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**Nuclear North Korea
Complexities of Korean Peninsula Peace**

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Introduction

It has been 64 years, 2 months, and 27 days since the ceasefire was signed, effectively ending the Korean War. During that period of time, global relations between North Korea and the west has been less than harmonious. In recent years the necessity to acknowledge the issue of having a technologically advanced, contested state, has come to pass. The combination of numerous successful nuclear weapon and missile tests, with the aggressive rhetoric from Kim Jong-un means attempting to ignore North Korea's previous vacant threats in attempts to receive food aid will no longer be sufficient. Successful missile tests with flight paths over northern Japan have the United States, Japan, and South Korea on high alert. North Korea's November 29, 2017 test reached an altitude of 2,796 miles, which is a massive step forward in their goal to be able to strike any part of the U.S. mainland. (Fifield, 2017)

Currently the major players involved are Russia, China, United States of America, Japan, and South Korea. All of these countries have a stake in what happens with North Korea. These concerns range from US involvement in a country bordering Russia and China, to potential refugee and economic concerns. Each country has their own motives and interests that influence how and where they allocate their resources and exert their influence. These stances are often dictated by historical relations. Taking a non-global approach to resolving the current tensions with North Korea by any party involved is dangerous and will most certainly be ineffective. The complexity and inherent unpredictable nature by some parties involved require thinking not only critically but globally. My interest comes from the complexity of the issue at hand. I have a habit of gravitating to the complicated, borderline unsolvable, questions in life. Having a work and educational background in risk management and a love for global politics, how to handle North Korea has occupied many hours of thought and contemplation.

Historically, the strained relations between North Korea and most of the world go back to Korea's division along the 38th parallel after World War II. This division was only meant to be temporary but the deterioration of relations between the United States and the USSR made reunification impossible. The official formation of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea happened a few years later in 1948. The United States of America, South Korea, Japan, and others refuse to recognize the legitimacy of the North Korean government. On the other side, the Soviet Union, now Russia, and China are some of the countries that do recognize the legitimacy of the North Korean government. The Korean War aimed to solve the issue of which government, the DPRK or the ROK, controls the whole of Korea. With no resolution, the issue is still contested by the two governments. The direct involvement in Japan, who are seen as Korea's ultimate enemy, by the United States after World War II was and continues to be the catalyst for anti-American sentiment by the DPRK and its citizens. When combined with the inability to have diplomatic relations with the DPRK, as they are not recognized as a legitimate government, repairing relations with North Korea is difficult. In an increasingly globalized world, mutually beneficial trade helps keep relations stable. To what extent has yet to be seen but both China and the United States have hinted that depending on how the issue of North Korea is handled could impact those relations. (Reuters, 2017).

With the introduction of nuclear weapons into the North Korean arsenal there comes a level of respect that is afforded to their words. Conventional weapons, while deadly, have a soft cap on the amount of destruction they can deliver in a period of time. There is also a practical range limitation on conventional weapons. The newfound ability to reach out further and hit harder than ever before puts an untold number of lives at stake. These advancements combined with the seemingly growing political instability within North Korea are making their longtime

allies and trading partners, China, uneasy (NPR, 2017). This is critical because without China being onboard with any action taken against North Korea, China will come to their defense as long as North Korea was not the first to strike.

The most recent phase of, phase IV, of North Korea's nuclear weapons program began in 2002 and continues to the present. (IISS, 2018). This continual movement forward with their nuclear weapons program has forced every recent U.S. presidency to tackle the issue of a nuclear Korean Peninsula. The approach the last three presidencies have taken has been "...Some combination of the same options has always been in play: negotiations, sanctions, the threat of force, and pressure on China to use its influence with the North. None of these tactics have worked." (Winnfeld & Morell, 2018). Three presidencies and little long-term progression made, the question begins to be asked "Why?". According to Admiral James 'Sandy' Winnfeld and Fmr. acting CIA director, Michael J. Morell, it can be broken down into a number of key elements. The isolated and paranoid Kim regime believes that the U.S. has intentions to overthrow them. Their response to this perceived threat is nuclear weapons, no matter the cost since preservation of the regime is above all else. The United States continually makes the mistake in believing that North Korean leadership is irrational which hinders them when crafting policy towards North Korea. Finally, Winnfeld and Morell believe that North Korea has no interest in crafting a comprehensive deal with the United States because the regime needs an enemy or "external distraction". This theory is mirrored by a number of U.S. foreign policy critics, including William Blum, who believe the U.S. needs enemies like North Korea to justify the massive defense spending of the United States.

