

THE INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF HUMANITIES & SOCIAL STUDIES

The Security Opportunities in the Korean Peninsula: The Implications of the DPRK-US 2018 Talks

Keratiloe Lineo Dube

Probationary Staff, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Zimbabwe

Abstract:

This article is guided by the rationale to contribute toward existing knowledge in the field of peace and security, particularly on nuclear weapons and diplomacy. This paper's analysis is from the perspective of global south-based scholars, attempting to complement the already existing literature on the analytical dimension of North Korea-US relations. The methodology is based on documentary research approach, focusing on examination of articles, interviews by experts and news articles in deducing analysis. The threat of war on the Korean peninsula has grown over the years, due to the combination of North Korea's nuclear programme, and US offensive foreign policy toward Pyongyang. In response, Pyongyang, opened indirect channels of communication, through track II diplomacy (involving informal ministerial level meetings with officials from DPRK, South Korea and the US and consultations with non-government officials and academics). Track diplomacy refers to the involvement of non-state actors in conflict resolution, Montville (1996).

Keywords: North Korea, Pyongyang nuclear and missile programme, the DPRK-US talks, South Korea, President Kim Jong-un, Korean peninsula, security

1. Introduction

1.1. Recent Diplomatic Activity in the Korean Peninsula

The Winter Olympics and subsequent Paralympics, which ended on 18 March 2018, and Kim Jong-un's visit Beijing on 27 March 2018 offer an opportunity for securitisation of the Korean Peninsula¹. From March 5 to March 6 2018, a high-ranking South Korean delegation visited North Korea, where it held a meeting with President Kim Jong-un. Thereafter, South Korea's President's office announced that Seoul and Pyongyang had reached a historic agreement on holding the third ever summit on 27 April 2018². Due to the mediation of the South Korean government, an agreement on a meeting between President Kim and the US President Donald Trump was reached. According to an editorial piece in the *Times of Israel*, dated 9 April 2018, after Kim Jong-un's trip to Beijing, on 3 April 2018, the North's foreign minister Ri Yong Ho made state visits to Beijing, Azerbaijan and other former Soviet republics³. Ri also paid a visit to Sweden in March 2018. Jenkins (2018) postulates that Sweden acts as a diplomatic mediator between Washington and Pyongyang.

This flurry of diplomatic activity shows political commitment towards fostering peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. This is clearly evidenced in the statement made by Kim Jong-Un at a party meeting of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) on 9 April 2018, making the first public mention on the intention of a summit between DPRK and the US scheduled in May 2018⁴. He delivered a report on the development of the recent situation on the Korean peninsula, and the growing rapprochement between the two (2) Koreas, in view of the inter-Korean summit, Hwang (2018).

According to Webb (2018) regardless of President Kim's motives, his outreach to Seoul, together with North Korea's participation in the Winter Olympics, the thaw in North-South relations, and Presidents Trump's and Moon's suspension of

¹ News of North Korea's participation in the Olympic Games which were held in Pyongchang in South Korea from February to 18 March 2018 was made public at the New Year address of President. Since the beginning of the year, relations between North and South Korea, often a bellwether for dynamics between the U.S. and North Korea, have thawed. The South Korean president, Moon Jae-in, responded quickly and positively to Kim Jong-un's announcement in his 1 January 2018 New Year Address that North Korea was willing to participate in the 2018 Winter Olympic Games, hosted in the South Korean city of Pyeongchang. Moon also welcomed Kim's suggestion that the two Koreas meet to discuss the Games. "N.K. open to sending delegation to PyeongChang Olympics: leader", *Yonhap*, 1 January 2018.

² This proposal was preceded by several informal contacts between officials from the two Koreas. Crisis Group interview, former National Intelligence Service official, January 2018; "Choe Mun-sun, 'Contact with North Korea two weeks ago ... North, 100% certain to attend Pyeongchang'", *Hankyoreh*, 2 January 2018; "Several meetings led to Olympics breakthrough: Sources", *JoongAng Daily*, 3 January 2018.

