

“Unravelling Disunity”: Analysing Global Security Implications after DPRK’s Rescind of Korean Reunification Policy

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1. Abstract

Since the establishment of Democratic Republic of Korea in 1945, under the leadership of the infamous Kim Il-Sung, the North Korean administration's stance on the question of Korea has been leaning towards 'liberating' their South Korean counterparts from the 'tyranny of the West', espousing a Korean reunification led by DPRK. However, with the symbolic destruction of the 'Arch of Reunification' in Pyongyang and harsh words spoken in North Korea's parliament, Kim Jong-Un has officially rescinded the long-standing goal, calling South Korea a 'hostile country' and a 'belligerent'.

Through this paper, we aim to analyse the security implications of this reversal of foreign policy, taking into consideration the nuclear capacity and strength of North Korean armed forces. We will analyse the policy responses and stances of stakeholders in the scenario, such as South Korea, Russia, China, the United States, etc., as well as consider India's stance on the same. Finally, through a policy alternative analysis, we will attempt to create an ideal Indian response for the same.

Keywords: security, North Korea, nuclear weapons, reunification, foreign policy.

2. Introduction

Korean Reunification, or North-South Reunification, is an active policy historically pursued by the Democratic Republic of Korea (or, North Korea) for the status of the Korean peninsula. The South Koreans have been open to the idea too, but their perspective on the reunification surrounding introducing ideals of democracy, capitalism and other Western concepts which are vehemently denied by their North Korean counterparts. Their policies suggest an active interest in promoting and creating a unified state of all Korean people under the umbrella rule of the North Korean lineage of leaders, Kim Jong-Un being the latest in line.

It is with him that the pursuit of reunification has taken an interesting and divergent route, creating an interesting fork in the road that seems to have major geopolitical and security implications for Asia as well as for the world. Kim Jong-Un's recent statements and the destruction of the 'Arch of Reunification' most definitely usher in an era of policy change. The problem we aim to tackle is threefold: to make rational sense of the decision-making and analyse the purpose of such a decision, to study the international stance and potential reactions, and most importantly, to understand India's position in this case. We must also contextualise these stakeholder decisions and positions by taking into account historic relations with the core states, and the conditions forming the Demilitarised Zone (DMZ). Finally, we will consider the implications of modern globalisation on the economic and military connections made by the Korean states, and what role that plays in the manifestation of this policy.

Thus, this paper tackles the policy design perspective from the North Korean side, while also considering the potential design of Indian foreign policy. Finally, this paper aims to propose certain recommendations. However, to avoid becoming a policy brief, the policies proposed will be purely theoretical and rational.

3. Literature Review

The scarcity of scholarly discourse on the matter is unfortunately obvious. With a situation as recent as the one currently engaging the region, it is understandable that the academic industry, characterized by rigorous research methodologies and peer-reviewed analysis, is yet to acknowledge its complexities. For the sake of this paper, the available literature primarily comprises news media reports, supplemented by occasional opinion pieces and hastily composed analyses. Scholars and researchers must turn to alternative sources—namely, reputable news outlets like the Financial Times and the New York Times—to gain insights into the unfolding events.

Scholars are facing the challenge of identifying and utilising information from often politically influenced sources while maintaining academic integrity. By reconfirming information from multiple sources and creating our analysis on it, scholars can contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the situation in North Korea, even in the absence of traditional literature. Unfortunately, in this case, we act as ‘first responders’ in the academic community and thus, need to continue our investigations based on the aforementioned methods.

An area where previous scholarly literature does benefit our research is an analysis of the North Korean capacities. The objective of these studies is to shed light on the intricacies of North Korea’s military prowess, offering insights into its strategic objectives and the challenges it poses to regional and global security. For this, we will mainly refer to two credible and publicly available articles, due to misreporting and unfair/underestimation quite common in governmental sources, which are rife with disputed and contradictory statistics and analysis.

The first article, published by the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) as a backgrounder, provides a comprehensive overview of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, missile tests, and military capabilities. It highlights North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons as a means to ensure regime survival, deter external threats, and bolster its status on the international stage. The article understands North Korea’s pursuit of nuclear weapons despite international condemnation and sanctions, citing its numerous missile tests and advancements in nuclear technology.

