

CHANGING TRENDS IN SOUTH KOREAN POLICY TOWARDS NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR POLICY

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Introduction

The Korean Peninsula occupies a very significant geo-strategic position in the global geopolitics. Any anomalous activities on or around the Korean Peninsula have potential to jeopardise peace, harmony and security of the region where interests of the four major powers, namely, the US, China, Japan and Russia collide. Inter-Korean relations becomes one of the most important since the emergence of North Korean nuclear issue. On the Korean Peninsula, the advancements of nuclear arms and missile technology of North Korea and its continuous provocations have created a serious turmoil. North Korea's posture of a nuclear powerful country and its activities has posed a serious threat to the world community but first and foremost to its adjacent South Korea. It has also defied the efforts of the global nuclear non-proliferation regime. Consequently, Inter-Korean relations deteriorated at an unprecedented level.

Therefore, it has been a serious concern for South Korean government to check the proliferation of nuclear weapons led by North Korea and improve inter-Korean relations for maintaining peace, harmony and stability on the Korean peninsula. However, there were limited options with South Korea to bring North Korea into a dialogue process or resolve the issue by all possible means. South Korea brought a number of policies to control North Korea's nuclear proliferation. South Korea, from the leadership of Kim Young-sam to the leadership of Moon Jae-in, followed an active policy to avert war on the Korean peninsula and to contain North Korea or bring North Korea on the path of denuclearization. The nature of the South Korean policy has changed over the period vis-a-vis the inter-Korean relations but the issue of North Korea's denuclearisation has remained prominent throughout these years. Since North Korea was using its nuclear program as the bargaining tool with its enemy states, so the policy adopted by South Korea to tackle North Korean nuclear program could not remain constant. The government of South Korea adopted various policy like appeasement, engagement, comprehensive engagement, conditional engagement, containment and Sanctions.

North Korean Nuclear Issue

After the emergence of nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, South Korea's policy towards North Korea has been critical over the years. The development of nuclear weapons and continuous provocations by North Korea has worsened the situation in entire Northeast Asian region and it has been persisting challenge for the South Korean policy makers to handle through diplomacy.

Nuclear program by North Korea has failed the efforts of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons led by the world community under the supervision of IAEA, an organ of the United Nations. Because, at several times, North Korea has been caught red-handed in the proliferation of the nuclear weapons program e.g., the Panama Canal seize on a ship "Chong Chan Gang", which revealed several missile parts shows that North Korea is transferring its missile technologies even to the African countries which are believed to be one of the WMD free zones and not having long range missile capability. North Korea is also accused of trading missile and other military equipment even with the East Asian countries and Iran and unstable Middle East and also to Myanmar e.g., in December 2009, 35 tonnes of weaponry (including rocket- propelled grenades and missiles) was seized by the Thai authority which has been sourced by North Korea and headed for an unidentified country in South Asia or Middle East from a cargo jet refuelling in Bangkok. Authorities from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) made a similar seizure in August 2009, when they stopped ten containers of North Korean military equipment off an Australian-owned vessel headed for Iran. Such activities draw attention of the world community. These activities posed serious threat to the world community but first and foremost to its adjacent country South Korea.

Looking at the non-proliferation efforts towards nuclear North Korea, it could be said that several efforts have been made in this direction. For example, the 1994 Agreed Framework was signed between North Korea and the United States. Four-Party talk in 1996, Six-Party talk in 2003 and several summits between two Koreas were executed in order to normalise the relations between the two Koreas. Despite several promises made by North Korea and the United States, some promises fall short and consequently North Korea continued to develop its nuclear weapons.

