

India's Policy towards the North Korean Nuclear Weapons Program*

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After the end of the Cold War, which marked the end of ideological rivalry between the two superpowers of the world, it was often thought that the threats of nuclear warfare had declined. However, the South Asian region and the Korean Peninsula in Northeast Asia have emerged as the new nuclear hotspots. The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is being regarded as a necessary step towards building peace in the region. Although the conflict on the Korean Peninsula does not affect India directly, the exchange of nuclear and missile technology between Pakistan and North Korea has been an issue of deep concern to New Delhi. India's stand on the North Korean nuclear weapons issue has evolved over the years and in 2017 the Indian Government came out with official notifications which have imposed severe restrictions on any cooperation with North Korea, except for providing food and medical assistance to this isolated state. This article aims to explain India's policy towards the North Korean nuclear weapons program.

Keywords: India, North Korea, nuclear weapons, nuclear non-proliferation treaty, denuclearization

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Introduction

After the end of the Cold War, which marked the end of ideological rivalry between the two superpowers of the world, it was often thought that the threats of nuclear warfare had declined. However, the spread of nuclear weapons since the end of the Cold War is indeed a dangerous development as the chances of miscalculations and conflicts have increased substantially. The South Asian region and the Korean Peninsula in Northeast Asia have emerged as the new nuclear hotspots. These two regions are also among the major conflict zones in the world and have witnessed violent conflicts in the past. The Korean Peninsula still remains a Cold War zone and the two Koreas have remained divided for the last seven decades.¹ Despite several punitive measures and sanctions by the international community, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK or North Korea) has not curtailed its nuclear ambitions. The denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is being regarded as a necessary step towards building peace in the region. Although the conflict on the Korean Peninsula does not affect India directly, the exchange of nuclear and missile technology between Pakistan and North Korea has been an issue of deep concern to New Delhi. Some of the missiles being possessed by Pakistan are stated to have been developed in North Korea.² On the other hand, the North Korean nuclear weapons program got support from Islamabad,

- 1 After the defeat of Japan in 1945 the Korean Peninsula became independent from brutal Japanese colonial rule (1910-1945). However, in the same year, the Korean Peninsula was divided along the 38th parallel by the Allied Powers, which eventually led to the establishment of two ideologically opposed regimes on the Korean Peninsula in 1948. On June 25, 1950, North Korea invaded South Korea to unify the country, which triggered a protracted Korean War. During the Korean War, South Korea was supported militarily by the U.S.-led United Nations coalition forces while North Korea was supported by China and the Soviet Union. An armistice agreement on July 27, 1953 brought an end to the hostilities, but there was no peace agreement. As a result, the two Koreas are still officially at war with each other.
- 2 B. Raman, "Pakistan's missile-rattling," *Business Line: The Hindu*, June 10, 2002, <<http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2002/06/10/stories/2002061000080900.htm>> (date accessed September 29, 2017).

particularly the Pakistani scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan played a crucial role in the proliferation of nuclear technology.³ The nuclear bombs and ballistic missiles are key elements of the nuclear weapons program. The spread of these weapons of mass destruction (WMD) also reflects the failure of Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) in preventing the proliferation of nuclear weapons technology. Although India is itself a non-signatory state of NPT, it has always supported the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions against the North Korean WMD issue and has been vigilant against the proliferation of nuclear weapons by this reclusive regime with India's neighbouring countries. The available literature on this issue largely focuses on the exchange of nuclear weapons and missile technologies between Pakistan and North Korea and its impact on the regional security dynamics in South Asia and Northeast Asia.⁴ However, there is a lack of literature which examines India's policy towards the North Korean nuclear weapons program. India's policy towards the North Korean nuclear issue is largely shaped by New Delhi's stand on the nuclear non-proliferation regime and regional security dynamics in South Asia. This article aims to explain India's policy towards the North Korean nuclear weapons program.

India and the NPT

The NPT has been an effort to control the spread of nuclear weapons in the world. This treaty came into effect in 1970 and it recognized only those countries as nuclear weapons states which had tested nuclear

3 David Albright, Paul Brannan, and Andrea Scheel Stricker, "Detecting and Disrupting Illicit Nuclear Trade after A.Q. Khan," *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 33, no. 2, April (2010), pp. 85-106.