³ Xinhua news report on President Kim Jong-un visit to Beijing, and subsequent meeting with President Xi Jinping.

⁴ Sunghee Hwang report about Kim's first public official mention of US-DPRK talks, *Times of Israel*. 9 April 2018.

military drills suggest all sides intend to show restraint. Crisis Group International (2018:46) asserts that, it is clear that, the US's notion of maximum pressure on North Korea has failed to exert extended deterrence on Pyongyang's nuclear ambitions. Therefore, the environment has not been conducive for dialogue between the two (2) countries.

Indications are that by reaching out, particularly to China, the North Korean leader, Kim Jong-un, is attempting to emulate the Chinese policy of economic liberalisation. It should be remembered that, China is predicted to out-pace the economy of the US by 2021, and is currently the fastest growing economy in Asia, courtesy of the import substitution industrialisation principle, which the Asian giant adopted at the turn of the 1997 global financial crisis⁵. Apart from the rhetoric of nuclearization of the North Korean regime, President Kim Jong-un has been snubbed over lack of human security and has been courting international attention over poverty and malnourishment of the North Korean populace and lack of economic development therein.

According to Cronin (2003:134) North Koreans are interested in increased economic cooperation with China, but they are worried about the growing Chinese influence over economic affairs in their country.

Furthermore, the extension of the olive branch by Pyongyang to Seoul by agreeing to meet for an inter-Korean summit is important as it signals North Korean commitment toward bridging a rapport with South Korea. Such a rapport is likely to usher in economic opportunities, to be accrued when there is economic cooperation, regional integration between the two (2) Koreas. Since 2006, North Korea has been at the receiving end of various United Nations Security Council (UNSC) sanction resolutions, banning the neighbours in the North-East Asia from importing Pyongyang's agricultural produce, food and oil. Consequently, North Korea's economy has been badly hurt by these sanctions.

It is noteworthy to point out that, at the behest of Seoul, President Kim Jong-un has agreed to meet with the US President Donald Trump for a summit between the two (2) leaders. It is at the realisation that, Pyongyang is well aware that for the slated 27 April 2018 inter-Korean summit, resolutions that are likely to emerge out of the meeting, are not to be at the expense of the South Korea-US relationship where the US has given economic aid to South Korea, and for a while the joint military exercises named the Ulchi Freedom. Gannon and Wentz (2015) concur that the Ulchi Freedom or the Team Spirit are a regular target at Pyongyang's denuclearization. It appears that, North Korea is not necessarily trying to seek out permission from the US or approval for economic cooperation with South Korea, but rather, that President Kim Jong-un has come to the realisation that the UN imposed sanctions, coupled together with the expanding stock piles of weapons of mass destruction, has exacerbated a hurting stalemate to the economy.

According to Lipset (1959), one of the early proponents of modernisation theory they purport that for economic development to be viable there is need for a country to be technologically endowed⁶. Rostow purported that technology from the developed Western countries was key in the initiation of industrialisation of the underdeveloped countries⁷. Barro (1998:24) puts forward that historically, long term economic development has been sustained by significant increases in productivity due to organisational and technological change. With North Korea, being well advanced in terms of technology, it not remains to be seen if, North Korea will churn this technology toward sustainable economic development.

1.2. The Dynamics of Relationships in the Peninsula

It is noteworthy to point out that the Asian giants have a recurrent proclivity of consulting the US in matters regarding the stability, peace and security of the Korean Peninsula. China, however in the past has been favouring a policy of non-intervention, Cronin (2003:118). Since the end of the Cold War, the region has been threatened by an insecure North Korea that has sought to guarantee its survival not by aligning with a major power but by nuclear weapons and long-range missiles. The Six-Party Talks have provided a process, but that process has still not managed to put all of North Korea's nuclear programmes on the table. Nuclear proliferation is not the only challenge to regional security in Northeast Asia. Korean Peninsula and nuclear proliferation are clearly regional issues affecting all of the neighbouring countries. Cronin (2003:129) postulates that, the issues of managing Cross- Strait relations, Chinese-Japanese relations, and China's re-emergence have also been consistent themes in the Peninsula's political discourse. More broadly, regional security concerns also include threats from transnational terrorism, conventional conflict, as well as from indirect or untraditional challenges such as energy security, economic upheaval, humanitarian disaster, and disease.

