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**Major Research Paper**

*The Complexity of Cross-National  
Interactions on the North Korean Issue*

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## **Abstract**

*Since the end of the World War II, the Korean Peninsula attracted a particular attention of the world. From the division of Korea and formation of two independent states to the development of ideologically, politically and economically different countries, from obtaining nuclear weapons and isolation of the North to modernization and opening of the South, the Korean people have experienced all the complications of the Cold War. Until now, the Peninsula is yet unified. The situation in the region is much more problematical than it was 70 years ago. The unpredictable and intractable behavior of North Korea always poses nuclear threats to regional and global security. The clash of interests of main actors in the Korean problem constrains the resolution process of this issue. The crisis on the Korean Peninsula has been scrutinized since its occurrence. A great number of theoretical frameworks and approaches have presented this problem from different angles. However, the complexity of the issue cannot be expressed solely by a particular theory. The purpose of this study is to examine the rationale of interactions between the DPRK and the main regional players in order to justify that the status-quo is the “best” situation for the North Korean leadership as well as for the states involved in the crisis for the time being. To achieve this aim, this paper looks at the history of relations between the DPRK and regional players, the interests of the countries and the rationale of their interactions. Historically, geographically and according to the empirical evidence, North Korea has been influenced by the USA, China, the Republic of Korea, Russia and Japan. There are two frameworks of interaction among them – currently not functioning political one in the form of Six-Party Talks and quite inefficient economic one represented by the sanctions. These states have formed a net with the DPRK in the centre. Pyongyang clearly knows its exchange value for all regional actors, it is also aware of boundaries it should not overpass for the sake of its own survival. This paper also presents a number of assumptions, which can upset the regional balance, as well as possible consequences in the case of drastic changes. It concludes that unwillingness of the main actors to step back and/or create favourable conditions for reconciliation, give reasons to suggest that the maintenance of status-quo is the optimal situation in the region.*

## **Chapter 1**

### **Introduction**

#### **The Actuality of the Study**

The Korean Peninsula has been one of the focus of the world attention since 1945 after the defeat of Japan in the World War II, which used to rule Korea. The world's splitting into two camps has influenced Korea; the country was also divided into two ideologically and politically different parts – North and South. Whereas the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) with the support of the United States chose the path of economic modernization and political liberalization, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) has implemented the communist model of development under the auspices of the USSR. The collapse of the Soviet Union has called into question the fate of the similar regime in the North Korea. However, communism in this country has been transformed into militaristic ideology under the supreme leader of the state. The issue of possible reunification of two Koreas is one of the actual topics in the world politics with uncertain forecast. Simultaneously, the formation of a new unipolar system of international relations more seriously raised the question of security on the Korean Peninsula. This region is posing threats to the security of the entire international community: hostile relations between two Koreas, foreign military presence, and proliferation of nuclear weapons just to name a few.

Today, North Korea seems to live by its own rules like never before. If the murder of domestic officials by the order of the Chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea and supreme leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea Kim Jong Un is considered an internal affair of the country, missile and nuclear tests during the last three years strongly bothered the world. Recently, even Russia and China showed more rigid attitude towards North Korea. Moreover, the United States and South Korea's plan to deploy the THAAD system on the

peninsula will lead to further inflame the situation. Therefore, the crisis on the Korean Peninsula remains unsolved; the threat to regional and global security is unprecedentedly high.

### **Purpose**

Historically and geographically, the Northeast Asia has been a region where the interests of different countries namely the USA, ROK, DPRK, China, Japan and Russia have clashed. Since the division of the Korean Peninsula into two ideologically, economically and politically different parts, it has become even more difficult for the involved players to have the same interests. Although the security issue is the priority, each of them has their own vision towards the problems. The situation is complicated by the different levels of engagement between the players and North Korea, which is considered to be the main “troublemaker”. Additionally, the DPRK has its own interests and ways of communication with the outside world. While Pyongyang is concerned with its regime survival, preserving and developing the nuclear program, South Korea, the USA and Japan seek for the absolute denuclearization of the DPRK. While China and Russia wish to have a secure regional environment for their further economic development, North Korea constantly conducts its tests deteriorating security and stability in the region. In addition, the USA is concerned with the human rights abuse in North Korea, South Korea wishes to dominate in the unification of the Korean Peninsula, Japan seeks a resolution of the abduction issue, China expresses its reluctance to see the USA on DPRK borders, Russia is interested in the economic development of Siberia and the Far East. However, North Korea behaves as a typical “rogue state” and currently benefiting from it. Pyongyang knows its value in the region for all stakeholders; therefore, it dares to be the pariah. Moreover, it is aware of the boundaries of each concerned country, and it will knowingly not overpass them otherwise it would be a “suicidal act”. Considering this situation, it is useful and interesting to look at the rationale of interactions between all the countries mentioned above with a special attention to the behavior of the DPRK. Therefore, the main purpose of this study is to examine the rationale of

interactions between North Korea and the “pentagon” of countries (other five involved countries).

