Abstract

Purpose: The Purpose of this article is to analyze the smart power strategy to the peace process on the Korean Peninsula and to suggest alternatives to build permanent peacebuilding efforts. This paper seeks to answer a key question regarding building a peace regime. What is South Korea’s smart power strategy for the peace regime building on the Korean Peninsula? Simultaneously, this paper also analyzes various South Korea’s domestic opinions over the North Korean nuclear issues.

Method: This study analyzed ROK’s Smart power strategies toward peace regime building on the Korean Peninsula. Smart Power means developing an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve objectives, drawing on both hard (military muscle, economic might) and soft power (economic aid, sharing culture). It is an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions at all levels to expand the state’s influence and establish the legitimacy of the action.

Results: The ROK’s smart power strategies to the peace process are as follows. First, in terms of using alliance, South Korea has to call for the U.S to foster a peace regime building on the Korean Peninsula while cooperating with the Biden administration’s democratic principle and ideology. Second, in terms of using partnership, South Korea has to induce China to put pressure on the DPRK to abandon nuclear weapons. Third, in terms of using institutions, ROK and DPRK have to transform the current 9/19 inter-Korean military agreement of the initial operational arms control into systemic arms control through early notification of mutual military training.

Conclusion: The essential components of smart power are using alliances, partnerships, and institutions, etc. In this context, South Korea has all the necessary elements of the ROK-US alliance and ROK-China economic partnership, and 9.19 inter-Korean military agreement. In the long and bumpy road of the peace regime building process, it needs strategic optimism in pushing ahead smart power strategies but in building defense posture, they need to be a strategic pessimist.

[Keywords] Smart Power, Strategy, Peace Process, North Korea, Alliance

1. Introduction

The Security contour on the Korean peninsula has remained largely unchanged since the end of the Cold War. North Korea’s recent appeasement policy towards South Korea represents its major tactical shift to improve relations with the U.S. which is a critical means by which North Korea seeks to escape international isolation and economic sanction. At the same time, the DPRK is tightening its state-centered control under the Covid-19 pandemic.

As the six-party talks are in a stalemate, North Korea could try to take advantage of protracted talks to expand its nuclear capabilities. The US’ long-standing goal has been to bring North Korea into compliance with its Nuclear Nonproliferation treaty (NPT) obligations - in effect, nuclear disarmament. But North Korea is approaching the Korean unification issue using the Vietnamese formula, to replace the truce agreement on the peninsular with a peace treaty with the US in a bid to bring
about the withdrawal of US troops in South Korea and achieve Korean unification under its initiative—
without foreign intervention.

North Korea’s positive participation in the recent peace process on the Korean Peninsula is a "charm offensive" aimed at maximization of its political and economic gains after realizing a nuclear weapon state. Since the start of North Korea's charm offensive in 2018, there has been skepticism about the sincerity of North Korean leadership's commitment to denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula[1].

Despite the long-standing mistrust between Pyongyang and Washington, North Korea also wants to hold bilateral talks with the US for the removal of the US nuclear umbrella over the South. Due to North Korea’s two-faced policy, it is difficult to maintain a consistent policy for South Korea.

This paper seeks a policy option by assessing the strategic environment for the peacebuilding process. What is South Korea’s smart power strategy for the peace regime building on the Korean Peninsula? Simultaneously, this paper also analyzes ROK’s domestic polemic over policy toward the DPRK.

2. Assessment of Strategic Environment for the Peace Process

The peace process initiated by the Moon Jae-in government was pursued for the last 4 years regardless of North Korea’s attitude and its policy changes, so South Korean administrations created an atmosphere in which the South could not react properly or reasonably to North Korean policy. South Korea's policy towards North Korea was unable to contribute to solving nuclear issues because it only concentrated on improving inter-Korean relations and shows of constructive engagement regardless of the nuclear situation. Moreover, the Moon Jae-in administration has reached the 9/19 Inter-Korean Military Agreement with the DPRK as an initial operational arms control[2].

However, the ROK government has to cope with the DPRK's two-faced policy with a smart power strategy so as not to give the wrong signal that may condone its Nukes. According to the CSIS report, smart power is neither hard nor soft power, it is the skillful combination of both <Table 1>.