Although, there is a general supposition that North Korea is a nuclear power country, it is also assumed that North Korea does not possess the capability to attack any country. In other words, North Korea is not in a position to initiate war against any country including South Korea. As the chief North Korean interlocutor Kang Sok-ju had admitted that North Korea's secret nuclear weapon program is a "cry for help" to draw a reluctant world into direct talks. According to the data collected in 2016 by the Korea Herald, the per capita GDP South Korea stood at \$27,633 and North Korea stood at \$1,300. This gap also somehow indicates that North Korea is not in a position to initiate a war. This is most probably because neither North Korea advances on cost-benefit calculation nor it can stumble into war inadvertently. By looking at all these things, it seems that North Korea's nuclear weapon program is inspired by its enemy or the situations North Korea fears of. So, North Korea will not go for war but may use these nuclear weapons as the bargaining tool with the enemies. Therefore, any policy made by South Korea impacts North Korea's behaviour or vice-versa. In this way, there are so many incidents which indicate that South Korean government employed policy has affected North Korea's nuclear behaviour.

Since North Korean nuclear program has been a consistent threat to ROK, in order to denuclearise North Korea, South Korea's government employed various kind of policies and the nature of these policies were not the same. The South Korean foreign policy towards North Korea varied from one government to others. Such changing trends in South Korean policy occurred because the diplomacy during any particular South Korean government did not work well. But at the same time, due to these changing trends in the relationship of both countries, not only political relations worsened but also economic relations were adversely affected. In other words, we can say all the objectives of the South Korean policy like family reunion, unification, trade promotion, denuclearisation etc did not bring desire results. In this scenario, understanding the nature of South Korean policy became quite significant because after getting threat from the North Korea, South Korean policy have been very attentive and vigilant in order to establish peace, harmony and stability on the Korean Peninsula. South Korea followed the policy of comprehensive engagement to containment. South Korea has also been involved in taking punitive actions against North Korea like raising sanctions over North Korea or in other words, such efforts made by South Korea were in an attempt to avert the war or to stabilise the Korean Peninsula.

Diplomacy of Cooperation and Comprehensive Engagement

South Korea employed a series of diplomatic efforts in order to denuclearise North Korean nuclear weapons program. Diplomacy of cooperation and comprehensive engagement was one of them which were employed by Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun. Their policies notably "Sunshine" and "Peace and Prosperity" were attempts to engage North Korea in several ways to develop interdependence between the two Koreas, to promote internal changes and to reduce the threat from North Korean side. Apart from this, in comparison to previous South Korean policies, it was the South Korea's first policy efforts which were not based on a zero-sum mentality. With this policy, President Kim Dae-jung and the successive president Roh Moo-hyun put efforts with intention to communicate with North Korean leader, not with intention to absorb North Korea in any way and South Korea was willing to assist North Korea by providing economic aid and creating business-friendly environment in North Korea, a positive sum gain for both countries. It was the assumption of both the leaders that economic interdependence in long run would facilitate the internal political changes, which would finally prepare roadmap for the unification of the two Koreas. But from the North Korean side, Kim Jong-il regime was only interested in receiving economic aid from South Korea rather than seeking mutual cooperation. Because of this, the Sunshine policy did not produce a tangible result and faced public criticism. This enforced Roh Moo-hyun to bring some changes in his engagement policy toward North

Korea including putting option of public opinion in his main principle. These efforts put by the South Korean government indicated that South Korea was willing to utilise its economic wealth as an inducement to communicate with the North. But at the same time, South Korea was also expecting the North Korea's reciprocity, which South Korea did not receive. Nevertheless, these policies signalled a strong and confident South Korean leadership, which was quite different from all the previous government's policy in order to directly engage North Korea into dialogue.

These policies helped South Korea to strengthen its national security because the Sunshine policy focused on non-provocation from either side. These policies also promoted inter-Korean cooperation and exchanges at an unprecedented level. But the nuclear test in 2006 by North Korea proved a little dearth vision in the principle of the policy. But overall, in compared to the earlier engagement with North Korea, South Korea left no stone unturned in improving relationship with North Korea.