Additionally, the article outlines North Korea’s military capabilities beyond its nuclear arsenal, including its large standing army, ballistic missile arsenal, and unconventional warfare capabilities. It emphasizes the threat posed by North Korea’s ballistic missiles, which have demonstrated the ability to reach targets in the region and potentially even the continental United States. Furthermore, the article discusses North Korea’s asymmetric capabilities, such as cyber warfare and special operations forces, which pose challenges to its adversaries.

The second source, a journal publication penned by Tae-Hwan Kwak, also delves into the historical and strategic context behind North Korea's military posture. It explores North Korea's militarized state ideology, known as "military-first politics," which prioritizes the military over other sectors of society.

Moreover, Kwak analyzes North Korea's military strategy of "self-reliance" (Juche), which emphasizes indigenous development of military capabilities and resilience in the face of external threats. He discusses how North Korea's isolation, coupled with its adversarial relationship with South Korea and the United States, has driven its military-centric approach to national security.

From insights from both articles, it is evident that North Korea possesses a formidable military arsenal, including nuclear weapons, ballistic missiles, and conventional forces. Its pursuit of nuclear weapons and robust military capabilities reflect its strategic imperatives of regime survival, deterrence, and regional influence. However, North Korea's militarized state ideology, coupled with its confrontational stance and disregard for international norms, poses significant challenges to regional stability and global security.

4. Across the Peninsula: A Brief History of the Korean Peninsula and Reunification Policy

Throughout history, the Korean Peninsula has been characterized by its division into North and South Korea following the end of World War II in 1945. This partition resulted from the agreements made between the Soviet Union and the United States, which controlled the northern and southern halves of the peninsula respectively. The Korean War (1950-1953) solidified this division, leaving the two Koreas in a state of animosity, separated by one of the most heavily fortified borders in the world, the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ).

In the aftermath of the Korean War, both North and South Korea pursued different paths in terms of political ideology and economic development. North Korea adopted a communist system under the leadership of Kim Il-sung, while South Korea embraced capitalism and democracy. This ideological difference, combined with geopolitical tensions between the Soviet Union and the United States during the Cold War, made the prospect of reunification a complex and contentious issue.

Despite periodic attempts at dialogue and reconciliation, progress toward reunification remained less than fruitful for decades due to clear ideological differences and geopolitical considerations. Both sides maintained a contrasting vision for the future of the peninsula, with North Korea advocating for a socialist reunification under its leadership, while South Korea pursued a democratic and capitalist model.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century and into the 21st century, various efforts were made to foster inter-Korean dialogue and cooperation. One notable initiative was the "Sunshine Policy" introduced by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung in the late 1990s. This policy aimed to

engage North Korea through economic cooperation and cultural exchanges, with the hope of building trust and laying the groundwork for eventual reunification. However, the Sunshine Policy ultimately failed to achieve its primary objective of bringing about lasting peace and reunification. This was followed by periods of heightened tensions exacerbated by North Korea's nuclear ambitions and provocative actions such as missile tests. These developments further complicated the prospects for reunification, as they reinforced mistrust and deepened divisions between the two Koreas and their allies.

However, the election of South Korean President Moon Jae-in in 2017 brought renewed emphasis on engagement with North Korea, culminating in historic summits between Moon and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un in 2018. These summits, along with the unprecedented meeting between Kim Jong-un and US President Donald Trump in Singapore, raised hopes for a potential breakthrough in inter-Korean relations and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

Despite these positive developments, the road to reunification remains riddled with obstacles. The deep-rooted mistrust between North and South Korea continues to pose significant challenges to the materialisation of a unified Korean Peninsula. This is further exacerbated by the recent developments in North Korea, bringing the possibility of reunification near to an end.

5. Contextualising Rescinding Policy

Now, the recent updates surrounding reunification come as a provocative set of actions and policies that Supreme Leader Kim Jong-Un has pursued recently.

