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THE NUCLEAR DISPUTE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES AND NORTH KOREA

ABSTRACT

The American-North Korean conflict on nuclear weapons has been making headlines for a long time. The potential of both countries is unquestionable and has an enormous influence on the entire world. The nuclear dispute between the United States and the DPRK began with the Korean War in 1950s and has been growing since. North Korea has strengthened its nuclear capability and is threatening the United States, the territory of Guam island, and the entire human nation. The regime is the only country which has tested nuclear weapons in the 21st century. The American government has been raising the sanctions against Pyongyang and China has been trying to invite both sides for negotiations and to ease the worsening tensions on the peninsula. Washington puts a lot of hopes into Beijing being able to handle the threats from North Korea, but Chinese claim they do not have enough leverage to hamper Kim Jong Un's regime. North Koreans, living under the constant control from the regime and propaganda, are separated from their families and the rest of the world. The Winter Olympics, which will be held by South Korea in February, 2018, gave both Koreas a chance to talk and to participate in the event together again, and maybe it is a possibility for the two sides to negotiate further agreements.

Keywords: Nuclear, USA, Korea, weapon, Guam, China, Pyongyang

1. INTRODUCTION

“North Korea is not like any other place in the world” (Levi, 2009, p. 345) In the 21st century, international relations are one of the most important parts of every country's politics and economy. Even if a particular subject does not involve one country directly, it can still have a great influence on its future. That is why we find it necessary to have a closer look on the nuclear dispute between The United States and North Korea. The main purpose of this work is to analyze the reasons and causes of this issue, to understand the real threat this situation can pose to the world, and to try to predict next events that can happen in the future.

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2. MATERIALS AND METHODS USED

Since it is an on-going dispute and in fact, no one knows what North Korea or the United States will do tomorrow, we base our work on historic events, statements of the involved countries and their recent actions. We focus on the countries leaders' speeches, their declarations and actual decisions. The contemplation of experts on North Korean issue and the analysis of mentioned factors can help us form our predictions.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. THE BEGINNING OF THE UNITED STATES AND NORTH KOREA'S CONFLICT

The U.S. Secretary of State Dean Acheson once said that "if the best minds in the world had set out to find us the worst possible location in the world to fight this damnable war, the unanimous choice would have been Korea." (Panetta, 2012)

The Korean War began in 1950 when the North invaded the South. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea received support from China and the Soviet Union, while the United Nations, with the United States as the principal force, helped South Korea. The final two years of the war became a War of Attrition, which is a military strategy to win a war by wearing down the enemy through permanent losses of personnel and material. In the end, the side with bigger resources wins the conflict. The fights in East Asia ended in 1953 and the peninsula stayed divided into North and South along the 38th parallel where during the war the UN's "Line Kansas" was formed (Millet, n.d.). What is important in particular is that both countries are still officially at war, because the agreement signed in Panmunjom guaranteed an armistice, but did not lead to a peace treaty. North Korea has been ruled by the Kim dynasty, officially called the Mount Paektu Bloodline. It started with Kim Il Sung, who developed a cult of personality connected to 'Juche' which emphasizes North Korea's political, economic, and military self-reliance (Juche Ideology, 2011). Kim Il Sung's son, Kim Jong Il was said to be born on the peak of a sacred mountain, while in fact he was born in Vyatskoye, Russia, under the former Soviet Union. Since 2011, his son, Kim Jong Un has been the leader of the country. In the DPRK's propaganda, The United States and South Korea are presented as a threat to the citizens' peace and happiness. In North Koreans' minds the entire peninsula is the territory of their country, and the "South" is just currently invaded by the "American Imperialists" (Urban, 2013).

The Korean War was one of the first military conflicts that happened after World War II, as a result of the Cold War. In this context, Korea can be called "a Cold War's range". Although it may seem like it was an inter-Korean conflict, it was Korea that incurred the biggest losses, while many other countries were involved, with major influence from the United States, The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China (Rurarz, 2009). It has been one of the bloodiest wars in Asia, and its consequences, even though fifty years have passed, are still visible.