Dismantling the regime is arguably less challenging than what would come afterwards. Would there be a reunified Korea? How would it impact the economies of neighboring

countries? There are thousands of questions that need to be asked with each possible outcome. Below are some findings and themes from researchers who have looked at aspects of this dynamic before. As the situation is evolving in real time though, information may not be always be current.

Previous studies, those done mostly before rise of Kim Jong-un, seem to have a more positive outlook. During the waning years of the Bush administration and the beginning of the Obama administration, there were signs that the DPRK was putting an increased focus on feeding its people at the cost of sacrificing its nuclear program. (Rechter, 2009). The Bush administration had allocated 553 million dollars for energy assistance and was restarting their food assistance program to the tune of 500,000 metric tons. (Rechter, 2009). This use of leverage to get aid in exchange for disarmament while still possible, is much more difficult to accomplish now that the program is at a stage where they are able to produce sizeable, working nuclear weapons in a timely manner. The change in leadership is also seen as a major hurdle to similar forms of leverage. Kim Jong-un has very large shoes to fill and there is little incentive to bargain with the enemy when their nuclear and missile programs are having the success that they are. Despite sanctions on North Korea for their nuclear program, the North Korean economy is having their fastest period of growth in nearly 2 decades. At just over 6% per year, the DPRK is finding growth despite the many restrictions put in place. (CNBC, 2017)

Since the option of leveraging economic aid in the form of lifting of sanctions or emergency food or funding has all but dissolved at this point, the other commonly talked about theme for resolution is targeted military action. (NPR, 2017). This is often shot down by experts though as the risk versus reward is not there. The vacuum of power is often seen as more dangerous than having a known, if unstable, person in power. Current approaches to the situation

are still being developed and they differ from country to country. Most approaches universally agree that having China involved is almost a necessity though. What influences these regional powers and does that change with the injection of nuclear weapons into North Korea's arsenal?

Theories, Approaches, and Methodology

The approach taken in this research is the constructivist approach through international relations theory. While there are a number of viable approaches in this instance, "multiple participant meanings, social and historical construction" (Creswell, 2014), combined with the open-ended nature makes it easier to draw meaning from multiple sources of information. With the ultimate goal being to cast light on the complexity and global nature of North Korean relations, the multiple participant meanings aspect of constructivism is crucial in getting that point across. Constructivism lends itself well to qualitative research which is going to be the backbone of this research.

History has played a significant role in how each of the countries involved interact with each other. It is history that has helped frame the policies by which these nations approach the situation with North Korea. By understanding and analyzing historical and current events a more complete picture of motivations and concerns begins to take shape. Using a constructivist approach and using qualitative research methods, this study attempts to gain an understanding into the intricate complexities that surround policy and North Korea. This study will be using strictly qualitative methods as quantitative and comparative research methods do not lend themselves well to this case. By viewing these events through a lense with a global perspective, more effective policies can be put into place. The hostility of North Korea makes the situation very fragile, making appropriate policy decisions that much more important. The goal is not to

craft or recommend policy but to better understand the importance and role of approaching complex international relations issues with a global perspective. The objective is to gain a better understanding of how complex the issues are and compare, contrast, and analyze the desires and possible actions by each party involved. The hope is that this study will show others the importance of looking at events with a global perspective and highlight the need for critical thinkers in the state department and international relations.

Research Question

How and what influences the stakeholder nations of the Korean Peninsula when it comes to foreign policy with North Korea and their nuclear weapons program and reunification?

Findings

What influences foreign policy in these countries comes down to an innumerable number of factors, ranging in their scale and significance. While it is easy to try and assign a value or importance to each factor, doing so can ignore elements of how various factors interact. This can be especially true with historical factors, which tend to be difficult to quantify.

History is one of the more significant factors that play a role in how these countries handle foreign policy. History provides a framework for how the present and future is formed. Studying the history and how it is interpreted and retold within each culture gives insight into action and inaction. History, especially when linked with other critical factors can paint a picture with valuable information.

North Korea is in an interesting position as it borders both China and the Soviet Union. Proximity and location played a significant role throughout the Cold War. When the United

States placed nuclear weapons in Turkey, on the doorstep of the Soviet Union, they responded by placing nuclear weapons in Cuba. North Korea played the roll as that buffer for China and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War. China and the Soviet Union were more than happy to use North Korea in that capacity. The United States values its military bases and has them in every corner of the world ready to be able to exert power in the name of protecting their interests.

Ideology has both historical and present importance in the current nuclear conflict gripping the Korean Peninsula. Ideology intertwines itself with history to paint a more complete picture, helping to establish motives behind action and inaction. The United States during the Cold War waged physical wars in an attempt to snuff out communism. That type of aggression caused a strong response from nations that shared similar ideologies, united against the capitalist west.

