India - North Korea Relations

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Introduction

North Korea is a mystery land. The country is largely a closed one and world at large is not in a position to observe and analyse the internal dynamics of the country. This is a surprising feature of the contemporary international politics that in the age of the information revolution and information sharing, world is unaware about even major developments in a particular country. This iron chained foreign policy of North Korea has baffled the world. Inspire of this information black out North Korea has worked in two sphere in recent times with much impact. These include development of nuclear weapon and missile development programme.

There is another aspect of North Korean foreign policy that it has maintained close and usefully relations with China. It has also developed cooperation with Pakistan mainly in the field of nuclear cooperation. These variables are not in positive terms for India. Indian policy towards Korean peninsula although stands away from the North Korean adventurism. This does not mean that India has not allocated any importance to North Korea in its Look East Policy. Although this relationship is unique in the contemporary international relations.

Why North Korea is important to India

North Korea is an important country for India due to quite visible reasons. It has developed relations with Pakistan on nuclear front and has disbalanced the balance of power in the East Asian region. Its close relations with China has also created problems for India because there
exists likelihood that China-Pakistan nexus can use North Korea as a proxy state against India. This perception is being bolstered by North Korean efforts to strengthen its nuclear and missile programmes.

This development has important consequences for the Indian security environment. Hence impact of North Korea cannot be discounted when India takes into account its security problems emerging from China, Pakistan and North Korea. This nexus is structured on a pragmatic grounds as without Chinese support, Pakistan could not have come into support of North Korea in helping to develop its nuclear programme. This support has helped North Korea to manifest itself as a nuclear weapon state. A development which is treated as illegitimate for North Korea and misuse of sovereign state for Pakistan which has led to a new pattern in international politics, i.e. unrestrained and authoritarian development of nuclear weapons, not in favour of the world peace.

Indian policy towards Korean peninsula

India has deep and old relations with this area, since the days of cold war. Indian stand for this area was initially based upon the cold war realities, emergence of China, and confrontation of USA and USSR, India knew that this was time to strengthen the UN and to take a moralistic stand. “When the United Nations Security Council denounced North Korea’s aggression on June 25, 1950, and demanded a cease-fire at the 38th parallel, India's prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, following a nonalignment policy, instructed the Indian representative to the Security Council, Sir Bengal N. Rau, to support the resolution. Without further advice from Nehru, Sir Bengal also approved the second resolution, calling for collective action to counter the aggression. The Indian Parliament unanimously approved Rau's voting for U.N. support of South Korea. Despite this diplomatic backing, India refused to commit military forces. Nehru considered the Korean conflict as basically the United States versus the Soviet Union and did not want to align with either side. Denouncing aggression, Nehru criticized North Korea, but insisted that he would not contribute to any expansion of the war. His goal was to secure a peaceful solution.”

This was in line to adopted policy of taking the right course in the global politics. “India’s pro-active and prominent role in the UN on the Korean question was both a manifestation of India’s
high standing in the international community as well as a reflection of India’s own view of the world, Asia and the cold war.” 2

Indian stand was recognized by both sides and was utilized by stakeholders in the region for the resolution of the crisis in the Korean peninsula because “India was one of the few nations that had open channels of communication at the highest levels of both sides of the Cold War. Indian diplomats held candid dialogues with all actors: they were largely, albeit reluctantly, accepted in the role of honest broker and were used by both sides to convey messages to each other. It is an evidence of the neutral role of India that its stand was roundly criticized at different times by the two sides!”3

After the division of the peninsula, India always made it clear that it was in support of unification of the region. This stand is continuation of its Korean policy as determined during the days of Korean War. This stand is unique core element of Indian policy towards this region. It reflects Indian desire to establish peace and reduce the threat of the nuclear and conventional war clashes in the region. “India has always supported the desire of all Korean people for reconciliation and cooperation, and their goal of a reunified Korean peninsula. We also support the effort to stop development and deployment of nuclear weapons and their delivery systems on the Korean Peninsula as well as associated proliferation of such technologies into and out of the peninsula.”4 At the core policy level India has always emphasized for the adoption of the peaceful means for the resolution of disputes and unification of the peninsula to be the final goal. With this policy approach “India had welcomed the North-South Joint Declaration of 15 June 2000 and favours reduction of tension on the Korean peninsula and reunification of the two Koreas through peaceful means and direct dialogue between them.”5

