomat*. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2022/03/south-koreas-relations-with-china-and-the-us-under-president-elect-yoon/> Accessed on April 21, 2022.

based on the pro-United States model but an extreme option which is more unlikely to occur is that reunification could be supported based on Chinese aggression over the peninsula to create a favorable situation serving the interests of China. Looking out from the Seoul's perspective it is desirous of the reunification of the peninsula which is pro-United States rather than pro-China as the present new South Korean administration is much rhetorical of developing its ties with Washington which makes it highly likely that Seoul might adopt much confrontational approach towards Beijing with regards to Korean peninsula affairs.¹⁵⁸

In this section, we will be analyzing certain constructive views and perceptions which might affect North Korea's relationship with China with the balanced rapprochement of China with South Korea in contemporary times. There had been a wide array of questions that arises when we analyze the triangular relationship between China, North Korea, and South Korea. Assessing the above-mentioned relationship between China and South Korea we seek to answer certain questions like why has North Korea is hardly concerned about the rapprochement of China and South Korea since 1992? Is North Korea not worried about the negative implications of this rapprochement?

So, it could be reflected by the fact that Pyongyang has no other option, especially in the post-cold war to stop the growing rapprochement of China and South Korea as "North Korea was placed in a position that compelled it either to accept isolation or to make the best of the situation by demonstrating some flexibility".¹⁵⁹ North Korea has showcased its flexibility by adopting some of the Beijing suggested economic reforms and has been quite positive in its approach toward the Inter-Korean summits since 2000.

The first argument that can be made here is that North Korea is very much assured from the Beijing's side that no matter how Beijing gets close to Seoul, "the Chinese will help North Korea as much as they can for the sake of preventing a collapse of its system or military instability".¹⁶⁰ As the Pyongyang's strategic goal is to simply survive in this hostile world

¹⁵⁸ "South Korea's New Leader Yoon Suk-yeol is Pro-Quad but Challenges Lie Closer to Home". (2022). *News18*. URL: <https://www.news18.com/news/world/south-koreas-new-leader-yoon-suk-yeol-is-pro-quad-but-challenges-lie-closer-to-home-4858760.html> Accessed on April 21, 2022.

¹⁵⁹ Barry Gills. (1996). *Korea versus Korea: A Case of Contested Legitimacy*. London: Routledge Publications Pvt. Ltd: p.231.

¹⁶⁰ Chae Jin Lee. (1998). *China and North Korea: An Uncertain Relationship*, in *North Korea After Kim IL Sung*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers. p.199.

order,¹⁶¹ this goal is reflected in its perception of growing China and South Korea ties as the “North Koreans adopted a realistic approach toward China’s growing linkage with South Korea and sought China’s diplomatic and economic assistance as much as possible.”¹⁶² Pyongyang has also one primary advantage with the burgeoning China and South Korea ties as such partnership would soon marginalize the role of United States in the region and henceforth would result in the decreasing levels of threat to North Korea. Also, the limited influence of the United States would result in the marginalized position of the United States in the reunification process of the Korean peninsula and thus would serve the interests of North Korea in general.

Another positive outcome is possible for North Korea where the engagement between South Korea and China acts as a balancer against the United States in the sense that today both Beijing and Seoul believe in strategically engaging with North Korea to resolve the nuclear crisis as compared to Washington’s hardline approach, such bilateral ties would evade away the sanctions regimes imposed upon North Korea as China’s veto would turn the whole table of the game towards the North Korea’s favor leaving out not even a minimal scope for South Korea’s choices to decide upon the issues of nuclear North Korea and thus such marginalized position of South Korea even in the decision-making process would ultimately lead to the reduced United States influence in the denuclearization as well as reunification processes as a whole.

In sum, it can be stated that when comparing the influence of both China and the United States, throughout the history it is the indispensability of Chinese influence in the Korean reunification process and even both Pyongyang and Seoul have to a greater extent accepted the fact that ‘China can break or make any Korean state’ and it has to be very well accepted that the ascendance of the Korean power has to much align itself with China as, Beijing has

¹⁶¹ Mel Gurtov. (2002). “Common Security in North Korea: Quest for a New Paradigm in Inter Korean Relations”. *Asian Survey*. 42 (3): p.417. URL: <https://library.fes.de/libalt/journals/swetsfulltext/14218853.PDF> Accessed on April 20, 2022.

¹⁶² Renner. See n.10.

huge stakes in shaping the geopolitical development of the Korean peninsula region due to its enormity of political, economic and military potential.¹⁶³

Inter-Korean Rapprochement: Role of China and Prospects for China-North Korean Ties

As we have decoded the changing China and South Korean ties in the contemporary era, it is also important for our study in deciphering the nature of the Inter-Korean ties in context with the role of China in the Inter-Korean affairs along with plausible prospects for China and North Korean relations in present times. With the end of the cold war, both North Korea and South Korea adopted a path of reconciliation which was previously not possible due to exacerbated antagonisms caused by the great power rivalries during the cold war era.

A good level of cooperation between Seoul and Pyongyang could be observed with the introduction of South Korean President Kim Dae Jung's (1998-2003) 'Sunshine Policy' under which the reconciliation process between the two commenced resulting in positive outcomes were at the political level. In 2000 Presidential summit held between both countries marked a dramatic shift in South Korea's approach toward North Korea resulting in South Koreans providing \$ 400 million of aid to North Korea in the hope of reducing tensions over the peninsula and helping North Korea open up its economy.¹⁶⁴ The two sides also began with the tradition of family reunions to establish the inter-Korean Kaesong Industrial Complex (KIC) near the Demilitarized zone.¹⁶⁵

As a successor to Kim Dae Jung, ROK President Roh Moo Hyun (2003-2008) moved ahead with its reconciliatory efforts under 'Policy for Peace and Prosperity'.¹⁶⁶ However, the DPRK'S first nuclear test in 2006 triggered ROK to reduce its financial aid as well as

¹⁶³ "Giving Lip Service with an Attitude: North Korea's China Debate". (2005). *The Nautilus Institute*. URL: http://www.nautilus.org/DPRKBriefingBook/china/Mansourov_DPRKChinaDebate.html Accessed on April 20, 2022.

¹⁶⁴ Chien-peng Chung. (2003). "Democratization in South Korea and Inter-Korean Relations". *Pacific Affairs*. 76 (1): pp.9-35. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40023987> Accessed on April 22, 2022.

¹⁶⁵ Daniel Wertz. (2017). "Inter-Korean Relations". *Research Report: The National Committee on North Korea*. URL: https://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/inter-korean-relations#footnote12_9u7kejl Accessed on April 22, 2022.

¹⁶⁶ Markku Heiskanen. (2003). "The Roh Administration Peace and Prosperity Policy and International Cooperation: The Eurasian Dimension, catalyst for the Reunification Process". *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*. 12 (1): pp. 1-28. URL: <https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/8883/1/0001477237.pdf> Accessed on April 22, 2022.

temporarily suspended fertilizer and food shipments to the DPRK. Despite such disruptions in their relations, the Inter-Korean summit of 2007 showed some progress which facilitated certain inter-Korean economic developments like the creation of a West Sea Economic Center in the North Korean port city of Haeju.¹⁶⁷

There had been major changes between 2008-2012 under the ROK President Lee Myung Bak who initiated the policy of 'Initiative for Denuclearization and Opening up North Korea' which pledged \$3,000 per capita income within 10 years if DPRK abandoned its nuclear programs and thus such demands were linked with the initiative to denuclearize North Korea.¹⁶⁸ Under Lee's administration, the relationship between the two remained tense aftermath of the Cheonan incident in 2010 and the failure of the secretive talks between the two in April 2011 led to disruptions in their relationship.¹⁶⁹

Following the assumption of power by South Korean president Park Geun Hye who adopted a pragmatic approach toward DPRK by building trust based on renewed negotiations and she stated that: North Korea must keep its agreements made with South Korea and the international community to establish a minimum level of trust, and second, there must be assured consequences for actions that breach the peace. To ensure stability, trustpolitik should be applied consistently from issue to issue based on verifiable actions, and steps should not be taken for mere political expediency.¹⁷⁰

Despite sporadic talks on the Inter-Korean cooperation during 2013 which was a result of exacerbating North Korea's belligerency over the Korean peninsula, still, South Korea maintained its limited assistance to DPRK by sending out its experts in the demilitarized zone to engage in certain environmental protection projects.¹⁷¹ Another notable change in the Inter-Korean relations was marked by a policy shift where the South Korean President began emphasizing reunification of the Korean peninsula, however, DPRK under Kim Jong-Un criticized such a policy which according to DPRK was aimed at collapsing the North Korean

¹⁶⁷ Wertz. See n.31.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid.