The gradual emergence of institutionalism or collective security in East Asia, or even in Northeast Asia, is not to be missed. The complex triangular relations among China, Japan, and the United States (US) make it difficult to take seriously the concept of regional pan-securitization, especially in the context of the Association of South East Asia (ASEAN), Cronin (2003:88). Meanwhile, Northeast Asia as a region becomes overly circumscribed when dealing with broader issues such as energy, the

⁵ Bueno de Mesquita and George Downs (2005), in the case of China purport that economic development, would satisfy social needs of the populace such that, it is less likely that they would demand for political liberties. In the context of China, strategic coordination has been a success in ensuring that the masses have access to economic goods.

⁶ Proponents of the Modernisation theory, propose that technology is essential to development of a country. Seymour Lipset, (1959) argue that economic growth leads to democracy, so that "development first, democracy later". However, Samuel Huntington (1968) arguing the alternative of the outcome of economic development as leading to political decay. This would be sufficed to say that it might have been North Korea's concern that having to open up its economy, would likely lead to the populace demanding for more political freedoms.

⁷ Robert Dorfman drew the same conclusions of the importance of technology in economic development, however this dimension of the modernisation theory is an arch rival of the Dependency theory.

environment, and economics, all of which are more easily considered with a wider number of actors, from Russia and India to the ASEAN members.

In the context of absence of accountable regional organisations, the nuclear issue, however, missiles seem to have no way out of its dilemma, even in theory. In the absence of any international legal instrument or regime, and acceptable compensation, it is very unlikely that North Korea will be persuaded to reduce, much less give up, its missile capability. Like the nuclear issue, however, missiles will require a concerted and coordinated effort of those parties that are threatened by them to deal with the problem effectively and in a peaceful way.

Relations with South Korea

As a sign of thawing of relations between the two Koreas, North Korea opened the communication hotline between Pyongyang and Seoul on 3 January 2018, which has been dormant for two (2) years, Jalil (2018:3). For South Korea, the North Korean nuclear program presents three distinct varieties of danger. Cronin (2003:93) asserts that the first, being that North Korean nuclear weapons could change the strategic balance on the Korean Peninsula. Secondly, a very strong reaction by the United States and other nations including Japan could lead to an outbreak of war on the Korean Peninsula; and third, North Korean nuclear weapons could touch off an arms race that might spur Japan as well as South Korea to become nuclear-weapon states. Unfortunately, South Korea by itself does not have the means to persuade North Korea to heed its advice to give up its nuclear program in exchange for economic and security benefits⁸.

China-North Korea Relations

The traditional relations between China and the DPRK are based on historical ties between the Communist Party of China and the Labour Party of the DPRK, the alliance forged during the Korean War when the two (2) worked together side by side, the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement signed jointly by both sides and the 1961 Treaty on Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance between Beijing and Pyongyang, Cronin (2003). Cronin (2003), goes on to point out that, since the 1980s, the two (2) countries have chosen different trajectories for economic growth and development, and the political and security interests of the two (2) have changed in accordance with the new international environment and the altered situation on the Korean Peninsula in the wake of the Cold War. Despite these changes, China and North Korea retain a unique or particular relationship. It is difficult to distinguish how much these relations are shaped by history and how much is based on self-interests.

In the wake of the end of the 2018 Olympics, bilateral relations between DPRK and South Korea greatly improved. DPRK's nuclear and missile programme is the precursor to talks about a more lasting resolution of the crisis and broader talks about East Asia's future security architecture.