Indian policy stand on Korean peninsula therefore naturally supported the Sun Shine policy of South Korea to North Korea. “The Sunshine Policy, a new type of engagement policy of South Korea towards North Korea, was set by the administration of the president Kim, Dae-joong in 1998 and lasted for a decade until the opposition party took over the ruling party seats. From the strategic move point of view, the Sunshine Policy was a new initiative for direct conversation with North Korea and it achieved the first mover’s advantage in a strategic move by inducing the North to take a cooperative attitude toward South Korea, consistently showing the South Korean government’s commitment on the promise of the ‘economy and politics separation principle’.”6
India has played a constructive role for the peninsula and this has been recognized at the global level. US for this reason have identified an Indian role in the peninsula’s problem. US officials have said that “India’s engagement with Pyongyang is a positive development and the US looks forward to learning from Delhi’s perspective (and) we need to share their perspectives as it can help us [the US] to improve our own understanding and perhaps approach towards North Korea (and) New Delhi’s view will be particularly important since the US regards India as a regional leader working towards stability and security in the Asia-Pacific.”

India North Korea relations

India -North Korea relations were established after much turmoil in the region. “India was one of the nine states which supervised elections in undivided Korea under UN auspices in 1947 and it had chaired the “Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission” after the Korean war of 1950-53, although New Delhi established consular relations with the fiercely independent communist state in 1962 and full diplomatic relations 11 years later.” Major features of these relationships are mainly two. First, the relations are based on “friendship, cooperation and understanding. As members of the Non-Aligned Movement, there is a commonality of views between the two on many international issues, e.g. Disarmament, South-South Cooperation, etc.”

Second, India has attempted to balance both countries in the peninsula. India had more tilt towards the South Korea after the end of Korean War. Even Pt. Jawahar Lal Nehru had commented that "I think we could really benefit in various ways if we gave it (North Korea) a little more importance"10, this tilt was corrected soon and during the 1960s India started to balance both countries, this fact was reemphasized after 2010 when India moved closer to South Korea and correction was made by allocating sufficient space to North Korea. Tilt did not mean that India had recognized only the South Korean interests. India never accorded South Korea as the only representative of Korean peninsula. Even in 1991 Indian PM P V Narsimha Rao had given a thought to visit North Korea though bureaucracy scuttled the idea in its nascent stage. “The then Ambassador of India in Seoul, B. M. Oza, recalls that Prime Minister Rao had decided to upgrade relations with South Korea. But, at that time. India's official policy was to equate the two Koreas and Prime Minister Rao considered visiting North Korea also. Ambassador Oza advised him to abandon the policy of equating North and South Korea. A. N. Verma, Principal
Secretary, to Prime Minister, also felt that it was pointless to visit North Korea.”11 Indian political elites hence maintained a policy of equality, bureaucracy held another view but finally political approach has won for this area. Indian recognition to North Korean existence in spite of international pressure for its unrestrained behavior has become second most important base of their bilateral cooperation and again in the recent time relations with North Korea have started to pick up. Historically it was initiated at the level of high dignitary visits but no head of state or head of the government visits were organized. “Dr. Shanker Dayal Sharma, Vice President (April 1992) visited North Korea at the invitation of DPRK Vice President who visited India in May 1991(and) Shri Mukhtar Abbas Naqvi, MOS for I&B (September 1998) went to to attend 6th Pyongyang Film Festival”12