### **Research Question**

North Korean careless leadership’s attitude towards the world, periodically leads the international community to a deadlock in understanding the country’s behaviour. Labelled such as “rogue state”, North Korea, in fact, satisfies all the assumptions related to this status. Among present “rogue states” (Iran, Sudan, Syria) North Korea “may be depicted as an almost perfect example of the classic ‘Rogue State’” (Meer, 2009, p. 223). The authoritarian regime, severe restriction of human rights and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction of North Korea may seem irrational; multifaceted and unpredictable actions may complicate or even prevent the dialogue with this country. However, I argue that this is the best way for North Korea’s leadership to preserve its power. Moreover, this situation is preferable not only for North Korea but also for other countries involved in the crisis on the Peninsula. Any critical change (collapse of North Korean regime, military intervention into the DPRK, forceful reunification under the ROK’s control) in the current state of affairs around the Korean problem will lead to a range of negative consequences for all major players: long-term insecurity and instability, refugee exodus, economic and geopolitical changes, a potential new wave of confrontation between China and the USA. Therefore, the main research question and the argument of this study is that the status-quo is currently a preferable state of affairs on the Korean Peninsula for all the players. To move from the dead point, it is important to have a commonly acceptable ground for negotiations and to assist in the economic development of North Korea.

### **Method**

This paper will be based on the qualitative research method. Qualitative researches tend to explore the subjects in their natural settings and understand phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2004). Moreover, they are used to explain the behavior, perspectives and experience (Holloway, 1997). Systematic collection, organization and

interpretation of the material is very important for this kind of researches (Malterud, 2001). All above-mentioned assumptions are relevant for this paper.

I will pursue a qualitative method with a theory-based, naturalistic and exploratory approach to the available information. The theory-based approach will help to justify my argument that the current foreign policy behaviour and line of actions of the DPRK are the best way for the North Korean political leadership in the interactions with the world main players. For this purpose, in my analysis section (Chapter 5) I will refer to the main theories: “Rogue state” theory, Neorealism, Regional Security Complex theory and Game theory in international relations<sup>1</sup>. As the purpose of this paper is to identify the rationale of interactions between North Korea and other countries, the naturalistic approach is essential for this research. To better understand the relationship between the DPRK and other states, namely the USA, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan, the paper will introduce the historical background and current condition of interactions between North Korea and each of the above-mentioned countries. The analysis of the international politics, behavior and decision-making process of a country might involve an issue of perception (Bradley, 1993). Most of the times it is difficult to find an objective explanation for the actions of actors; however, a number of existing empirical information will give an opportunity to study this topic from different perspectives. Finally, the exploratory approach will be used to examine the rationale of interactions between North Korea and the “pentagon” of countries. A comparative analysis of related countries case studies will help to figure out a strategic pattern of interactions. Subsequently, the ultimate goal is to justify why the status-quo on the Korean Peninsula is the “best” or preferable state of affairs for the North Korean political leadership as well as for other countries at least for now.

This paper will incorporate a number of secondary sources from scholarly articles, books, news reports and other online resources. Due to the complexity of the issue and number of actors

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<sup>1</sup> See more about these theories in Chapter 2.

involved, the research will include analysis of available information in English, Russian, Chinese and Korean languages.

## **Contribution**

The first contribution of this study is the presentation of almost all existing theories and approaches in studying of the crisis on the Korean Peninsula. The description and analysis of different theoretical frameworks help to understand the complexity of the issue from different angles and perspectives.

The second contribution is seen through the incorporation of secondary sources in different languages, namely in the languages of the main countries involved in the Korean problem.

The third contribution is a visual presentation of a figurative pattern with complemented explanation for the rationale of interactions between North Korea and the main players. This pattern was created according to historical, geographical and empirical evidence.

## **Structure**

This paper consists of six semantic chapters with the first one as Introduction. The second chapter will present the literature review based on the theories and approaches used to conduct the research on the Korean problem. The third chapter reveals the historical ties and current relations between the ROK, the USA, Japan, China, Russia and the DPRK as well as the interests of these countries on the Korean Peninsula. The fourth chapter will provide some insights on the domestic issues and international behavior of North Korea. The fifth chapter will present a rationale of interactions in the region by analyzing the existing and new frameworks of contacts between six countries. The sixth chapter, which is Conclusion, will summarize the main points of the paper. It will also offer some limitations of this research as well as potential areas for future studies. I believe that the proposed outline is one of the best ways to explore this topic as it

clearly and logically shows the history of this issue, the position and interests of the main players and the rationale of their interaction.