¹⁶⁹ Aiden Foster Carter. (2011). "South Korea- North Korea Relations: A Turning Point? *Comparative Connections*. 13 (2). URL: https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/1102qnk_sk.pdf Accessed on April 22, 2022.

¹⁷⁰ Park Geun Hye. (2011) "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust between Seoul and Pyongyang," *Foreign Affairs*. 90 (5): p.14.

¹⁷¹ Wertz. See n 165.

regime and South Korea.¹⁷² However, in 2016 Inter-Korean relations got deteriorated in response to DPRK's fourth nuclear tests and ROK adopted strict sanctions against DPRK along with the DPRK Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea announcing the Kaesong Industrial Complex to be put under military control, South Korean assets to be freeze and military to military communications were to be terminated.¹⁷³ Even the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) deployments damaged their relationship as Park stated that it had "become indisputably clear that the existing approach and good intentions will by no means work in countering the North Korean regime's determination to develop nuclear weapons."¹⁷⁴

Under the Moon Jae In's administration which assumed power in 2017, two major efforts were initiated facilitating Inter- Korean cooperation. Firstly, the Panmunjom Declaration which was signed by Moon and Kim Jong-Un at the Inter-Korean Summit in April 2018, resulted in the efforts made to improve upon Inter-Korean relations, the de-escalation of military tension, and the establishment of a permanent peace regime in the Korean Peninsula.¹⁷⁵ The second aspect of Moon's North Korea policy 'The Korean Peninsula Peace Initiative (KPPI)'¹⁷⁶ dealt with the primacy of maintaining peace and stability over the Korean peninsula; adopting a step by step approach toward the denuclearization process as even Seoul believes in the fact that it has limited capacity in influencing the denuclearization process and henceforth the policy of Seoul's ambiguity comes into the forefront; in contrast, Seoul also believes that it has the main stakes at resolving the North Korea nuclear crisis and thus was reflected in becoming a mediator between Washington and Pyongyang; although President Moon supported the UNSC sanctions, it still believed in resolving the nuclear crisis through negotiations and dialogues.¹⁷⁷ Lastly, it promoted the idea of promoting dialogues while also

¹⁷² "No More to Mockery at Nations. (2014). *Pyongyang Times*. URL: <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1450716603-139290083/no-more-to-mockery-of-nation/> Accessed on April 22, 2022.

¹⁷³ Wertz. See 165.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ "Full text of joint declaration issued at inter-Korean summit". (2018). *Yonhap News Agency*. URL: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20180427013900315> Accessed on April 22, 2022.

¹⁷⁶ Chung-in Moon. (2021). "Moon Jae-in's Stalled Odyssey to Peace in Korea". *The Diplomat*. URL: <https://thediplomat.com/2021/07/moon-jae-ins-stalled-odyssey-to-peace-in-korea/> Accessed on April 23, 2022.

¹⁷⁷ Ser Myo Ja and Lee Sung Eun. (2017). "Moon stresses solidarity with China in speech". *Korean Joongang Daily*. URL: <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2017/12/15/politics/Moon-stresses-solidarity-with-China-in-speech/3042162.html> Accessed on April 24, 2022.

ensuring that North Korea's provocations are met with intense force projections and henceforth Seoul has attempted to create its force posture vis- a vis North Korea and this was showcased when in early July 2017, Seoul and Washington conducted a decapitation missile-firing drill in retaliation against the North Korea's first Inter-Continental Ballistic Missile launches.¹⁷⁸ It also ordered the temporary deployment of the four additional launchers of the missile defense system.¹⁷⁹

Now, that we have in brief discussed the changing geopolitical dynamism of Inter-Korean relations, in the next section our study would also focus on the supplementary role of China in the Inter-Korean affairs to leverage its influence over the region as a whole.

Chinese interests over the Korean peninsula carry a lot of weight as China views the region through its geopolitical lens and sees it as a theatre of Great Power competition with the United States. China in past has been able to cooperate with both the Koreas on economic, security as well as strategic levels as specified in Chapter II and Chapter III respectively of this thesis. After a deep study of China's relations with both Koreas, it could be stated that in the post-cold war era, China's approach towards the Korean affairs is aimed at maintaining its good neighborly relations with both Koreas to facilitate peace, stability, and prosperity of the Korean peninsula which ultimately would benefit the Chinese domestic interests and also would leverage its influence over the Korea related issues and events. In present times, it becomes pivotal for China to assert its influence over the Korean peninsula as China believes that to create a Sino Centric world order it is required that China believes in creating a stable environment in and around its borders and as the Korean peninsula is a geopolitical hotbed for interstate conflicts between ROK and DPRK, China has attempted to maintain its strategic balance of cooperation both with ROK and DPRK to not only serve its domestic interests but also to thwart the influence of United States in the region and thus China has and in near future most likely will be actively responding to the geopolitical developments of the peninsula through the overarching prism of U.S. China strategic competition and given these geopolitical stakes, China certainly is desirous of getting involved in the Inter-Korean affairs.

¹⁷⁸ "South Korean President Arrives in Berlin". (2017) *The Yonhap News Agency*. URL: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170705005751315> Accessed on April 23, 2022.

¹⁷⁹ Lee Chi Dong. (2017). "Allies to deploy strategic assets, THAAD launchers against N. Korea". *The Yonhap News Agency*. URL: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20170729003051315> Accessed on April 23, 2022.

There had been many instances where it could be observed that China has been playing a role of a mediator in the Inter-Korean reconciliatory efforts. These efforts by the Chinese seem that China might not have any underlying strategic issues in facilitating the Inter-Korean rapprochement. So, China to reconcile the interests of ROK and DPRK, China has been coordinating with both the Koreas during the Inter-Korean summits at different points of time to improve the Inter-Korean relations in general. For instance: Before the 2000 Inter-Korean summit, the North Korean leader Kim Jong IL paid a visit to Beijing where the then-Chinese leader Jiang Zemin emphasized China's support for North-South rapprochement.¹⁸⁰ Similarly, just after the conclusion of the 2000 Inter-Korean summit, another mediating gesture was showcased by China where Jiang Zemin viewed that the summit would eventually lead to an independent and peaceful reunification of the peninsula.¹⁸¹ Another notable example could be observed when after the Panmunjom Summit of 2018 between two Koreas, China asserted its constructive role in influencing the interests of both Koreas, China quickly conducted a meeting with Kim Jong-Un to indicate the vitality of China and North Korea's relations in the face of harsh sanctions imposed upon DPRK, also China mended its ties with ROK by dispatching its state councilor Yang Jeichi to Seoul by diplomatically pledging out the way to uplift all the sanctions which were imposed upon South Korean companies by China. Such efforts of China showcase the fact that China desired of becoming an active part of the Inter-Korean issues as it feared that U.S. interference through summits conducted with North Korea (Hanoi Summit 2018) would marginalize the role of China in the Korean affairs.¹⁸²

With regards to the prospects for China-North Korea relations in context with the Inter-Korean rapprochement, it could be observed that China is more likely to play the role of a facilitator by adopting a double partnership strategy, although Seoul has made preferences to partner with the U.S. on Korean related matters, still, Seoul will have to look for Beijing's actions of efforts to get through denuclearization of North Korea as China being a stabilizer in the region could to an extent handle out the belligerency of North Korea especially under Kim Jong-Un

¹⁸⁰ Zhang. See. n. 11.

¹⁸¹ Ibid. p.140.

¹⁸² Jeonseok Lee. (2018). "China and the Korean Peninsula: Kim holds the cards now". *East Asia Forum*. URL: <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/05/30/china-and-the-korean-peninsula-kim-holds-the-cards-now/> Accessed on April 24, 2022.

due to dependence of North Korean economy on China and thus could bring North Korean compliance over the negotiation table of denuclearization.

Assessing the Chinese stance on Inter-Korean reunification process China would like to maintain the status quo of both the Koreas while advocating principles of reunification.¹⁸³ China is more likely to maintain its balance with both the Koreas to maximize its position in the reunification process to serve its political goal of the reunification of the Chinese mainland with Taiwan,¹⁸⁴ but looking into the reality of the geopolitical situation of the Korean peninsula China strives for a divided Korea as the reunification would affect the political calculus of Beijing as China fears that the reunification based on Pro- western model would undermine the influence of China over the region and thus would even affect its relationship with its tributary state North Korea as the regime collapse of its tributary state might bring chaos into the neighboring borders of China resulting in the fading away of the Chinese dream of becoming a regional hegemon in the confrontational face of the United States and its allies.