4 Prakash Nanda, *Nuclearisation of Divided Nations: Pakistan-India-Korea* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2001); Gaurav Kampani, "Second Tier Proliferation: The Case of Pakistan and North Korea," *The Nonproliferation Review*, vol. 9, no. 3 (2002), pp. 107-116; P.R. Chari and Vyjayanti Raghavan, *Comparative Security Dynamics in Northeast Asia and South Asia* (New Delhi: Pentagon Security International, 2010).

devices before January 1, 1967. On the issue of NPT India's position has been that this treaty allows few countries to possess nuclear weapons and therefore, discriminates between nuclear "haves" and "have-nots." India's opposition to the NPT has been rooted in its policy of non-alignment and it has been opposed to any international agreement which is discriminatory in nature. Since its independence from Britain in 1947, India has strived to pursue an independent and non-aligned foreign policy.⁵ During the Cold War period, when the world was divided between the two military blocs led by Soviet Union and the United States of America (U.S.), India did not join any of these groups and remained non-aligned. Although India established a treaty of "Peace, Friendship and Cooperation" with the Soviet Union on August 9, 1971, New Delhi never became a full-fledged military ally of the Communist bloc. In order to maintain "strategic autonomy" in international relations, New Delhi recognized the importance of nuclear weapons. As the country of Gautama Buddha, Mahatma Gandhi and Mother Teresa, India has always advocated for global peace and disarmament, but the world is certainly not an ideal place. India learnt this lesson when it was attacked and defeated by China in 1962. Despite seeking *Panchasheel*⁶ in relations with its Asian neighbour, China's attack was an eye-opener to New Delhi and since then India has taken "China's threat" very seriously. Two years later, China conducted its first nuclear test which propelled India to actively engage in the development of nuclear weapons technology, resulting in the first "peaceful nuclear explosion" by this South Asian nation in May 1974. On the other hand, India's rivalry with the Islamic Republic of Pakistan is almost eternal and both countries had fought at least four wars since their independence after partition of erstwhile British India on the basis of religion in 1947. The close alliance between China and Pakistan is a major challenge to the Indian security establishment. As a result, in May 1998, India conducted nuclear tests

5 Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet S. Pardesi, "Explaining Sixty Years of India's Foreign Policy," *India Review*, vol. 8, no. 1, January-March (2009), pp. 4-19.

6 *Panchasheel* refers to the five principles of good neighborliness and peaceful coexistence. These were the guiding principles of the China-India agreement in 1954.

and declared itself a nuclear weapons state. After the nuclear tests, in a letter to the then U.S. President Bill Clinton, the then Indian Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had pointed towards China and Pakistan as the major reasons for India's nuclear weapons program.⁷

In recent times India's application for membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG)⁸ has been stalled by China and some other countries on the ground that India is a non-signatory state to the NPT. However, India has consistently opposed the proliferation of nuclear weapons and has refrained from sharing this technology with any other country. India has pursued a "dual track strategy" of developing a nuclear deterrence in defiance to the nuclear non-proliferation regime, but also advocating for nuclear disarmament.⁹ India has fully abided by the UNSC resolutions against proliferation of nuclear weapons by any other country. As a responsible nuclear power state India has also played its role in checking the proliferation of WMD technology in the world. India's track record regarding nuclear non-proliferation has been recognized by the world powers and the U.S. has particularly been keen to cooperate with New Delhi in civilian use of nuclear energy. Although the India-U.S. civilian nuclear agreement of 2005 is a deviation from the non-proliferation regime, it acknowledges India's strong commitment towards nuclear non-proliferation. Ironically, three decades earlier, in 1975, the U.S. created laws against nuclear weapons development by India itself.¹⁰ In recent years the U.S. has also been pushing for India's membership in the NSG.

7 "Nuclear Anxiety; Indian's Letter to Clinton On the Nuclear Testing," *The New York Times*, May 13, 1998, <<https://www.nytimes.com/1998/05/13/world/nuclear-anxiety-indian-s-letter-to-clinton-on-the-nuclear-testing.html>> (date accessed May 16, 2019).

8 NSG is a 48 member group which was created in the wake of India's first "peaceful nuclear explosion" in 1974. The aim of this group is to limit the trade of nuclear material with only those countries which are signatories of NPT.

9 Leonard Weiss, "India and the NPT," *Strategic Analysis*, vol. 34, no. 2 (2010), pp. 255-271.

10 Mumin Chen, "Re-assessing the International Nuclear Non-Proliferation Regime: A Comparison Between India and North Korea," *Jebat: Malaysian Journal of History, Politics & Strategic Studies*, vol. 38, no. 2, December (2011), p. 144.

India-North Korea Relations

India's relations with North Korea go back to historical times. In the ancient period Indian cultural influences through Buddhism spread to the Korean Peninsula. However, in the modern period after India got independence from British colonial rule in August 1947, it briefly got involved in the Korean conflict. India contributed whatever it could have done in its capacity to bring a peaceful resolution to the Korean conflict and unification of the two Koreas.¹¹ KPS Menon from India supervised over the United Nations (UN), organized elections in South Korea in 1948, in which North Korea did not participate. Later, during the Korean War (1950-1953) India sent a medical team and as chairman of the Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission (NNRC), New Delhi played an important role in the repatriation of prisoners of war. India along with other neutral nations also made efforts in the signing of the armistice agreement in 1953, which brought an end to the hostilities on the Korean Peninsula.¹² However, realizing the complexity of the Korean conflict India maintained a low profile engagement with both Koreas after the Korean War and in 1962 New Delhi established a consulate level relationship with both Seoul and Pyongyang. Nonetheless, India's relations with North Korea remained uneasy vis-à-vis India's relations with South Korea during the Cold War period. On the issue of the China-India border conflict in 1962 North Korea supported China. Subsequently, New Delhi came out with a strong protest note on July 20, 1963, which regarded Pyongyang's support of Beijing as "an unfriendly act amounting to interference in the internal affairs of the Government of India."¹³ Later, during the India-Pakistan