## **Chapter 2**

### **Theory and Approaches: Literature Review**

The main purpose of this study is to explore the rationale of interactions between the DPRK and the countries historically involved in the crisis on the Korean Peninsula in order to justify the current international behaviour of North Korea. This country attracts the world's attention due to its nuclear program and ballistic missiles' tests, constant political and military provocations, stagnant economy, violation of human rights, and intractable political leadership (Armstrong, 2011). Among other issues, there is the absence of a peace treaty formally ending the Korean War (1950-1953) and unification of Korean Peninsula (Kim, 2010; Park & Roh, 2014). As all these problems are largely interconnected, the majority of experts on North Korea (eg. Armstrong, Lankov, Becker) tend to study a whole complex of matters by titling them as "Korean problem" or "Crisis on the Korean Peninsula", however, depending on the theory used, there are studies looking at particular issues such as security and nuclear proliferation (Neorealism: eg. Kang, Shen; Regional Security Complex Theory: eg. Park, Kahrs). Additionally, it is worth mentioning that theory-based research is a common practice for Western scholars, less for the Russian, Chinese and Korean ones. Even if the latter use the theories in the analysis, they tend to refer to the theoretical frameworks developed by the Western scholars. This section will provide a literature review of studies about the Korean problem based on several theories and approaches. The presence of a great number of perspectives allows us to look at this topic from different angles.

#### **Neorealism: Security on the Korean Peninsula and Nuclear Proliferation**

One of the classic theories to explain some aspects of foreign policy and international behaviour of North Korea is neorealism. The founder of this theory Kenneth Waltz in his book

*The Theory of International Politics* pointed out that according to neorealism, states are more concerned with security in the anarchical world rather than interest-maximization, and are oriented in defensive strategies (1979). Kang argues that the foreign policy of North Korea is not surprising and even normal from neorealism perspective; moreover, the theory can explain “long-peace” on the Korean Peninsula (1995). The DPRK is developing nuclear weapons to defend itself, and not to attack; in addition, North Korean deterrence is a result of presence in the region and commitment by the USA to protect South Korea (Kang, 1995). The political leadership of this country considers its nuclear deterrence as assurance of its independent foreign policy (Shen, 2009). Therefore, the DPRK “has no other option but to demonstrate its military capability” (Kim, 2016, p. 981). However, Pyongyang knows that it cannot win a war with South Korea and the United States with or without nuclear weapons; therefore, the “peace” on the peninsula can be maintained as long as Washington is committed to protecting Seoul (Kang, 1995). Shen, who argues that North Korea uses the nuclear deterrence as a tool to gain economic and humanitarian help from other countries, also used “security maximization” argument (2011). The DPRK sees the USA as a threat to its survival, and “it is impossible to stop the country’s nuclear program because of the self-help system” (Shen, 2011, p. 208). Although neorealism can give insights about nuclearization of North Korea, it could barely provide an explanation to any engagement of the DPRK with other countries and following potential change in the region’s dynamic.

### **Regional Security Complex Theory: Collective Responsibility of Neighbors**

Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) is closely related to Neorealism, by emphasizing security however, it deals with regional level rather than a system level (Buzan et al., 1998). According to this theoretical framework, in one region, states are interdependent; their national security’s concerns cannot be separated (Buzan, 1991). One obvious and important characteristic is geography (Buzan & Waeber, 2003). Therefore, North Korea falls under the Northeast Asia’s security complex with historical, geographical and geopolitical roots (Park,

2012). This region, however, traditionally has been a place where the interest of great powers such as China, USA and Russia clashed, and Korea can even change the structure of Northeast Asian RSC (Kahrs, 2004). However, Kahrs also pointed out that any forced change in this region would result in greater instability creating preconditions for a war (2004). Park argues that regional countries are responsible for the insecurity of North Korea, and only close cooperation and many resources will help to improve the situation on the Korean Peninsula (2012). These scholars also emphasize a vital role of China in the issue due to its historical, geographical and cultural ties with North Korea (Kahrs, 2004; Park, 2012). The key to change the status-quo on the Korean Peninsula, Kahrs (2004) sees it not only in the gradual improvement of the relationship between the two Koreas but also in the reforms of North Korea, which ultimately will form politically, military and economically secure region. Park considers a necessity to change the policies of neighboring countries towards limiting Pyongyang's "noise". As a result, she supposed that North Korea could change its tactics of survival to ones that are more positive. Additionally, South Korea, in her opinion, should influence more on North Korea and be ready for controlling its future (2012). Although this theory helps to understand the necessity of collective actions by the regional countries, it fails to provide more detailed measures that are necessary in order to improve the current situation on the Korean Peninsula (for example, what concrete positive policies are needed, or what will be the mechanism of incremental reforms in North Korea). It also seems that the theory does not consider the "pariah" nature of the North Korean political leadership.

### **Selectorate Theory: "Carrots" for political elite, "sticks" for citizens**

In addition to security issues, North Korea has attracted the world's attention due to its authoritarian political leadership. Many studies are dedicated to the existence and survival of the repressive North Korean regime. One of the theories in this line is the Selectorate theory. It emphasizes that the main interest of a leader is to come to power and maintain it. For this purpose, a ruler has to have a support and help of "inner circle" of people (Mesquita et al., 2011).