To conclude this chapter, it can be inferred that the triangular relationship between China, ROK, and DPRK has shaped the political as well as strategic dynamics of the Korean peninsula as a whole because China both through its backdoor channel mechanisms and its active diplomacy has attempted to create a balance between the Two Koreas and such strategy of China is by its global ambitions of creating a Sino Centric world order and at regional levels, it serves the aims of China desiring of becoming a regional hegemon over the Korean peninsula region. China still knows the fact that despite its constant support not only for DPRK but also for ROK, it has limited capacity in influencing the ROK interests in the region. Looking into the current situation of the peninsula, Seoul has been supporting the U.S. stance on the Korean peninsula.

So, the only option viable for China is to engage and re-engage its historical ally North Korea to shape the dynamics of the Korean peninsula. But, one major fact cannot be denied at all that despite the limitedness of Chinese capacity on balancing both the Koreas equally, China had been persistent in lobbying South Korea despite knowing the fact that it is inclined toward Washington in serving its interests in the region. Looking from both the ROK and DPRK

¹⁸³ Panda. See n. 8. p.183.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

perspectives, even ROK needs China's support not only to expand its business across the region but also to persuade China in handling its belligerent little brother North Korea from creating a mess over the peninsula.

From the DPRK perspective, China becomes vital to DPRK due to the constant dependency of the North Korean economy on China which somehow creates pressure on North Korea to change its behavior according to the dictates of China to gain maximum domestic benefits. Thus, such interdependency between China, ROK, and DPRK showcases that every stakeholder in the region is balancing their partnership with each other to prevent any further complications within their partnership which might otherwise create an imbalance of interests within the region due to any of the actors belligerency resulting in the consequences which might hinder the national interests of every stakeholder involved into the geopolitics of the region.

Therefore, in the following chapter again we will be dealing with the other major stakeholders like the U.S, Japan, and Russia involved in the Korean peninsula and will discuss how the interests of each of these stakeholders converge and diverge with both China and North Korea in the Korean peninsula region which would shape the future of the Korean peninsula.

Chapter IV

China and the Major Powers in the Korean Peninsula: Politics of Great Power Competition

Introduction

The Korean peninsula had been the contested theatre for the great power rivalries as brutal wars had been fought by the then-Czarist Russia, Japan, China, and the United States which left the whole of the peninsula colonized and divided. In the post-cold war era, the peninsula had been a key element in shaping much of the politics of North East Asian security architecture. In the security architecture of the region, North Korea has been one of the actors in the region which through its nuclear brinksmanship has changed the balance of power in the region. Therefore, to create a stabilized situation over the Korean peninsula major powers of the world had adopted different strategies in tackling the Korean conundrum, and henceforth this chapter of the thesis explicates the nuanced understanding of policies and perspectives that major powers of the world hold and thus unveil the different strategic paths adopted by these powers to pursue their interests in the Korean peninsula. For our research, we have taken the perspectives of the United States, Japan, and Russia vis-à-vis China in dealing with the politics of nuclear North Korea.

The United States versus China: A Case of Strategic Competition

There had been differing parameters for evaluating the differing U.S. as well as Chinese perspectives in dealing with the Korean conundrum. Firstly, the U.S. highly prioritizes the complete and verifiable denuclearization of the Korean peninsula as it wants to prevent North Korea's export of nuclear know-how to other states and non-state actors which might be detrimental for the regional as well as global security.¹⁸⁵ Here at this juncture both U.S. and China converge on the view that North Korea's eventual possession of nuclear weapons would trigger both Japan and South Korea to build up their arms weapons which would create a situation of security dilemma in the region again leading to the chaotic situation over the

¹⁸⁵ Wade L. Huntley. (2007). "U.S. Policy towards North Korea in Strategic Context: Tempting Goliath's Fate". *Asian Survey*. 47 (3): pp. 464-467. Doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/as.2007.47.3.455> .

peninsula. However, it is to be noted that such horizontal proliferation is not at all a concern for either Beijing or Washington.

With regards to resolving the nuclear crisis of the peninsula, the U.S. adopted a multilateral approach towards facilitating the denuclearization process where China entered the scene in April 2003 with the trilateral talks between the U.S., China, and North Korea followed by the six-party talks between ROK, DPRK, U.S., China, Japan, and Russia, however, the talks failed in 2009 with the North Korea's conduct of its long-range missile tests in 2006.¹⁸⁶

Various other efforts were also initiated by the U.S. to resolve the nuclear crisis issue, such as in 2012, the U.S. and North Korea met in Beijing where North Korea agreed to suspend operations at its Yongbyon uranium enrichment plant, invite IAEA inspectors to monitor the suspension, and implement moratoriums on nuclear and long-range missile tests. In response, the US agreed to provide the North with 240,000 metric tons of food aid.¹⁸⁷ But the hopes to deal with the nuclear crisis were short-lived as in 2012, North Korea successfully launched the Unha3 and in August 2013, satellite images revealed that North Korea had restarted its heavy Yongbyon nuclear reactor.¹⁸⁸ Even the Trump Kim Singapore summit of 2018 did not create any benefits for the U.S. in general, instead, it was North Korea that benefitted a lot from the summit where it cleverly explicated its belligerent behavior caused due to continuous U.S. military presence in the South Korea and thus, the pressurized U.S. in realizing the fundamentals of the situation in the Korean peninsula.

So, the question arises as to why the United States failed in its efforts of denuclearizing the Korean peninsula? Therefore, the logic behind such failure has been the U.S. attempts to pressurize North Korea by imposing stringent sanctions and the continuous military posturing of the U.S. like conducting joint military exercises such as Vigilant Ace air force interoperability exercises, etc. has emboldened North Korea to continue with its nuclear proliferation as a deterrent against U.S. aggression as a security dilemma situation arises for

¹⁸⁶ Namrata Goswami. 2019. "The US grand Strategy and Preference in Korean Peninsula", in Titli Basu (ed.), *Major Powers and Korean Peninsula: Politics, Policies and Perspectives*. New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd: 146-147.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid. p.148.

¹⁸⁸ Paul Eckert and Arshad Mohammad. (2013). "Satellite image suggests North Korea has restarted Yongbyon nuclear reactor - U.S. group". *Reuters*. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/korea-north-nuclear-idINDEE98A0H120130912> Accessed on April 25, 2022.

North Korea which views such U.S. coercive posture to be aiming at destabilizing the North Korean regime to create a U.S. led regional order over the peninsula.

In contrast, if we look into the post-cold war era Chinese posture towards North Korea vis-à-vis U.S. it could be observed that China had been quite influential over the DPRK. Although China by supporting U.S. has imposed sanctions on DPRK like UNSC resolution 1718 in 2006¹⁸⁹ and 2017 UNSC resolutions which resulted in the restricted exports of oil, machinery, and textiles to DPRK along with the freeze of the North Korean assets,¹⁹⁰ nevertheless, China moderated its sanctions against DPRK keeping in mind the long-standing fear of that excessive economic pressure on DPRK could lead to regime collapse. Also, after the failure of the Six-Party Talks, it is China that remains the sole provider of economic aid to maintain the stability of its buffer state which becomes vital for China's security against U.S. troops in ROK. Even China developed confrontational rhetoric against the U.S. in 2016 with the deployments of THAAD systems and as a result, a stark response came from Xi Jinping: "The U.S. deployment of an advanced anti-missile system in South Korea gravely harms the strategic security interests of China, Russia and other countries in the region."¹⁹¹ It is even believed by many Chinese experts on North Korea that it is only the United States which destabilizes the North-East Asian region by its warmongering rhetoric resulting in further exacerbation of the insecurity in the region. It was stated by the Chinese ambassador to the US: "Honestly, the United States should be doing much more than now, so that there's real effective international cooperation on this issue. They should refrain from issuing more threats. They should do more to find effective ways to resume dialogue and negotiation."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ "Security Council Committee established pursuant to resolution 1718". (2006)". *United Nations Security Council*. URL: <https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sanctions/1718> Accessed on April 26, 2022.

¹⁹⁰ Rick Gladstone. (2017). "U.N. Security Council Imposes Punishing New Sanctions on North Korea.". *The New York Times*. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/08/05/world/asia/north-korea-sanctions-united-nations.html> Accessed on April 26, 2022. See also. "Security Council Imposes Fresh Sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Including Bans on Natural Gas Sales, Work Authorization for Its Nationals". *United Nations*. URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12983.doc.htm> Accessed on April 26, 2022; "Security Council Tightens Sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2397". (2017). *United Nations*. URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13141.doc.htm> Accessed on April 26, 2022.