11 Ranjit Kumar Dhawan, "India's Efforts for Peace and Unification of the Korean Peninsula," *Tamkang Journal of International Affairs*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2016), pp.1-35; Kim ChanWahn, "The Role of India in the Korean War," *International Area Review*, vol. 13, no. 2 (Summer, 2010), p. 26.

12 India, Ministry of External Affairs, "India-Republic of Korea Bilateral Relations," *Briefs on India's Bilateral Relations*, New Delhi, October 2017, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/Republic_of_Korea_October_2017.pdf> (date accessed October 31, 2017).

13 India, Ministry of External Affairs, MEA Library, *Annual Report (1963-64)*, New

war in 1971 over Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan), North Korea criticized India for dismembering Pakistan and supported Islamabad by supplying some military equipment such as artillery ammunition, multiple rocket launchers and spare parts of the weapons.¹⁴ In May 1971 New Delhi also threatened to expel some North Korean officials from the country due to their alleged involvement in certain “undesirable activities,” such as promotion of the revolutionary movement in India.¹⁵

As a non-aligned country India recognized the existence of the two Korean states and established embassy level diplomatic relations with Pyongyang and Seoul in 1973. In August 1975, North Korea also became a member of Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) – to which India was a founding member. As members of NAM, New Delhi and Pyongyang share similar views on several international issues including disarmament and elimination of nuclear weapons from the world.¹⁶ In the various NAM summits, India has consistently supported the unification of the two Koreas in a peaceful manner and without any interference from foreign powers.¹⁷ However, despite having diplomatic relations and common views as being members of NAM, India maintained minimal relations with North Korea. Although there were regular meetings by diplomats and leaders of both countries, there had

Delhi, p. 44, <<http://mealib.nic.in/?2386?000>> (date accessed October 1, 2017).

14 Yatindra Bhatnagar, *Korean Experience* (New Delhi: Deepsadhana Publication, 1979), pp. 129-130; Prakash Nanda, *Nuclearisation of Divided Nations: India-Pakistan-Korea*, p. 65; David Brewster, “India’s Developing Relationship with South Korea: A Useful Friend in East Asia,” *Asian Survey*, vol. 50, no. 2 (2010), p. 407.

15 *The Times* (London), May 7, 1971, cited in David Brewster, “India’s Developing Relationship with South Korea: A Useful Friend in East Asia,” p. 405 in Footnote 3.

16 India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Briefs on India’s Bilateral Relations*, “India-DPR Korea Relations,” New Delhi, August 2017, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Portal/ForeignRelation/2_DPR_Korea_October_2017.pdf> (date accessed October 19, 2017).

17 *Summit Declarations of Non-Aligned Movement (1961-2009)*, Kathmandu: Institute of Foreign Affairs, April 2011, <<http://namiran.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Declarations-of-All-Previous-NAM-Summits.pdf>> (date accessed October 23, 2017).

been no meeting at the highest level. This shows that the bilateral relationship between India and North Korea has been merely formal without much substance.

After the end of the Cold War, New Delhi introduced changes in its economic and foreign policies, which played an important role in realigning India's relations with both Koreas. India's economic liberalization and "Look East"¹⁸ policy found more common ground with South Korea, and relations between the two countries have developed substantially in the last two and half decades. In contrast to this, India's relations with North Korea have remained marginal in the post-Cold War years due to Pyongyang's reluctance to adopt economic liberalization measures and its role in the proliferation of WMD with Pakistan. As a result, India maintained its "small" embassy in Pyongyang to have some engagement with this isolated country. The relations between New Delhi and Pyongyang in the post-Cold War period were largely shaped by India's non-alignment policy and the humanitarian support needed by North Korea due to frequent famines and economic sanctions imposed on Pyongyang because of its nuclear weapons program. India sent thousands of tons of food and humanitarian aid to North Korea. Also, India made a small contribution in the human resource development of North Korea by providing educational training to North Korean students and researchers. A children's school, an agricultural farm and a shoe factory in North Korea received regular grants and support from India. However, due to the several international sanctions on this "Hermit Kingdom,"¹⁹ trade relations between India and North Korea have remained minimal (Table 1).

18 The "Look East" policy was initiated in the early 1990s by P.V. Narasimha Rao administration to improve India's relations with the countries of Southeast and East Asia.

19 North Korea is also referred to as "Hermit Kingdom" due to its isolationist policies. In fact this term was used for the Korean Peninsula in the pre-modern period. The term "Hermit" was first used for Korea by William Elliot Griffis. See William Elliot Griffis, *Corea: The Hermit Nation* (London: W.H. Allen & Co., 1882).