Table 1. Foundation of soft power[3].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>International sources</th>
<th>Domestic sources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>· Respect for international laws, norms, and institutions</td>
<td>Culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Fundamental reliance on multilateralism, and disposition</td>
<td>· Pronounced social cohesion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>against excessive unilateralism</td>
<td>· Elevated quality of life</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Respect for international treaties and alliance</td>
<td>· Freedom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commitments</td>
<td>· Sufficient opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Willingness to sacrifice short-run national interests in</td>
<td>· Tolerance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>order to contribute toward the collective good</td>
<td>· Alluring lifestyle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>· Liberal foreign economic policies</td>
<td>· Cultural status(religious, racial, ethnic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Political institutions</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Democracy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Constitutionalism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Liberalism/pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>· Well functioning government bureaucracy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Smart Power discourse is an American oriented concept that was firstly coined by Suzanne Nossel in 2004. Later in a CSIS report in 2007, that term was heavily promoted by the commission co-chaired by Richard Armitage and Joseph Nye. The exercise of hard power may meet with global disapproval, while the use of soft power becoming a more important asset.

Smart power means developing an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve objectives, drawing on both hard(military muscle, economic might) and soft power(economic aid, sharing culture) as shown <Figure 1>. It is an approach that underscores the necessity of a strong military but also invests heavily in alliances, partnerships, and institutions at all levels to expand the state’s influence and establish the legitimacy of the action. Given the high stakes involved, North Korean
proliferation, if unaddressed and unreversed, has the potential to destabilize the whole Northeast Asian region and beyond.

Figure 1. Definition of smart power[4].

South Korea’s smart power strategy direction calls for 1) the implementation of a strategic opening policy toward North Korea which can induce the latter to dismantle its nuclear program and bring about real change, 2) the pursuit of a practical diplomatic course that is based on national interests, 3) the promotion of a stronger Korea-U.S. alliance through which both nations’ interests are fostered, 4) the expansion of Korea’s Asian diplomacy, 5) strengthening of Korea’s diplomatic contribution to the international community, 6) the internationalization of energy diplomacy, and 7) the fostering of increased opening and exchanges to fulfill the objective of turning Korea into a cultural powerhouse[5].

In the case of the North Korean provocations, the South has to respond with principles as follows[6].
∙ There should be a response to the DPRK’s provocations, to ensure that it does not conclude that it may act with impunity.
∙ The possibility of achieving a significant change in North Korean policy is probably low now.
∙ In a practical sense, sanctions are more likely to be effective if they are multilateral in scope. And the political impact of a united front can be as important as the specific severity of the sanction.
∙ Pyongyang is likely to carry out more provocations, so it is useful to keep some sanctions in reserve. They should be increased incrementally. Incrementalism makes it easier to gain China’s support.

In the interest of denuclearizing North Korea, the United States and its negotiating partners should pursue a comprehensive agreement that forges a credible path to a denuclearized peninsula through the use of a broad range of powerful incentives and disincentives. The Biden administration may rule out any rewards to North Korea without a verifiable denuclearization. The Biden administration’s denuclearization negotiation with the DPRK can be a bottom-up style of CVID[7]. President-elect Biden however, stressed that the US would not pursue summit talks with North Korea as President Trump has. President Biden would only meet Kim Jong Un only under the condition of DPRK’s drawing down of its nuclear capacity.

3. ROK’s Domestic Polemic over Policy toward the DPRK

To lead North Korea to accept a reformist policy and change its society, the South and the interna-
tional community have to engage it and try to exchange diverse information so that the North Ko-
rean elite and citizens can harbor hope for a Kim Jong Un System. But the South will keep on partici-
pating in the current sanctions that are being imposed on North Korea until it gives up its nuclear
weapons. The communist regime has yet to show any fundamental sign of abandoning its nuclear
ambitions[8].

3.1. Conservatives

The “conservatives”, represented by hawkish policymakers, believe that South Korean and U.S. in-
terests on the Korean Peninsula are not fundamentally divergent and that South Korea should pri-
oritize relations with its long-time ally[9]. The conservative’s reasons for strengthening ROK-US al-
liances are as follows.
- South Korea is the immediate target of North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missiles, which put
  innocent South Korean citizens at risk.
- North Korea ignores agreement with South Korea despite receiving its aid.
- Many conservatives feel that South Korea has consistently supported and provided assistance to
  North Korea, but has never received anything in return.
- South Korea should use its influence(international sanction) to change North Korea’s policy.
- South Korea should continue talking to the other five parties to exert influence over North Korea
to scrap its nuclear weapons programs.