Analysis

History

The Korean Peninsula as it is recognizable today took shape in 1945 with the unconditional surrender by Japan, bringing both World War II and the Sino-Japanese war to an end. This surrender brought the liberation of Korea and a division in allegiances. In its most basic form it came down to the United States and the west versus the Soviet Union, and China. As it relates to the regional powers there is the Soviet Union/Russia, China, and North Korea all of which share a similar ideology or have in the recent past. On the opposite side of the spectrum you have the countries that allied themselves with the United States and the west which include Japan, and South Korea.

These allegiances were formed within days of World War II ending and the liberation of Korea. The Soviet Union entered Korea from the north and the United States from the south in an attempt to liberate Korea first. Korea was divided along the 38th parallel, the north occupied by the Soviet Union and the South by the United States with support from the west. This division eventually erupted in war with the north invading the south in 1950. The war lasted three years with the Soviet Union and China fighting alongside North Korea and the United States, backed by the UN with over 20 countries providing troops, fighting alongside South Korea. This and the ensuing cold war set the stage for strained relations and division that is still present and impacting foreign policy.

North Korea was formed at the conclusion of World War II with the surrender of Japan and the established Joint Trusteeship of Korea. Russia entered the north of Korea after the surrender of Japan to the United States. The Korean peninsula was divided along the 38th parallel. North Korea established their own government under communist rule with the help of the Chinese and Soviet Union. The Soviet Civil Administration ruled North Korea till 1948, at which point they established the official government and name - the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. In 1948 the Kim legacy began with Kim Il-sung until his death in 1994. Kim Il-sung saw North Korea through the Korean War and the Cold War years. North Korea holds tremendous amounts of animosity for Japan and the United States as a result of their involvement and ties to Japan in the post-war era. Japan was ruthless during World War II and Korea was under their control during that time. This put North Korea firmly in the camp of Russia and China while the United States went on their crusade to stop out communism. Two Kim's have taken up the role of Supreme Leader of North Korea since Kim Il-sung's death in 1994.

South Korea's history begins much like North Korea's, with the liberation from Japan after their unconditional surrender to the United States in 1945. The United States entered Korea from the south and occupied Korea up till the 38th parallel. The United States Army Military Government in Korea (USAMGIK) was in charge of South Korea from 1945-1948 at which point The First Republic of Korea was established. While the Soviet's pulled out of North Korea, the Republic of Korea chose to embrace the presence and guidance of the United States in the late 1940s. In 1948 the United Nations with resolution of 195 of the Third General Assembly recognized the Republic of Korea as the sole legal government of Korea. In 1950 the DPRK invaded the ROK and the Korean War broke out. After three years of war the DPRK and ROK agreed to return to the pre-war status relation status. Throughout the years the ROK went through a number of various government's, totalling six in all. The Sixth Republic of Korea was established in 1988 and is the current form of government ruling South Korea. The ROK and the United States have had a close relationship over the years. There are a number of US military bases within South Korea and both militaries perform regular exercises together. This is one of the many ways that South Korea has allied itself with the west and their ideals.

Russian/Soviet history as it relates to the current situation with North Korea, as stated in the findings, begins to take shape in the waning months of World War II. While allies during the war, leadership in Russia knew that there was going to be conflict with the west. Despite this, Stalin agreed to his initial promise of wartime cooperation. (Stokesbury, 1990). Russia had troops stationed on the 38th parallel for three weeks waiting for American troops to arrive and secure the south. With the ending of the war, the period of cooperation did not continue into peacetime. As time continued, the relationship with the United States, and at that time U.S. occupied Korea, deteriorated until the attack by the North against the South. The Soviet Union,

under orders of Stalin, agreed to train and provide logistical, monetary, and other forms of indirect support, through China, to North Korea. With the eventual ceasefire, closure to the conflict would not come. The Cold War intensified and changed as dynamics shifted with changes in leadership on all sides. A number of incidents strained the relationship and brought both sides to the brink of nuclear war. The placement of nuclear weapons in Turkey and the subsequent placement of nuclear weapons in Cuba was among the largest of such incidents. Others include the downing of a CIA U-2 spy plane, the Vietnam war, and the Soviet-Afghan war.