<Table 1> North Korea's trade partners in year 2016

	Percentage of North Korea's trade with foreign countries				
North Korea's export destinations	China (83%)	India (3.5%)	Pakistan (1.5%)	Burkina Faso (1.2%)	Others (10.8%)
North Korea's import origins	China (85%)	India (3.1%)	Russia (2.3%)	Thailand (2.1%)	Others (7.5%)

Source: The Observatory of Economic Complexity, North Korea, Trade Balance, <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/prk/#Trade_Balance> (date accessed October 23, 2017).

North Korea-Pakistan WMD Trade

Despite having vast differences in socio-cultural and political systems, North Korea and Pakistan share a unique relationship. One common thread that binds these two countries is China, as they both are the closest allies of this Asian giant. They also share similar origins as they emerged with the division of their motherland — the Korean Peninsula in the case of North Korea and British India in the case of Pakistan. The relations between Pyongyang and Islamabad were established in 1971 during the India-Pakistan war over Bangladesh. During this war Pakistan allegedly got some military support from North Korea and after the liberation of Bangladesh, Pyongyang criticized India for its role in the dismemberment of Pakistan. After the end of the Cold War, North Korea-Pakistan relations found new purpose with regards to the exchange of missile and nuclear technologies. In the post-Cold War period, due to the loss of economic and military support from the Soviet Union, North Korea emerged as an exporter of ballistic missiles and started seeking nuclear weapons technology for the survival of the ruling Kim dynasty.²⁰ Although North Korea was a signatory state of NPT, it withdrew from this non-proliferation treaty in 2003. Pakistan was also looking for ballistic missiles which could target Indian cities. As a result, the convergence

²⁰ North Korea has established a hereditary succession of power in the country. Kim Il-sung (1948-1994), Kim Jong-il (1994-2011), and Kim Jong-un (since 2011) have been the rulers of North Korea.

of military interests brought North Korea and Pakistan together. In 1993, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited Pyongyang and allegedly received missile technology from the North. Some of the missiles being possessed by the Pakistani army are stated to be of North Korean origin.

On the other hand, North Koreans got help from Pakistan in the development of nuclear weapons. The probable reason which led to transfer of the nuclear weapons technology by Islamabad to Pyongyang was due to Pakistan's lack of hard currency to pay for the North Korean ballistic missiles. This is also evident from the fact that during the 1990s, Pakistan was under U.S. sanctions due to its nuclear weapons program. According to Gaurav Kampani, "Above all, Pakistan's proliferation behaviour is evidence that in some circumstances, reliance on sanctions to manage proliferation carries the risk of producing negative outcomes."²¹ This can be applied to the North Korean case as well. Due to international sanctions, Pyongyang has largely depended on illicit trade of WMD for the survival of its regime. North Korea has also depended on barter trade or has often demanded "deferred payment" in its trade with foreign countries for food and fuel. As a result, in exchange for North Korean ballistic missiles, Pakistan provided in-part nuclear technology, in-part cash and fertilizers and in-part wheat, which was either from Pakistan or imported from the U.S. and/or Australia to North Korea.²² Pakistan's military ruler Pervez Musharraf has mentioned this illicit trade in his memoir in the following words,

Doctor A.Q. [Abdul Qadeer] Khan transferred nearly two dozen P-I and P-II centrifuges to North Korea. He also provided North Korea with a flow meter, some special oils for centrifuges, and coaching on centrifuge technology,

21 Gaurav Kampani, "Second Tier Proliferation: The Case of Pakistan and North Korea," p. 107.

22 Prakash Nanda, p. 71; see P.R. Chari and Vyjayanti Raghavan, *Comparative Security Dynamics in Northeast Asia and South Asia*, p. 141; B. Raman, "Pakistan's missile-rattling."

*including visits to top-secret centrifuge plants.*²³

North Korea's role in the proliferation of missile and nuclear technology has been an issue of concern for India. The North Korean missiles acquired by Pakistan are a threat to India's own security as these missiles have brought Indian cities within the range of Pakistan's nuclear weapons. Similarly, Pakistan's support of North Korean nuclear weapons program is a threat to India's "strategic partners" such as U.S., South Korea and Japan. A statement by the Government of Germany in 2019 revealed that Pakistan's nuclear proliferation activities have "increased sharply" in recent years.²⁴ As a result, New Delhi has remained vigilant against the proliferation of WMD in its neighbourhood.

