

North Korea Conundrum: Quest FOR Autonomy OR Influence?

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Abstract

This research work analyzes the motives behind the establishment of nuclear weapons by North Korea to explore the best policy option for the US to curb the danger of North Korean nuclear strategy. To explore the accurate results qualitative research techniques are applied in this research work. This study is explanatory to connect the different ideas and to understand the reasons, causes, and their effects. Secondary data that is related to this topic is largely collected through the existing literature. North Korea uses its nuclear weapons as bargaining chip against its allies and adversaries. For the regime's survival, Kim Jong Un relies too much on nuclear weapons rather than the economic situation, domestic landscape, technological capacity and so on. With the adoption of the policy of coordination, the US can curtail the danger of North Korean nuclear strategy. The main end of the US foreign policy is to impose diplomatic pressure or sanctions inconsistent with the realistic views for obtaining remarkable results that is an element of carrot and stick diplomacy due to provocation and non-cooperation attitude of any state. The current study would prove useful to adopt the positive approach to tackle the issue of North Korean nuclear weapons. The study focuses on the multilateral approach adopted by the US for best possible

results. The US first of all gets the support of its regional allies then satisfies the needs of North Korea.

Keywords: North Korean nuclear ends, neo-realism, US foreign policy, Policy of coordination, Multilateral approach.

Introduction

The Korean Peninsula, along with the Middle East and Afghanistan, is included in the list of most aggressive, dangerous, troublesome and unstable regions of the world. North Korea has become a true conundrum to the West for almost the first day of its existence. All of these are not due to the unique type of communist ideology which was introduced by its first supreme leader Kim Il Sung, but due to its unique pattern of social and cultural life which is new for those who live far away from them. Supreme leaders of North Korea have also launched a unique type of security dilemma which raised many questions within and outside the region (Bechtol. Jr, 2014).

North Korea became successful in producing more comprehensive and complex nuclear weapons (Bermudez Jr., 2015). When Kim Jong Un came to power, he tested the more destructive nuclear weapons that can target the US and its allies. According to several reports, North Korea has produced 30 nuclear weapons which will increase by 2020. North Korea acquired enough nuclear weapons that can target the mainland of Japan and South Korea. North Korea is trying to pursue enough missiles that can reach the whole continental US all the way down to Florida. In 2018, CIA Director Mike Pompeo highlighted this thread in the following words that “the regime may complete the program within a handful month” (Klingner, 2018).

North Korean efforts for the acquisition of nuclear weapons are considered by the North Korean officials as a best diplomatic option to remove the threats from the US and its allies. They view that nuclear weapons are necessary for the survival of the country. North Korea's nuclear arsenal has posed a great challenge to the international community, especially to the US because it is a great challenge for the hegemonic status of the US on Korean Peninsula. It is said that North Korea spends too much of the country's income on the development of nuclear weapons and it is observed that it operates with aging technology and equipment (Litwak, 2017).

Research Questions:

This research work tries to explore the best answers of the following questions:

- Which thing makes the North Korean regime “tough”?
- How to deal with the issue of North Korean nuclear strategy?

Literature Review

To explore the best policy option for the US to curb the danger of the North Korean Nuclear issue it became very necessary to discuss the danger of North Korean nuclear weapons. An extensive

literature is available on the above mentioned topic. But the most relevant books, reports, articles and editorials to this topic are mentioned below.