The tensions were ignited with an inflammatory statement made by Kim Jong Un in the North Korean Parliament in January, which has effectively served as a rubber stamp in the governance of the state, serving the demands of the Supreme Leader. Kim Jong-Un officially declared North and South Korea to have deteriorated their foreign policy towards one another, especially terming their relationship as a “relationship of two hostile countries, a complete relationship of two belligerents amid war”.

Furthermore, to further accentuate and clarify his policy on the matter at hand, he claimed the ‘Arch of Reunification’ to be an eyesore. The Arch of Reunification, a symbolic monument in Pyongyang, North Korea, met its demise soon after. Erected in August 2001 to commemorate the reunification proposal set forth by Kim Il Sung of North Korea, the arch stood as a testament to the aspirations for unity on the Korean Peninsula. Its large concrete structure adorned the multi-laned Reunification Highway in North Korea, connecting the DMZ to the bustling city of Pyongyang. The monument had appeared in postage stamps approved by both Il Sung and Jong Un.

Tensions further intensified when active propaganda machines run by the state which targeted South Korean audiences were called off, pro-unification organisations were effectively banned and

disbanded, and state departments and private-public entities promoting inter-Korean tourism were essentially defunded out of existence.

We need to rationalise this decision since it is a result of years of policy failures as well as an indicator of what is to come in the future. An important factor leading to the scrapping of the historic policy is Kim Jong Un's gradual but certain disillusionment with his Western counterparts, especially after the failure of the US-North Korean summit during the presidency of the controversial President Donald Trump. This was further exacerbated by the failure of agreement with the leftist South Korean governance. This forcing policy has been timed to perfection, with US Presidential Elections looming large, China rising in influence in Asia and beyond with the recent successes of the BRI, and Russia holding strong in Eurasia even with the Ukraine crisis. Within these alliances, North Korea derives legitimacy of power from its allies and also takes away international attention from them. Thus, it is possible to argue that the North Korean policy of souring inter-Korean relations was, in fact, a matter of bringing attention away from the Ukraine crisis, or that it used the rising influence of China to force the question of Korean sovereignty into the international zeitgeist while also forcing a move from the new President of the United States after the elections.

Keeping these considerations in mind, we take into account what this policy indicates. Experts believe that the policy indicates an eventual ideological ground for a war being set by Jong Un. This is rationalizable due to their militaristic policies, as well as recent flare-ups in long-standing crises of sovereignty. Furthermore, a war between the Koreas may lead to active participation from the West and the allies of North Korea due to the apparent difference in the military power between South and North Korea. Eventually, experts fear a major shift in global order or a shift in the politics pursued by the West on the question of North Korea. It is equally possible that the new President of the United States could very well choose to collaborate with North Korea on this question in an attempt to appease and maintain peace in a foreign land where they cannot afford to either fight a war (proxy or directly), or to lose an important ally (i.e. South Korea).

In conclusion, veteran US diplomat Robert Carlin has aptly and succinctly described what all the experts have quoted and are fearing: "Like his grandfather in 1950, Kim Jong Un has made a strategic decision to go to war".

We must also contextualise the policy to internal political and humanitarian conditions in North Korea. The first thing to consider is the dominance of the elite over the "inferior" North Korean citizens, and their plans to establish control over all Korean people. The North Korean elite can demand and derive resources from their country, while their people suffer a food shortage, high political and social repression with restricted freedoms, and a huge population of unsatisfied people aiming to leave the country. This adds to the refugee crisis that the authorities from North Korea are dealing with. Many North Korean refugees use the lines of trade and communication set between the two Korean states as a safe route to escaping the country, while many others find refuge in South Korea. These people often turn to whistleblowers against the North Korean regime, revealing horrific facts about the conditions of the people in the area. With lofty political

ambitions dominating the narrative, we must consider the constructivist position of society and how it impacts foreign policy. The safety of North Korean refugees is under heavy threat due to the rescission of the reunification policy.