¹⁹¹ "China, Russia share opposition to U.S. THAAD in South Korea: Xi". (2017). *Reuters*. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-thaad-russia-idUSKBN19O0N8> Accessed on April 26, 2022.

¹⁹² "China's Washington envoy says U.S. should stop threats over North Korea". (2017). *Reuters*. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-northkorea-missiles-china-diplomacy-idUKKCN1BR003> Accessed on April 27, 2022.

Another point is also to be noted that Beijing to thwart the U.S. influence in the region has adopted even a diplomatic approach where after the Trump Kim Summit of 2018, although the tensions on the Korean peninsula got eased, it left no role for Beijing to influence upon the matters of the Korean peninsula and this became a great concern for Beijing as China feared that the U.S. and the Two Koreas might develop peace mechanism on the Korean peninsula and such major decisions without the participation of China was unacceptable¹⁹³ and according to some Chinese analysts: “Chinese were concerned that North Korea was drifting away, our influence in Pyongyang was declining, and our interests were not being protected”.¹⁹⁴ So, China being insecure about the presence of the U.S. in the region, Beijing began to reassert its position by launching its diplomatic initiatives like the 2018 visit to Pyongyang by Song Tao, director of the CCP’s International Department, which marked the appreciation for the “cordial hospitality, warm comradeship and friendship” he had received during his “unforgettable visit to China.”¹⁹⁵ Another effort was made with the Xi’s visit to Pyongyang in June 2019, which marked the appreciation for the 70th anniversary of their traditional diplomatic ties and such visit was made before the G20 Osaka summit which signaled the fact that despite the failure of the Hanoi Summit of 2019 China was determined to improve its relations with DPRK regardless of the troubled state of the U.S.- North Korea diplomacy.¹⁹⁶

As the U.S. believes in creating a favorable a great balance of power serving its goals of maintaining its primacy over global affairs, it also helps in building the capacities of its allies to counter the threat of its enemies. In the Korean peninsula region, the U.S. has been infuriated with the present ambiguous Chinese actions toward nuclear North Korea as it was rightly stated by the US Senator from Arkansas, Tom Cotton: “China has been playing both sides of the street saying one thing to Western officials in public but doing nothing to stop

¹⁹³ Cheng Ping. (2018). “War-end declaration good, but not necessary”. *The Manila Times*. URL: <https://www.manilatimes.net/2018/08/14/opinion/analysis/war-ending-declaration-good-but-not-necessary/430211> Accessed on April 27, 2022. See also: Catherine Wong. (2018). “China could be excluded from peace talks after Donald Trump-Kim Jong-un summit, analysts say”. *South China Morning Post*. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy-defence/article/2143934/china-could-be-excluded-peace-talks-after-trump-kim> Accessed on April 28, 2022.

¹⁹⁴ Revere. See n.1.

¹⁹⁵ “KJU Meets with Song Tao”. (2018). *North Korea Leadership Watch*. URL: <http://www.nkleadershipwatch.org/2018/04/16/kju-meets-with-song-tao/> Accessed on April 28, 2022.

¹⁹⁶ Revere. See n 1.

North Korea from getting nuclear weapons or now to get them to denuclearize”.¹⁹⁷ Such a contradictory stance of China has created an atmosphere of distrust between the U.S. and China in the region that it becomes challenging for the big players to cooperate on the common policy of denuclearizing North Korea.

In addition to this argument, the U.S. also faces challenges from China regarding the reunification process of the Korean peninsula as China has always been cautious while dealing with Pyongyang and Beijing would be suspicious of any U.S. actions in any scenario which might create united and democratic Korea on its borders. So, the basic crux lies in the fact that if the U.S. strives for a reunified Korea based on its democratic principles, then the major task for the U.S. and its allies would be to convince Beijing and assure that reunification would be more in support of China’s interests in the region. The U.S. and its allies were also be obliged to conduct a frank and unprecedented dialogue with China which is again the biggest challenge as the U.S. needs to specify the role of both Chinese, as well as U.S. forces on the post-unification borders of Korea and certain security guarantees and confidence-building measures, have to be adopted taking into consideration the holistic attitudes and perceptions of China towards the reunification process,¹⁹⁸ as discussed in chapter II of this thesis, China has always signaled out its interests in keeping the two Koreas divided with the inherent fear of reunification based on pro-U.S. model which might destroy the buffer region of DPRK created between U.S. and China over the Korean peninsula.

Role of Russia in Resolving the North Korean Challenge

Russia’s role in the North East Region revolves around its geo-economics interests as Russia desires of maintaining peace and stability in the region to integrate its Russian Far East (RFE) and Siberian region with the neighbors of North-East Asia to facilitate economic projects in the RFE to bring economic prosperity to the region. The North East region provides Russia the opportunity to export its energy resources from RFE to the North-East Asian region gas

¹⁹⁷ Associated Press. (2017). “US Senator accuses China of ‘lying for 25 years’ about North Korea”. *South China Morning Post*. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/world/united-states-canada/article/2123392/leading-us-senator-accuses-china-lying-25-years> Accessed on April 28, 2022.

¹⁹⁸ Evans J. Revere. (2015). “Korean Reunification and U.S. Interests: Preparing for One Korea”. *Research Report: The Brookings Institution*. URL: <https://www.brookings.edu/on-the-record/korean-reunification-and-u-s-interests-preparing-for-one-korea/> Accessed on April 29, 2022.

markets. As a result, Russia initiated its Sakhalin oil and gas pipeline transportation project in 2009 which becomes a trilateral project involving ROK, DPRK, and Russia.¹⁹⁹ Russia is also interested in exporting its Russian electricity to the Korean peninsula as well as its projects also involve connectivity projects to connect Trans Korean Railway to the Russian Trans-Siberian Railway.²⁰⁰ Highlighting the role of the Korean peninsula, it was rightly mentioned by some Russian experts that: Normalization of the inter-Korean relations would undoubtedly be facilitated by putting the following large Russian South Korean North Korean partnership projects into practice: the international rail corridor from Europe to Korea, the construction of a Russia North Korea South Korea gas pipeline, and the creation of a unified energy system in Northeast Asia, which includes regions in East Siberia and the Russian Far East.²⁰¹

Nonetheless, these viable economic projects of Russia could only be realized only after the normalization of the rogue behavior of North Korea and thus denuclearization of the Korean peninsula becomes indispensable for the fulfillment of the Russian projects in the region.

With regards to the perceptions on the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, Russia shares the same views as China that North Korea's missile programs had perpetuated due to the pressures created by the U.S. and its allies' creating instability in the region. The Communist Party leader of Russia Gennady Zyuganov has called for the adoption of the diplomatic policy to resolve the Korean conundrum and stressed the efforts of Russia and China on searching for the peaceful solution to the North Korea problem.²⁰²

Russia and China had been on the same page where they believed that the nuclear weapons are a powerful deterrent that protects the North Korean sovereignty against U.S. and ROK, however, Russia too supports the UNSC sanctions to be imposed upon DPRK but disregards the utility of such sanctions to resolve the issue. Thus, it was stated by Mikhail Ulyanov,

¹⁹⁹ John W. Bauer. (2009). "Unlocking Russian interests on the Korean Peninsula". *U.S. Army*. URL: https://www.army.mil/article/27946/unlocking_russian_interests_on_the_korean_peninsula Accessed on May 9, 2022.

²⁰⁰ Artyom Lukin. (2018). "Why Russia Is Still Playing Second Fiddle in Korean Geopolitics". *Analysis Report: Valdai Discussion Club*. URL: https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/russia-second-fiddle-in-korea/?sphrase_id=433795 Accessed on May 9, 2022.

²⁰¹ I.S Ivanov. (2015). "Security and Cooperation in Northeast Asia: the Russian South Korean Experts Joint Paper". *Working Paper: Russian International Affairs Council*. URL: <https://www.slideshare.net/RussianCouncil/security-and-cooperation-in-northeast-asia-the-russiansouth-korean-experts-joint-paper> Accessed on May 9, 2022.

²⁰² "Russia's communist party leader slams Trump's statement on North Korea as provocation". (2017). *Tass Russian News Agency*. URL: <https://tass.com/politics/966596> Accessed on May 9, 2022.

