



Politics of hegemony: The case of United States of America vs North Korea nuclear imbroglio

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Abstract

The concept of hegemony has been a controversial phenomenon in foreign relations. Theorists have divided views on what the concept should contend with, in view of domineering interests of the super powers. To the realists, which hold tenaciously to “power” and control of it, “might is Righter”, according to Machavelli (1968), this view of might being right is the content in of debate in global politics. The case of US and North Korea is a clear indication of this politics of hegemony and the global imbroglio, where the globe is almost divided into bipolarity, if necessary measures are not taken. This issue has taken the centre stage in global politics and foreign relations. The question is why is America so concerned with the case of North Korea? The answer is simply hegemony – where America always pursues its agenda of hegemony as “police of the world”, including North Korea. The theoretical frame used in this work is the realist theory or approach which states clearly that “Power” is central to the relations of states at the international system. And, that states seek to maximize their powers in order to maintain their hegemony on other states.

Keywords: politics, hegemony, nuclear weapon, imbroglio

Introduction

The issue of America and North Korea as a case study is this work is all about hegemony of the United States over every other states in the world politics. America does not want rivalry under any circumstance. That is why it became fretful and nervous when there was a recent turn of event in North Korea with its alleged admission to the possession of nuclear weapons. Prior to this time, America has been making efforts to realize the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula despite its bilateral relation with the Republic of Korea. Penultimately, North Korea has recently transformed the existing bilateral US – Republic of Korea alliance into an awkward triangular relations, thereby complicating the previous bilateral relation and making it difficult to manage (Navari, 2008) [24].

During the cold war, the relationship between United State and Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was almost non-existent. The Untied State’s policy toward North Korea back then was either containment or even indifference, as it was perceived to be just a part of US policy towards the Soviet Union and China. In the post Cold-War era, however, when the Soviet empire and the Communist bloc were no more, North Korea emerged as a consequence of it being a key element in the US security policy. According to Louw (2013) [20], “in regard to the US-DPRK relationship, the Korean Peninsula remains a last vestige of the Cold War legacy that can be classified as a sort of “Cold War hangover”.

As a post-cold war era rogue state, Democratic People’s Republic of Korea draws interest towards itself to the US on a wide spectrum of foreign policy issues ranging from weapons of mass destruction, missile development, international terrorism and so on. Hence, on October 21, 1994, after sixteen months of negotiations, the US and North Korea signed an Agreed Framework that helped to achieve a long standing and vital US objectives of bringing

an end to the threat of nuclear proliferation on the Korean Peninsula and providing basis for more cordial relations between North Korea and the rest of the globe.

Conceptual/Theoretical Review

The concept of hegemony and power relations among states at the international level require very critical analysis, using the realist theory with its ideas, attitudes which prioritize natural interests, competition security and state power as central in shaping and expressing the manner which states interact with one another.

The realists contend that the international system and security environment are the dominant factors to determine states behaviour. According to Gat (2006) [15], states act independently of each other and that their sovereignty should be deemed as sacreed. Realists view power and competition as two inseparable components which are the currency of international politics. They also argue that global dynamics are dominated by states that act in the pursuance of self-interest and the quest for power (Mearshelmer, 2010). To Waltz (1997) in his theory of international politics, the abilities of states to deftly employ the respective elements of state power as a holistic and focused manifestation of state craft in the context of the international political system will ultimately determine a state’s position and standing in the international structure.

In Schoema’s (2007), view this perspective on the role of the state translates to the national security of a state as the most important foreign policy goal and requires the military to protect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state. This, therefore implies that states must be able to apply the military instrument of power in the event that coercive measures are required in defence of the country (Lyno-Jones, 1999).

In the realm of global politics, states men and diplomats are propelled by the survival and security of their respective

states. They are neither constrained by ethical standards, nor by any known law of self-deprivation or self-abnegative. Rather, they often maximize gains of their countries by any available methods (Morgenthau, 1973). A cursory look at Realism would reveal that it seeks to equate power with commodity which can be acquired at will. It ignores the fact that power is transient, relative and circumstantial.