3.2. Leftists

The Leftists blame the US and South Korea’s Conservative government for the lack of progress on
North Korea due to its failure to engage in bilateral talks, provide sufficient security assurances to
North Korea and eventually normalize bilateral relations. The Primary “leftist” arguments are that
South Korea cannot risk damaging the relationship with a counterpart of reunification. Therefore,
South Korea must continue to provide aid to avert instability. The Leftists think that engagement has
worked in other countries, most notably China and they believe that it was beginning to work in
North Korea. While conservatives prone to see denuclearization as a precondition for peace and sta-
bility, conversely, leftists are likely to believe peace and stability are the preconditions for denuclea-
risation. Seoul prefers the conservative approach <Table 2>.

Table 2. Conservatives and leftists position[10].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conservative</th>
<th>North Korea’s denuclearization policy first</th>
<th>Assisting economic aid package</th>
<th>Striking peace treaty</th>
<th>Peace and stability first policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Conservatives</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leftists</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
<td>o</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.3. Strategic optimists

Amid the UN enforce sanctions against North Korea, the strategic optimists think that North Korea
cannot but come back to the negotiating table. They think that the North Korean regime insecurity
may bring the government back to compromise in the denuclearization process[11]. The PRC could
take a variety of steps to squeeze North Korea more subtly. Some such steps would involve making
China’s banking facilities less and less convenient for the DPRK to use. Strategic optimists think that
China also worries about North Korea’s nuclear ambitions may trigger an arms race in the Northeast
Asian region. Citing these concerns of China, many optimists hope that China may press the DPRK
into abandoning its nukes. Strategic optimists think that Pyongyang will only be willing to denuclea-
rise if its cost-benefit and risk-reward calculations change. They may think that the North Korean re-
gime tries to gain early incentives to maximize the benefits it could gain without fully relinquishing
its nuclear program[12].

Strategic optimists want to dismantle North Korea’s nuclear program and normalize the denuclea-
rization talks at the center stage[13]. Joel S. Wit suggests that a US policy based on containment and isolation alone only concedes that North Korea will remain nuclear-armed and that its weapons programs will further develop. Therefore he argues that an effective American strategy towards North Korea will require a combination of tough measures with serious dialogue and engagement. Strategic optimists think that South Korea needs to encourage North Korea to make the policy change. To move in that direction, the South needs to go ahead with its policy to assist the North based on a policy change in the North and make economic cooperation with the North in such a way as to quicken North’s change in policy and system. In this vein, South Korea can use the idea for a grand bargain as a strategic chip encouraging the North’s change under the principle of free democracy and the market economy, plus its “new peace initiative.”

To this end, they may suggest simultaneous talks on a peace regime that can and should be used as an institutional foundation for North Korea to abandon its nuclear arsenal. Under a peace regime, North Korea will find no ground to rely on nuclear weapons but will base its security on a legal basis. It is high time to realize that solving North Korea’s nuclear issues has to be managed in the long-term perspectives. A quick solution may demand a lot of costs. The ultimate goal must remain a commitment to the NPT. Short of that goal, however, it is desirable to move towards a mid-way station that would, at a minimum, a) halt further nuclear weapons development; b) cap fissile material production; and c) stop or minimize WMD-related exports[14].