Director of the Russian Foreign Ministry in the 72nd session of the United Nations General Assembly: “Just like other countries, we strongly condemn Pyongyang’s nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches in violation of the UN Security Council resolution. We supported the latest sanctions imposed by the UN Security Council. However, the sanctions are not a cure at all”.²⁰³ In addition, Russia has blamed even the North Korean leaders for exacerbating the conflictual situation over the Korean peninsula as it was stated by Alexander Gubaev: “Nuclear developments have negative consequences for Russian security interests because they give the United States a legitimate pretext to develop its military infrastructure in and around the Korean Peninsula, including the recent deployment of THAAD. This is the major reason why Moscow continues its efforts with other members of the international community to limit DPRK missile and nuclear capabilities”.²⁰⁴

Russia has been supportive of UNSC sanctions against North Korea and this was depicted when Russia came out with a 2017 decree which restricts the trade, economic, financial, and technical cooperation with DPRK. Despite such restrictions just like China, Russia has been making promises for development with DPRK wherein 2012 both the leaders of Russia and DPRK signed an agreement to settle the North Korean debts, followed by 2014 levels of openness and cooperation between the two to facilitate Russian investments in the DPRK.²⁰⁵ Another point is to be noted that on the point of implementation and violation of UNSC sanctions the US and Russia had a confrontational face-off where the US had been constantly alleging Russia’s systematic violations of the UNSC sanctions for instance: the US alleged that Russia transferred its oil products to DPRK in the violation of UNSC resolution 1718 and other remarks were made by Ambassador Nikki Haley in UNSC Briefing on Non-proliferation and the Implementation on September 17, 2018: North Korea continues to illegally procure refined petroleum products with the help of Russia. Not only that, when we pursued UN

²⁰³ Mikhail Ulyanov. (2017). “Remarks by Mikhail Ulyanov, Director of the Foreign Ministry Department for Non-Proliferation and Arms Control and Representative of the Russian Federation at the First Committee of the 72nd session of the UN General Assembly, within the General Debate”. *Permanent Mission of the Russian Federation to the United Nations*. URL: <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/statement-by-russian-federation-eng-72-nw.pdf> Accessed on May 9, 2022.

²⁰⁴ Alexander Gubaev. (2017). “A Russian Perspective on the Impact of Sanctions”. *Research Report: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Moscow Centre*. URL: <https://carnegiemoscow.org/2017/08/03/russian-perspective-on-impact-of-sanctions-pub-72723> Accessed on May 9, 2022.

²⁰⁵ Liudmila Zakharova. (2016). “Economic cooperation between Russia and North Korea: New goals and new approaches”. *Journal of Eurasian Studies*. 7 (2): p.154. URL: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366516300124> Accessed on May 9, 2022.

designation of the Patriot and other North Korean, Russian, and other country-flagged ships that are illegally transferring oil, Russia consistently blocked these designations in the sanctions committee.²⁰⁶

The US also alleged that a Russian bank had assisted a transaction with a person prohibited by the US for his alleged involvement with North Korea's nuclear weapons program²⁰⁷ and also The US further alleged that Russia has allowed thousands of new North Korean laborers into the country with new work permits which according to the US is violating UN sanctions.²⁰⁸ The US Russia face-off was also observed where Russia blocked the UNSC resolution 1718 stating that: The US-presented evidence in support of this proposal is unconvincing. We cannot accept the pressure exerted by the US delegation in the UN Security Council and its subsidiary bodies, which has already become a norm. Using an artificially tightened deadline, it is trying to push through its own decisions without taking into account the opinion of the other members. Clearly, Washington is trying to keep Pyongyang under maximum pressure as long as possible, in effect, up to the completion of the denuclearization process. This policy is destructive for settling the issues of the Korean Peninsula and evokes extreme resentment.²⁰⁹

So, looking into such pieces of evidence it is clear that just like China, Russia had been questioning the efficacy of the UNSC sanctions imposed upon DPRK and Russia suggests a concrete plan to resolve the Korean conundrum and thus a consensus exists between Russian and Chinese views on the denuclearizing North Korea. This statement by the Russian Ambassador to the UN, Vassily Nebenzia, placed an alternative solution stating that: We proposed a reasonable and realistic alternative to the ultimatum logic of the sanctions, which has proved unworkable time and again. The alternative consisted of the following: beginning

²⁰⁶ Nikki Haley. (2018). "Remarks at a UN Security Council Briefing on Nonproliferation and the Implementation and Enforcement of UN Sanctions on North Korea". *United States Mission to United Nations*. URL: <https://usun.usmission.gov/remarks-at-a-un-security-council-briefing-on-nonproliferation-and-the-implementation-and-enforcement-of-un-sanctions-on-north-korea/> Accessed on May 10, 2022.

²⁰⁷ Sasha Ingber. (2018). "Russian Bank Hit With Sanctions For Helping North Korea". *NPR News*. URL: <https://www.npr.org/2018/08/03/635465039/russian-bank-hit-with-sanctions-for-helping-north-korea> Accessed on May 10, 2022.

²⁰⁸ Bob Fredericks. (2018). "Russia may have violated UN sanctions by giving work permits to North Korean laborers". *New York Post*. URL: <https://nypost.com/2018/08/02/russia-may-have-violated-un-sanctions-by-giving-work-permits-to-north-korean-laborers/> Accessed on May 10, 2022.

²⁰⁹ Manabhanjan Meher. 2019. "Russia and the North Korean Challenge", in Titli Basu (ed.) *Major Powers and the Korean Peninsula: Politics, Policies and Perspectives*. New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd: p.243.

implementation of not just the sanctions-related parts of the aforementioned resolutions of the Security Council, but also those of the provisions calling for a peaceful political and diplomatic settlement of the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula through dialogue and negotiation.²¹⁰

Russia views the Six-Party talks as a window of opportunity to try a multilateral approach to solving the thorny issues that plague the Korean peninsula region.²¹¹ Professor Igor Tolstokulakov of the Far Eastern Federal University of Russia has argued that “sanctions would not work with North Korea and suggested closer cooperation between regional powers including China, Russia, the US, Japan, and South Korea to find a peaceful and acceptable solution to Korean crisis which also require the active participation of from the side of Pyongyang.”²¹² Both Russia and China had been propagating the idea of Six-Party Talks at every forum and being the party to these Six-Party talks, unlike other stakeholders, both Russia and China had been active in partnering with each other when a joint declaration was signed on July 4, 2017 meeting between Xi and Putin in Moscow which stated that: Our common foreign policy priorities include a comprehensive resolution of the Korean Peninsula issue to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Asia. We have agreed to actively promote our common initiative based on Russia’s stage-by-stage plan for a Korean settlement and China’s initiatives for a parallel freeze of nuclear missile activities in the DPRK and the large-scale military exercises by the United States and the Republic of Korea.²¹³

Even the Chinese ambassador to UN Wu Haitao welcomed this joint initiative and stated that: The joint proposal of China and Russia is practical and feasible and is aimed at promoting the peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula and the maintenance of peace and stability on the peninsula. As such, we hope that the proposal will elicit responses and support from the parties concerned.²¹⁴

²¹⁰ Ibid. p.246.

²¹¹ Georgy Toloraya. (2008). “The Six Party Talks: A Russian Perspective”. *Asian Perspective*. 32 (4): pp. 45-69. URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/42704653> Accessed on May 10, 2022.

²¹² “Conference on the Future Development of South Korean-Russian Relations In Search of Trilateral Cooperation in Northeast Asia”. (2018). *Hans Siedel Foundation Korea*. URL: <https://korea.hss.de/en/news/detail/in-search-of-trilateral-cooperation-in-northeast-asia-news2492/> Accessed on May 10, 2022.

²¹³ “Press statements following Russian-Chinese talks”. (2017). *Russian President Website*. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/54979> Accessed on May 10, 2022.

²¹⁴ Meher. See n 209. p.249.

Here, such joint initiatives by both China and Russia taking into consideration the framework of the Six-party talks indicate the fact that China's cooperation with Russia in this region is motivated by the asymmetric relationship both have with the U.S. In this multilateral framework, Russia had been quite accommodating to the needs of China and both countries need the support of each other to sustain the sanctions imposed on DPRK henceforth this cooperation could prevent any regime collapse of DPRK which might have negative spillover effects in the region. Thus, the partnership of both Russia and China is also a major concern for the U.S. as it believes that both Russia and China share the same global view of thwarting the U.S. led world order and thus perceives both the countries to be revisionist powers who are working in consonance with each other to displace the U.S. position in both the regional as well as global affairs.