In international politics, an actor chooses its own resources without knowing its opponent's choices which sometimes result in unexpected outcomes. This is enunciated by American hegemony over the North Korea and other countries, resulting to nuclear warfare which has metamorphosed into the current global imbroglio.

The Nuclear Warfare: America Vs North Korea

As the North Korea has dramatically accelerated the pace of progress in building its nuclear programme in recent years, and as the Trump administration has alternately leveled abreast of military return and engaged in high-profile summitry with Kim Jong—Un. The issue has risen to the top of US foreign policy agenda. The current round of US Diplomatic engagement with North Korea may hold enormous consequences for the future of the Korean Peninsula, perhaps leading to the denouement of this long saga or to another round of both sides “muddling through” with no ultimate resolution in sight (Anderson, 2017) ^[1].

The Trump administration has framed negotiations with North Korea in stark binary terms – either to a more intensified confrontation and conflict but few experts expect North Korea to give up its nuclear arsenal anytime soon (Buzan, 2009) ^[5].

The recent turn of events in North Korea with its alleged admission to possessing nuclear weapon has created nervous tension in the United States, especially as North Korea has transformed the existing bilateral relations it had with America into an awkward one thereby making more complicated and difficult to manage. North Korea's ultimate fear is a US invasion or an aerial attack designed to overthrow the regime of Kim Jong and the ruling Korean Workers Party (KWP). This fear was fuelled by US attack on countries without nuclear weapons, such as Iraq, Afghanistan and Yugoslavia. Thus, in its view, possessing nuclear weapon would be the ultimate guarantee that the US would not attempt to invade and bring down the regime or regime change of Pyongyang and North Korea's nuke could serve as warming to Washington that there will be a very high price to pay if the United States were to attack. That price could as well be the destruction of US bases in South Korea and Japan, or attacks on Seoul and Tokyo or even Los Angeles and San Francisco, if Pyongyang succeeds in developing a fully international ballistic missile.

More recently, Washington's concerns have stemmed from North Korea's close ties with the “rogue states” such as Iran, Libya and Syria. In addition, in the light of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the US, Washington ultimate fear is that Pyongyang could even connive with al-Qaeda, thereby posing “an imminent danger of nuclear weapons being detonated in US cities”, in the words of William Perry, former US defense secretary.

As it can be clearly deduced, America's fears and North Korea's fears collide; if either side makes concessions, it believes its worst nightmares would be realized and other side (America or North Korea) would launch aggression. Total lack of trust on both sides worsens the chances of

resolutions. Hence, the nuclear warfare between America and North Korea.

The America's Policy Options to Forestall Its Hegemony on North Korea

The fact that North Korea is building up nuclear weapon is well known to neighbouring states and beyond, and the United States response to North Korea's nuclear ambitions will have significant regional and global political and security consequences.

By testing two nuclear devices, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has challenged the United States and the region to accept its nuclear status.

Ironically, although intended as a declaration of strength, North Korea's nuclear and missile tests also show its weakness, vulnerability and desperation, underscoring its political isolation, failing economy, lagging conventional military capabilities and teen desire for international acceptance and recognition (Barry, 2017) ^[3, 4].

In other for America to forestall its hegemony against North Korea, certain policies known as “U.S. Policy Options” were deemed expedient, through the instrumentality of a Task Force which came up with four policy options for the United States and its partners – viz.

1. Explicit acquirensience,
2. Containment and management
3. Rollback, and
4. Regime change

The Task Force concedes that US policy is constrained and that the United States has limited ability to effect change on its own. Given the reality of a bad situation with few good choices, the Task Force considered the pros and cons of each option and its likelihood of adoption and success. It ultimately rejected options 1 and 4, acknowledged the interim benefits of option 2, and endorsed option 3 which is denuclearization.