This group of people is known as Selectorate that can influence in choosing and promoting a leader (Ingram, 2013). Some experts admit that the Selectorate theory perfectly describes the situation in North Korea with “highly repressive rule by narrow elite, unaccountable to the mass of citizens and offering little improvement in general” (Gallagher et al., 2013, p.1). Ingram also sees the Selectorate theory is ideal for clarifying the political situation in North Korea where only key political figures, military commanders and representative of Kim dynasty have access to the high-level political decisions (2013). Moreover, it is easier to maintain the power by “feeding” a small group of influential people in the autocracy such as North Korea. Important political and military individuals receive “carrots” whereas ordinary people get “sticks” (Ingram, 2013). Although the Selectorate theory, as recognized, can explain the survival of North Korean repressive regime, but not its resilience. The latter, however, determines the stability of the political leadership (Gallagher et al., 2013).

Closely related to the Selectorate theory is a regime survival model, which states that all provocative activities of North Korea are aimed to maintain or even strengthen the authority and legitimacy of the ruling Kim family (Akaha, 2002; Cha, 2009; Kim, 2016). According to this theoretical framework, the domestic situation with the weak economy and constant leadership of Kim dynasty is crucial for understanding and explaining the international behaviour of the country (Kim, 2016). While this approach seems very useful in pointing out the necessity of the current regime to stay in power and its ardent desire to survive, however, it fails to provide any insights about the possible influence of neighboring countries and international dynamics on the foreign policy of DRPK. What will happen to the regime if the outside world stops giving any economic and humanitarian assistance to North Korea? To what extent does Beijing or Moscow influence Pyongyang?

### **“Rogue State” Theory: Unpredictable Troublemaker**

Decision-makers in the foreign policy of the USA consider North Korea alongside with Iran, Syria and Sudan and previously Cuba, Iraq and Afghanistan, a “rogue state” (Miles, 2013; Preble, 2005; Meer, 2009; Triplett, 2004; Rose, 2011; Becker, 2005). Most of scholars (eg. Preble, Meer) pointed out that the term “rogue state” is very controversial and has been changed through the years. Today “rogue states” often ruled by authoritarian leaders, have issues with human rights abuse, support terrorist or other criminal activities, spread weapons of mass destruction (Meer, 2009). More generally, these states are “troublemakers” for the world; they go against international norms and rules. Most of the times the behaviour of “rogue states” is perceived as irrational and analogical to “normal states”, however, their actions are justifiable from their perspective (Preble, 2005). The DPRK’s behavior and actions such as committing human rights abuses and conducting nuclear program make the country meet the criteria of a “rogue state”. Meer also considers North Korea “as an almost perfect example of the classic “rogue state” for its ability to maneuver in the international arena in a “rogue way” (2009, p. 223). It is worth mentioning that among current “rogue states” North Korea can be seen as the most uncompliant and unpredictable due to its non-cooperative attitude towards the world. Additionally, it seems that the political leadership “enjoys” being “rogue” because this status can help to ensure its survival, as well as the economic and humanitarian assistance from abroad.

### **Game Theory: Searching for Answers**

Recently it is becoming more popular to use game theory in the International Relations (Allan et al., 1999; Marks, 2011; Snidal, 1985). The value of the game theory is in the deepening an understanding of the issue by making it simpler. The game theory in the world politics should be perceived in terms of “goal-seeking behaviour of states in interdependent international system” (Snidal, 1985, p. 27). There are not so much scholar research on the North Korean problem with an application of game theory. Among available ones, there are studies based on Bayesian model and two-level game theory. The analysis of the North Korean case according to the Bayesian model shows that the DPRK has different tactics in the interaction with South

Korea and the USA (Kim & Choi, 2002). Pyongyang will behave according to its preferences, however, the authors suggest Seoul to support and try to engage with North Korea regardless whether it wants to accommodate or not. As for the interactions between the DPRK and the USA, two countries can cooperate only if North Korea is sincere and the United States have a pacifistic attitude towards Pyongyang, other scenarios of communication between these two states will not lead to the desired outcome (Kim & Choi, 2002). South Korean scholars Park, Nho and Yoon adopted quantitatively modified two-level game theory to explain war threats of North Korea since 2013 (2015). By providing three separate patterns of negotiation between North Korea and South Korea, the USA and China, the authors concluded that each country would adopt moderate policies towards North Korea in order to get an opportunity for restarting negotiation process. However, if making concession would be done at the expense of interest, countries can still implement hard line policies (Park et al, 2015). Closely related to this approach is “hard-line versus accommodating” theory. According to its assumptions, provocative North Korea’s behaviour is a response to confrontational policies of the USA and South Korea (Lee, 2012).