The Korean Peninsula has been the epicentre of conflict in the region, being threefold, indicating the variegated dimensions in the relationships amongst the countries in the Asia Pacific region. The dynamic includes the perceived DPRK-China relations, DPRK-Japan and DPRK-US relations. Indications are pointing to the fact that, contrary to public opinion, that the relations between the DPRK and the US are thawing, it however appears that the two (2) countries have always been in communication, meeting in the neutral countries around the world, namely Singapore.

1.3. *The Prospect for Peace: The US-DPRK Talks*

As for the talks themselves, a recurring issue has been whether they would aim at North Korea's denuclearisation, a goal on which Washington insists, and to which Pyongyang objects. While this disagreement will need to be resolved at some point, it need not and should not stand in the way of resumed talks. In this regard, all the interested parties, China, Japan, South Korea and the US, which are all nuclear weapons states, go to the negotiating table as equals. Such ripe conditions are most likely to produce sustainable resolutions for liberal peace on the Korean Peninsula.

In view of the upcoming US-DPRK meeting slated for May 2018, it will sound a death knell to the protracted conflict between US-DPRK, China-DPRK, DPRK-South Korea and Japan's ambition of continued pressure on DPRK.

Moreover, as a matter of protecting strategic vested interests, some parties are fanning artificial conflicts in the Asia Pacific as they greatly benefit from the prolonging of the disagreements. The likelihood of the threat of nuclear warfare in the Peninsula would mean a disruption of economy of the Asian Tigers. According to Barro (1998:24) East Asian countries were widely regarded as economic miracles, in countries including Taiwan, South Korea, Singapore and Hong Kong. This is so because growth rates of gross domestic product from 1960 to 1995 were around 6% (six percent) per year. These performances placed this East Asian group at the top world's growth list. China and Japan, the world's second and third biggest economies could face major disruption. Resultantly, failure to reach consensus about the contentious peninsula would be a zero-sum game, with the DPRK mostly to benefit in keeping its nuclear arsenal.

As such, if the US-DPRK talks begin without a glitch, it would be a security benefit to the Asian giants, that is, China, Japan, South Korea and the US.

It is noteworthy to point out that, just the leaders of Pyongyang and Washington getting to sit down together will usher in a shift in the geopolitics. Secondly, there is grave need for formation of a peace organ to oversee the securitisation of the Peninsula. As it is the main regional body, Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), is lacking in this regard, where

⁸ Many of the resolutions emerging from the inter-Korean summit, between Presidents' Kim Jong-un and Moon Jae-in, held on 29 April 2018, include the signing of a peace treaty, formally ending the 1953 Korean War.

some member states, in the eyes of international law, seems to be abiding by the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), and many other regional institutions verdicts in vowing non-cooperation with Pyongyang. On the other hand, however, some states are employing back channels methods to still engage the hermit kingdom of Pyongyang.

Moreover, the aftermath of the DPRK-US talks is going to be a critical time period, which will either make or break the situation in the Peninsula. In view of this, as propounded by Barry Buzan a security community is therefore essential to ensure relative peace and stability and put to rest the Pyongyang nuclear problem. According to Buzan (2009) a security community is one committing to liberal institutionalism and fostering perpetual peace by conferring sovereignty to one intergovernmental body. However, although self-interests are inevitable in the realpolitik among nations, political commitment will be crucial in encouraging peaceful nuclear development and not necessarily denuclearise. Denuclearisation is in itself not possible, since most of the Asian giants are nuclear weapon states. Commitment to a security community endowed with the vision of promoting egalitarian cooperation among states will likely be successful in deterring Pyongyang from its bellicose nuclear development.

2. Conclusive Analysis

The outcome of the DPRK-US talks is going critical in shaping the peace and security discourse in the Asia Pacific. So far, great participation has been seen in making coordinated efforts towards easing of tensions around Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programme. In conclusion, any resolutions to come out of the inter-Korean summit and the DPRK-US talks are going to usher in a paradigm shift in the balance of power in global politics. This is going to have effects not only in East Asia, but the world over, relations are going to be moulded around the hegemonic states.