Option 1: Acquiescence: In this option, the US might accept the idea put forward by the North Korea leadership that an improved diplomatic relationship should be delinked from denuclearization decision by focusing on reducing tensions and improving relations with North Korea regardless of its nuclear status. Such an approach would reduce crisis and open doors for diplomatic and political options for bilateral engagement (Philip, 2005) ^[27].

Option 2: Containment and management; A second option was to pursue a policy that classifies the North Korean nuclear challenge as a problem to be managed with a likelihood of near-term resolution. Recognizing that it will take a long time and a concerted effort to denuclearize North Korea, the administration would work in concert with partners to contain North Korea onward proliferation as its primary objective, while blocking North Korea vertical proliferation by preventing through a combination of negotiations and coercive measure from increasing the size or the sophistication of its nuclear arsenal and missile delivery capacity. The Task Force believes that this approach – containing the problem and managing the reality while paying lip service to the objective of rollback, focuses on risk, while waiting for circumstances conducive to North Korea's eventual denuclearization.

Option 3 – Rollback: A third option would be to immediately and consistently press for North Korea's return to the path of denuclearization. This approach would

involve a step-up combination of sanctions and incentives designed to make North Korea abandon its nuclear programs. According to Habib (2009) ^[16], if this measure is taking there would be constant political pressure by the international community on North Korea to limit its alternatives to negotiation.

Option 4 – Regime Change: A fourth option for achieving denuclearization would be to pursue regime change in North Korea. This might include support for subversive activities intended to undermine the current leadership, expansion of economic sanctions, strengthened measures to inspect and interdict all cargo to and from North Korea, and a rhetorical policy designed to publicly support regime change (Cummings, 2010).

Giving the widespread pessimism regarding the likelihood of the current regime voluntarily giving up its nuclear weapons, its lack of credibility in implementing past diplomatic agreements and its willingness to sell unconventional weapons and missiles technologies to the highest bidder, this approach prioritizes denuclearization over stability. It assumes that any negotiation will be a pretext for delay, rather than a vehicle for successfully managing or resolving the dangers posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program. (<https://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing/papers/history-u.s.-dprk-relations>).

It implicitly assumes that a new North Korean regime would be more amenable to negotiations and willing to give up its weapons. But an obstacle to this regime change option is the fact that it contradicts the high priority which North Korea's neighbours place on a stable transition to a new leadership forced on North Korea.

Nonetheless, the option of actively supporting regime change should be held in reverse as a possible cause of action in the event that North Korea continues to pursue horizontal or vertical proliferation or nuclear development activities in defiance of existing UN resolutions. North Korea's failure to return to the path of denuclearization could also lead the United States and other members of the Six Party Talks to conclude that regime change is the only possible way to rollback North Korea's nuclear program.

Strategies to Improve Relations between USA and Republic of North Korea

The historical roots of improved relations between America and North Korea can be traced back to 1988 under President Reagan's "modest initiative" which allowed unofficial non-governmental visits by North Koreans to the United States, thereby making it easy for stringent financial regulations which impede travel to North Korea by American citizens. It also granted permission for U.S. diplomats to engage in substantive discussions with North Koreans in neutral settings (Anderson, 2017) ^[1].

The US engagement policy to improve relations with North Korea can be discussed and evaluated in the context of the following four key objectives;

1. Enhanced Regional Stability: The prospect of a potentially unstable North Korea, armed with a large nuclear weapons stockpile and a growing long-range missile force, had been forestall and hopefully averted. Also, by delaying and helping to keep a lid on tensions. U.S. policy has served as a bridge from difficult times to a more promising prospect which is currently being experienced.