These were major political visits, besides members of communist parties in India and foreign services professionals also visited North Korea. Visits from the North Korean sides were not of the highest level but were made by political- bureaucratic leadership of the country. In February 1988 Mr. Li Gun Mo, Prime Minister on a goodwill had visited India. Several other visits were organised thereafter by North Korea which included “Mr. Li Jong Ok, Vice President of DPRK (May 1991 and March 1993), Mr. Yang Hyong Sop, Chairman, Supreme People’s Assembly (April, 1998), Mr. Choe Thae Bok, Chairman of SPA as Secretary of Central Committee of the Workers’ Party of Korea (October 1998), Mr. Pak Gil Yon, Vice Foreign Minister (April 2000), Mr. Jang Chol, Vice-Chairman of Supreme People’s Assembly (January 2003), Mr. Choe Chang Sik, Vice Minister of Public Health in November 2005 to attend the 3rd GAVI Partners’ Meeting held in New Delhi, Mr. Ma Chol Su, Director of 4th Department in the DPRK Ministry of Foreign Affairs (March 2006) to discuss bilateral matters with JS (EA),Mr. Ri Ju Kwan, Vice-Chairman of the DPRK Information Committee (April 2006) to sign the Agreement on Cooperation in the field on Information, Mr Kim Yong Il, Vice Foreign Minister, visited Delhi in May 2007 and August 2009, Ri Su Yong, Foreign Minister of DPR Korea on a bilateral and standalone visit (12-14 April 2015) – the first ever Ministerial-level visit from DPR Korea in nearly three decades.”13

At the economic front India and North Korea have developed a framework for the economic cooperation but it is not much advanced due to “limited foreign exchange with DPRK, non-availability of direct shipping and non-guarantee of payments through an established banking
and insurance system. Because of these factors and for the UN sanction, Indian exporters have not shown much enthusiasm in exploring this market. Bilateral trade between India and DPRK declined during the recent past mainly due to the latter’s inability to carry on foreign trade due to financial crunch.” 14 Other factors have also contributed for North Korea’s decline in the global trade, making a dent in the trade with India also. It has been observed that “for most of North Korea's history, international trade has been regarded as a necessary evil. Both the North Korean regime's juche ideology and the planned character of the North Korean economy are antithetical to the notions of comparative advantage and the exploitation of international trade for the purpose of increasing income and welfare, and, as one might expect, North Korea's economic relations with the rest of the world have been unusually brittle. The 1970s push for military modernization left the country heavily indebted relative to its meager export earnings, and the 1975 de facto default effectively cut it off from international capital markets. The economy suffered further negative shocks with the withdrawal of Soviet economic support in the mid-1980s and the subsequent collapse of the Eastern Bloc economies, which had been North Korea's largest trade partners, in the early 1990s.” 15 In spite of these constraints the “India’s export to DPRK was US$ 76.52 million and import was US$ 132.53 million during the Financial Year 2014-2015. “16
A study of India- North Korea trade analysis can be made with respect to other countries.

According to the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA) under the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy in South Korea, India was third in North Korea’s trade volume in 2013. (KOTRA (2013), 2013 Nyun Bukhan Daeoeimuyeokdonghyang [The Trend of Foreign Economic Policy in North Korea 2013]) As can be seen in Table 1, India took up 1.3% of total trade volume of North Korea showing the dramatic growth of imports from North Korea. Despite the dramatic change, China has been far ahead of trade and investments into North Korea. 

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>North Import Amount</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>North Export Amount</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Total Volume of Import and Export Amount</th>
<th>Increase</th>
<th>Importance</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>3,633</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2,914</td>
<td>17.3</td>
<td>6,547</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>89.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>96.5</td>
<td>48.6</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>-29.9</td>
<td>104.2</td>
<td>37.3</td>
<td>1.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>India</td>
<td>63.1</td>
<td>-16.7</td>
<td>34.9</td>
<td>24,659</td>
<td>98.0</td>
<td>29.1</td>
<td>1.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>85.0</td>
<td>112.1</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>-51.8</td>
<td>95.6</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>59.3</td>
<td>23.6</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>108.1</td>
<td>60.8</td>
<td>24.8</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Bilateral economic relations suggest the trend of relationship between the countries. India- North Korea may not have very close relations but these cannot be negated at all. This economic fact is bolstered by the Indian role after the imposition of sanctions on North Korea.