India's Position on the North Korean WMD Program

Although India has maintained normal diplomatic relations with North Korea since 1973, relations between the two countries have remained uneasy, particularly due to Pyongyang's belligerent behaviour and the exchange of nuclear and missile technologies with Islamabad. During the Cold War period, North Korea's anti-India activities, including its support of China during the Sino-India border conflicts of 1962 and of Pakistan during the 1971 Indo-Pak war, created frictions between Pyongyang and New Delhi. In the post-Cold War period, India has remained concerned over the issue of the spread of WMD technology in its neighbourhood. North Korea's involvement in the proliferation of nuclear technology with Pakistan, Iran and Myanmar is against India's interests. Therefore, on several occasions, India has taken actions against

23 Pervez Musharraf, *In the Line of Fire: A Memoir* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2006), p. 294.

24 Rezaul H Lashkar, "'Sharp increase' in Pakistan's efforts to illegally get N-tech: Berlin," *Hindustan Times*, November 16, 2019, <<https://www.hindustantimes.com/world-news/sharp-increase-in-pakistan-s-efforts-to-illegally-get-n-tech-berlin/story-7EoBewOumY6JqlMR4w2meI.html>> (date accessed November 16, 2019).

North Korean shipping vessels, suspecting them of transporting nuclear materials or parts of ballistic missiles (Table 2).

<Table 2> List of North Korean ships confiscated by Indian officials

Name of the North Korean ship	Time of confiscation	Place of confiscation	WMD materials on board
Ku Wol San	June 1999	Gujarat coast	Parts of ballistic missiles
MV Musan	August 2009	Andaman coast	Not found
Hyangro	October 2009	Kerala coast	Not found

Sources: Prakash Nanda, *Nuclearisation of Divided Nations: Pakistan-India-Korea* (New Delhi: Manas Publications, 2001), pp. 68-69; John Cherian, "In murky waters," *Frontline*, vol. 26, no. 18, August 29-September 11, 2009, <<http://www.frontline.in/static/html/fl2618/stories/20090911261805700.htm>> (date accessed February 17, 2018); Special Correspondent, "North Korea ship," *The Telegraph* (India), October 5, 2009, <https://www.telegraphindia.com/1091005/jsp/nation/story_11574195.jsp> (date accessed February 17, 2018).

On the request of U.S. officials a North Korean jet was denied permission by the Government of India to cross Indian airspace in August 2008. This North Korean aircraft was supposedly destined for Iran and was suspected of carrying parts of ballistic missiles or other WMD materials.²⁵ Apart from these incidents, India has repeatedly condemned the testing of nuclear devices or missiles by North Korea and has raised concern regarding involvement of Pyongyang in the proliferation of WMD in South Asian region. However, it is indeed interesting to note that North Korea never made any serious complaints over these issues to New Delhi, and bilateral relations remained as usual. On the other hand, India sent thousands of tons of humanitarian assistance to North Korea and abstained from voting against this secretive regime on human rights related issues in the UN and its affiliated agencies. India also provided some technical training to North Korean researchers and students. Some of the scientists from North Korea who were trained in the Centre for Space Science and Technology Education in Asia and the Pacific (CSSTEAP) in Dehradun, India were

25 "N Korean jet denied permission to cross Indian airspace," Bureau Report, *Zee News*, November 5, 2008, <http://zeenews.india.com/news/nation/n-korean-jet-denied-permission-to-crossindian-airspace_481092.html> (date accessed January 9, 2015).

later found to be actively involved in the North Korean WMD program.²⁶ This alleged “Indian connection” to the North Korean nuclear program was mentioned in an UN report. But the spokesperson of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs denied these allegations and maintained that the courses provided by CSSTEAP to foreigners including North Koreans is “very general” and is “available in open-source.”²⁷

However, the shift in India’s policy towards the North Korean nuclear weapons program was evident in April 2017 when its Ministry of External Affairs came out with an “extraordinary” official notification which has put severe restrictions on any cooperation with this reclusive state, except with regards to food and medical aid.²⁸ Later in October 2017, the Government of India published another notification regarding economic sanctions on North Korea.²⁹ The nationalist administration of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in India has taken a harder stand on North Korean provocations and has been more assertive in raising issues of North Korea’s nuclear proliferation activities at the international forums. After coming to power in May 2014, the Modi administration

26 Nilanjana Bhowmick, “India’s embarrassing North Korean connection,” *Al-Jazeera*, June 21, 2016, <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2016/06/india-embarrassing-north-korean-connection-160620195559208.html>> (date accessed October 10, 2017).

27 India, Ministry of External Affairs, *Media Briefings*, “Official Spokesperson’s response to a question on an article in Al Jazeera on Indian and DPRK,” New Delhi, June 23, 2016, <<http://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/26945/official-spokespersons+response+to+a+question+on+an+article+in+al+jazeera+on+india+and+dprk>> (date accessed October 10, 2017).

28 The notification by Indian Ministry of External Affairs against the North Korean WMD program is in reference to several UNSC resolutions: 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013), 2270 (2016) and 2321 (2016). India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Democratic People’s Republic of Korea-Non-Proliferation order,” *Press Releases*, New Delhi, April 21, 2017, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/28415_DPRK_Non_Proliferation_Order_April_2017.pdf> (date accessed April 30, 2017).