There are also several articles online providing some insights on the North Korean issues using game theory elements. The professor of Yale University Paul Bracken, by referring to the game theory, considers that it is more effective for understanding Korean problem to connect the strategies of different countries involved in the crisis on the peninsula (2016). In the director of the East Asia Non-proliferation Program at the James Martin Center for Non-proliferation Studies at the Middlebury Institute of International Studies, Jeffrey Lewis’s view, North Korea follows the “simplest and most effective” strategy in the interactions with the USA – tit-for-tat (2009). According to John Park, U.S. Institute of Peace, North Korean non-cooperative attitude looks like an “elaborate game of chicken”, to succeed in it, “the most effective way is to rip out the steering wheel” (Labott, 2013, np.). American journalist and author Evan Osnos sees the prisoner’s dilemma in the North Korean issues with two players that are the USA and China

(2013). Washington wants to see the DPRK as a stable place, China does not want Pyongyang be under the Western impact (Osnos, 2013). It seems that Game theory elements can give some interesting insights on the North Korean issues; however, it is difficult and perhaps even impossible to find one pattern that would comprehensively explain a whole range of matters observed.

### **Reunified Theory: When or If then How?**

The majority of studies about the DPRK see the unification of two Koreas as the future of the Korean Peninsula. However, most of the experts do not have a clear answer about when, if and how will it happen. Ultimate unification is a goal of two Koreas (French, 2004; Kim, 2015; Cha, 2016; Lankov, 2013). Additionally, by unifying, the region can achieve stability (French, 2004). While both countries, the DPRK and the ROK, individually wish to unite the Korean Peninsula under their own leadership, there are a number of obstacles to this process: huge political, economic, social gaps, different interests and allies just to name a few (Cha, 2016). There are also dissimilar views on how the unification may happen. Russian leading North Korean expert Lankov thinks that it will be as a result of crisis or collapse of the political regime in North Korea (2013). Western specialist French is having almost the same opinion as his Russian colleague indicating that “as long as Kim3 and the KWP are in power, North Korea must remain independent and the peninsula divided” (French, 2004, p. 380). Chinese scholars insist on negotiations between two countries and finding common grounds (eg. Nationalism) for peaceful unification process (Meng, 2010; Yu, 2015). One possible option is to form a nation based on “one country, two systems” model (Meng, 2001). A number of projects on unification offered by different experts remain on paper; the future of the Korean Peninsula is still unpredictable and unclear.

### **Other theories: “Madman” and “Bargaining Leverage”**

Among other theories used by the scholars, there are “madman” and “bargaining leverage” theories. “Madman” theory explains North Korean actions as irrational and unpredictable; however, these attributes are normally prescribed to Pyongyang by its adversaries (Roy, 1994). As for the “bargaining leverage” theory, all threatening actions of the DPRK have only one aim: that is to get more economic and humanitarian assistance from other stakeholders (Mazzar, 2007; Sigal, 1998;).

Different theories and approaches to the crisis on the Korean Peninsula help to analyze and understand the issues from various angles and perspectives, however, all of them have shortcomings and are unable to wholly explain the state of affairs in the region. Therefore, a systematic study of interactions on the peninsula, incorporating views of all actors is needed. Hence, one of the main objectives of this paper is to present interests of the main players (USA, China, South Korea, Russia and Japan) in North Korea and explore their rationale of interactions.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Main Players**

This section will focus on tracking the history of interactions between North Korea and each of the main players, namely, USA, ROK, China, Russia and Japan. It will also give insights on the interests of each country on the Korean Peninsula.

### **South Korea and North Korea: Where to Find a Common Ground?**

The origins of the current tensions on the Korean Peninsula were laid in 1945 when the World War II ended. Instead of unified and peaceful Korea, there was a formation of two countries that are currently politically, ideologically and economically completely different from each other. With the hope of eventual reunification, the two Koreas for over last 70 years have maintained ambiguous relations of being closer or distant from time to time. However, until now, no peace treaty at the end of the Korean War has ever been signed, not to mention about a mutually agreed position on the unification of the peninsula.

The conflict dates back to an agreement between the United States and the Soviet Union to divide the country into two zones for more effective “cleaning” of the territory from the Japanese aggressors. The separation was made on the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, and after the final liberation of the Korean Peninsula from Japanese invaders, allies have begun to form a transitional government with a view to further unification of the northern and southern areas in the integral state under the unified leadership (Cumings, 2011; Pinkston, 2003). However, Moscow and Washington could not reach a common agreement leading to a proxy Korean War, which enshrined the division of the peninsula. Since then, South Korea is under the auspices of capitalism with the USA as the main supporter, and North Korea established pro-Communist regime with the provision of the USSR and later China. The Korean Peninsula has become a victim of two confronting powers (Kwak, 2016). The formation of the Korean Demilitarized

Zone (DMZ) caused the separation of many Korean families, which is currently one of the biggest issues for these countries (Lynn, 2007).

The 50-60s were marked by the constant provocations and confrontation between two Koreas. Among them, there were hijacking South Korean airliners by the North Korea (1958, 1969), killing South Korean policemen (1969), attacking the South Korean Blue House (1968) and others (Fisher, 2007).