Diplomacy of Hard-line Policy

With the advent of Lee Myung-bak government, the South Korean policy towards North Korea changed abruptly. During the reign of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, the South Korean policies had positive intent but despite it and comprehensive engagement, South Korea faced second nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula. At this time, South Korea's policy towards North Korea faced criticism by the South Korean people. Even this criticism became the significant issue during the 2008 South Korea's presidential election, and it helped President Lee Myung-bak to come into power. After coming into power, President Lee curtailed all the assistance to North Korea which was being provided in accordance with the agreements signed during the previous governments. Lee Myung bak said that South Korea would firmly deal with North Korea which was considered to be important in bringing peace and stability including denuclearisation of North Korea. President Lee's engagement policy towards North Korea faced several unexpected problems and challenges. North Korea suspended inter-Korean dialogue just few after months of the inauguration of Lee government blaming South Korea's engagement policy as anti-North Korea. North Korea refused to resume talks with South Korea because Lee government did not follow the agreement signed between Kim Jong-il and Lee Myung-bak's predecessors in 2000 and 2007. In other words, the provisions have been made for bringing inter-Korean relations on track was not acceptable to the conservative leaders.

In order to improve inter-Korean relations, President Lee tabled several policies towards North Korea. Although, North Korea looked the Lee's initiatives towards itself as a hard-bargaining policy or a kind of conditional policy of South Korea, but the initiatives taken by the Lee government could not be seen from that angle. The policy of "denuclearisation and opening" and "vision 3000" were structured in way that both countries could establish peace and stability on the Korean peninsula as well as strengthening the relationship with world community. Lee government focused on the openness on the North Korea towards world community. This proposal also attracted the support from progressive party. Even several characteristics have also been included in the Lee Myung-bak's approach like "vision 3000" talks about the development of North Korea. Lee government always gave low priority to the importance of North Korea which was also a part of filling frustration on North Korean side so that North Korea should also put efforts to improve bilateral ties between two Koreas. In consequence of that the result came to the contrary to their expectations. The unilateral engagement policy led by the South Korean administration did not produce the South Korea's desired form of changes and reforms in North Korea. Despite the multidimensional efforts to improve bilateral ties between two Koreas, North Korean erratic nature to pursue nuclear weapons deteriorated inter-Korean relations and North Korean nuclear issue remained as a challenge to resolve. President Lee's hawkish policy towards North Korea and Pyongyang's newly amended constitution to emphasise North Korea as a state of nuclear power, an invincible military power with strong political dogma left several issues unresolved. These issues must have been resolved in order to maintain peace, harmony and stability on the peninsula. When Park Geun-hye came to the power, it was her prime concern to bring stability in inter-Korean relations amid such circumstances where North Korea has become an uncooperative state. This has limited Park government's ability to adopt meaningful steps. However, President Park recognized distrust as the main cause in deteriorating bilateral relations. North Korea always blamed South Korea's hawkish policy and its military exercise with United States. For new government president

park there was a big challenge to bring changes in North behaviour by underlying the principle of mutual trust and mutual develop.

The situation on Korean peninsula has been deteriorating due to power transfer in North Korea. North Korea's new supreme leader Kim Jong-un continuously exercised military provocations and nuclear weapons despite international condemnation. Apart from this, North Korea has continuously been threatening South Korea and its allies. Even at several times, North Korea warned foreign embassies in Seoul to evacuate in case of conflict. Mistrust deepened under the Lee Myung-bak administration. Several incidents worsened inter-Korean relations during his tenure. It was thought that power shifting in North Korea would bring some positive changes between two Koreas, but Kim Jong-un erratic behaviour did not let inter-Korean relations to be improved. In order to strengthen South Korea's strategic engagement towards North Korea, President Park Geun-hye thought to establish trust as an important measure, which can give potential stability of inter-Korean interactions following the long-term exchanges and cooperation between two countries.