6. Russo-Sino-Korean Nexus

With this in mind, we must also consider the political backing and legitimacy North Korea enjoys in its endeavors. The geopolitical conditions in Eurasia as well as in South Asia prove to be beneficial for the North Korean administration since Russian and Chinese officials feel comfortable in openly declaring their support for the state. The first, and most basic, argument for this is the erosion of the unipolar world with the rise of the Global South, led by China and backed by Russia. This Russo-Sino nexus has effectively countered the American hegemonic powers, thus ensuring that the political ambitions of these states can manifest in ways that openly and directly counter the US without risking violence or sanctions against them. By embedding themselves deeply within the global trade system, the Chinese diplomats and officials become increasingly unaffected by American sentiments, thus allowing for these open declarations of support for a rogue state to happen legitimately. American recognition of Chinese economic power and military stronghold over important choke points across the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), mainly the Straits of Malacca, reinforce these ideas and make these declarations digestible for the international community. This adds another layer of complexity to the erosion of the policy since powerful backing ensures that our previous study of the North Korean military might be rendered useless due to the presence of Russian or Chinese assets in North Korea in times of need.

Russo-Korean diplomatic ties have been hastened in recent times. This change is attributed to the ongoing Ukraine crisis, where the war has gone on for almost two years and has created a military and diplomatic deadlock between the West and Russia. For Russia, as a country that is an outcast in world politics and yet a nuclear power, North Korea is a useful neighbor to cultivate. For North Korea, trade sanctions on Russia from the West divert their high-quality exports into DPRK at a cheaper rate, thus aiding in reducing their own internal food and energy crises, while building military capacities and allowing for their state to focus purely on their land recuperation strategy. This is a huge factor in the timing of the policy, since North Korea has faced crippling shortages and internal crises for a long period but has been given some respite after Russian ties have improved.

To conclude, Russia's Ambassador to North Korea, Alexander Matsegora, anticipates 2024 to be a breakthrough year for the two countries' military and geopolitical ties, thus indicating some amount of followthrough on this policy rescission induced by the deepening ties.

Having said this, let us truly consider the possibility of an armed offensive strategy from the North Korean government. Within this realm of absurdity, South Korea would not be left defenseless against the North Korean military alliance, which itself may not materialise. Firstly, the US and the West have fostered ties with South Korea as a buffer state in the radicalised Asian area, countering

China and North Korea through their strategic position. South Korea has also built global trade dependencies by offering high-quality technological products, solutions, and services that are invaluable to the global economy.

Furthermore, Russia and China both hold considerable amounts of bilateral trade ties with South Korea. South Korea has exported goods and services worth around 150 billion USD to China, and around 6.33 billion USD to Russia, as reported by OEC World. This shows that the overarching globalised economics at play here will prove to be a major hindrance to North Korean ambitions and support. Jong Un requires Russian and Chinese support for the global legitimisation of their cause and to effectively counter the global support South Korea can garner. Unfortunately for him, his main sources of support are heavily entrenched in the global trade nexus that South Korea has cultivated over the years.

7. Indian Position

Before we begin understanding the Indian position on the question of Korean Reunification, we must first consider what has been India's stance when it comes to both South and North Korea.

India's foreign policy towards the Korean Peninsula, specifically South Korea and North Korea, has evolved significantly since its independence in 1947. Initially, India maintained a relatively neutral stance, striving for non-alignment and diplomacy in its engagement with both Korean states. However, over time, India's relations with South Korea grew stronger, while its engagement with North Korea remained limited due to various geopolitical factors.

In the early years following independence, India's focus was primarily on consolidating its sovereignty and promoting economic development. As such, its engagement with the Korean Peninsula was limited, and it largely refrained from taking sides in the ideological rivalry between the two Koreas.

i) India's Budding Relationship with South Korea

India's relationship with South Korea began to gain momentum in the 1970s, driven by economic interests and a shared commitment to democracy and development. Bilateral trade and investment between India and South Korea increased, and cultural exchanges flourished, contributing to the strengthening of ties between the two countries.

Throughout the latter half of the 20th century and into the early 21st century, India's foreign policy towards the Korean Peninsula continued to evolve in response to changing geopolitical dynamics. India's growing economic ties with South Korea led to enhanced cooperation in various sectors, including trade, technology, and defense.