The first warming of relations between two countries was recorded with the US-China reproaching. The following change in the regional security and geopolitical situation resulted in issuing in 1972 the South-North Joint Statement on the national reunification by Seoul and Pyongyang (Lee, 2008; Wertz, 2017). Both sides agreed on the reunification without external interference, peacefully and by promoting different exchanges and mediation committees (Kim, 2011). Since then, each president of the ROK has his/her own views on inter-Korean relations and takes proper measures to implement provisions of the policies towards the DPRK.

The second attempt to improve inter-Korean relations was done under the first democratically elected president of South Korea Roh Tae-Woo (1988-1993), which launched a policy named *Nordpolitik* aimed to diplomatically recognize China and USSR – the main allies of the DPRK (Wertz, 2017). Among the results of this policy, there were direct inter-Korean trade and sports exchange (1989) as well as the signing of South-North Basic Agreement on reunification, peace, military non-intervention and cooperation (Cha, 1997; Kim, 2012; Lee, 2008; Wertz, 2017). This document was followed by the Joint Declaration on Denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. The two countries refused to have any activities related to the weapons of mass destruction (Oberdorfer & Carlin, 2014).

One of the most ambitious initiatives on the rapprochement between two Koreas was the *Sunshine Policy* of the ROK, which was designed to ease the tensions and achieve unification. Newly elected in 1997, president of South Korea Kim Dae Jung (1998-2003) was helping

economically suffering northern neighbour by assuring its national security (Legere, 2002). June 2000 was marked by the first presidential summit of two Koreas since the division of the peninsula. During this event, leaders of both countries agreed on family reunion meetings and creation of inter-Korean Kaesong Industrial Park (KIP). There was a clear distinction between humanitarian aid, economic cooperation and political issues under *Sunshine Policy* (Wertz, 2017). The next South Korean president Roh Moon Hyun (2003-2008) continued the favourable policy towards North Korea by increasing aid and assistance as well as investments. However, the situation on the peninsula deteriorated due to development of DPRK nuclear program and its first nuclear test in 2006 (Bluth, 2008). Six-Party Talks between China, USA, Russia, Japan, ROK and DPRK, which started in 2003, showed their vicissitudes, one of their success was a second inter-Korean summit of leaders in 2007. Apart from the signed peace declaration to replace Armistice at the end of the Korean War, other outlined plans during that meeting did not get their implementation (DISEC, 2016).

The relations between North and South of the Korean Peninsula significantly worsened under the President of the ROK Lee Myung Bak (2008-2012), who took a “pragmatic” approach to the DPRK. His initiatives of help and assistance were closely related to the denuclearization of North Korea (which was not happening); therefore, the aid from the South was considerably reduced (Wertz, 2017). Additionally, in 2009, North Korea declared the annulation of all earlier reached agreements with Seoul (DPRK to Scrap All Points, 2009). Since then, the relations between two countries until the end of the presidency of Lee Myung Bak were not marked by any significant success; on the contrary, there was a further deterioration due to a series of incidents, such as the explosion of the South Korean corvette *Cheonan* and firing of South Korean *Yeonpyeong* Island. As it was investigated, the two incidents were caused by North Korea (Suh & Lee, 2010; Kim & Gitterman, 2012; Wertz, 2017).

Park Geun Hye, who became the 11<sup>th</sup> President of South Korea at the end of 2012, promised to better the inter-Korean relations by renewing the dialogue, strengthening the mutual

trust and at the same time strongly responding to all provocations from the North. A new policy of engagement with Pyongyang was named *Trustpolitik* (Yun, 2013). The tendency in the relationship between two Koreas under President Park was characterized by antagonism with temporary warming. During this period, two sides addressed a range of issues such as new working conditions of KIC, family reunion and others. In addition, Seoul made efforts to increase humanitarian aid to the DPRK through UN and NGOs. It also promised even more help to its neighbour if Pyongyang could abandon its nuclear program (Wertz, 2017). The North, however, did not favourably accept a followed shift in the *Trustpolitik* emphasizing on unification as a core line of inter-Korean policy of the ROK. Pyongyang perceived it as a threat to its regime. Moreover, the continuing nuclear tests of North Korea have aggravated already existing tensions (Unification is a Jackpot?, 2014; No More to Mockery the Nation, 2014). To respond to the growing nuclear threat of the DPRK, in July 2016, ROK and the USA announced the deployment of the American THAAD missile defence system, and November same year, South Korea and Japan signed a provisional military intelligence-sharing agreement (Lee, 2017; Ji, 2016).

Among the main interests of Seoul on the Korean Peninsula, we could list:

1. National and Regional Security: South Korea is concerned with its national security due to the nuclear arsenal of the northern neighbor. The agreed presence of American military troops, as well as the planned deployment of the THAAD system, may serve as evidence.
2. Denuclearization: South Korea strives for DPRK to abandon their nuclear program. It seems that Seoul perceives denuclearization as the only way to guarantee the security on the peninsula.
3. Economic interest: South Korea is interested in economic development of North Korea. I suggest that economically stronger North Korea would be easier to collaborate with and would be more open to dialogue on eventual reunification.