Since North Korean developed its nuclear weapons on the principle to safeguard the regime from the external threat, North Korea never showed its sincere willingness to abandon its nuclear program at any cost. That's why the challenge to denuclearise North Korea for any South Korean leader remained insurmountable. So, when Moon Jae-in became the President of South Korea, South Korea incorporated a mix kind of foreign policy towards North Korea. When he assumed power in 2017, he played an active role in improving the bilateral ties between two Koreas.

Considering Sanctions as the Best Strategy

North Korean nuclear issue has created regional unrest that harmed the stakes of several countries. It has also harmed the strategy of world's non-proliferation policy. On or around the Korean Peninsula, the North Korean nuclear issue has had significant effects. Since several diplomatic efforts to check North Korean nuclear program went in vain, the Six-Party Talks was designed to address the North Korean nuclear crisis and North Korea was the part of these talks, but it withdrew from these multinational talks in April 2009.

In order to check the nuclear proliferation by North Korea, multilateral efforts including sanctions were imposed North Korea as the strategy. Sanctions were viewed as the part of problem as well as the potential solution to North Korea's stubborn pursuit of nuclear power. Since the international community has been faced a huge challenge of reacting to the situation caused by North Korean nuclear crisis, it was considered that sanctions against North Korea would be an appropriate course of action to deal with obstinate North Korea until or unless North Korea takes concrete measures towards denuclearisation or decides to resume the negotiations.

However, the options like sanction or assistance both have been unable to make North Korea its nuclear programme. For humanitarian reasons and security considerations, sanctions would not be the best policy to tackle Pyongyang. It has been evident that after the nuclear test by North Korea, the international community has adopted the method of sanctions in dealing with North Korea. Sanctions came into consideration after the 2009 nuclear test and the Thai authorities in December 2009 seized 35 tonnes of weaponry sourced from North Korea. Authorities from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) made a similar seizure in August 2009 when they stopped ten containers of North Korean military equipment off an Australian-owned ship headed for Iran. Since North Korea showed unwillingness to return into the multilateral talks then sanctions were considering as an important tool to compel North Korea to come into dialogue process or to consider gradual denuclearisation.

In the long-run and challenging international efforts to resolve the North Korean nuclear impasse, sanctions have played a crucial role. These sanctions have been in the form of unilateral or multilateral economic or non-economic measures. So, the interested parties like South Korea, Japan, the United States, and European Union have applied sanctions as the main coercive instrument in dealing with North Korea's nuclear weapons and its long-range ballistic missile programs. Basically, there have been some important goals behind imposing sanctions against North Korea- first, in order to improve the human rights situation, it was necessary to initiate the conditional engagement where sanction works in condition mode. Second, ensuring peace and stability have been the priority of the regional players but it could have been possible only in one case when North Korea agrees to abandon nuclear

weapons program. Third, smooth and gradual unification of the Korean Peninsula has also been an objective behind imposing sanctions against North Korea. Fourth, avoiding another North Korean nuclear crisis, sanction was considered to in consonance with such normative goal.

Initially, sanctions crafted against North Korea were to slow the nuclear proliferation programs in several parts of the world, but later sanctions became the instrumental tool to exert pressure on North Korea to denuclearise at gradual pace and participate in multilateral dialogue, trade, cooperation and exchanges. So, enhancing the possibility for North Korea's denuclearisation, sanctions were considered as the great strategy and the imposition of sanctions has helped to pressurise North Korea to think over the abandonment of nuclear weapons program.