Indian view of North Korea as a threat

North Korea is treated as a threat to the world. This is a common perception about North Korea by USA and its allies. Even China, its strong supporter has felt depressed after its recent developments in the missile technology because somewhere China also has analysed that strengthening of North Korea may even challenge even its might one day in threatening manner as it has done with western world. Although Chinese control on North Korea still persists but
new developments cannot be discounted in future.

The fear which is being realized by western countries, Japan, South Korea and now by China, though in less measure, has also been realized by India as well. Indian hypothesis is that North Korea may be a problem to it on two level, first it can be used as proxy state to create problems to India by the Chinese-Pakistan nexus which has come into nexus to challenge Indian supremacy in the region and Pakistan efforts to establish a balance of power in South Asia; Chinese interest is to limit India within the South Asian region. It is a possibility that they can use North Korea to place its illegitimate power against India but this hypothesis does not hold good due to the reason that so far no threat has emerged from the side of North Korea to India and India and North Korea have maintained smooth relations with each other. The only possibility may emerge of deterioriation of relations when India moves closer to South Korea and Japan. As far as Indian stand on Korean peninsula has been recognized by North Korea where India does not treat South Korea as the only proprietor and inheritor of the peninsula. Therefore, so far role of North Korea as a proxy state against India has limited relevance.

Second, North Korea at individual level expands its power arm to challenge the authority of the neighbouring states. This possibility also stands away from the realism due to international pressure which has increased in the recent time. At the global level it has been realized that North Korea may in reality emerge as a rogue state, for this reason USA and its allies have attempted to use two pronged strategy; to initiate negotiations with North Korea with the involvement of major powers with stakes in Korean peninsula, and to apply the UN sanctions on North Korea to bend to International sanction regime as they succeeded in Iran. North Korea had conducted nuclear test in 2006 thereafter under Security Council resolution 1718 and after next nuclear test in 2009, under resolution 1874 sanctions were imposed. In spite of these sanctions North Korea had continued to have trade relations with several countries including China. “An analysis of the trading patterns of each customs regime based on their moving average annual growth rates of exports to the DPRK during the period of 2006-2012 (brings out specific features). The first group including Indonesia, Italy, China, Hong Kong, and Russia shows increasing trends in exports of both all commodities and HSPC related goods. States in the second quadrant, India, presents a negatively growing trend in the total national export amid the
expanding HSPC exports. The entities in the third quadrant consisting of Singapore, Taiwan, Germany, Thailand, Malaysia, and Japan have generally downward propensities in both types of exports. Sri Lanka is not displayed due to its growth rates exceeding 100%, and Philippines is not shown as no HSPC related goods were exported to the DPRK in the period of 2004-10. Recalling that the ideal implementation of resolutions 1718 and 1874 should be seen as a negative growth in HSPC exports without a significant change in regular trading relation with the DPRK(HS codes used for this study are defined as HS codes with Proliferation Concern (HSPC.) From the point of view of customs officers, HSPCs may draw more attention than other HS codes. Products falling under HSPC may include items for obvious WMD purposes, dual-use industrial machines or materials, under-threshold items for the control of MECRs, and legitimate goods."

18 This analysis shows that India has important place in North Korean economy although it is not as impressive as China has but role of India in its economic sphere has been recognized by North Korea. Hence, this possibility also remains remote that North Korea may emerge as a serious threat to India although it confrontation may increase with US and its allies.

Therefore Indian threat perception towards North Korea is negative which means India does not view it as a serious security threat except its role as a partner in the three country nexus. This perception is against to global view about it. As US and South Korea have demanded more strict sanctions on North Korea after the recent developments. South Korea has recently emphasized to adopt a very strong policy against North Korea after its Hydrogen bomb explosion. “Over the past 10 years, North Korea has conducted four nuclear tests and launched six long-range missiles — all in violation of Security Council resolutions and Pyongyang's international obligations, Oh told a council meeting on respecting the principles of the U.N. Charter. If we go on business-as-usual vis-a-vis the DPRK's repeated nuclear tests and advancement of missile capabilities, the entire world could fall prey to the DPRK's nuclear blackmail.”19