4. Reunification: South Korea seeks for the reunification of the peninsula preferably under its control and leadership.

### **USA and North Korea: Hostility and Mistrust**

United States of America and North Korea do not have formal diplomatic relations (The U.S. Department of State, 2016). The hostility between two countries started during the Korean War (1950-1953) and, over the last decades, mistrust has only deepened due to the nuclear program and missile tests of the DPRK. Being an ally of South Korea and a country concerned with its world's hegemony, the United States consider North Korea an "outlaw", which poses a threat to American, regional and global security (Miles, 2013).

Concerned that Korea would fall under the full control of the USSR, the United States of America requested Soviet army to leave the south of the country and occupied it by September 1945 (Buzo, 2002). The USA was also one of 15 countries that sent their troops to help South Korea in attacking North in 1950 (Folly, 2014). Since then, Americans maintained their military presence in South Korea as they consider it vital for the protection of South, for regional peace and security (Jonsson, 2011). The primarily hostile relationship between the USA and North Korea only worsened after the signing the Korean Armistice Agreement, which symbolized the end of the Korean War. A series of provocative events during 1960-1980s initiated by North Korea perpetuated the mutual distrust with the USA. Among them, there were the attack of the U.S. intelligence ship *Pueblo* (1968), the downing of the American reconnaissance plane (1969), killing of four U.S. soldiers near the boundary of the DMZ (1969), killing of two American army officers in a neutral area inside the DMZ (1976) (Fisher, 2007). Some improvements of the relations between two countries were made during the presidency of George H. W. Bush in the end of 80s – beginning of 90s. Following the foreign policy *Nordpolitik* of South Korea that aimed at normalizing relations with its northern neighbour, Washington launched a "modest initiative" towards North Korea. The USA supported exchanges between two countries and

reduced isolation of the DPRK (Merrill, 2001). The admission of both Koreas into the United Nations in September 1991 was also supported by the U.S. (Piehler, 2013). Additionally, the contributing factor to further warming of the American-North Korean relations was the signing of a nuclear safeguards agreement by Pyongyang with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). It allowed this institution to inspect nuclear facility of North Korea (Fisher, 1997). In the response to this, in 1992, the USA and South Korea cancelled their joint annual military exercise *Team Spirit* (Farrell, 2009). The culmination of rapprochement was the US-DPRK Agreed Framework, which was adopted for “freezing Pyongyang’s plutonium development in return for annual fuel-oil deliveries, two light water nuclear reactors and improved relations with the U.S.” (Legere, 2002, p.3), and formation of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) for implementing provisions of the Agreed Framework. However, favourable relations between two countries did not last long due to the withdrawal of North Korea from Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 2002, which also resulted in the suspension of Agreed Framework. In the meantime, a new president of the USA George W. Bush included North Korea in the list of the countries named “axis of evil”, and the DPRK informed the American government about the development of the nuclear weapons (Lanteigne, 2015). Since then, two countries perceive each other as a threat: the USA sees North Korea as a danger to its ally South Korea, and, ultimately, to the regional and global security whereas the DPRK considers the United States to be hostile to Pyongyang and threatening its survival. It should also be mentioned that the USA is a member of the Six-Party Talks (2003-2007) on the North Korean nuclear weapons program. Additionally, the U.S. is an active initiator and supporter of unilateral and multilateral sanctions against the DPRK. However, despite the tensions, until present time the U.S. still provides humanitarian aid to North Korea (Manyin et al., 2014; Sung, 2017).

After tracking briefly the history of interactions between the USA and North Korea, it is obvious that among the main interests of Washington on the Korean Peninsula, there are:

1. Regional and global security: the United States is concerned with the security of its allies in the region – South Korea and Japan. Washington also considers “North Korea to be top national security priority” (Seib et al, 2016). As for new elected American president Donald Trump, he assured South Korea in “ironclad” commitment to protect and defend its ally (Choe, 2017; Wroughton, 2017).
2. Security concerns are directly related to North Korea’s possession of the nuclear weapons. Washington wants the DPRK to stop developing the nuclear arsenal as well as to renounce missile tests.
3. The USA seeks to improve the situation with human rights in the DPRK, prevent drugs and labour trafficking as well as illegal sales of weapons (O’Carroll, 2015).
4. The USA seeks reunification of two Koreas. It wishes to see a united, free and democratic Korea led by the ROK (Legere, 2002; Revere, 2015). In this case, Washington can maintain its influence in the Northeast Asian region and balance economically and military rising China.

### **Japan and North Korea: Strong Colonial Imprint**

The relations between Japan and North Korea is also characterized by hostility and mistrust. Colonial rule of Japan over Korea from 1910 to 1945 left its negative impact on the mutual interaction. Until now, Japanese-North Korean bilateral relations have not officially established, persistent tensions have been replacing the temporary rapprochement; however, the absence of diplomatic talks outweighs its presence.