3.2. THE AMERICAN IDEA OF NORTH KOREA'S POTENTIAL ACTIONS

At the Press Conference on the North Korean Missile Crisis which took place on April 20, 2017, the North Korean issue was discussed by William Perry and Sig Hecker. William Perry, the Secretary of Defense of the United States in 1994–1997, warned in March 1994 that the US had planned to stop North Korea from developing an arsenal of nuclear weapons. Perry described two alternatives in NK. One being that the North Koreans could collect an arsenal of nuclear warheads that could be fit atop missiles that would be able to reach close countries. The other alternative was “facing up to them in a way that could cause a catastrophic war” but Perry said that this danger would not stop the US from trying to freeze North Korea’s nuclear program (Smith, 1994). In October 1994, in Geneva The Agreed Framework between The United States of America and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea was signed. North Korea agreed to freeze its nuclear program and they established that “the two sides will move toward full normalization of political and economic relations” (US-DPRK Agreed Framework, 1994). Then in 1999 William Perry went to North Korea to negotiate another possibility of North Koreans giving up their nuclear and long-range missiles programs. They almost closed the deal, but when in 2000 George Bush was elected president of the United States, the American Administration changed and in 2002 both Bush and North Korea withdrew from the Agreed Framework. After his travels in 2004 and 2008, William Perry described his beliefs about North Korea. He said that “North Korean regime is ruthless and reckless, but is not crazy” (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2017, p.2) and that their main goal is to keep that regime in power and their way to do that is to use the arsenal of nuclear weapons as deterrence. They also maintain the regime through internal threats and a secret police. Those beliefs led Perry to four judgments. First was that North Koreans know that if they use their arsenal to attack South Korea or the United States by surprise, that will lead to the end of their regime and therefore, destroy their country. Then Perry added that if South Korea or the US have any preemptive attack, North Korea will react militarily, starting with South Korea. The next belief was that now, for the first time in 20 years there’s a possibility of negotiation with North Korea, because China has began to be concerned about that matter. China sees that if South Korea or Japan go nuclear, it can be detrimental to their core interests. The last, final Perry’s judgment was that if the US wants the negotiation to be successful, it has to be divided into two phases. First needs to be focused on reducing the actual, nuclear danger, and try to get North Korea to stop developing the missiles and control over their exports. The second phase should be a reduction of the nuclear arsenal and, in some time, a nuclear-free peninsula (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2017). According to David Wright, an American expert on the technical aspects of nuclear weapons, North Korea does not have a long-range missile that can carry a nuclear warhead but it is possible that in the future they will develop one if they keep working on pieces they already have. A freeze on missile testing would stop NK from flight tests, and therefore, would prevent them from developing their arsenal. Wright adds that no one knows whether North Koreans would agree to freeze their program, but the US should use the opportunity of negotiation, especially when the Chinese could help. (Union of Concerned Scientists, 2017, p. 5) The United States puts a lot of hope in China’s reaction to the matter and they believe that the Chinese could help solving the issue in a peaceful manner, but the Chinese have never made any determined actions. They have a different approach to the dispute.