This research work analyzes the motives of North Korea for the establishment of a nuclear strategy. North Korea wants to acquire a number of ends from its nuclear program. [Warden \(2017\)](#) in his article describes the ends of North Korea's nuclear weapons program. It uses it as a catalytic tool to get support from China, to deter an attack from enemies and will also be used as an instrument during the war fighting. [Bermudez Jr \(2015\)](#) analyzes the intentions of North Korea behind the nuclear weapons. He also pointed out that Pyongyang had launched its nuclear program on a number of principles including: (1) deter an expected attack from the US (2) survival of the regime (3) economic prosperity of the nation (4) counter the internal threat (5) reunification of the two Koreas. [Bechtol. Jr \(2014\)](#) describes in his book that Kim Jong Un always followed a script prepared by his father Kim Jong Il to control the military of the country. By following this script, Kim Jong Un maintained and developed the asymmetric and conventional forces. North Korea followed the provocation strategy to get the attention of the international community. [Chanlett-Avery and Rinehart \(2013\)](#) in his report pointed out that Kim Jong Un wanted to prove himself as the most powerful leader in the region and deter the other states, he conducted more missile and nuclear tests which were more destructive than previous ones. [Roehrig \(2013\)](#) says that nuclear weapons became the main strategic tool of North Korea for gaining its goals and it is also viewed that the Kim regime is not ready to give them up. Pyongyang is trying to establish such missiles that can directly target the US mainland. Pyongyang will use nuclear weapons only for its survival. If there will be a military strike against it then North Korea utilizes nuclear weapons in retaliation. [Bush \(2010\)](#) defined the three reasons on which bases North Korea acquired the nuclear program. First, it provides security to the Kim regime. Second, get the status of a more powerful state in the world and counter its enemies. Third, fight a battle at home and there is a strong desire in the domestic level to establish a nuclear arsenal. The other scholars are not satisfied with these reasons and argued that the political, security and psychological ambitions of its leadership are the main reasons which led to a desire to acquire nuclear weapons. [Michishita \(2010\)](#) says that North Korea's military actions are not different from any other military activities throughout the world. North Korea's military actions are just for its security and deterrence purposes. North Korean leaders always carry out military actions under their own desires. [Fuqua Jr \(2007\)](#) describes the historical and ideological foundation of North Korea. He points out the importance of Juche ideology for North Korea. Juche is the North Korean style of communism. He considers that Juche ideology is the primary interlocutor in the fight to counter North Korean nuclear proliferation. [Pinkston \(2006\)](#) North Korea's interests towards the US is the removal of its troops from the borders of South Korea, economic development of North Korea and security of the regime. Different authors suggest different ways to satisfy the North Korean regime in the pursuance of its demands. [Freeman & Gurtov \(2018\)](#) in their research work discuss the prospects of engagement towards North Korea. Engagement is a set of diplomatic actions to reduce the tensions between the two divert sides in a conflict. The authors perfectly analyze the policy of engagement towards North Korea but they do not define how this engagement will be succeeded, North Korea used it

as a tactic to complete its missile and weapons strategy. [Revere \(2017\)](#) states that all the countries should agree on a single commitment to impose economic sanctions on Pyongyang and the international community should make stronger inspections on nuclear technology of North Korea trading with the support of other countries. This option also does not give the full assurance to freeze North Korea's nuclear program. [Tanaka \(2017\)](#) views that to avoid the dangers of nuclear war, all the regional players play their role. They rightly understand each other's motives for regional stability. With the assistance of China, UNSC resolutions and a strong alliance with regional partners i.e. South Korea and Japan, the US administration can overcome the challenge of North Korea's nuclear threat. [Hamisevicz \(2015\)](#) describes that due to its nuclear program North Korea became a land of Lousy option for the US. According to him, the US should make long-term strategies to prevent the further development of the North Korean nuclear weapons program and also follow the policy of strategic patience towards North Korea. The above suggestion is also full of dangers; North Korea will take advantage of the long-term strategic policy of the US and with the passage of time it will be succeeded in achieving its ends. [Kim \(2014\)](#) discusses the isolated policy of North Korea with the special reference of negative introduction and negative identification. The constructive approach is applied by the author to analyze the way of North Korea's reluctant attitudes towards the agreement for denuclearization. He does not consider the national interest and security which are supreme for every country. States interact with each other to pursue their national interest which is the core concept of realism. [Boik \(2011\)](#) provides the description of the US foreign policy towards the Korean Peninsula. In his view the policymakers of the US must adopt the policies of engagement towards North Korea with strong support from its allies. When Westerners and Americans will engage with North Korea on the cultural, economic and social levels, then they will be able to understand each other. [Ford \(2011\)](#) suggests the following points on which Pyongyang may be ready to dismantle the development of its nuclear weapons program: First, greater respect in the international community; second, security to the Kim regime and third, opportunity to choose the bold new strategic weapons of mass destruction (WPD). But he did not clear the point, as the following statement would satisfy the North Korean desires. [Kim & Seliger \(2011\)](#) views "targeted sanctions with robust engagement" as the best option to freeze the North Korean nuclear program. Along with this option, Washington should make a strong alliance with the other regional countries and try its best to satisfy their demands. There is also a problem that the authors do not clearly define how the policies of economic sanctions and engagement are worked together. [Pritchard and Tilelli Jr \(2010\)](#) suggest four options to counter the North Korean nuclear program including (1) explicit acquiescence, (2) containment and management, (3) rollback, and (4) regime change. [Rozman \(2007\)](#) describes in his book about the North Korean nuclear crisis and all plausible tools utilized by the US to get the coordination of other regional states. During the president Bush era, the US made a strong alliance with Russia, China, Japan, and South Korea. [Grunau \(2004\)](#) measures the two alternative policies of the US towards North Korea i.e. confrontation and engagement. The policy of confrontation counters the authoritarian regime in North Korea and puts economic pressure on it to freeze its nuclear program.