- 2. Thwart Weapons Proliferation:** The plan by North Korea to pill up nuclear weapons would have threatened the international non-proliferation region and in turn led to pressures in the Republic of Korea (ROK) and perhaps Japan to develop nuclear weapons. All these outcomes have been avoided as a result of America's efforts to thwart such weapons proliferation. It was America's efforts that secured the North's announcement of a long-range test moratorium in late 1999, although there was yet to be a deal curbing the North Korea's exports or its own indigenous deployments.
- 3. Encourage South-North Dialogue:** U. S. policy has had mixed results, not entirely due to its own efforts, but also because of domestic and inter-Korean politics. President Kim Young Sam's inconsistency – a predict of his own style of policy making and domestic political pressures – had a lot to do with his lack of success with Pyongyang. President Kim Dae Jung's consistent pursuit of improved relations, in spite of various domestic political pressures, has been an important factor leading to the nascent rapprochement between the two.
- 4. Maintain Close US – Republic of Korea (ROK) Cooperation:** Periodic differences between the United States and the Republic of Korea over policy towards the North have not under mined the overall bilateral relationship. Working out these differences through consultation is what counts and, on that score, the United States has succeeded in maintaining a close relationship with North Korea.

Policy Agenda for the Future

A strong U. S. – Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance based on stability, non-proliferation and reconciliation becomes the cardinal objective of the new policy agenda for the future. Controlling North Korean weapons of mass destruction and ballistic missiles has been and will continue to be a critical U. S. priority, but that does not preclude a much more active effort to tackle what is likely to be a more critical threat of the North Korea towards deploying conventional military forces.

The current U. S. administration should push toward both fronts, recognizing that in the near – term, progress may be more likely in controlling ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons if only conventional forces remain the bedrock of the North's security posture. In pursuing engagement, the U. S. policymakers should keep in mind a number of guidelines such as the following;

First, coping with changing circumstances on the peninsula will require shaping an effective policy making mechanism inside the executive, with congress and other stakeholders.

Second, policymakers can engage in endless debates about the North Korean intensions for nuclear proliferation, but constant diplomatic probes are still the best way to find out its real motives.

Third, the U. S. should keep its priorities focused. Its main objective is not to transform North Korean society, but to bind and diminish the security threats, although it may be a by-product of that effort.

Fourth, the U. S. must be seen by all as actively supporting the Korean peace process. As a result, close policy coordination will be essential to avert undermining South-North dialogue.

Fifth, U. S. should be prepared for speedbumps, particularly unexpected provocations by the North that could undermine engagement. Therefore, maintaining a long-term perspective will be critical.

Finally, the United State will have to work out modalities to generate international support and collaborations as well as maintaining a balance of power on the peninsula.

Conclusion

The politics of hegemony is centered on the Realist theory as it foundational framework of analysis. Although theorists have varied views on what it should contend with, but the general consensus is its domineering interests of the super powers. The realists hold tenaciously to power and its control which forms the basis for hegemony. The case of America and North Korea is a clear indication of this politics of hegemony. The North Korea's efforts to pile up nuclear weapons has been thwarted by America simply because it wants to maintain its hegemony on North Korea – vis – a – vis the entire globe. In view of this America has come up with certain policy options in order to forestall its hegemony on the North Korea.

To ameliorate this problem, strategies to improve the relationship between America and North Korea were proffered as possible solutions.

Recommendations

1. Concerted efforts should be made towards ensuring peace between the two countries through various consultations and peace talks.
2. The United Nations intervention is crucial through the enforcement of rules and regulations to curb the excesses of the North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons.
3. Efforts should be made to craft serious conventional arms reduction proposals which should run the gamut from confidence-building measures to force reduction.
4. New policy formulation and implementation should be facilitated through the appointment of a special representatives for the Korean peace process and the establishment of a special observer group. Also the Trilateral Coordination Group established by the 1999 review of U. S. policy towards North Korea should be re-invigorated to serve this purpose.
5. The nuclear agreed framework should equally be re-invigorated. A delay in the planned certification by the international Atomic Energy Agency might thwart further peace initiatives.

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