3.4. Strategic pessimists

There will be little chance for a solution to North Korea’s nuclear issues unless the North revises or changes its strategies toward South Korea and foreign countries. The North Korean regime views the development of nuclear weapons as key to preserving its political system in the face of what it interprets as a hostile US policy. North Korea’s nuclear weapons program was closely connected with the country’s security strategy[15]. Given its centrality for regime security, it cannot be abandoned unless DPRK regime security is fully guaranteed[16]. But Pyongyang’s lack of trust in US security assurance may make the solution difficult to implement[17]. After almost thirty years of on-again, off-again bilateral and multilateral negotiations, preventing the DPRK from producing and proliferating nuclear weapons remains today the all-consuming focus of US policy toward Pyongyang. Pyongyang’s history of “brinkmanship diplomacy” and its continued pursuit of nuclear weapons, despite its stated commitments, to denuclearize, cause many observers to doubt that the regime will ever negotiate away its nuclear capability. To be a nuclear weapon state is a broader strategy of the DPRK’s regime survival. North Korean leaders have to complement their revenues with aid from the outside world. They want outside aid without too many conditions. Brinkmanship and blackmail are the only alternatives for the regime’s survival. Therefore, it seems that US sanctions on Pyongyang are appropriate in the short term to demonstrate the will of the international community to stem the spread of nuclear weapons and bring the DPRK back to the negotiating table. It needs close cooperation among the US, ROK, and Japan at a minimum, with China, Russia, and others preferably on board, to increase the costs involved in North Korea’s possessing nuclear weapons.

But over the long term sanction will not bring about a positive change in North Korea’s behavior toward other countries or its citizens. In particular, considering North Korea’s record, Pyongyang is likely to transfer nuclear weapons technology to state or non-state actors[18]. Whether they are patterned after programs in China or Vietnam, any active programs for economic reform will be burdensome for the North because it is not equipped with the institutional tools or capability to deal with the resulting waves of change.

Economic sanctions against North Korea have been strengthened and extended in response to its nuclear and missile tests. However, those sanctions have not been made meaningful in “punishing” North Korea. Additionally, the more the international community tries to isolate this country, the more North Korea will depend on nuclear weapons as a bargaining chip. Sanctions alone will not create a lasting solution to the North Korean conundrum and must be complemented by other long-term strategic approaches. The long-term effect of sanctions has been to harden the DPRK’s resistance to international cooperation and reinforce its isolation from the liberalizing influence of global
economic integration.

Strategic pessimists think that the DPRK will not abandon its nuclear program whatever outside pressure may inflict upon its regime. They think that North Korea already has nuclear weapons and its regime may handle international pressure skillfully in the future.

They believe that China and Russia covertly endorse North Korea’s developing nuclear weapons to check the US expansion in Northeast Asia. The US attempts to persuade China to put pressure on North Korea to quit its nuclear weapons might be absurd. Because China may seemingly cooperate with the US and international community but it thinks that the ultimate responsibility to denuclearize North Korea is under the shoulder of the U.S. Moreover, China takes advantage of the situation to strengthen its national influence in Northeast Asia. Chinese policymakers may regard that a nuclear-armed DPRK seems to be a lesser evil than collapsing North Korea. Because Beijing needs to maintain internal stability and promote economic development. Concerns that an implosion of the North Korean regime or economic stress caused by stringent sanctions could send a flood of North Korean refugees across its shared border drive Beijing’s opposition to stern reactions to North Korean provocations. Notwithstanding China’s desire to serve as an honest broker, it keeps on seeking a close relationship with North Korea.

If there is a contingency situation in North Korea, it may help the North Korean Regime to sustain its power covertly to maintain stability around China’s bordering zone. So far, at least, Beijing’s conviction that pushing Pyongyang to the wall is counter-productive and likely to bring about chaos[19]. Strategic pessimists think that the DPRK’s partial surrender of nukes might also be negotiable. To reduce the risks inherent in partial agreements, the United States should insist on significant, irreversible steps at the outset of any limited agreement. They believe that this may ensure substantial progress toward denuclearization and lessen the potential for derailment.

4. Conclusion

South Korea is the country that feels the most threatened by North Korea’s nuclear tests. The U.S. government is now remaining firm in its position that sanctions against the North will continue unless the North takes significant steps towards dismantling all its nuclear weapons development programs. For the smart power strategy, the South has to take a firm stance over the North’s appeasement gesture with a principle while talking with them.

The failure of the United States to stop and now reverse the DPRK nuclear over the previous three decades threatens its hegemonic leadership in Northeast Asia and is linked to the decreasing ability of American power to shape events in other proliferation-prone regions such as South and West Asia. As time passes, the US’s ability regarding deterrence and negotiation may decrease while the North’s nuclear program may result in its possession of more nuclear weapons. A militarily muscular China with substantial international economic ties will be able to exercise considerable political power that could prompt U.S. friends and allies to make difficult choices, eroding U.S. influence around the world possibly including the North Korean nuclear issues. The US should not pull out its force in the Korean Peninsula under the sole condition of North Korea’s giving up its nuclear strategy. Because North Korea has huge chemical and conventional weapons.

