



Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Matters Arising

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Abstract

The study examines the prospect and challenges of the reunification of the Korean Peninsula. Before the last fifty years, the Korean Peninsula was recognized as a unified and autonomous city whose citizens have enjoyed decades of historical and economic ties until foreign influence now divided them along ideological leaning. The ideological rivalry between the United State and the Former Soviet have played a significant role in entrenching the division. The paper attempt a SWOT examination of the possibilities of the reunification and how this can be attained with minimal effort from both of the divide. Data were gathered mainly from secondary sources and a conflict approach/variant of the regional integration theory was adopted to underpin the study. Findings indicate that foreign influence have been the major factor in creating and sustaining the division between the North and South, and that the economic sanction on the North Korea if not lifted by the US can mar the reunification efforts. Considering the development and market integration experiences by other South East Asian countries like Singapore, China Malaysia and Taiwan, there is hope that former Korean Peninsula will achieve total reunification and economic integration. The study recommends amongst others the need for US and China to reduce its overbearing influence in the region and allow both government (North & South) to take their destinies into their hands.

Key words: Korean Peninsula, Reunification

Introduction

Korea, or the Korean Peninsula, is a region in East Asia. Since 1945 it has been divided into the two parts which soon became the two sovereign states: North Korea (officially the Democratic People's Republic of Korea) and South Korea (officially the Republic of Korea). Korea consists of the Korean Peninsula, Jeju Island, and several minor islands near the peninsula. It is bordered by China to the northwest and Russia to the northeast. It is separated from Japan to the

east by the Korea Strait and the Sea of Japan.

The common saying that no nation can exist/operate economic autarky is a common place in that interdependency becomes inevitable if nations must respond to the globalism and take advantages inherent in it. The needs for interdependency have become imperative as it is the surest way for nations to catch up with the technologically advanced nations especially in the areas of real development. This interdependency could cut across economic, security, health and socio-

cultural (Van Ginkel & Vanlangenhove, 2003).

The fall of the Berlin wall and subsequent disintegration of the former Soviet Union have proven the fact that no single politico-economic principle is capable of providing a nation with the requisite of development. In other words, neither capitalism nor socialism is strictly sufficient to answer the development requirement of a nation. Each of these principles has its inherent contradictions, it takes courageous leaders to identify the salient attributes of both and domesticate them by putting into cognizance the historical realities and developmental needs of their respective countries.

More so, the Hiroshima and Nagasaki bombing is still fresh in the memories of leaders and the few who witnessed it. The fallout of this crisis have left an indelible mark in world history not because of the lethality of the weapons used but the attendant humanitarian crisis it brought to the fore. Perhaps, the consequences of WW II was what necessitated nations to sign non-aggressive pacts and the discouragement of the use of lethal weapons no matter the provocation.

Literature Review

During the Yi dynasty, the Korean Peninsula practiced Confucianism and this have lasted for centuries until Christian evangelism led by the United State Missionaries. The wake of the end of World War II and the subsequent emergence of unipolar global order made US to assume the position of global hegemon. The cold war period marked the beginning of non-violent hostilities between US and Russia

occasioned by ideological rivalry and the quest by both countries to acquire allies. While US is promoting capitalism and democracy, Russia promoted socialism and communism.

Youngseop (2021) took a cursory examination of the role of the Bible in the divided Korean Peninsula where imperialism and American churches play a vital role in complicating the relationship between the two regions. He looked at the relationship between the church and the state (especially American churches) and how this have impacted on the relations between the two hitherto unified communities. This entails that the American churches were not left behind in the campaign for allies. By implication,, churches in the Peninsula (south) that yielded to the call by American Churches are likely those to be supported and promoted.

Dalton (2020) considered the need for the Korean Peninsula to transcend politics of deterrence and attained cooperative security where he submits that the North Korea should necessarily abandon its nuclear proliferation program in the interest of peace regime and denuclearization which still constitute a major challenge to US-DPKR negotiators. The fear of Kim Jong-un is the fact that playing in to the hands of the US by accepting to suspend its nuclear programme may likely lead to an internal uprising that will inspire a regime change. And for the DPKR, its nuclear program is the only way out because no nation will contemplate any form of aggressive behavior towards it. It further suggest that the US have exhausted all tactics and maneuvers to compel the DPKR

to sheathe its sword by embracing denuclearization and peaceful regime in the Peninsula.

Skylar (2018) argued on the possibility of Chinese army assisting the US in securing the DPRK nuclear arsenal should crisis broke out between the North and South Korea. What this portends to the effort of denuclearization and peaceful regime in the Peninsular is that US can be disparate in its campaign to cooperate or sign a pact with China to force a regime change in the DPRK and by extension, halt the nuclear proliferation in the region.

It is instructive to note at this juncture that the US must learn from it experiences in Afghanistan, Iraq and recently Libya. The world had suffered enough of this kind of desperation to acquire resources and control through domination and use of gun barrel to subdue innocent and peace seeking people. The action of the US is a recipe for chaos and lawlessness in the region which will push human kind to extinction.