Russia has also been positive about adopting an approach of summit diplomacy and the Russian Foreign Ministry stated in 2018 that: We welcome the successful holding of the meeting between the leaders of the two Korean states in Panmunjom on April 27. We regard it as a significant step by Seoul and Pyongyang to national reconciliation and the establishment of strong relationships of independent value. We have a positive view of the agreements enshrined in the Panmunjom Declaration on the results of the inter-Korean summit. We are ready to facilitate the establishment of practical cooperation between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea, including through the development of tripartite cooperation in the railway, electricity, gas, and other industries.²¹⁵

Russia through diplomacy has also been able to create dialogues that establish peace and stability in the Korean peninsula and this initiative of Russia was visible during the Vladivostok summit of 2019 where for the first time both Kim and Putin met and discussed issues of bilateral partnership and denuclearization process and thus Putin reiterated that: "Russia welcomes the DPRK's steps to establish a direct dialogue with the United States and normalize relations between North and South Korea. We proceed from the premise that there

²¹⁵ Jojin .V. John. (2018). "Situation in Korean Peninsula: Responses of Six Party Members (North Korea, United States, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan) - Who Said What April 26-May 7, 2018". *Commentary Report: Indian Council of World Affairs*. URL: https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=2510&lid=1774 Accessed on May 10, 2022.

is no alternative to a peaceful resolution of the nuclear and other problems in the region”.²¹⁶ Therefore, Russia will always be the major player in the Korean peninsula and will keep its balanced relationship with both the Koreas to establish peace in the region as well as to prevent any further escalations in the region caused by any asymmetries in the power dynamics caused by great power rivalries in the region.

Japan’s North Korea Strategy

Assessing Japan’s stance on the North Korean nuclear issue, Japan has been advocating for the ‘maximum pressure’ strategy and argued that sanctions are the only tools through which the DPRK could be coerced to shape its policy.²¹⁷ At the 2017 United Nations General Assembly, Japan cautioned that “dialogue is employed as a tool by Pyongyang for ‘deceiving us and buying time’, and that ‘not dialogue, but the pressure is the way forward in making Pyongyang relinquish its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in a complete, verifiable, and irreversible manner.”²¹⁸ In December 2017, Ambassador Koro Bessho, Permanent Representative of Japan to the United Nations and also the Security Council President for December, argued that the furtherance of nuclear and missile development ‘could never be tolerated and maximum pressure would be applied to end it’.²¹⁹

Japan’s North Korea policy mainly revolves around the DPRK’S nuclear missile programs as well as the abduction issue and therefore, Japan seeks a ‘comprehensive resolution of outstanding issues’ comprising nuclear and missile issues in addition to the abductions issue, ‘which continues to be the most important. Within its framework of pressure and dialogue. Some of the instances where Japan adopted both pressure and dialogues were: The Japanese Maritime Self-Defense Force and the Japan Coast Guard plays an active role when it comes

²¹⁶ Associated Press. (2019). “Russian and North Korean leaders promise stronger ties at Vladivostok meeting”. *The Guardian*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/apr/25/kim-jong-un-meets-vladimir-putin-for-first-time-at-vladivostok-summit> Accessed on May 10, 2022.

²¹⁷ Titli Basu. 2019. “Rethinking Japan’s North Korea Strategy: In Cross-Currents between Kim Jong-un and Donald Trump”, in Titli Basu (ed.) *Major Powers and the Korean Peninsula: Politics, Policies and Perspective*. New Delhi: KW Publishers Pvt. Ltd. 261.

²¹⁸ “Address by Prime Minister Shinzo Abe at the Seventy-Second Session of the United Nations General Assembly”. (2017). *Ministry of Foreign Affairs for Japan*. URL: https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/unp_a/page4e_000674.html Accessed on May 11, 2022.

²¹⁹ “Security Council Tightens Sanctions on Democratic People’s Republic of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 2397”. (2017). *United Nations*. URL: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc13141.doc.htm> Accessed on May 11, 2022.

to monitoring the implementation of UNSC Resolution 2375 and 2397 which forbids member states from engaging in ship-to-ship transfers of goods to or from North Korean-flagged vessels, along with diplomatic dialogues like Japan in 2018 worked efficiently to maintain dialogue mechanism with Pyongyang in the PyeongChang Winter Olympics with the aim of representing its interests.²²⁰

However, the normalization talks between the two countries had been stalled since the 1990s as North Korea had been quite assertive in the situation that the ties can be normalized only after the settlement of past issues ‘by way of a Japanese apology; compensation; returning the Korean cultural assets taken away during Japanese occupation; as well as extending legal status to ethnic Koreans residing in Japan’.²²¹ Also, the abduction issue of Japan has narrowed down the Japanese efforts in resolving the nuclear crisis in the region.

Apart from analyzing Japan’s discourse on North Korea, it is also important to decode how within the Six-party framework, Japan had been engaging with the parties to the talks at bilateral levels to shape the dynamics of the Korean peninsula. Here, for our research, we have opted out of analyzing the relationship between Japan with both China and the US. So, with regards to China, both Japan and U.S. are on the same page as Japan continues to regard China as a security threat and this was reflected in Japan’s National Defense Program Guidelines that these defense guidelines continue to emphasize the perceived threat posed by the build-up in Chinese capabilities, asserting that “Such Chinese military and other developments, coupled with the lack of transparency surrounding its defense policy and military power, represent a serious security concern for the region including Japan and for the international community.” A leading goal of Japan’s security policy is, therefore, to counter Beijing’s “unilateral, coercive attempts to alter the status quo based on its own assertions that are incompatible with existing international order.” Above all, these efforts are concentrated on challenging China’s expanding activities in the East China Sea, especially around the Senkaku Islands, as well as in the South China Sea, where Japan accuses China of conducting “large-scale, rapid reclamation of maritime features, which are being converted into a military

²²⁰ Basu. See n.217. pp.270-271.

²²¹ Mark E. Manyin. (2001). “North Korea-Japan Relations: The Normalization Talks and the Compensation/Reparations Issue”. *CRS Report for Congress*. URL: <https://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/crs/RS20526.pdf> Accessed on May 11, 2022.

foothold.²²² Even Japan shares the view that China in present times has emerged as a revisionist power that is intent on reshaping the world in a way that is antithetical to the interests of the United States and its allies.²²³

In the post-cold war era although it seems that the US-Japan alliance is considered to be one of the cooperative alliances in the world order. But looking into the alliance in the case of the Korean peninsula, and especially under Japan's Abe administration and U.S. Trump administration with regards to the abduction issue, U.S. and Japan had slightly differed in their approaches. In 2014, Japan eased sanctions on DPRK including elevating the limits on the reporting of cash remittances and permitting port calls by North Korean vessels as Chairman Kim pledged to renew investigations into and institute a special investigation committee on, the abduction issue. Nevertheless, such relaxations were nominal and natural as Japan still supported the US for the DPRK nuclear programs.²²⁴

Another argument that can be applied to this analysis is that Japan has concerns over the US approach towards resolving the Korean conundrum, as several realities got unfolded with the conclusion of the Trump Kim Singapore Summit of 2018 which created apprehensions for Japan regarding whether Washington's discussions with Pyongyang served Tokyo's national interests as decoupling ICBMs (Inter-Continental Ballistic Missiles) and short and medium-range ballistic missiles; ignoring human rights issues in the Singapore Summit; the fault lines in trade matters (including the initiation of investigation by the Department of Commerce under Section 232 of the Trade Expansion Act of 1962 with the objective of determining of auto imports 'threaten to impair the national security') is testing the metal of the US-Japan alliance.²²⁵ Thus, the US has been focusing on the ICBMs rather than on short and middle-range missiles which might in near future be a security threat to Japan.

Another key issue is related to the contingency planning concerning Japanese consent vis-à-vis the use of the bases in the Korean peninsula as even though in 1969, Prime Minister Eisaku

²²² James D.J. Brown. (2018). "Japan's Strategy to Keep the North Koreans and Chinese Down, the Americans in, and the Russians Neutral". *Research Report: Korea Economic Institute of America*. URL: https://keia.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/kei_jointus-korea_2019_1.4.pdf Accessed on May 11, 2022.

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Sheila A. Smith. (2014). "Pyongyang's New Overtures and Abe's Diplomacy". *38 North*. URL: <https://www.38north.org/2014/05/ssmith053114/> Accessed on May 11, 2022.

²²⁵ Basu. See n.217. p.265.