Sino-Korean relations over the last 70 years, like with most of the regional powers, is not straightforward. For a number of decades there was a regional power struggle between China, Korea, Japan, and colonial powers. To properly frame how China approaches Korean relations there must be understanding of China's history with the other regional powers, most specifically, Japan. The Sino-Japanese War is the kicking off point for a lot of the foreign relation issues that exist between China and Japan. The Empire of Japan committed atrocities on the civilian population of China. It is estimated that 3.9million Chinese were killed between 1937 and 1945 from Japanese operations in China and is almost completely made up of civilians. (Rummel, 1991). The true numbers will never be known as documentation of such crimes was destroyed by Japanese officials after their surrender in 1945. While there has been official apologies for some of such acts, there has been a general lack of recognizing such acts which has not helped soften tensions between Japan and China. It is this history and Japan's history with Korea that cause issues. Both Korea and China have bad blood Japan and by association the United States. This division was exemplified after the Korean War, where the United States, Japan, and UN backed South Korea and China and Russia backed North Korea.

The history of the United States as it relates to its hand in Korea begins with the attack on Pearl Harbor. This incident brought the United States into World War II in both the European theater and the Pacific theater. With Japan's surrender after the war, Korea was released from Japanese control and the United States occupied both Japan and the southern part of Korea, up to the 38th parallel. The conditions under which Japan surrendered took away their right to have a Military. The result is the U.S. providing protection for Japan by having their military stationed in Japan. The approach the United States government took to foreign relations with Japan post-war and their efforts in rebuilding has been a topic of contention between North Korea and the United States. There has been a tremendous amount of animosity between Japan and Korea over the years resulting from Japanese actions and occupation prior to and during the Sino-Japanese War and World War II. This animosity extended holding the United States accountable for letting Japan "off-the-hook" for the war crimes they committed. The United States, with UN support, came to the aid of South Korea in 1950 after the invasion by the DPRK. Post-war, the United States has remained a near-constant military presence in South Korea.

Strategic Importance

North Korea's largest border is with China, at 880 miles. For China, sharing an 880 mile border with an ally that you have tremendous influence over is considerably advantageous. While the relationship between China and the United States has been mutually beneficial as of late, it hasn't always been that way. That does not mean there isn't tensions outside of the economic benefits it affords. While distance doesn't play nearly the role it once did with the advancement of technology, it is still plays a critical role. The United States is no stranger to exerting control and influence over nations and people to expand or protect their interests. It is

understandable that China might be wary of the U.S. attempting to do so closer to their border than they already are. North Korea plays the role of a physical “buffer” to the influence of the United States and the west coming out of South Korea and Japan.

While only a small section of North Korea and Russia are shared, Russia has been extremely vocal about the west expanding their sphere of influence closer and closer to the Russian border. While the collapse of the Soviet Union gave independence and sovereignty to much of its former landmass, many of the countries remained well within Russia’s sphere of influence. Russian leadership has been incredibly vocal about the attempts to bring neighboring countries, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Albania were all part of the Soviet Union’s sphere of influence and joined NATO after its collapse. This provides numerous places of strategic influence on Russia’s doorstep for the west. Korea is very close to crucial ports on the eastern coast of Russia. Vladivostok is Russia’s largest port on the Pacific, making it a target of strategic importance. North Korea is less than 100 miles from Vladivostok, highlighting the importance of keeping North Korea within the Russian/Chinese sphere of influence.

The United States is in a unique situation as their border is an ocean away from Korea and East Asia. Where location becomes important for the United States is with the military bases and the influence and interests they can exert and protect with those assets. Having the ability to stage military infrastructure in other nations provides an artificial extension of their borders. With recent advancements in North Korea’s ability to reliably launch long range missiles, the continental United States is within striking range. This puts the U.S. in a position that it has not been in before. It’s bases and interests have been within striking range but not its territorial border. North Korea is very aware that this bothers the United States and many of its citizens.

Ideology

Ideology is at the heart of the historical divide between North and South Korea. Like the split of East and West Germany, the Korean Peninsula was not only a physical split but an ideological split. Unlike with West and East Germany, Korea did not reunify after the fall of the Berlin Wall/Soviet Union. Ideologies defined the regional powers for decades during the Cold War. Twenty-eight years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, tensions between communist nations and the United States are still in the process of thawing. Ideology still plays a significant role in how the regional powers surrounding Korea approach foreign relations.

As it is with most nations, ideology intertwines itself with deeply with history. China's adoption of communism set it down the path to align itself with Russia/Soviet Union but at odds with the United States. The United States saw both China and the Soviet Union as the hubs from which communism would spread. The fear of communism that was perpetuated in the west helped fuel animosity and conflict with the east. The hold that the United States had on Japan and South Korea during the Cold War was the key to west's plan on on halting the spread of communism.