Growing relations between India – North Korea does not mean that India is not a part of global effort to restrain North Korea. Indian stand is in support of the sanctions. India also worries about the nuclear proliferation from the side of North Korea. “India’s worries about North Korea’s non-proliferation record stems from its suspicions of the country’s close collaboration with Pakistan on missile and nuclear technologies. North Korean minister had explained recent actions by his country as those taken in self-defence against South Korea. India was a friend of
North Korea but was taking a different position from the Pyongyang government on the nuclear issue given that it was a question of principle and in the backdrop of India’s impeccable record on non-proliferation,”20 India has maintained smooth relations with North Korea. There are trade relations and the visits of North Korean political elites have taken even in the recent time. “Both sides continue to work closely in international fora and support each other on various issues of bilateral and international interests”21 but India does not support its proliferation programme though does not treat it as immediate security threat except its complicity with Pakistan.

Contemporary developments in bilateral relations

In the recent time the relations between India and North Korea have improved. The basis of relationship has been friendship and cooperation, the socialist approach of both countries and India’s good relations with USSR during the start of cold war and thereafter continued practice of non alignment. After the aggressive postures by North Korea, India has recently advised North Korea to involve other stakeholders and open itself to the world so that its security concerns are met. North Korea has pleaded that it has security threat, mainly from South Korea and its benefactor USA, but India always attempted to make North Korea realize its acts and open to the world, the basis of god relations have continued. “At the diplomatic level, India has always supported six-party talks and peaceful resolution of the dispute in the Korean peninsula”22

At the bilateral level there is increased interaction between both countries. North Korean Foreign Minister had visited India in April 2015, with an objective to strengthen the economic relations with India. “In order for North Korea to survive, it will be forced to find new trade partners; Russia is one at this moment. But expanding the market can never harm the DPRK’s economy; Ri’s main goal would be strengthen the economic potential between the two countries.”23

India also responded by participating in the National Day function of North Korea in December in which Indian Home Minister (state) participated, a strong diplomatic move showing that India had now allocated a new and important place to it. This was in the direction of already well established good relations between both countries. One factor which has pushed India towards North Korea in recent time is based on economic interests: “North Korea is estimated to have one of the largest global deposits of minerals and rare earth metals necessary for India’s IT industry and electronic majors ,”24 moreover “it is a resource-rich country, with loads of coal,
bauxite and other minerals.” 25 This has been analysed that in future North Korea can be of utility for its development. The new government in India is trying to involve and engage every potential country in its development programme. Mangolia, North Korea, Canada etc. are being allocated larger role in India’s economic foreign policy.

Although one serious hindrance in contemporary India and North Korea relation has come from Indian side. At the political level India has enhanced its interaction with North Korea but at the diplomatic level there exists certain problems. As Indian Foreign Services Officers (IFS) are not keen to be posted as ambassador or at any other level in the Indian embassy in North Korea. “Since no officially eligible candidate in India's foreign service has volunteered for the assignment, the Narendra Modi government has appointed a veteran Chinese interpreter (Jasminder Kasturia) as the ambassador in Pyongyang, the seat of the most reclusive regime in the world. But her appointment marks the first time India has failed to find officers from even the IFS 'B’ - a cadre of stenographers, assistants and reserve diplomats who can be promoted to the main corps - for its top job at the mission in Pyongyang.”26 This problem is not positive development for the India – North Korea relations and should be immediately redressed.

Conclusion

It can be inferred that India and North Korea have cemented their relations and India may not experience any threat from North Korea. Although India is skeptical to North Korean nexus with Pakistan and its high dependence upon the China. That seems to have been factored by India in its enhanced diplomatic ties with it. Indian move has been acknowledged at the global level; even USA has searched for Indian support for the resolution of problems created by North Korea. Indian interests are governed by the economic interests as well India wants to limit its tilt towards Pakistan, there is one deficiency that India’s elite diplomatic staff appears to be reluctant to stay in North Korea. This needs to be corrected.

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