

Review - North Korea and Northeast Asian Regional Security

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BENJAMIN HABIB, MAR 24 2015

North Korea and Northeast Asian Regional Security.

Edited By: Simon Shen

Abingdon: Routledge, 2015

North Korea's doctrine of simultaneous nuclear weapons and economic development heralds the death knell for regional denuclearisation diplomacy and the arrival of a new strategic environment, in which regional states are realising that they may need to engage with North Korea as a nuclear-armed state. The volume *North Korea and Northeast Asian Regional Security*, edited by Simon Xu-Hui Shen, provides an enigmatic addition to the academic scholarship covering this terrain. The volume seeks to explore North Korea's role in Northeast Asia and provide perspectives on North Korea's impact on regional security from the viewpoints of neighbouring states. It explicitly does not aim to stake out a particular position on North Korea's foreign policy behaviour, a methodological approach that on the one hand is broad enough to incorporate the eclectic spectrum of perspectives provided by its contributors, while on the other hand leaving the book without a strong unifying theme to tie these contributions together.

The volume features a number of intriguing contributions from scholars working across the region. In chapter 2, Shen tentatively suggests that the neorealist argument of Waltz (1981) that "more nuclear weapons may be better" illustrates why a nuclear-armed DPRK is unlikely to threaten Northeast Asian regional security. According to this logic, the danger of nuclear miscalculation has been over-stated and the long-standing posture of deterrence by the US and its allies has been remarkably stable for over sixty years, even during periods of North Korean provocation.

In chapter 3, Panda (p. 27) argues that "the only possible way of resolving North Korea's nuclear issue" is through the Six Party Talks process, augmented by economic engagement with the DPRK, demonstrable steps by the US to reduce its nuclear arsenal (and thus its nuclear threat to North Korea), and concerted Chinese efforts to bring Pyongyang back to the Six Party Talks.

Citing the deployment of ROK troops abroad, US military bases in South Korea, and inter-Korean reconciliation as case studies, Chung provides a fascinating contribution in chapter 4 on how the role of the South Korean peace movement and the liberal-conservative divide in South Korean politics impacts on the ability of South Korean society to soberly debate policy vis-à-vis inter-Korean relations.

Roy's contribution in chapter 5 on the China-US-DPRK strategic triangle is the highlight of the volume, in which he foreshadows a tension between China and the United States in their approaches to North Korea resulting from the changing balance of power between the two great powers as the American unipolar moment exhausts itself. Roy argues that the idea of a common purpose between Beijing and Washington in addressing the North Korean nuclear program was based on ill-considered expectations; that the Chinese expected the US to directly address North Korea's security concerns as the key to unlocking the crisis, while US officials held an over-inflated view of China's

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ability to influence North Korean decision-making. Chinese foreign policy elites have been engaged in intense debate over the appropriate approach to North Korea for some time, however it is likely that the official policy of restrained disapproval will continue to carry the day.

Cheung describes the contours of domestic debate in Japan on its North Korea policy in chapter 6, centred on three strategic options: constructive engagement, hard hedging with comprehensive engagement, and containment. Cheung observes that the Japanese government has adopted the hard hedging + comprehensive engagement strategy, with the emotive issues of the DPRK kidnapping cases and the conservative desire for normalisation of Japanese statehood presenting obstacles to the adoption of any more moderate policy option.

In chapter 7, Leung argues that despite ideological difference among Russian policy-makers, Russian policy vis-à-vis North Korea provides Moscow with an entry point to Northeast Asian diplomatic institutions and economic linkages, with the objectives of developing the Russian Far East and reinstating itself as a regional power.

The contributions in this volume were originally published as a special issue of *The Journal of Comparative Asian Development* in December 2011 and disappointingly, the content and style of the volume does not appear to have been updated from the original journal publication. While individual chapters do have their highlights, the volume suffers from a lack of a consistent unifying theme to tie the chapters together (including detailed introductory and concluding chapters) and other stylistic inconsistencies (e.g. references to chapters as “articles”). Given the original publication of the contributions in 2011, the material is also somewhat dated, failing to take into account the death of Kim Jong Il and the leadership transition to Kim Jong Un, North Korea’s February 2013 nuclear test and the accelerating change in the balance of power between the United States and China, in addition to key leadership changes in North Korea’s neighbouring regional states.

For example, the “rogue state” nomenclature used in chapter 2 is also obsolete, an artefact of the policy language popularised by debates during the era of the Clinton presidency that is not representative of current academic debates. In addition, Panda’s (p. 27) recommendations regarding the restart of the Six Party Talks do not acknowledge that the window of opportunity for the denuclearisation of the DPRK was largely closed by Pyongyang’s February 2013 nuclear test. Panda (p. 28) further suggests that “The strategy to engage Pyongyang in the Six Party Talks (SPT) has failed, with Pyongyang walking out for no convincing reasons,” yet the reasoning behind North Korea’s exit from the talks has been shown in the academic literature (Cha, 2002, Habib, 2011) and in North Korea’s own propaganda (Ri, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 2012) to be reasonably clear; North Korea is a determined nuclear weapons and ballistic missile proliferator, driven by a number of economic, strategic, political and bureaucratic motivations all linked to the regime’s over-arching goal of survival. A more plausible outcome in the present day may be bilateral DPRK-US talks dealing directly with normalisation of relations between the two countries, acknowledging, explicitly or by de facto, North Korea as a nuclear power.

In the crowded field of North Korean foreign policy and Northeast Asian security analysis, this volume is a late-comer to the party. It would be of most benefit to readers interested in DPRK foreign policy and Northeast Asian politics during the late-Kim Jong Il period. Overall, *North Korea and Northeast Asian Regional Security* offers a good collection of regional perspectives on the security problems posed by nuclear North Korea, however, as a single volume, the book comes together as less than the sum of its parts.

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