North Korea is likely to cause several future crises in Northeast Asia, by using WMD. What North Korea needs now is not to raise useless tensions, but to make a strategic decision to denuclearize. North Korea is now faced with a food shortage and economic chaos sparked by international economic sanctions under the Covid-19 pandemic. North Korea might have to try and overcome internal crises by creating external crises in the future as well. Therefore the US needs to pursue an engagement policy towards North Korea to solve the problem.

The Northeast Asian states may also suffer significant damage if they do not fully prepare for the contingency[20]. Such close trilateral cooperation is now needed given the DPRK’s ability to cause great damage. Although the United States, China, and South Korea share a strong interest in developing mutual understandings on responding to North Korea, some gaps in priorities suggest consi-
derable points of potential conflict in US-China-ROK-Japan coordination in a crisis scenario. Seoul primarily wants to avoid sudden regime collapse in the North but is also cautious to limit direct intervention by China and the United States despite South Korea’s lack of capacity to solely manage large-scale North Korean instability. The US would support South Korean efforts in crisis management with its military forces. The US, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and China should maintain a tight grip on U.N. Sanctions so that Kim Jong Un has no choice but to step forward onto the international stage.

China would want to avoid the economic and regional security implications of instability in North Korea but also has a strategic interest in restricting US-led intervention. If North Korea collapses, there would be little chance of preventing the hemorrhaging of dangerous technology and fissile materials into the terrorist groups. Aside from posing a political, security, economic and humanitarian nightmare for East Asia, the collapse could trigger a confrontation between Beijing and Washington as each moves to protect its interests on the Peninsula. If North Korea collapses violently and sends thousands of refugees fleeing into Northeast China, Beijing might send troops into the country to restore order over the objections of South Korea and the United States[21]. To date, there has been no US-China-ROK-Japan discussion at any level on managing instability in North Korea.

The end of the Kim dynasty will create an atmosphere of a different approach. Therefore, for the long term, while talking with North Korea, Washington, Beijing, Seoul, and Tokyo have to prepare for contingencies of the DPRK regime to tackle problems that may occur from various scenarios. Only continued vigilance and close collaboration and consistent sanctions by the UN and its member states will be able to contain North Korea. In the long and bumpy road of the peace process, the ROK has to use smart power to induce North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons by employing a tight link strategy among the ROK-DPRK-US triangle. The essential components of smart power are using alliances, partnerships, and institutions, etc. In this context, South Korea has all the necessary elements of the ROK-US alliance and ROK-China economic partnership, and 9/19 inter-Korean military agreement.

First, in terms of using alliance, South Korea has to call for the U.S to foster a peace regime building on the Korean Peninsula while cooperating with the Biden administration's democratic ideology. Second, in terms of using partnership, South Korea has to induce China to put pressure on the DPRK to abandon nuclear weapons. Third, in terms of using institutions, ROK and DPRK have to transform the current 9/19 inter-Korean military agreement of the initial operational arms control into systemic arms control through notification of mutual military training. In those processes, the South Korean government has to map out a creative roadmap by using a smart power strategy for the permanent peacebuilding and denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. In the long and bumpy road of the peace regime building process, it needs strategic optimism in pushing ahead smart power strategies but in building defense posture, they need to be a strategic pessimist.

5. References

5.1. Journal articles


### 5.2. Books


### 5.3. Additional references


### 6. Appendix

### 6.1. Authors contribution
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial name</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Author: SL   | - Set of concepts ☑  
- Design ☑  
- Getting results ☑  
- Analysis ☑  
- Make a significant contribution to collection ☑  
- Final approval of the paper ☑  
- Corresponding ☑  
- Play a decisive role in modification ☑  
- Significant contributions to concepts, designs, practices, analysis and interpretation of data ☑  
- Participants in Drafting and Revising Papers ☑  
- Someone who can explain all aspects of the paper ☑ |