It is obvious that extant literatures on the subject matter have portrayed the DPRK as a deviant nation that must be halted by any means. Forgetting that God created man and made him free. North Korea decided to take its destiny into it hands and beside, the united nation charter holds that all nation must be allowed to decide the nature of political system it deem fit to practice and in no circumstance should a relatively bigger nation lord it over the weaker ones.

Theoretical Framework

There are numerous theories that can be used to underpin studies of this nature.

However, out of these theories, the conflict variant of regional integration theories is selected to underpin the study. The conflict approach to regional integration was popularized by Haas (1971) when he claimed that the major aim of regional integration is acquire new techniques for resolving conflict among the integrating partners. In the process, there is need to calm down national pride, rights and sovereignty to achieve this goal. In the process of acquiring these new techniques, according to Haas (1971), nation-state need to “mingle merge and mix with their neighbors” voluntarily to finding a common ground to put a stop to hostilities. It is notable from the above arguments that, the purpose of regional integration is to end year or decades of hostilities by nations and states coming together. This can also be exemplified in the ‘Paris Peace Conference’ or what is popularly called the Versailles Treaty of 1919, which brought the First World War to an end (Ghali and Nwokedi, 2016). This was meant to serve as a vital step in European integration, but the Paris Peace Conference severely punished Germany and the Germans felt greatly wounded.

To link the theoretical framework with the topic under review thus; both the North and South were formerly under the Korean Peninsula until 1948 when they were divided. Today, their relationship is hall marked by hostilities, tension and suspicion. The conflict approach holds that voluntary interaction and lowering of national pride and sovereignty will herald a new dawn of integration between the North and South without necessarily infringing/intruding on each other’s

political and economic leaning. To this end, leaders of both nations should transcend the current hostilities and work on a common ground that will allow free flow of goods and people across the divide to foster cooperation, peace and integration.

The Reunification of the Korean Peninsula: Prospects and Challenges.

The reunification of the Korean Peninsula have over the years preoccupied the mind of scholars and analyst especially on the need to have a common ground for both countries (North & South) to relate and mingle in order to foster regional integration/unification. One of the prospects of the reunification of the Korean Peninsula is that both countries have attained a high level technologies that could be transformed into producing high tech machines and equipment that would make work easy and contribute to the GDP of both countries. The nuclear technologies for instance can be redirected into the production of stable and high voltage electricity to power industries and other sub-sectors of the economies of both countries. This will allow for the massive production of goods and services for local and international consumption. Also, space exploration is another important area which if properly explored will help mitigate the challenge posed by climate change through early warning signals and adequate budgetary plans to arrest any catastrophe by both governments.

The North and South Korea have over the year's attained reputation in the production and marketing of computer soft and hardware. The reunification of both countries will not only make the region a hub of economic activities, it will further boost

their confidence on the need to integrate in the interest of peace and stability. To this end, arms race and stockpiling of weapons will no longer gain currency and shall be replaced with vigorous economic activities for the mutual benefits of the reuniting/reintegrating partners.

Nuclear technologies could be used in creating sophisticated medical instruments that could help medical diagnosis and identification of ailment treatment. The attainment of the above will make the region most sought after in the treatment of both tropical and contemporary medical conditions around the world. Agriculture is also not left out as many agricultural workers around the world used radiation to stop the reproduction of insect that hamper the growth and development of crops leading to bumper harvest for food security.

Challenges

Dalton (2020) identified a number of "vexing" issues that needs urgent solution for the reunification to be attained.

1. The role of Joint US- South Korea's stationed in Republic of Korea (ROK)
2. The status of US extended deterrence to South Korea and Japan.
3. Disposition of the Democratic People's Republic (DPKR) suspected chemical and biological weapons and ballistic missiles inventory.
4. Other North Korean behavior that contravenes international norm and standard.

The US joint mission in South Korea is not only seen as a threat to the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, it further heightens tension and the possibilities of the use of lethal weapons in the event of any escalation of crisis. This singular act of the US stationing a military mission in South Korea made pundits and scholars believe that it is a preparatory military strategy to respond to any eventuality in the region. The US has in its interest of expanding its geo-political stronghold extended its deterrence from South Korea to Japan with a view of gathering intelligence to demonstrate its might.

The dispositions of the DPRK especially in its uranium nuclear enrichment programs coupled with other behaviors like testing the lethality of missiles and refusal to cooperate with the UN atomic nuclear experts to respond to calls for denuclearization have created a huge vacuum with the resultant effect of refusal by the DPRK leaders to take heed. The irony of the whole matter is the fact that the US is trying to use its influences to prevail on the UN to compel the DPRK to suspend its nuclear program. The question that should preoccupy a discernible mind is; Does the US who often times boasts of its weapons stockpile have a moral stand to insist that other nations must be prevented from acquiring one?