The policy of engagement ultimately relates to the survival of the authoritarian regime in North Korea and ensures the economic benefits.

Overall literature available on the above-mentioned topic requires to be understood widely: including nuclear strategy, international institutions, international politics and strategic goals of countries involved. Consequently, North Korea's nuclear crisis escalated several issues in world politics. The changing circumstances of Pyongyang's nuclear issue needs the attention to suggest the variables which will make it feasible to negotiate and which options should be taken to settle the crisis. The main end of this research work is to update the existing literature. This study will try to explore the best policy option to settle the nuclear issue which was not resolved during the last few decades.

Research Methodology

This study looks at how Pyongyang felt a need for the possession of nuclear weapons and in what ways the US has responded. This research work evaluates the approaches of both the countries and explores the best policy option to remove the danger of North Korean nuclear weapons.

To accomplish the above objectives, Qualitative research techniques are applied in this research work. This study is also explanatory to connect the different ideas and to understand the reasons, causes, and their effects. Secondary data that is related to this topic will be collected largely through the existing literature i.e. books, journals, articles, and editorials. Libraries, newspapers, and magazines are also consulted for this purpose. In spite of all this, several secondary data such as news articles and experts analysis are also used as supplements.

Results and Discussion

Objectives of North Korean Nuclear Strategy

There exists great diversity among the scholars on the question: why does North Korea launch a nuclear strategy? What does North Korea seek to achieve through its nuclear arsenal? What are the objectives of North Korea's nuclear weapons program? Initially, many of them viewed that North Korea was trying to build up its military capability and just wanted to use it as a negotiating chip through which North Korea bargained away for diplomatic and economic benefits. Today, some scholars view that North Korea launches a nuclear strategy to deter an expected attack from the US. Conversely, some consider that North Korea wants the reunification of the Korean Peninsula under its terms (Klingner, 2018). However, the widely held objectives of North Korean nuclear program are as under:

Security measures

As similar to all nuclear powers, North Korean nuclear weapons are also understood as a deterrence tool to protect the country against international intervention and maintain the state's sovereignty. From the first day of its independence North Korea has always had an all-inclusive observation of threat. In this way, the North Korean leaders view North Korea as being in a condition of regular

threat from the international community, also mixed with an incessant and existential anti-imperialist struggle (Ballbach, 2018).

During the Korean War, North Korean leaders feared that the U.S may drop nuclear weapons on it (Bermudez Jr., 2015). In the same way, North Korean leaders view that without nuclear weapons the country will bear the fate like Moahamar Gaddafi and Saddam Hussain. North Korea's military supreme command said, "This land is neither Balkans nor Iraq and Libya". In a very deeper psychological sense, Kim regards the nuclear weapons as significant for the survival and continuation of the Kim dynasty in North Korea (Pollacks, 2013). According to Jeffrey Lewis, a nuclear policy expert, Kim Jong Un too relies on nuclear weapons for the survival of its regime (Mosher, 2018).

Rivalry between South Korea and North Korea created destability on the Korean Peninsula. For more than six decades, both the states threatened the continued existence of each other. Each state has ensured its survival by strengthening its arms forces and making a coalition with great powers. North Korea got the support of China on the other hand South Korea made strong allies with the US. In this way, security is the basic motive of Pyongyang for the establishment of a nuclear weapons strategy (Mosher, 2018).