3.3. CHINA'S PERSPECTIVE ON THE NUCLEAR ISSUE

In February 2003, the U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell visited China and met with the vice president of China – Hu Jintao. Powell claimed that the U.S. was unable to trust North Korea anymore and advised that China should invite the U.S. and North Korea's delegates to Beijing for negotiations (Fu, 2017, p.5). Given that the denuclearization of North Korea was in China's best interest, they accepted American request and planned to invite the delegates for talks. Unfortunately, while China was trying to be a mediator in the conflict, it did not have the leverage that would resolve the dispute between North Korea and the United States. Chinese said that they were not able to convince their neighboring nation to stop its nuclear development. Later, North Korea agreed to participate in such negotiations, but they stressed that the main reason for their nuclear development was a permanent threat from the United States, and the only way in which the matter could be resolved was through direct agreement between them and the United States. The U.S. did not agree to that and requested that any talks with North Korea would have to involve China as well. China stayed included in the negotiations until the two parties finally agreed to come to Beijing. On April 22, 2003, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that the U.S. and North Korea both agreed to meet in China and negotiate the nuclear issue. Later, Japan, South Korea and Russia joined the negotiation. According to Fu Ying who led the Chinese delegation, at the beginning of the meetings the talks were actually between the Chinese and North Koreans and between the Chinese and the United States, which was constantly refusing to meet with DPRK alone. It was obvious that the U.S. and North Korea had their plans for the negotiation, both willing to reach an agreement, but both ready to respond militarily if the talks would not work (Fu, 2017, pp.9–10). Discussions between the U.S. and DPRK were going better and better with every meeting held by China, until George W. Bush started his campaign for re-election and the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice referred to the North Korea as the “outpost of tyranny” (Rice targets 6 ‘outposts of tyranny’, 2005). North Korea reacted by stating that they had already built nuclear weapons and would no longer participate in the negotiations. For the first time, the U.S. imposed financial sanctions against North Korea (Davenport, 2017). After that some negotiations between the United States and North Korea ended with mutual agreements, but it also had its issues and in 2009, after next election in the United States, Barack Obama and the South Korean president Lee Myung-bak requested North Korea to stop the provocations and return to nuclear negotiations, because North Korea had performed nuclear and firing missiles’ tests that year, said it produced more weapons and they had exchanged fire with the South for the first time in seven years (Branigan, 2009). During the next years, the U.S. kept increasing the sanctions and in 2013 and 2014 North Korea conducted another nuclear and missile tests. On May 20, 2015 DPRK claimed that it has “the ability to miniaturize nuclear weapons, a key step toward building a nuclear missiles” (Mullen, 2015). In 2016 China again invited the two parties to negotiate the issue and try to deal with it in a peaceful manner. A deployment of an anti-missile system in South Korea announced in July, 2016 added a great concern for China, because if the deployment would radiate through a part of China that would mean a weakening of China's deterrent. Chinese also saw that the U.S. considered the deployment in other countries of East Asia, and that could lead to numerous confrontations regarding a strategic balance in that region (Fu, 2017, p.21). In 2017, with Donald Trump being the head of the American Government, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi stated that

“To defuse the looming crisis on the peninsula, China proposes that, as a first step, the DPRK suspend its missile and nuclear activities in exchange for a halt of the large-scale US-ROK exercises. This suspension-for-suspension can help us break out of the security dilemma and bring the parties back to the negotiating table. Then we can follow the dual-track approach of denuclearizing the peninsula on the one hand and establishing a peace mechanism on the other. Only by addressing the parties’ concerns in a synchronized and reciprocal manner, can we find a fundamental solution to lasting peace and stability on the peninsula” (Wang, 2017).

At the beginning of April 2017, President Donald Trump stated that if China did not pressure North Korea to disable its nuclear program, the U.S. would take the action on its own. He added that he could offer a political recognition to Taiwan – an island that Chinese claim to be a part of their country (Weaver, 2017). Also, during his campaign, Donald Trump called China “a currency manipulator”, explaining that Chinese are taking American jobs and businesses. (Merica, 2017). Jim Walsh, a Senior Research Associate at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology’s Security Studies Program, said that acting alone is not a way to solve the issue. He explained that the U.S. sanctions strategy would not be effective without China’s help and South Korea’s support as well. A North Korea specialist at the Centre for American Progress, Adam Mount, said that Japan and South Korea are also detrimental to dealing with the DPRK. According to Mount, both countries are “fundamental partners for deterrence, sanction implementation and diplomatic moves” (Weaver, 2017). American misunderstandings about handling the nuclear issue were easily noticed, and it seemed to be even further from making an agreement with China. After the U.S. – China Summit, Rex Tillerson, U.S. Secretary of State said that China’s President Xi Jinping “understands that the situation has intensified and has reached a certain level of threat that action has to be taken” and added that the Chinese are beginning to realize how dangerous to their country the situation is becoming (Helmore, 2017). President Trump took back the accusation that China is “a currency manipulator” and the U.S. Vice President Mike Pence stated that he thinks that

“the President’s direct engagement with President Xi of China and the fact that now you’ve seen China turning back coal shipments from North Korea, making changes in the ability of people to travel by air from Pyongyang into China and other measures that they may well take in the future demonstrates the hands-on diplomacy that President Trump has brought to this” (Merica, 2017).