Ideology is arguably at the heart of the conflict between the Soviet Union/Russia and the west. After World War II the United States was dead set on eradicating the spread of communism at all costs. There are a number of fundamental aspects to how Russia's leadership approaches foreign policy, specifically as it relates to North Korea and East Asia: 1) priority of having China as a geopolitical ally; 2) dismissal of resolving disputes with Japan and disinterest in possible Japanese investment; 3) neutral stance on reunification efforts but retaining loyalty to Pyongyang; 4) distrust of United States and their role in East Asia. (Kolotov, 2008)With Russia

and China being the largest practitioners of communism there was natural tension and conflict. The United States was no stranger to using their military and economic might in attempts to stop the perceived uncontrollable spread of communism. Since the onset of the Cold War, much of the globe was split into two camps...those that side with the United States and those who side with the Soviet Union. With the collapse of the Soviet Union the practice of having to take sides ended in most instances. While the Soviet Union was no more, the ideologies embraced during that period have endured.

Post World War II, Soviet occupied area of Korea adopted communism which helped define the North Korea that is seen today. North Korea is one of the five remaining communist countries in the world. While the other communist countries, such as China, have embraced aspects of capitalism, North Korea has not. How much of that is the result of North Korea or the west is debated. North Koreans do not solely rely on the government food distribution system to survive though. According to Beyond Parallel, a project aimed at gaining insight into North Korean life through defectors, there is significant engagement in market and bartering activity. A poll by the Institute for Peace and Unification Studies at Seoul National University in 2015 shows the upward trend in the use of markets to supplement the lack of food available via the government food distribution program.

YEAR	YES	NO	NO RESPONSE	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS (1)
2011	68.6	27.6	3.8	104
2012	69.3	29.9	0.8	128
2013	74.4	25.6	0	133
2014	69.8	30.2	0	149
2015	76.7	23.3	0	146

The SNU surveys draw upon a pool of North Korean defectors who have arrived in South Korea during the previous year. Source: North Korean Public Perception on Unification 2015(북한주민 통일의식 2015), Institute for Peace and Unification Studies, Seoul National University, 2015, p.110.

This data and defector testimony points to North Korea not being seen internally as a socialist/communist paradise, it is not without internal economic engagement as is commonly believed and portrayed by western media. This shared ideology between the Soviet Union, China, and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was a uniting factor against the attempts of the United States and the west to control the perceived spread of communism throughout the world.

The ideology that has historically driven the United States over the last 70 years is one fueled by anti-communist sentiment. The fear that communism will spread and somehow destroy the American way of life was widespread during the Cold War. This sentiment drove foreign policy and was the main focus behind U.S. occupation of South Korea. Everything devolved into capitalism vs. communism and the U.S. foreign policy at the time in East Asia was no different.

South Korea under the guidance of the United States adopted a democratic form of government and embraced capitalism. This decision allowed them to be recognized as the official government of Korea by the United Nations and put them in a position to economically prosper in the long run while North Korea has struggled with sanctions. Allying with the west

directly tied South Korea to the successes of the United States and the west. This worked to their advantage but South Korea struggled with establishing their form of government, going through six different variations before the current government was established in 1988.

Analysis of Current Peace Talks

This study was started before current peace talks between the DPRK and the ROK began. It is not an analysis of current relations, but relations prior to the peace talks and the factors that have historically lead to issues of coming to peace. This paper will also not serve to analyze what lead to the current peace talks happening now (April 2018) and whether or not they will be successful. It is important to know that attempts at peace have happened before and promise has been shown but no lasting agreement has survived. This is by far the most promising attempt at peace and possible reunification but expectations need to be managed and history not forgotten.

Conclusion

Peace is difficult and can be incredibly elusive. It is talked about by the general public as if it is something that two parties need to agree to undertake. While not exactly false, it is far from being that simple. Factors such as history between nations, location, and conflicting ideologies play an important role in understanding the complexities that face leaders in such situations. In the case of North Korea, there are multiple countries with multiple different histories, ideologies, and interests that drive their own agenda. Media plays a significant role in how the public views and interprets agendas which can lead further difficulties when chasing after peace. Western media often interprets Kim Jong-un and North Korea as the mortal enemy of the United States and freedom, looking to wipe the United States off the map if possible. The

reality is that North Korea's primary goal above everything else is regime survival. Nuclear weapons and threats towards the west is, in their opinion, is the most effective way obtaining that goal.

In practicality it is not just North Korea and South Korea that have to agree to come together. China and Russia have tremendous influence over North Korea and the direction that it takes. The same goes for the United States having influence over South Korea. Decades of history filled with death, aggressive rhetoric, and ideological hatred have stood in the way of peace for years. These things take time to resolve and that time may be coming soon. Whether North Korea will back out once concessions are made is yet to be seen but when they want to come to the bargaining table it is not something that can, or should, be taken lightly.

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