29 India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Non-Proliferation Order related to UN Security Council Resolutions on DPRK (October 31, 2017),” *Press Releases*, New Delhi, November 4, 2017, <http://www.mea.gov.in/Uploads/PublicationDocs/29093_New_DGFT.pdf> (date accessed April 22, 2018).

initiated the “Act East” policy to further deepen India’s economic and strategic partnership with the countries of Southeast Asian and East Asian region.³⁰ Nevertheless, India’s approach towards North Korea under the Modi administration has remained lukewarm.

Although the Modi government in India abstained from voting against North Korean human rights situation in the UN on November 18, 2014 and provided Pyongyang with food aid worth U.S. \$ 1 million in 2016, it firmly conveyed to North Korea that New Delhi would not tolerate the proliferation of nuclear weapons. During the visit of the then Indian Minister of External Affairs Sushma Swaraj to South Korea in December 2014, the then South Korean President Park Geun-hye thanked her for New Delhi’s support on the issue of North Korea’s denuclearization.³¹ When Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong visited New Delhi in April 2015, which was the first ever trip by any foreign minister from the DPRK to India, Swaraj “conveyed to her [North] Korean counterpart the significance of peace and stability in the Korean peninsula for India’s Act East policy.”³² Later, during the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to Seoul in May 2015, the joint statement for “Special Strategic Partnership” between India and South Korea expressed concern over the North Korean WMD program.³³ In recent years India has begun considering North Korea’s WMD program as a national security threat

30 The period of the first Narendra Modi government was from May 2014 to May 2019. Prime Minister Narendra Modi got re-elected with majority seats in the lower house of Indian Parliament in May 2019.

31 Sohn JiAe, “President meets Indian foreign minister,” *Korea.net*, December 30, 2014, <<http://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=124301>> (date accessed January 10, 2015).

32 India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Visit of Foreign Minister of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” *Press Releases*, New Delhi, April 13, 2015, <<http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/25062>> (date accessed October 10, 2017).

33 India, Ministry of External Affairs, “India-Republic of Korea Joint Statement for Special Strategic Partnership (May 18, 2015),” *Bilateral/Multilateral Documents*, Seoul, May 18, 2015, <<http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25261/india++republic+of+korea+joint+statement+for+special+strategic+partnership+may+18+2015>> (date accessed October 16, 2017).

and supported the multi-nation forum called “Vancouver dialogue” in January 2018 to control North Korean nuclear weapons proliferation.³⁴

India and North Korea's Denuclearization

Till this date India has largely been a passive actor on the issue of controlling North Korea's WMD program. New Delhi has been taking measures against Pyongyang in response to the resolutions passed by the international community. Even the notifications published by the Narendra Modi administration in 2017 were in support of the resolutions passed by the UNSC against the WMD program of North Korea. This raises an important issue over whether India can play a more active role in the affairs of the Korean Peninsula and contribute to the reduction of the North Korean nuclear arsenal, if not its complete denuclearization? In the present context, India's participation in the issues related to the Korean Peninsula remains limited, mainly due to limitations in India's own capabilities. According to Wang Hwi Lee, Sang Yoon Ma, and Kun Young Park,

*India's impact on the Korean peninsula is neither direct nor explicit. However, its strategic relations with China, Russia, and the United States may have significant implications for the balance of power in the Northeast Asian region.*³⁵

India's economic, diplomatic and military influence beyond the South Asian and Indian Ocean region remains questionable. Although the importance of India in the geo-politics of the “Indo-Pacific” region has been increasing, it has still a long way to go before New Delhi could be regarded as a major power beyond the Indian Ocean region. However, India, in alliance with like-minded countries like Japan, U.S. and

34 Saubhadra Chatterji, “N Korea's nuclear tests a threat to our security,” *Hindustan Times* (New Delhi), December 26, 2017, p. 9.

35 Wang Hwi Lee, Sang Yoon Ma, and Kun Young Park, “Korean Foreign Policy and the Rise of the BRICs Countries,” *Asian Perspective*, vol. 31, no. 4 (2007), p. 219.

Australia, could put substantial pressure on China to restrain North Korea's belligerent behavior. Beijing still remains the most important diplomatic, economic and military partner of North Korea. Despite the harsh economic sanctions placed on the Kim dynasty, petroleum tankers and pipelines from China keep North Korean military vehicles rolling on the streets and along the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that has been the de-facto border between the two Korean states since 1953.

In this regard, the U.S. has also been seeking India's greater role in the denuclearization of North Korea. This is apparent from the statement of the former U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs Kurt Campbell before the Senate Foreign Affairs Committee in 2011 when he revealed that, "the United States and India have discussed North Korea in our Strategic Dialogue and other bilateral and multilateral exchanges."³⁶ In July 2017, a delegation from the U.S. State Department visited New Delhi to seek India's active role in curtailing North Korea's WMD program by scaling down diplomatic relations between India and North Korea.³⁷ Later, in August 2017, the then commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, Admiral Harry Harris, said that India can play a significant role in defusing the North Korean nuclear weapons threat.³⁸ However, despite substantial U.S. pressures, New Delhi did not completely break bilateral diplomatic relations with Pyongyang and during the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Rex Tillerson to New Delhi in October 2017, Sushma Swaraj said that, "India believed a diplomatic presence in

36 "US seeks India help to deal with North Korea," *The Indian Express* (Agencies), March 2, 2011, <<http://indianexpress.com/article/india/latest-news/us-seeks-india-help-to-deal-with-north-korea/>> (date accessed October 09, 2017).