In recent years, India's foreign policy towards the Korean Peninsula has been characterized by a pragmatic approach, seeking to balance its strategic interests with regional stability and global concerns. As South Korea emerged as a major economic and technological powerhouse, India deepened its cooperation with Seoul across various domains, including trade, investment, and defense.

The trade between the two democratic states has seen a steady and steep increase, with Indian materials providing a vital base for South Korean production while South Korea imported microchips giving a strong alternative for India to the rising dependencies on Taiwan and other states. Tourism and transportation services formed the core of their two-decade history of services trade. In 2022, India exported almost 8.2 billion USD worth of goods to South Korea, led by refined petroleum, raw aluminum, and raw lead. In contrast, South Korea exported almost 20.6 billion USD worth of goods to India, led by integrated circuits trade and special purpose ships.

Thus, the trade balance between the two countries heavily favors the South Koreans and builds an important layer of dependency on the Indian economy.

ii) India's Deteriorating Relationship with North Korea

In contrast, North Korea's provocative actions, including nuclear tests and missile launches, strained its relations with India and the international community. While India remained committed to diplomatic engagement and dialogue, it also supported measures aimed at addressing North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities through multilateral forums such as the United Nations.

India's engagement with North Korea remained relatively low-key, primarily due to their isolationist policies, human rights concerns, and its nuclear ambitions. India maintained a cautious approach towards North Korea, balancing its desire for peace and stability in the region with its commitments to international norms and non-proliferation efforts. Meanwhile, India continued to engage with North Korea on select issues, such as humanitarian assistance and regional security, while maintaining pressure on Pyongyang to abide by international norms and commitments.

This is quite visible in the foreign trade between the two countries. The exports to North Korea from India have decreased at an annual rate of 9.87%, falling from 28.7 million USD to just over 1.7 million USD. Furthermore, exports from North Korea to India have fallen even further at an annualised rate of 11.2%, from 36.8 million USD to an abysmal 1.47 million USD. This shows the general trend in confidence that Indian traders and thus, the country's administration, have in the North Korean administration. Indian citizens do not trust the economic and political stability of the state and are, thus, unwilling to trade with their North Korean counterparts.

However, the shifts in the global world order could be enough to influence India's threat perception balancing between the two states. With the China-Russia nexus supporting North Korea, while the US balancing its power as other states oblige to bandwagon with the West, India finds itself in an uncomfortable position.

iii) India's Stance

As a state, we have deep relations with both sides of the coin, fostering a positive relationship with both the US and Russia over time. Due to our proximity to China, and the regional militaristic and economic threat we face from them, it is in our best interests to align our policies with our Chinese counterparts. However, doing so would effectively isolate us from the West, a policy that we cannot consider because of our trade dependencies on states like the US and those aligned with the US.

Here, we must consider India's internal situation and policies as well. This can be broken into two parts: the recent history of Indian foreign policy (i.e. under the Modi administration) as well as the

importance of the upcoming General Elections and what that could hold for the country's foreign policy.

The Modi government has navigated a balanced foreign policy, maintaining relations with key players like the US, Russia, and China. By forging strategic partnerships with the US, while also sustaining longstanding ties with Russia through defense and energy cooperation, we have demonstrated our diplomatic finesse, exemplified by the Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar. India has also engaged constructively with China, fostering economic collaboration while addressing border disputes diplomatically and reducing our trade dependencies. This nuanced approach proves India's commitment to safeguard our national interests and promote regional stability amidst complex geopolitical dynamics.

Luckily, the foreign policy considerations of the leading parties standing for elections in 2024 seem to be quite similar to each other, with similar balanced policies followed historically, with exceptions made for wartime or economic crises. Thus, it is fair to say that the policies that could be potentially followed by the two administrations on the Korean question will not be too dissimilar.

8. Recommendations

As previously mentioned, the policy recommendations are to be theoretical and hypothetical for the sake of maintaining the integrity of our reported findings. The main policy recommendation we can give from our findings is to remain aloof yet aware, which MEA S. Jaishankar has exemplified.