Sato argued that securing South Korea was critical for maintaining Japan's national security and thus permitted the US to utilize facilities within Japan in case of a contingency, Prime Minister Abe categorically articulated that, in the case of contingencies in the Peninsula, Japan would require the US to engage in prior consultation before using the bases for aiding South Korea.²²⁶

However, despite these underlying differences between both US and Japan, Japan has attempted to assure the US that Japan is not a free rider and is a valuable ally of the US and has showcased its national military capabilities as well as enacted laws of collective defense 2016 to protect the military assets of the US and other allies and such actions depict that although the US-Japan alliance is not fully reciprocal, but also it is not one-sided also.²²⁷ Thus, it can be inferred that in near future Japan is more likely to be supporting the US and South Korea as well in resolving the nuclear crisis of the peninsula for all the three countries apart from North Korea being the regional threat to their national security interests, it is also the China threat which is the biggest challenge for both US and its allies as the aggressive posture of China poses challenges to these countries not only in the Korean peninsula region but also creates an environment of insecurity in the whole of the global order as China desires of maintaining its status quo while also destabilizing the influence of the US and its allies on the various aspects of strategic issues concerning global order. Specifically dealing with the North Korea in general, Japan will require the support of both the ROK and US to provide equal support of UNSC sanctions on DPRK to deter the blockading of Chinese influence over the Korean peninsula affairs as Japan fears that the China DPRK nexus would lead to long term costs of national security threat to Japan upon its both territorial as well as maritime borders.

To conclude this chapter, it can be summed up that the major powers like Russia, Japan, the US, and China have in reality changed the geopolitical dynamics of the Korean peninsula as a whole and is the important member of the six-party talks multilateral approach to resolving the Korean conundrum, each of these major powers at their initial bilateral levels has attempted to persuade North Korea in changing its behavior. In realist terms, each of these

²²⁶ Toby Dalton, Narushige Michishita and Tong Zhao. (2018). "Security Spillover: Regional Implications of Evolving Deterrence on the Korean Peninsula". *Issue Brief: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*. URL: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_336_Dalton_Michishita_Zhao_Korea_Brief_final1.pdf Accessed on May 11, 2022.

²²⁷ Brown. See n.222.

major powers had been shaping the security architecture of the region in accordance with their national interests, and each one of them attempted to influence the balance of power of the region in their favor. China's factor has always been preeminent in this region where countries like Russia are likely to support China's stance on the DPRK nuclear issues as both these countries converge on aiming at thwarting the influence of the US over the region as well as the global world order. Whereas the US and its allies based on their 'China threat Theory' had been aligning on common grounds of cooperation surpassing their nominal differences on various issues of this region.

It is to say that over the Korean peninsula issue although the primary aim of the great powers is to denuclearize the DPRK. But the ultimate long term goal for these great power like the US is to deter Chinese presence in the region and thus great power competition comes into play, each major power justifying their course of actions against each other resulting in the situation of security dilemma which might further exacerbate tensions over the peninsula and thus would provide a ground for belligerent North Korea to pursue its nuclear ambitions to a greater extent along with extracting benefits from its ally China to look out for its domestic economic stability while also fulfilling the appetite of its nuclear programs. Thus, the blame for the North Korea's belligerency has been attributed to the continuous US presence in the region which has in reality resulted in the failed negotiations to resolve the nuclear crisis of the region in general and has too failed in providing appropriate security assurances and guarantees to DPRK which again becomes an obstacle to arrive at a common point of conclusion which might have been beneficial not only for the two Koreas but also would create a path of cooperation amongst the major powers to influence the politics of the region.

Chapter V

Conclusion

It is historically evident that the China and North Korea relationship has been one of the enduring traditional friendships forged with fresh blood and tested in war. However, in reality, the present-day partnership is filled up with ambivalence. As China has adopted a cautious approach while dealing with North Korea by attempting to regulate North Korea's belligerent behavior through limited international sanctions measures and coercive actions to prevent further nuclear proliferation. This also means cooperating with the same to maintain the regime stability of the state to prevent any security implications over China's borders. Further, this strategy has also helped China to keep America away from the region to tilt the balance of power in the region towards China. Therefore, leverage its influential posture in the region which serves its national interests.

Major Findings

It has become evident that the traditional relationship between China and North Korea had turned out to be bumpy as constant repairing and patch-up work was adopted by China to maintain its legitimate influence over North Korea. Such contradictions in the actions were observed during the period between the 1960s and 1980s as although security guarantees were being provided by China to North Korea in the form of the signing of China DPRK Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation in 1961, the conclusion of certain deals in 1970s like Agreement and Free Military Assistance Agreement; 1976 development of Chinese-Korean Friendship Oil Pipeline depict the Chinese initiatives of revamping the relationship which went into low ebb during the 1969 Cultural Revolution in China. Despite the steps adopted to improve their relationship, the relationship between China and North Korea further deteriorated because of the divergent political and economic choices of Kim Il-Sung and Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s.

It is also to be noted that China through its 'carrot and stick' approach had been able to positively maintain its influence over North Korea as carrots were being provided to DPRK in the form of the military as well as economic assistance and China brokering in between the US- DPRK rapprochement. This was supplemented by the Chinese stick approach as it limited

its economic aid to DPRK due to a lack of flexibility in the North Korean economy. Even in the period of 1990s, there was a limited economic engagement between the two and also the politico diplomatic relationship also became inoperative in nature. So, assessing the pieces of evidence mentioned in this chapter it could be inferred and support the first hypothesis that Beijing has and always will cooperate with Pyongyang with some limited measures to maintain peace and stability over the region as the fault lines that fraught their relationship in the past were not directly exposed. Such strains were manageable leading to the development of a normal partnership that has not only served Chinese interests in maintaining its status quo over the region but also has brought economic benefits to DPRK in general. In addition, Beijing is much aware of its limited capacity for economic coercion on DPRK as excessive pressure might result in the regime collapse which becomes detrimental to the Chinese national interests. Therefore, has resorted to both engagements as well as prevention strategies toward DPRK to facilitate Chinese influence over the whole of the Korean peninsula region.

In the post-cold war era, China had aimed at playing a constructive role in maintaining peace and stability of the region as it became a strategic necessity for Beijing to check out for North Korea's belligerency. It compelled China to retain its strategic autonomy over the region with the growing US DPRK ties. While the politico diplomatic ties between the two countries were marked by the high level of diplomatic and military level visits in early 2000, ultimately the institutional relationship became fraught with the 2006 first nuclear test of DPRK. This event depicted Chinese ignorance and ambiguity toward DPRK. However, realizing the strategic necessity of China's influential posture over the region and also to maintain its status quo, China reinvigorated its institutional ties with DPRK. Following the DPRK nuclear tests in 2009, however restoration of the ties could not prevent DPRK's proliferation over the region.

In addition, during the Kim Jong-un era, China being supportive of UNSC sanctions, could not completely withdraw itself from playing an active role in resolving the Korean conundrum. Henceforth after the bad years of 2016-17, China in the year 2018 and 2019 quickly repaired its ties with DPRK at both political as well as economic levels to thwart the US influence over the Korean peninsula regions which emerged after the Trump Kim Summit of 2018.

Another point of inference is that today China aims at assisting DPRK with the sole motive of maintaining the regime stability of the DPRK as well as strives for promoting benefits for the economic developments of the North Eastern region of China bordering DPRK. With the Chinese assistance initiatives in the form of food aid flows, technical as well as educational assistance to North Korea, China always desired North Korea to be leaning towards its side to regulate the behavior of DPRK, but such materialistic assurances to date could not reap any positive results from DPRK. But this has only created a stabilized environment in and around the borders of China. Similarly, China had been providing economic incentives to the DPRK which aims at not only changing the behavior of the DPRK but also persuading the DPRK to open up its economy. However, assessing the economic interaction in recent times, it could be reinstated that the impact of UNSC sanctions on the bilateral economic interaction was nominal as although China to rebrand its image in front of the international community imposed economic sanctions on the DPRK. But watered down upon the intensity of such sanctions with the long-standing fear that excessive pressure on DPRK might lead to regime collapse and this argument becomes quite supportive for the first hypothesis.

With regards to the Chinese stance toward denuclearization, and supporting the first hypothesis, the Chinese had always believed that resolving the nuclear crisis of the Korean peninsula requires not only the imposition of sanctions but had always advocated the policy of resolving the nuclear crisis in a phased manner where China had been supportive of the fact that economic engagements served out the goal of complete denuclearization. As China is quite apprehensive about the fact that if China exerts its economic coercion over the DPRK then it would trigger the DPRK to tilt towards the US or its allies and thus would prove to be detrimental to the Chinese level of influence in the region.