37 Indrani Bagchi, "Scale back engagement with North Korea, US tells India," *The Times of India*, July 30, 2017, <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/scale-back-engagement-with-north-korea-us-tells-india/articleshow/59828183.cms>> (date accessed October 21, 2017).

38 Press Trust of India, "India A Loud Voice, Can Help Resolve N Korea Crisis: Top US Commander," *NDTV*, August 12, 2017, <<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/india-can-help-defuse-north-korea-crisis-top-us-commander-1736856>> (date accessed October 09, 2017).

North Korea was necessary to keep lines of communication open.”³⁹ The Narendra Modi government’s efforts to continue engagement with Pyongyang was evident when General VK Singh, the then Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs visited North Korea in May 2018, which was the first ministerial level visit from India to this reclusive state after a gap of almost two decades.⁴⁰

The recent developments on the Korean Peninsula and the diplomatic activities of China, South Korea and the U.S. with the Kim dynasty in North Korea have also not gone unnoticed in India. In the backdrop of April 27, 2018 inter-Korean summit, New Delhi voiced its apprehensions regarding the proliferation connections of North Korea’s WMD program.⁴¹ The Indian foreign policy establishment has been keeping an eye on the rapprochement between Pyongyang and Washington DC. India’s Ministry of External Affairs welcomed the U.S.-North Korea summit in Singapore in June 2018 but also reiterated its concerns about the North Korean nuclear proliferation linkages in South Asia.⁴² According to noted Indian strategic analyst, C. Raja Mohan, “Whether they [Donald Trump and Kim Jong-un] succeed or fail [on

39 “Terror groups threatening stability of Pakistan govt: Tillerson after talks with Sushma,” *Hindustan Times* (Agencies), October 25, 2017, <<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/terror-groups-threatening-stability-of-pakistan-govt-tillerson/story-wlcJg5UBV5iwAi6l6HoeN.html>> (date accessed October 25, 2017).

40 India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Visit of Minister of State for External Affairs General Dr. V.K. Singh (Retd.) to the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” *Press Releases*, New Delhi, May 16, 2018, <<https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29899/Visit+of+Minister+of+State+for+External+Affairs+General+Dr+VK+Singh+Retd+to+the+Democratic+Peoples+Republic+of+Korea>> (date accessed June 15, 2019).

41 India, Ministry of External Affairs, “Inter-Korean Summit meeting at Panmunjom,” *Press Releases*, New Delhi, April 28, 2018, <<http://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29856/InterKorean+Summit+meeting+at+Panmunjom>> (date accessed April 29, 2018).

42 India, Ministry of External Affairs, “India Welcomes the U.S.-DPRK Summit,” *Press Releases*, New Delhi, June 12, 2018, <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/29973/India_Welcomes_the_US_DPRK_Summit> (date accessed May 28, 2020).

issue of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula], India would be staring at a very different set of geopolitical equations in East Asia."⁴³ This is indeed an important moment for the NPT regime and security dynamics in the Northeast Asian region. However, it appears that India's role shall remain marginal in this whole process of the rapidly changing geopolitical situation on the Korean Peninsula. On the other hand, there is a possibility that North Korea may never completely give up its nuclear weapons as they are the most important tool for the survival of the Kim dynasty's regime in the country. As a result, it would be much more pragmatic for India to continue to be vigilant against North Korea's WMD proliferation activities in the South Asian and Indian Ocean region where New Delhi has been an influential power and in this regard cooperate with other major powers of the Indo-Pacific region.

An Analysis

India's policy towards the North Korean nuclear weapons program has evolved over time. During the Cold War period, and as members of NAM, India shared a similar view with North Korea on the issue of disarmament. In the post-Cold War period, and with changes in India's economic and foreign policy goals, there has been a shift in New Delhi's approach towards the North Korean nuclear weapons program. India has remained wary of the proliferation of WMD in its neighbourhood. The role of North Korea in the development and proliferation of nuclear and missile technology with India's archrival Pakistan has certainly strained New Delhi's relations with this "Hermit Kingdom." As a result, India has kept a low profile engagement with North Korea. Although India is stated to be one of the major trade partners of North Korea after China, the actual trade between the two countries is very small (Table 3).

43 C. Raja Mohan, "Raja Mandala: A Korean miracle," *The Indian Express*, March 13, 2018, <<http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/raja-mandala-a-korean-miracle-donald-trump-kim-jong-un-5095542/>> (date accessed April 22, 2018).