1. Aloof, Neutral yet Involved: It is in our best interest to mediate between North and South Korea, effectively mediating between Russia and the West. We will not only be able to cement our position as a leader of states in Asian matters but also balance our interests and powers between states dissimilar to each other in their policy and ideology. We must remain "neutrally involved", that is, neutral but involved in de-escalation processes. This also safeguards us from the militaristic implications of the potential North-South Korean war, with no obligations on us to support any state militarily. Taking a side in the matter seems to be out of order for the overarching goal of Indian development, considering the geopolitical realities of the contemporary world.
2. Effectivity of Negotiating: However, we must soften our perspective on North Korea to ensure that our ever-improving ties with South Korea are not perceived as threats to the North Korean claims. This builds a closer relationship and a sense of adequate familiarity with the North Korean regime, important for our goal to serve as mediators between the two countries and, consequently, the two factions dividing the world. Thus, we need to hold more diplomatic missions to improve our ties with the North Korean administration, and potentially provide them support in their internal troubles of food and energy in association with the Russians.

3. Tackling the Trump Question: With this, we can also offer a neutral mediatory option between the West and the North Korean government. There are no North Korean sympathisers in any positions of power in the Western powers, except former President and presidential candidate Mr. Donald Trump. If Trump is elected, India will build a more positive and pragmatic relationship with the US through our peacemaking mediation efforts with North Korea. If Trump is not elected, India will serve as an effective vessel of information transportation between the West and North Korea, attempting to clarify the often-cryptic North Korean decision-making to the global audience. Thus, no matter what the resolution to the Trump question is, we will make sure to hold a positive relationship with the West.

4. Expanding intelligence and information: We must maintain a comprehensive understanding and monitoring systems of North Korean proliferation efforts and diplomatic decision-making through back-channel communications as well as foreign sources. The policy of reunification was rescinded under claims of South Korean aggression, thus indicating that the North Koreans aimed to counter the supposed aggression shown by the South Koreans. This inevitably leads to armed proliferation, thus requiring the aforementioned policy recommendation. We must use the international intelligence alliances we find ourselves to be a part of, especially the Quad, in an attempt to reinforce our intelligence as well as build a security net against aggression in the South Asian region.

5. Track II Diplomatic Approach: Beyond these 'hard' power measures, we must consider soft power measures contributing to peacebuilding. A main factor of this is promoting Track-II diplomacy initiatives between the Koreas as well as between India and North Korea. Track II diplomacy refers to informal, unofficial, and often discreet diplomatic efforts undertaken by non-governmental actors to facilitate dialogue and conflict resolution between parties involved in a dispute or conflict. Unlike Track I diplomacy, which involves formal negotiations conducted by official government representatives, Track II diplomacy operates outside of government channels and is not bound by official mandates or constraints.

6. Using Sports as Diplomacy: Another unconventional method of confidence-building measure between North and South Korea is to use India's vast resources in sports and build support and connections between the two Korean countries through this. Promoting an active sporting culture between the two countries by hosting national teams from South and North Korea of different sports in Indian facilities, which serve as a neutral ground for both, would be a great way to use sports diplomacy to ensure peace-making as well as promote Indian sports with interactions with Korean athletes and global exposure on Indian facilities. Furthermore, such interactions can help in making local sympathisers in both states, potentially building a bond of familiarity and eventually, friendship.

9. Conclusion

The situation, as of right now, is not actively belligerent in its scope. Both states have made accusatory statements in their internal administrations and have shown aggression towards the other historically, but the current geopolitical scenario of the world has evolved past 'hard' power conflicts and wars. Due to the complex interconnectedness of the world, it is incredibly naive to imagine any level of international support to the North Koreans in their supposed 'battle of humanity' against the South Koreans. Thus, for the scope of this issue, we can rule out armed conflicts and look at diplomatic instability.

Through this paper, however, we can see that there is an evident need for active de-escalation between the two states. The policy is strategic, but it does prove to be potentially militaristic if unaddressed. However, for India, this question proves to be yet another ground for them to prove their aggressive global neutrality which has become the norm for Indian foreign policy experts to promote in recent times, staying out of the situation and mediating between the active stakeholders. In conclusion, this year will prove to be an interesting period for the Korean peninsula and might see historic changes.

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