Remaining Options for South Korea

Even it has been almost two decades, denuclearisation of North Korea remains as a challenge for the world countries. Over the years, several countries have put efforts to denuclearise North Korea at different levels including South Korea. But the aim to denuclearise North Korea has not been achieved. South Korea, at its own level, has employed almost every possible option but still it has failed in denuclearising North Korea. The advancement of nuclear arsenals of North Korea is seen as a counterbalancing strategy against the enemy countries. So rather than talking about denuclearisation, North Korea focuses on enriching itself by possessing strong military, long-range missile capabilities and nuclear armaments. In this situation, whether South Korea's diplomacy towards North Korea became fail or successful, remains as a part of debate but it is sure that South Korea has very limited options. First, if North Korea does not possess a great economy or not in a position to initiate war then let North Korea develop nuclear weapons. Second, if South Korea and the United States feel that North Korean nuclear armament race created regional imbalances, South Korea and the United States should make pre-emptive strike against North Korea or levied some strict sanctions on North Korea. But this option does not seem to be feasible because such options may give birth to another Korean War or World War III. Third, South Korea need not worry because it has the security umbrella of the United States. Fourth, South Korea should constitute some multilateral talks or mechanism for putting more pressure on North Korea. Fifth, South Korean can gain support of many countries in making this world nuclear free zone for exerting pressure on North Korea for denuclearisation process.

South Korea's Middle Power Diplomacy

Scott A. Snyder and Easley, Leif-Eric in their book "South Korea's foreign relations and security policies" clearly elaborate about the South Korea's economic development and global position. This book discussed about South Korea's development from a war-torn country to an economic power and its role as middle power in denuclearising North Korea. This book inculcates the notable international contributions as a middle power and its capability to deal with larger neighbours and a divided Peninsula.

Another set of examples also elucidates the South Korea's middle power diplomacy and its role in the process of denuclearisation of North Korea. Stephen W. Boswork was the United States special representative for North Korea policy in the Obama administration and served as the ambassador of the United States to South Korea from 1997 to 2001. When he was being interviewed in 2012, he was very clear about the US role in the first North Korean nuclear crisis and how the role of the United States got minimised and the role of South Korea increased after emerging as a middle power. According to him, a number of fundamental differences occurred at the Korean peninsula from the first nuclear crisis. First, the strategic context within which the United States and our allies and partners were dealing with North Korea has shifted dramatically from the United States to the regional actors and due to economic strength, South Korea played an assertive role in leading this North Korean nuclear issue at international level. In 1990s, North Korean issue was largely as a matter for the United States to settle but due to economic prosperity, the democratically elected president of South Korea took this North Korean nuclear issue in its own hand to settle. Second, there are several multilateral mechanisms to resolve the North Korea nuclear crisis, but South Korea has always been at the forefront to tackle this issue including the formation of various types of engagement. Third, although, Northeast Asian region witnessed the rise of China and growing influence of China, the economic prosperity of South Korea has enabled it to formulate the North Korean policy of its own wishes and reach out China

if it needs any assistance. It may placate China by offering economic benefits. The economic prosperity has helped South Korea to improve relations with the regional countries and gave more strength to the South Korean policy makers in order to formulate potential policy against North Korean nuclear issues. Now the situation in East Asia is like without taking South Korea into belief, the United States, China, Russia are not in a position to go head in order to maintain regional order.

At the present time, South Korea is a giant economic power, its bilateral relation is quite important for other regional countries including China. In order to tackle North Korean nuclear issue, the economic capability of South Korea has enabled it to work as a middle power not only in East Asia but also in entire world. It has become quite obvious that South Korea's middle power diplomacy has exerted an impactful effect on North Korea. Regarding the stance to settle down the nuclear issue, South Korea's middle power diplomacy has played an assertive role in bringing North Korea into dialogue process with the ultimate goal of dismantling North Korean nuclear reactors or disarmament of North Korea.

Conclusion

North Korean nuclear program has a serious impact on Inter-Korean relations. It proved to be an existential threat to its adjacent country, South Korea. South Korean government adopted various policies like appeasement, engagement, comprehensive engagement, conditional engagement, containment and sanctions in order to avert the war like situation or to deal with North Korea nuclear aggression. South Korea also adopted its economic strength in containing North Korea's nuclear aggression and ultimately South Korea also exposed North Korea's nuclear intent at global platform.

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