Deterrence Strategy

Secondly, North Korean leaders consider nuclear weapons as a strategic tool to deter an expected attack from the US. Korean People's Army studied the deterrence strategies of different countries i.e. Iraq. After the study KPA also adopted its own nuclear deterrence strategy. With the failure of the Agreed Framework 1994, Pyongyang established an emergency nuclear weapons program to ensure security. High officials of North Korea in their speeches described that the utilization of conventional ground forces, overwhelming artillery and ballistic missiles as well as North Korea's privileges to acquire nuclear weapons are all to deter the US nuclear threats.

Many experts view that Pyongyang utilized its nuclear weapons only for defensive purposes. If the US and its allies will attack North Korea then the North Korean army will utilize nuclear weapons against them in retaliation. This approach was adopted by the SPA as a state policy in 2013 (Bermudez Jr., 2015).

Bargaining Chip

In the past, North Korean officials used nuclear weapons as diplomatic bargaining chip to acquire economic assistance. In this case; North Korea acquired nuclear weapons not to deploy them but instead to get a concession from its allies and enemies (Warden, 2017). North Korea, which relies on foreign assistance to a considerable level, has continuously attempted to gain such assistance from the international community by deliberately using nuclear threats and foreign policy confrontations. North Korea is the weakest party in the game, so it uses its nuclear weapons as a provocation and brinkmanship to make the negotiations with the US for denuclearization on most favorable conditions (Ballbach, 2018).

The persuasion of nuclear weapons by North Korea dates back to 1960 when it developed a small nuclear research arsenal with the help of the USSR. North Korea merely took gradual steps to develop its nuclear weapons and sometimes traded away testing and even services to get political and economic benefits (Baker, 2018). Pyongyang probably believed that nuclear and missile tests in 2006 forced president Bush to decrease the demands and offered more concessions in the process of negotiation. So he asked, “Why not try again?” (Bush, 2006). Again in February 2012, North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear and missile program in the Leap Day Agreement and came to the table of negotiation, in return of all these promises it got food aid. Instead of such a commitment, North Korea is not taking steps to dismantle its nuclear program which raises many questions about the validity of such promises (Ballbach, 2018).

Unification of Korean Peninsula

The ultimate goal of North Korea is to unify the two Koreas under its terms. The constitution of North Korea described reunification as “the supreme national task”. North Korea's constitution was adopted in 1948 which was revised in 1992 and again in 1998. The unification of the Korean Peninsula is the central theme in all these documents. The North Korean media propagates that Pyongyang’s nuclear program is always for defensive purposes. Pyongyang holds a defense that the US will conduct a military strike against its nuclear activities to protect the country. However, Home T. Hodge describes, the North Korean leadership views the Southern part of their country is occupied by “US imperialists” and the true meaning of defense doesn’t mean the only protection of North Korea but the protection of the Peninsula. Pyongyang official's conception of peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula may be different from that of their counterparts in Washington, Seoul and elsewhere.

Having failed to unify the Korean Peninsula by military actions, the North Korean leadership felt a need to combine the diplomatic and political efforts with offensive military strategy. North Korea is gradually developing offensive nuclear warheads such as nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and submarines. North Korea believes that reunification through the force of arms will appear to be possible for it (Scobell & Sandford, 2007).

Economic Prosperity

North Korea also uses its nuclear program to extort goods and money from other states. Even though North Korea is in a state of completion of its nuclear program, Kim Jong Un has shown his willingness to shift his attention from nuclear weapons to his five years strategy to develop the economy. On the other hand, the mature nuclear program gives North Korea enough ability to meet the economic challenges of the state. In the Singapore meeting 2018, US president Donald Trump, South Korean president Moon Jae-in, and Chinese president Xi-Jinping all offered economic assistance to North Korea. From past to present North Korea always used its nuclear weapons to get economic benefits from its allies and adversaries. Despite its officials' crazy attitude towards the world the other states are bound to give economic aid to North Korea otherwise it may use its technology to agitate for peace in the world (McGuire, 2018).