China claims that their main interests are the denuclearization of the Peninsula and keeping the Northeast Asia peaceful and secured. They create themselves as a mediator in the U.S.-DPRK dispute and ensure that their role is to prevent any conflict in that region (Fu, 2017). From the American view, China is seen to be crucial for solving the nuclear issue. It is North Korea’s main trading partner and has been leading the negotiations since 2003. In December 2017 the Secretary of State Rex Tillerson said that China “has applied certain import bans and sanctions, but it could and should do much more” (Tillerson, 2017). Tillerson added that the U.S. will also “pursue American interests in [...] trade imbalances, intellectual property theft and China’s troubling military activities in South China Sea and elsewhere”. Even though Americans know that they need China to finally end the conflict, during the last few days of 2017 President Trump accused China of allowing oil to go into North Korea and stated that with such actions, China is preventing a “friendly solution” to the nuclear issue.

A Chinese Defense Ministry spokesman, Ren Guoqiang denied the accusations and claimed that the country is enforcing all the resolutions against North Korea (Trump claims China 'caught red-handed', 2017).

3.4. NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR THREATS

Since the time of ceasefire in 1953 the relations between North and South Korea were really tense. In 1963 North Korea asked the Soviet Union for help in developing nuclear weapons, but was refused. The same thing happened in 1964, after they addressed China (Lee, 2009). North Korea decided to take action on its own and started, what it called, "all-fortressization", which was the beginning of the militarized North Korea we know now (Pike, 2010). We know that North Korea is developing their nuclear potential fast. There are three nuclear warhead types. Fission devices, which are the type of weapons used in Japan during World War II, then there are staged thermonuclear weapons, that can be up to thousands of times more powerful than those used in the World War II, and a variety of 'hybrids' between those two (Rathi, 2016).

On May 25, 2009, the DPRK conducted the nuclear weapon test, which was as powerful as the missiles dropped by Americans in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Many of the world's leaders condemned the nuclear weapon test in North Korea, claiming that it broke the international law and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1718 which had imposed a series of economic and commercial sanctions on the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2006 (Felden, 2016). The United States made a statement and emphasized that North's actions could lead to worsening the tension on the Korean Peninsula. The nuclear weapon test mentioned above was not the first one conducted by the regime, and not the last one, as well. Particularly dangerous test took place on September 3, 2017.

"At noon local time on September 3, a 6.3-magnitude earthquake registered at North Korea's Punggye-ri testing site, according to the US Geological Survey. That indicated Pyongyang detonated a hydrogen bomb with a 100-kiloton yield." (Ward, 2017)

The hydrogen bomb which caused the earthquake can be carried by an intercontinental ballistic missile. After the test, the Korean Central News Agency noted North Korea conducted the test to "examine and confirm the accuracy and credibility" of the weapon. The test proved that North Korea's missiles "have been put on a highly precise basis and the design and production technology of nuclear weapons of the DPRK has been put on a high level to adjust its destructive power in consideration of the targets and purposes" (Kemp, 2017). The statement also said that the country ruled by Kim Jong Un was capable of regulating the power of the nuclear warhead. North Korea's actions have caused strong reactions around the world. In Japan and South Korea, on National Security Councils meetings, the nuclear issue was discussed. They focused on establishing whether the DPRK had actually managed to conduct a test as it was described in the statement. That same day, the President of the United States, Donald Trump, arranged a meeting in the White House to analyze the situation. Donald Trump, in a post on Twitter, called North Korea a "rough nation" and said that it became to be "a threat and embarrassment to China" (Trump, 2017). The United States took important actions in rising the economic sanctions against North Korea. Steven Mnuchin, the United States Secretary of the Treasury even advised Trump to completely stop the trade with Kim Jong Un's regime. The U.S. Government clearly tries to take more drastic measures

to prevent North Korea's attack but it seems like they do not have a coherent policy on that matter.