In June 2018, tensions between the United States and North Korea were at least temporarily ameliorated when Trump and Kim held a summit meeting in Singapore. The summit raised hopes that the United States and North Korea would avoid steps that could lead to war and that the North Korean nuclear threat would be resolved

through further negotiations. This entails that the age-long hostilities will soon come to an end and peace will be returned to the Peninsula. The two leaders seemed to establish a personal rapport. They also signed a joint statement that committed North Korea to “work toward complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” and pledged joint efforts to “build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula (Skylar, 2018).

In the aftermath of the Trump-Kim summit, however, North Korea's actions raised doubts about its willingness to eliminate its nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. Although North Korea apparently had demolished its nuclear test site in May 2018 and began dismantling a missile-engine test site in July 2018, reports from the U.S. intelligence community and independent observers suggested that Pyongyang was continuing to build intercontinental ballistic missiles and was preparing to conceal its nuclear assets and activities (Dalton, 2020).

Moreover, the post-summit diplomatic interactions between the United States and North Korea suggested that even if there were progress toward the elimination of North Korea's nuclear weapons, it might be far less rapid and complete than the United States had hoped. After former U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo held two days of reportedly fruitless talks in Pyongyang in July 2018, North Korea denounced the United States for making a “unilateral and gangster-like demand for denuclearization. In August 2018, the North Korean foreign minister privately accused the United States of retreating from the agreement that had been reached at the Trump-Kim summit.

The uncertain progress of U.S -North Korean negotiations and disturbing signs of activity from North Korea's nuclear complex suggest that Pyongyang has no plans to give up its nuclear arsenal. Even if the United States and North Korea agree to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula, North Korea may surreptitiously violate the agreement or renege on its commitments. The United States may contemplate military force to disarm North Korea or to take control of North Korea's nuclear arsenal if the Kim regime collapses or the Korean Peninsula otherwise plunges into chaos. In any of these scenarios, China is likely to play a critical role. As a neighbor of North Korea, China has the most at stake and the greatest capability to intervene. This paper considers what China might do in various scenarios involving conflict, chaos, and nuclear weapons in North Korea and how the United States and China might act to further their shared interests.

North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and delivery systems has been a thorn in the side of U.S -China relations for more than two decades. U.S. policymakers and experts agree-halting North Korea's nuclear and missile program is the top priority for the U.S.-China bilateral relationship. On the other hand, the DPKR sees pursuing its nuclear program is also a matter of priority and there is no amount of pressure that will make it dismantle its nuclear arsenals.

Economic Sanction as a Tool to Frustrate the Reunification Agenda

The current economic sanctions by US on the DPKR have long outlived its relevance because despite the sanctions, the DPKR have continued to relate with other parts of the world and refused to backtrack on its

quest for uranium nuclear enrichment. The paper argued that the US must as a matter of urgency rescind from its gimmicks and allow the leaders of both North and South Korea to relate, mix merge to foster integration and the spirit of oneness.

From the realist point of view, the economic sanctions place on North Korea have make the DPKR more stronger and persevering in that they were able to survive the sanctions through discipline and self-reliance. The spirit of discipline and focus as enshrined in the Juche Philosophy ensures that the people must take their destinies into their hands by attaining full pledge political independence, economic sovereignty and military self-reliance.

The US and other allies must learn to respect the sanctity of nations and desist from unnecessary interference in country's domestic affairs. The decision for reunification should be entirely left in the hands of the leaders who must as a matter of commitment, lower their national sovereignty, right and pride in favor of a robust economic, socio-cultural benefit. Both leaders should see the reunification agenda as a brilliant opportunity to deepen trust and interdependency in the peninsula by refusing to yield to US divisionary ploy to make peace difficult in the region.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The division of the Korean Peninsula for the past three and half decades have witness the skepticism, fear, tension and uncertainties in the region. This was fuelled by the western interest particularly the US and its allies. On the other hand, the DPKR have spent huge sum in its nuclear enrichment with less regards to the implication of

housing this WMD within its shores. The budget use for the creation and sustaining these WMD could be rechanneled into other sectors that will have a far-reaching impact on the citizens. The paper is not oblivious of the chaotic nature of the international politics and how the supposedly big nations exact influences on weaker nation, the Korean peninsula needs to catch up with its neighbors like Singapore, China, Malaysia and Taiwan in terms of real development.

The reunification agenda of the Korean Peninsula is apt and timely as there is no any better time than now when the world is faced with various cases of terrorism, climate change and migration. If achieved, the reunification will herald a new dawn characterized with integration, economic boost and strengthening of the regional security block to guard their countries from both internal and external intruders. It is our hope that the leaders of North and South Korea will make frantic effort towards the reunification agenda to forestall outbreak of crisis with attendant's human catastrophe. The following recommendations are considered germane in a bid to make the reunification an enduring one. 1- Both leaders should see the idea as a noble one by making commitments towards the realization of the agenda through migration, commerce and the elimination of barriers to trade. 2- The United Nations should invoke the necessary penalty/sanction on any nation that refused to respect its charter. This will further guarantee the peace and non-interference in the domestic affairs of smaller nations by a relatively stronger one. 3- The US should unconditionally remove the long embargo/sanction place on the

DPKR. This will further enhance trade and other forms of economic activities between the North and South.

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