

Security on the Korean Peninsula: Domestic and International Dimensions

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A conference report by James Beard, doctoral candidate, Department of Politics and International Relations, Swansea University

The conference brought together academic speakers from both Europe and Asia to discuss the domestic and international dimensions of security on the Korean Peninsula. Through an examination of traditional and non-traditional security studies, the conference pushed the debate beyond that of the issues surrounding the recent nuclearization of the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (DPRK). The nuclear issue was debated alongside questions of human security, reunification, and international bilateral and multilateral talks on the future peace and security of the region.

Panel 1 – Human Security in the DPRK

Following Professor Roland Axtmann's welcome, the first panel began with Professor Michael Sheehan of Swansea University. He opened proceedings with his paper, '**Freedom from Fear: Political oppression in the DPRK**'. Prof. Sheehan's paper concerns the under-researched issue of human rights in the DPRK. The paper cited North Korea's violation of

both liberal civil and political rights and communist social and economic rights. The insecurity of the North Korean regime has led to a catalogue of human rights violations which, he argued, triggers an obligation on the part of the UN to act. However, the refusal of DPRK to recognise the moral authority of the UN, a body at which, technically, it is at war, makes deeply problematic any action on the part of the international community.

Following Prof. Sheehan, Dr Alan Collins, also of Swansea University, provided a perspective on the famine of the mid 1990s with his paper, **'Freedom from Want: Famine and Migration and the DPRK'**. Dr Collins considered the causes and effects of the famine and what implications this has for security. He argues that a combination of agricultural mismanagement and failure in the distribution network, which allocates rations on the basis of loyalty to the regime, ensure a large portion of the blame for the famine rests at the regime's door. International aid was hindered by these distributive failures and despite signs of economic liberalisation between 1995 and 2005 the regime has since begun to retrench the reforms that it made and a return of famine is possible. The implication of this for human security in the DPRK is the need to remove the cause of the *insecurity* – perhaps through reunification of North and South.

The importance of new, broader understandings of security was a crucial aspect of the discussion. This revolved around the availability of data from the DPRK which, it was acknowledged, is scarce and which comes from problematic sources. The well-developed nature of the North Korean police state was cited as a possible explanation for the apparent lack of popular discontent. Dr Collins stressed that new security paradigms centralise the responsibility of the state to protect its citizens, rather than the importance of sovereignty. In

placing the North Korean people centrally to their own security issues, a clearer understanding of the dilemmas facing the region can be teased out.

Panel 2 – Reunification of Korea

Following the first panel concerning human security issues, Dr Key-young Son, of Sheffield University, turned our attention towards the issue of reunification with his paper: '**Are We Near Sunset Boulevard? The Sunshine Policy and an "Imagined" Road to Unification**'. Dr Son offers one possible road to unification - following the Sunshine Policy - which he refers to as 'Sunset Boulevard'. According to this model South Korean engagement with the North could pave the way to greater symmetry and free travel between the two states. North Korean existential fears may slowly be eroded by the Southern commitment to engagement. This could pave the way for a 'free travel phase' which could eventually lead to de-facto unification.

Professor Hideya Kurata, of Kyorin University, Tokyo, considers the subject of '**Building Peace though Security Assurances**'. Professor Kurata considered both the national and regional dimensions to 'peace building' between North and South. Failure to find common ground between them or in the Four Party Peace Talks led to the Six Party Talks and the 2005 joint statement to 'Promise to Promise' and 'Action to Action'. Following this, multilateral talks aimed at the denuclearization of North Korea – without which peace building is impossible - and the establishment of a 'commonwealth' become the primary focus of North-South talks on the subject.

Questioning concerned the Boulevard approach and the extent to which it emulated previous attempts at reunification elsewhere in the world. Both North and South Korea have tended to regard their problem as unique, while turning to other examples, for instance in Europe, for comparative guidance. The possibility of reducing military tensions, the question of arms control and traditional security concerns were all raised in the discussion.

Panel 3 – The Six-Party Talks

Following some lively discussion of the first two panels over lunch, attention turned to the third panel. Dr Jianjin Yu, of the China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong, Shanghai, examined the Six Party Talks and the role of China in his paper '**China and the Six Party Talks: Seeking Multilateral Security in East Asia**'. Dr Yu stressed China's post-Cold War shift from bilateral to multilateral security concerns and its positive role in the Six-Party Talks. China's dilemma concerns its pursuit of a nuclear-free DPRK and maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsular, and maintaining its traditional relationship with Pyongyang; that is, how to persuade Pyongyang to adjust its policies while also maintaining the principle of non-interference in internal affairs. China has assumed leadership in the Six Party Talks and may develop it in the long term into a conflict resolution mechanism via permanent and regular institutionalised talks.