The 2017 was a year of a fast progress in North Korea's missile program. The country fired 23 missiles, which means that Kim Jong Un during his 6 years of reign has tested more missiles than his father and grandfather together. The tests are thought to be North Korea's idea of political impact, and that is the main reason for the firing, but it is obvious that they have to perfect their technology and this is what they are doing, as well. Jean Lee, a global fellow at Wilson Center located in Washington, D.C. and a lecturer on North Korean studies explained that the tests come in a pattern, and the firings are always close to some holidays to take advantage of nationalists favor, for example one firing came after the country's most important day in a year – A Day of Sun, and another after the U.S. President Donald Trump's and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's meeting. This can be a part of a bigger plan, as well. Lee says that what the DPRK is trying to do is to “get on the radars of Donald Trump and world leaders” and keep the world on pins and needles. They want to create a threat of firing a nuclear missile and they want all the countries to wait and check if the test is or is not happening. Tong Zhao, a fellow in the Nuclear Policy Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace based at the Carnegie–Tsinghua Center for Global Policy in Beijing adds that North Korea is able to afford postponing or even canceling nuclear tests so they could use them as a leverage or something they can offer to give up if the Trump administration would be interested in an agreement (Berlinger, 2017). North Korea may be conducting a lot of missile tests but it is already believed to be able to launch a nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missile in 2018 (Nakashima, Fifield, Warrick, 2017). The information was delivered by the U.S. officials who insisted on anonymity.

3.5. THE GUAM ISLAND

In August 2017 North Korea informed about its plans to invade the Guam Island, which is located in the Micronesia region of the Pacific. The island was captured by the United States in 1898 as a result of the American-Spanish war and since then, is a part of the U.S.' territory, but it is not a state. North Korea's choice to threaten to attack Guam was not a coincidence. The island is the closest part of American soil to the DPRK and the regime said they were “carefully examining a plan to strike the US territory of Guam with missiles” (Allen, 2017). Out of 170 000 Guam's citizens, 7000 are soldiers, who take care of the army's strategic points: the Andersen airport and the Apra Harbor. The announcement was a Korean reaction to the United Nations Security Council resolution which added more economic sanctions against North Korea (Gladstone, 2017). The resolution banned all exports of seafood, coal, iron and lead. It was forbidden to hire North Korean employees, as well as to establish a company with assets from the DPRK. These sanctions were very difficult for the Korean economy, which was already poor and weak. North Korea has one of the lowest GDP in the world, even though it has a lot of mineral resources. After the threat of invading the Guam Island, The United States' President contacted the Governor of Guam, Eddie J. Baza Calvo, to reassure him that the American Army was ready to defend and support the island (Wagner, 2017). The Island's officials had made special announcements for the citizens explaining how to react in case of any danger from North Koreans' army. These are the measures that have to be taken and the Guam Island should be prepared for any potential attack, but North Korea should be aware, that their strike will cause American immediate reaction.