Cronin (2003:88) Condoleezza Rice's statement of "outpost of tyranny" and axis of evil just did offset and aggravated the DPRK toward a nuclear and missile programme. In the past there has been attempts to reach a decision over Pyongyang nuclear arsenal through the Six party talks last held in 2006, which however stalled when stakeholders to the meeting started questioning, the motives of China, which over the years had acted as the host, convener, negotiator and diplomatic mediator between the DPRK and other members to the Six Party Talks. Since China and South Korea have the greatest economic and diplomatic interaction with North Korea, they have an essential role to play in crafting a more robust approach. To date, they have preferred an incentive-based approach, with transfers of energy, food, and other assistance to the North Korean regime

3. References

- i. B. Buzan and Lene Hansen, *The Evolution of International Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 60-64.
- ii. Montville foreword in Michael Henderson, *Forgiveness Factor: Stories of Hope in a World of Conflict* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1996) p.xii-xviii.
- iii. Patrick M. Cronin, *Double Trouble: Iran and North Korea as challenges to international Security* (London: Paeger Security International, 2008), p. 44, 86-94, 118, 128-134.
- iv. Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Ordering in Societies* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).
- v. T.G Carpenter and Doug Bandow, *The Korean Conundrum: America's Troubled relations with North and South Korea* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).
- vi. Crisis Group International, 'The Korean Peninsula Crisis (II): From Fire and Fury to Freeze-for-Freeze', January 2018, pp 1-3; 13,16.
- vii. B. de Mesquita, and George Downs, 'Development and Democracy', *Foreign Affairs* 84 (5), 2005, pp77-86.
- viii. Daniel Wertz and Chelsea Gannon, 'A History of US-DPRK Relations' (publishing house not identified) November 2015.
- ix. G.Y. Jalil, 'A Thaw in North Korea And South Korea Relations', *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, January 2018.
- x. G. Ong-Webb, 'Behind North Korea's Olive Branch: An Alternative View', *Rajaratham School of International Studies*, January 2018.
- xi. R. Dorfman, 'Economic development from the beginning to Rostow', *Journal of Economic Literature* (June 1991) 573-591
- xii. S. Lipset, 'Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy', *American Political Science Review* 53 (1) 1959 pp 69-105.
- xiii. Robert J. Barro, 'The East Asian Tigers have plenty to roar about', *Economic Viewpoint* 1998 pp 24-47
- xiv. Elizabeth Shim, 'China is welcoming news of South Korea plans to send a special envoy to Pyongyang, calling it a move that will "help ease the situation" on the Korean peninsula', 2 March 2018, < <http://www.upi.com/south-korean-envoys-sent-to-pyongyang> >(3 March 2018)
- xv. Federico Pieraccini, 'Xi Jinping and Kim Jong-un Historic Meeting in Beijing: Make Korea United Again!' 30 March 2018, <www.globalresearch.ca/indepthreport/north-korea_kimjongunvisit%20to%20Beijing> (3 April 2018)
- xvi. 'Kim Jong Un Initially Assesses Upcoming S Korea, US Summits' - Reports, 10 April 2018, <<http://sputniknews.com/asia/201804101063387085-korea-dprk-usa-summit-party/>> (10 April 2018)
- xvii. Sunghye Hwang, 'Kim makes first official mention of US-North Korea talks', 9 March <<http://www.timesofisrael.com/kim-makes-first-official-mention-of-us-north-korea-talks/>> (10 March 2018)

- xviii. Colin Alexander, 'After Mike Pompeo's trip to North Korea, this is what we can work out about Trump and Kim Jong-un's upcoming talks', 18 April 2018 <<http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/north-korea-us-mike-pompeo-trump-kim-jong-un-meeting-a8310101.html>>(20 April 2018)
- xix. Peter Symonds, 'Trump's secret diplomacy with North Korea', 19 April 2018, <<http://www.wsws.org.com>> (20 April 2018)