After analyzing all the above points one by one, it can be said that the most widely held view about North Korea's nuclear program is to deter an expected attack from the US which is ultimately related to maintaining the security of the country. All other aspects also interconnected to enhance the measures of security directly and indirectly.

Best policy option for the US

From the last three decades, the negotiation with North Korea over its nuclear weapons became the main priority to the US foreign policy concern on the Korean Peninsula. Although multiple states are involved in solving the issue, the US has predominated among all of them to resolve the issue diplomatically. As a superpower, the US policy-makers try to make effective policies to isolate and pressurize North Korea to create peace on the Korean Peninsula. However, many scholars observed, the steps that are taken by the US administration to address the issue of North Korean nuclear program through the combination of pressure and diplomacy have many times slowed or for a time being halted North Korea's nuclear progress, but it has been failed to solve the fundamental issue of North Korean nuclear program (Hamisevicz, 2015).

In this alarming situation, the US should adopt the policy of coordination into two phases. In the first phase, the US will make close allies with the other regional partners including China, Japan, Russia, and South Africa in order to develop a common framework of planning and discussion to make the Korean Peninsula free from nuclear weapons. The previous US administrations have failed to accomplish their goal towards the Korean Peninsula because there was a lack of mutual trust between the US and its allies.

The US policymakers should emphasize on the policy of coordination with the strong support from its allies. In this way, the US will be able to make effective strategies to freeze the North Korean nuclear program. China is the biggest trading partner of North Korea so it can play a very decisive role to resolve the issue. But China is not supporting the US efforts to create peace on the Korean Peninsula Because it has its own interests in the region. The U.S should remove all its clashes with China for regional stability. All the regional allies of the US do not favor a conventional war with North Korea. They want the solution of the nuclear issue through peaceful means. The US took effective steps for the fulfillment of the demands to all the concerned states.

In the second phase, the US should promote coordination with North Korea. This type of engagement will encourage Pyongyang to induce social, political and economic exchanges with the international community. This option can include the substantial US investment in North Korea to form a scenario of mutual trust between them. North Korea recognizes the importance of economic reform for its survival. The US government has an important role to play. It gives enough opportunities to North Korea so that it will be able to resolve its internal problems by itself. In this way, there is very hope that North Korea may itself agree to give up its nuclear strategy, if the US will fulfill its requirement. But at the same time, the US administration maintains a strict hand over North Korea if it will not cooperate with the US in the process of negotiation.

Conclusion

At the end, it can be said that North Korea is not preparing for a war of aggression. It is argued that due to the dependence of North Korea on China which is the main state to avoid any escalation on the region and its efforts to make alliance with the developed states, North Korea's acts of aggression are attempted to ensure security of the country. North Korea uses the nuclear weapons as a catalytic tool to ensure its continued existence with the support of China. North Korea developed the more advance economic policies to compete the international community. This research work also explored the more aggressive narratives about North Korean conducts and find out that no logical arguments made from the second perspective. It is observed that no state ready to support North Korea to wage a war against its adversaries. The North Korea's economic reforms are also not enough to prepare the country for an offensive war. The US policymakers should emphasize on the policy of coordination with the strong support from its allies. In this way, the US will be able to make effective strategies to freeze North Korean nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula in a peaceful way then establish bilateral relations in a more rational way with North Korea.

Implication

Besides contributing to the existing literature, the study widely addresses the several aspects of the North Korean nuclear program. It may be useful for future researchers to broadly understand the ends of North Korean nuclear strategy. Secondly, the study suggests the best policy option for the US policy-makers to dismantle the nuclear activities on the Korean Peninsula and improve the relations with other regional players.

Limitation

This research faces some inheritance limitations. The primary focus of the research is to suggest a long term policy option for the US to freeze the North Korean nuclear program. This is the requirement of the time to adopt long term policies towards North Korea. There is a lack of immediate solution of the problem.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Nabila Ali: wrote the paper

Muhammad Azhar: devised the main idea and research design

Muhammad Waris: contributed to data collection

Sundas Aslam: Edited the manuscript

Hamid Iqbal: Proofreading

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