3.6. THE WINTER OLYMPICS IN SOUTH KOREA.

Apart from the nuclear issue discussion, the countries managed to meet and discuss North Korea's participation in the Winter Olympics. With the beginning of the year 2018, Kim Jong Un, in his New Year's speech, said he would consider sending a delegation for the Olympics held in South Korea. (Agence France-Presse, 2018) It is not the first time when the Olympics would be a center of a political game. In the early 2000s two Koreas, still at war, marched together at the Olympic ceremonies. South Korea said that they would lift the sanctions and allow North Korea to participate in the Olympics and even proposed that both sides would march together during the ceremonies again. Pyongyang made it clear that they would not discuss the nuclear issue, because it was aimed only on the United States and should not be a subject of the two Koreas' talks. However, Seoul still tried to discuss the issue and proposed talks to denuclearize the peninsula. After that, North Korea made a statement, saying that "This is not a matter between North and South Korea, and to bring up this issue would cause negative consequences and risks turning all of today's good achievement into nothing" (North Korea agrees to send athletes, 2018). That did not change the fact that Donald Trump took credit for the negotiations between both countries and the South Korea's president agreed with this statement and said "I think President Trump deserves big credit for bringing about the inter-Korean talks, and I want to show my gratitude. It could be the result of US-led sanctions and pressure." (McCurry, 2018)

4. CONCLUSIONS

Although we understand the hopes of the countries for easing worsening tensions on the peninsula, it is hard to agree that North Korea's decision to participate in the Olympics will affect the U.S. – DPRK relations. In our opinion it is one of those events after which North Korea could change its actions and conducts another missile test, and it is also possible that the other countries expressing their hopes for easing the tension is just another political game.

Predictions related to future events on the Korean Peninsula are various. Some people think we are in a danger of world's nuclear war, that can be the beginning of the end of the world. Every potential military conflict, not only the nuclear one between North Korea and the United States and their allies, could bring unpredictable results for all human nations. Since some time ago, North Korea has been presenting to the world a dramatic show in which the nuclear weapons and human right violations play the main roles. Despite many sanctions imposed against the DPRK, Pyongyang has not changed its strategy and is still testing its opponents. It is evident that world's empires do not want to be responsible for starting a war that can bring dramatic consequences.

As Martin Luther King Jr. once said: "The choice is not between violence and nonviolence but between nonviolence and nonexistence". A crucial role in creating world's future belongs to the United States, which no matter what should try not to worsen the conflict. That can be a challenging task after Donald Trump was elected president. It seems to be irresponsible to make such inconsiderate accusation towards Kim Jong Un who is presenting how great potential his army has. North Korea's military potential has changed a lot during last 10 years. From a country that was only threatening the world with its nuclear potential, DPRK transformed into a country which actually has and is ready to use its weapons. Nuclear tests in

2016 and 2017 were a great surprise for the world, because until the actual, physical test of the weapons, no one was aware how large is North Korea's potential. A great difference in power between both tests shows how fast Kim Jong Un's arsenal is developing. That is why we find the experts' opinions reasonable, that the United States does not have a lot of time to take actions towards North Korea. It is possible that in the future, when the regime will develop their arsenal completely, they will start selling their equipment to other dictatorial countries or let their scientists work in such places. Now, North Korea would need a least an hour to launch a nuclear missile, which is still enough time to prevent it from firing, but in the future, when they will reach a certain level of development, there can be not enough time for the reaction. We have to remember that even if North Korea's army is worse than American, Japanese or South Korean, its personnel and materials are enormous. Around the border there is about six thousands of artillery pieces, that can fire a 'rain of bullets' capable of reaching the South Korean capital – Seoul (Rich, 2017). Apart from the nuclear arsenal, the regime has both biological and chemical weapons as well.

The dispute between The United States and North Korea is not only limited to those two countries. China is seen to be crucial for solving the conflict, South Korea and Japan try to negotiate as well. North Korea is developing its arsenal so fast that if the countries do not take some actions now, the results can be irreparable. The Korean regime is ruthless, but it is necessary to keep the country together. If the regime will use its weapons, it would mean the end of the Kim's dynasty and land, but it would also cause a lot of pain and a great damage in the world. They have been increasing their missile tests and is actually the only country which has tested a nuclear weapon in the 21st century. Even if those are just threats, the United States' military does not have the capability of stopping the North's missiles. Since the conflict still remains we have to wait for countries' next decisions. "All we have left is to believe that, we will live to see one Korea, united without a bloodshed" (Rurarz, 2009)

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