Dr Russell Ong, of the University of Manchester, offered an evaluation of United States foreign policy towards North Korea, and an assessment of its options regarding the Korean issue in his paper, entitled '**US and the Challenge of North Korea**'. Dr Ong sees the DPRK as posing a number of problems for US foreign policy. The US requires regional stability and considers itself a guarantor for international security; it also possesses ideological goals and

commitments to the War on Terror. North Korea poses problems for these objectives and gives the US two policy options. Unilateralism, ignoring the Six Party talks, and opting for a pre-emptive strike aimed at regime change. This option is increasingly seen as unpopular, leaving 'great power management', that is, allowing the Six Party Talks to manage the situation. Both the US and China seek stability in the region, but they perhaps have too many differences for 'great power management' to be effective.

The question of whether institutionalised multilateral talks can exist alongside bilateral agreements was a strong focus of discussion. The extent to which the Six-Party talks could be thought of as a nascent security regime was raised, which led to the question of how compatible are the interests of the USA and China? A further question concerned whether North Korea represented a challenge at all to the USA and was it as much of a blessing as a problem? Dr Ong conceded that a bellicose Pyongyang did assist the US in maintaining a military presence in the region but he also suggested that perhaps this scenario was also a blessing for North Korea – showing US imperialist attitudes so starkly. Although time prevented further discussion the need for the North Korean regime to have external “enemies” in order to maintain tight internal control, is an important consideration when considering the viability of tension reducing (conciliatory) moves that are designed to induce cooperative behaviour from Pyongyang.

Panel 4 – Nuclear Proliferation

Opening the final panel was Dr Christopher Hughes of Warwick University. His paper, **'Japan's Defence Posture, Missile Defence and the Response to DPRK Nuclear Proliferation'** considered security issues on the Korean Peninsula from a Japanese

perspective. Dr Hughes suggests that the DPRK stands at the forefront of Japanese security concerns, due to many incursions and violations. Japan perceives North Korea as an existential threat in the form of its nuclear capabilities, and also a political threat to its alliance with the United States as it threatens to expose strategic differences over the purpose and value of the alliance. Overall, Dr Hughes suggests that North Korea has become a 'catch-all threat' – all changes in Japanese security policy are cited as a response to North Korea. This has normalised the trajectory of Japanese security policy in its increasing use of force.

Next Dr Seung-young Kim of the University of Aberdeen, with his paper '**US-South Korean Military Alliance: Impact of DPRK Nuclear Status**'. Dr Kim discussed the trajectory of the US-South Korean alliance following the North Korean nuclear tests. Their responses differed and the US disapproved of the Sunshine Policy, favouring more selective engagement. Their divergent interests in military action on the peninsula and elsewhere are contrasted by South Korea's need for the US to provide deterrence. The future of the alliance is uncertain – South Korea wants great autonomy from US interests in the region and to remain neutral with regard to US-North Korean relations.

The final paper was delivered by Unto Vesa of the Tampere Peace Research Institute, Finland. His paper, '**North Korea and the Non-Proliferation Treaty**' focused on why North Korea entered the Treaty in the mid-80s, why it tried to withdraw in the mid-90s and the ongoing current crisis, particularly in light of the recent nuclear test. Mr Vesa describes the whole process as 'The Long and Winding Road' and the story is one of hard bargaining: concessions, sanctions, crises and reconciliations leading once again to economic, political and security commitments in order to draw the DPRK back to non-proliferation talks.

Discussion concerned the role of conservative media and other forces in Japan, which seem to be acting in symbiosis with the North Korean question in order to push a particular security agenda. The relationship between a change in government in South Korea and its relationship with the North was also raised and its impact on the US-South Korean alliance was analysed. It was also suggested that the Non-Proliferation Treaty could have impeded North-South relations and the North Korean reactions to the United States' 'Axis of Evil' rhetoric meant that credible threat scenarios exist on *both* sides of the table. Seeking the perspective of the people of North Korea sums up the aims of non-traditional security theorists to capture dimensions of security not previously recognised or acknowledged. The hope is that this conference has gone some way to illuminating those dimensions in the context of the Korean Peninsula.