In the long term and supporting the second hypothesis it could be inferred that Beijing is against the Korean unification as China fears that a reunified Korea would be pro- US-based reunification process. And because of this reason in past China had been maintaining the stability of the Kim regime to keep Pyongyang on its side. It had been historically evident that Korean unification was noted in the secret cable communication drafted by the East German Embassy in Pyongyang on March 28, 1973, which stated: ‘China will support Korean unification only when it is confident that a unified Korea will be pro-Chinese’. Such historical

pieces of evidence prove the fact that a peaceful reunification of the Korean peninsula should be pro-China so that a strategic and stable buffer region is created between the US and China. As both the powers through their great power status are attempting to influence the region. In this great power competition, China through its Realpolitik with Chinese characteristics has tackled DPRK discipline, good neighborly relations, and a pragmatic, and reactive response to situations as they arise over the region.

In contemporary times, the relationship between China and South Korea could be explained from both liberalists as well as realist paradigms. So, from the liberalist perspective, both countries engaged with each other since 1992 to bring economic benefits to the development of the North-Eastern region of China and the ROK. Moreover, the ROK government has engaged to provide economic maneuverability to the South Korean businesses and also to reduce tensions on the Korean peninsula. However, as per our research liberalist paradigm does not provide plausible explanations for the development of their relationship as Beijing does appreciate South Korea's contribution toward China's economic growth and modernization. However, with so many Asian countries contributing, South Korea's contribution cannot be enough to solely explain Beijing's desire. Therefore, the realist paradigm attempts to explicate the fact that Beijing through its good neighborly relations had attempted to maintain good relations with both the Koreas to become a regional hegemon. Here it is worth mentioning that China has pursued its version of realism by maintaining good neighborly relations and pragmatic, reactive responses to situations as they arise. This Realpolitik with Chinese characteristics, combined with China's physical and economic size, geographical and cultural proximity, and historical strength respective to Korea, makes a good relationship with the peninsula desirable.

With regards to growing Seoul and Beijing ties and assessing the implications for Pyongyang, it could be inferred that Pyongyang is less concerned about such burgeoning ties between the two countries. Further, such growing ties provide twin benefits to Pyongyang: firstly, it would marginalize the influence of the US over the Korean-related affairs, and secondly, although Seoul in present times had been rhetoric about following the path of the US-led approach while dealing with North Korea. On the other hand, Beijing and Seoul believe in tackling nuclear North Korea through strategic engagements. Thus, such an approach would moderate

the intensity of sanctions imposed on the DPRK. China through its neighborhood diplomacy might not leave any room for Seoul to decide upon the future trajectories of the Korean peninsula and again would reduce the US influence in the region.

Answering the second research question, today with the continuous DPRK nuclear proliferation the China and South Korea relationship had been affected in the sense that such provocations triggered Seoul in tilting toward the US. This was even observed in the THAAD deployments by ROK in 2016 followed by Seoul supporting the US Indo Pacific strategy in 2019. Thus, such contradictory actions of Seoul against China had in reality affected Chinese and South Korean economic ties which have cost a good amount of loss to the South Korean investment companies. However, this does not completely prove the fact that China would always be employing a hardline approach toward ROK, but might adopt a stabilized approach towards Seoul as in the reunification process. Here, China would not be wanting Seoul to support a pro-US-based reunification process as it is detrimental to the Chinese interests in the region.

In addition, China had adopted an active diplomacy approach toward mediating the Inter-Korean affairs. From the realist perspective, Beijing through its balancing approach towards both the Koreas in the region desired of creating not only the Sino Centric world order but also wanted to become a permanent resident power as well as a regional hegemon in the Korean peninsula. Thus, even ROK needs China for business prospects, DPRK needs PRC for its domestic stability and China needs both of them to maximize its influence over the region to minimize the US dominance in the region in the face of current US-China strategic competition emerging in the present regional as well as world order. Thus, the realist paradigm explicates the fact that each of these stakeholders in the region is attempting to hedge each other while pursuing their national interests in the region. Each of these stakeholders had attempted to tilt the balance of power of the region towards their sides to shape the future power structural dynamics of the region as a whole.

The power dynamics of the Korean peninsula had been shaped by major powers like the US, Japan, and Russia and each of these power at bilateral levels had attempted to resolve the Korean nuclear crisis. An atmosphere of great power competition clouded the geopolitics of the Korean peninsula as two blocs had been created. One bloc consisted of both Russia and

China which are attempting to limit US influence in the region by adopting a lenient attitude towards DPRK nuclear proliferation, whereas the other bloc consisted of the US, Japan, and South Korea which under the security dilemma situation had been rhetorically harsh towards DPRK to not only resolve the nuclear crisis but also to deter Chinese as well as Russian influence over the Korean affairs. Thus, assessing the present situation over the Korean peninsula region, these great power rivalries had provided a ground for DPRK in justifying its belligerent actions as these rivalries had resulted in failed negotiations to resolve the Korean crisis. Thus, the lack of cooperation between these major powers again posed the biggest challenge of arriving at a common point of compromise. To conclude this might have become otherwise beneficial for all the stakeholders involved in this region to make this part of the world a stabilized and prosperous region which could have contributed to the regional as well as global peace and stability.

Areas for Additional Research

This thesis aimed at analyzing the China and North Korea relations in general as well as the role played by other major powers in shaping the power dynamics of the region. This area of research could be further investigated by taking into consideration the role of India in shaping the dynamics of the region under the overarching lens of US-China strategic competition and also the role of ASEAN states would have been highlighted to provide a comprehensive view of the Korean peninsula dilemmas. From the theoretical perspective, this thesis had adopted the realist perspective which focused only on the security concerns of the actors, other theoretical paradigms like the liberalist view could have been emphasized to unveil the role of institutions, as well as the constructivist approach, could have explicated the uncertain relationship between China and North Korea based on ideological and cultural ties. Henceforth relating the Korean peninsula dynamics from different theoretical angles could provide dynamism in the area of this research.

Limitations of the Study

Although the arguments in this thesis support all the hypotheses, it also attempts to answer the research questions based on the relevance of facts existing within the realistic situation prevailing over the Korean peninsula region. Still, this study might not have provided the

exactly plausible postulates behind the changing relationship between China and North Korea due to the lack of available literature based on various static facts and figures and such lack of consistency had posed challenges in unraveling the actualities of the relationship. Also, the non-transparent nature of both China and North Korea had even posed challenges in knowing the realities of policy formulations affecting issues of denuclearization and reunification resulting in the ambiguous policy and strategies revelations which have in general affected the key findings of this thesis.

Conclusion

According to the data and facts assessed in this thesis, it seems that Beijing may now be reconciling itself to the reality of a permanently nuclear-armed North Korea. Although it has not completely given up hope for denuclearization. Also, policymakers need to consider certain points that looking into the present US-China strategic competition, China is more likely to turn down the demands of the USA at the negotiation table. China will resist any effort by the United States to exclude it from the process of bringing permanent peace to the Korean Peninsula, including talks to establish a peace regime or the conclusion of a treaty bringing the Korean War to a formal end.

So, to resolve the Korean conundrum, the other stakeholders like the US and its allies need to at some point prevent antagonism with both China and North Korea. It needs to pave a path of reconciliation based on various security guarantees and assurances rather than adopting a complete hardline approach to resolve the Korean nuclear crisis. The US and its allies need to acknowledge the equal Chinese role in the Korean peninsula affairs. It also needs to overcome and lay down the policies not keeping in mind the China threat theory but to formulate policies keeping in mind both Chinese as well as North Korean interests in the region.

Today, the US had been obsessed with the issue of improving China-North Korea relations. At the same time, the problematic nature of its current relationship with China has proved to be a lacuna for the US foreign policymakers to deal with the Korean conundrum. Further, the US had been lacking in strengthening the international coalition to maintain tough-minded sanctions and other pressures on North Korea. Therefore, the ongoing erosion of the

international sanction regime poses a major challenge for U.S. efforts to use “maximum pressure” to convince North Korea to denuclearize.

Finally, the US and its allies need not underestimate Beijing’s strategic political calculations toward the Korean peninsula. As both US and China had converged on bringing complete denuclearization of the Korean peninsula but had adopted different strategies in realizing this goal. Henceforth, looking into the realities of the situation China to date had shown no signs of cooperating with the US and its allies. It seems that in near future China might be accommodative of the needs and interests of nuclear North Korea and the United States may be prepared to accept a freeze or cap on the North’s program instead of the North’s full, final, and verified denuclearization. Thus, the dream of bringing peace and stability to the region might prove to be futile leading to further escalations and making the region more volatile in the world order.

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