Despite India's opposition to the NPT, it has shown a strong commitment on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation. Similar to North Korea, harsh economic sanctions by the U.S. failed to deter India from developing its own nuclear weapons.⁴⁴ But India has refrained from sharing nuclear weapons technology with any other country of the world. In this regard, India's opposition to the North Korean nuclear weapons program reflects New Delhi's policy of preventing the spread of WMD in the South Asian region. In 2017, the Government of India came out with comprehensive measures against the North Korean nuclear program, which has significantly curtailed any Indian collaboration with this reclusive state, except for food and medical assistance. On the other hand, the U.S. has also been seeking India's greater role in solving the North Korean nuclear issue.

<Table 3> India-North Korea bilateral trade (Values in U.S. \$ millions)

Year	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
Export from India to North Korea	76.52	110.88	44.84	57.55	26.99
Import from North Korea to India	131.93	87.90	88.59	25.08	3.30
Total trade	208.45	198.78	133.43	82.63	30.28

Source: India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Department of Commerce, "Export-Import Data Bank," Kolkata, <<https://commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/iecntq.asp>> (date accessed July 13, 2019).

In recent years, India has taken a tougher stand on the North Korean nuclear weapons program, but it seems that New Delhi also does not want to completely isolate North Korea. India has continued to maintain some level of engagement with the North. This is also evident from the fact that the then Indian Minister of State for Home Affairs, Kiren Rijju visited the North Korean embassy in New Delhi in 2015 to participate in an event and expressed his desire for improved trade relations between the two countries.⁴⁵ However, North Korea's continued provocations,

44 Nitya Singh and Wootae Lee, "Survival from economic sanctions: a comparative case study of India and North Korea," *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, vol. 4, no. 2, July (2011), pp. 171-186.

45 Kallol Bhattacharjee, "India reaches out, wants to upgrade ties with North Korea,"

including two nuclear tests in 2016, did not go well with the Indian authorities. As a result, India decided to restrict trade relations with North Korea, except for food and medicinal assistance. In recent years the Kim dynasty has become more careful to dodge UN surveillance and sanctions regarding North Korean nuclear proliferation activities, so India has been seeking support from the international community on this matter. Apart from regional security concerns in South Asia, India is also concerned that the North Korean WMD program adversely affects the strategic balance in the Northeast Asian region and hampers the security interests of South Korea and Japan. In meetings with South Korean and Japanese leaders, New Delhi has shared concerns about the detrimental impact of the North Korean WMD program in the Northeast Asian region. At the same time Indian leaders have been advising their North Korean counterparts to refrain from belligerent and provocative behaviour that may endanger peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. South Korean leaders and the U.S. have also been seeking India's support and cooperation to denuclearize North Korea.

Conclusion

The spread of nuclear weapons in states like North Korea and Pakistan is indeed a worrisome development for the international community. However, for India, it is an issue of deep concern. The exchange of nuclear and missile technologies between Islamabad and Pyongyang has been detrimental to India's security. On the other hand, the possibilities of a nuclear war between North Korea and the U.S. have also increased in recent years. During his speech in the United Nations General Assembly in 2017, the U.S. President Donald Trump even threatened to "totally destroy" North Korea. Denuclearization of North Korea is regarded as an important step towards building peace and

The Hindu, September 16, 2015, <<http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-reaches-out-wants-to-upgrade-ties-with-north-korea/article7656332.ece>> (date accessed October 17, 2017).

stability on the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asian region. However, all efforts to denuclearize the North have failed. Economic sanctions have only made the life of the North Korean people miserable but have not deterred its regime to give up its WMD program. Any major conflict on the Korean Peninsula would have disastrous consequences. Although India does not have much leverage on issues related to the Korean Peninsula, it has consistently opposed the North Korean nuclear weapons program and has supported UNSC resolutions on this issue. India's position on the issue of nuclear non-proliferation and its deepening engagement with the East Asian region has been recognized by the U.S. As a result, Washington DC has been seeking India's participation and cooperation in denuclearizing North Korea.

India's response to the North Korean nuclear weapons program is also an indication that New Delhi has a desire to more actively participate in international affairs and solve issues which are beyond its territories and neighbourhood. Nuclear proliferation is a global problem as leakage of these technologies to non-state actors and terrorist organizations would be catastrophic. In recent years India's position towards the North Korean nuclear weapons program has become more rigid and New Delhi has sharpened its disagreement with North Korean belligerence. In all likelihood North Korea may also never completely surrender its nuclear arsenals, so New Delhi's efforts should be to prevent further proliferation of the North Korean WMD program and spread of WMD technology to other states and non-state actors. However, it would indeed be interesting to observe how India cooperates with the U.S., Japan and South Korea on the North Korean nuclear issue and seeks similar reciprocity from Washington DC, Tokyo and Seoul with regards to Pakistan's nuclear weapons program.

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