After defeat of Japan in the World War II, Korea was liberated from Japanese colonial rule. Although the majority of Koreans were back to the historical land, there were still many of them who stayed in Japan (Blomquist & Wertz, 2015). In order to help Korean people who faced discrimination in their life and employment, in 1955, North Korea assisted in formation of the

General Association of Korean Residents in Japan known as *Chongryon*<sup>2</sup>. It has functioned as an advocacy organization and unofficial representative of the DPRK in Japan (Japan – Koreans, n.d.). The occupation of *Chongryon* has been different: from the repatriation of Koreans to the DPRK to trade, financial and even illicit activities. This organization used to contribute by raising money and remitting funds to North Korea. It was very active until 2006 when Japan imposed sanctions on it and limited its activities (Blomquist & Wertz, 2015; Creamer, 2003).

During the first decade after the Korean War, from 1955 to 1964, the DPRK and Japan maintained economic and trade operations. The main interest of Pyongyang was to prevent Tokyo to be close to Seoul as well as to reduce its own dependence on the USSR (Chung, 1964). However, the cooperation was deteriorated by establishing basic diplomatic relations between Japan and the ROK in 1965 (Deming, 2008). The two countries maintained minimum contacts in 70s and 80s, and only in 1990, Shin Kanemaru, a powerful political leader and a member of Liberal Democratic Party of Japan, paid a visit to Pyongyang where both sides agreed on normalization of relations. A joint declaration released after the meeting of Kanemaru and Kim Jong Il called Japan to apologize for the colonial ruling, to pay compensation as well as to establish diplomatic ties (Martin, 2007). As for Japan, Tokyo wished North Korea could better address the issue of abduction of Japanese citizens by the North Korean agents (Yamamoto, 2011). However, a seemingly successful visit of Japanese high official eventually did not bring the planned outcome. A slight rapprochement between two countries was in 1994 when the U.S. and the DPRK signed the Agreed Framework. Japan provided financial assistance to KEDO and donated tons of food to North Korea (Blomquist & Wertz, 2015). This warming, however, did not last long, and has been deteriorated by the North Korean missiles over Japanese territory in 1998 (Wudunn, 1998). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the relations between two countries remain hostile and

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<sup>2</sup> There is another organization named *Mindan*, which supports ethnic Koreans that identify themselves with the Republic of Korea. Although in 50-60s, most of Koreans supported *Chongryon*, today the number of members of *Mindan* is greater than the number of members of *Chongryon*. Among 600 000 Koreans currently living in Japan, 65% are members of *Mindan* whereas 25% belong to *Chongryon* (Blomquist & Wertz, 2015; Rosen, 2012; Mindan in Japan, 2012).

cold. Several attempts to normalize bilateral contacts did not lead to agreements satisfying both sides. Apart from the sanctions imposed by Japan due to the nuclear program of the DPRK, the two countries cannot reach consensus about the “status” of the economic assistance of Japan<sup>3</sup> and the abduction issue (Blomquist & Wertz, 2015). Several negotiations within the Six-Party Talks, Japan-DPRK Red Cross Talks did not bring significant breakthroughs.

After tracking the history of relations between Japan and North Korea and looking at the main trends of negotiations, Japan is interested in:

1. Guaranteeing its security: Japan is concerned not only with the nuclear program of North Korea, but also with the security interests related to Korea as a whole. Due to historical, geopolitical and other factors, Japan has issues with each of the countries in the region; therefore, further deterioration of relations with the DPRK seems undesirable for Tokyo.
2. Resolving the abduction issue: The government of Japan has identified 17 cases of abduction of Japanese citizens. In 2002, North Korea apologized for the kidnappings of Japanese people and eventually admitted the abduction of only 13 victims, however, refused to recognize any other cases (“North Korea briefs Japan”, 2015). Japan perceives this issue as a threat concerning the sovereignty of the country and safety of its citizens. Without resolution of this matter, normalization of bilateral relations will not be easy to achieve.

### **China and North Korea: Can “teeth” be without “lips”?**

China and North Korea relations differ from the ones observed above. Being a strong ally, the biggest trading partner and the main provider of food and energy to the DPRK, China has been helping to sustain the Kim dynasty for decades. Only recently, the bilateral relations have experienced some complications due to the unilateral missile tests of North Korea and the

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<sup>3</sup> “Status” of economic assistance: there were disputes about how the economic assistance of Japan to the DPRK should be perceived; Japan saw it as a help whereas North Korea tend to refer it as “reparations/compensation” for the colonial time (Manyin, 2001).

following strong intention and plan of Washington and Seoul to deploy the anti-ballistic missile system in South Korea, which goes against the security interest of China. As solely for China, it does not matter whether North Korea is strong or weak. A strong North Korea is acceptable for Beijing in the sense that it would be able to sustain itself and continue posing threat to the USA and its allies. A weak North Korea is also acceptable for Beijing, as it would continue seeking help from China and rely on it.

China and the DPRK diplomatically recognized each other in 1949, few days after the foundation of the People's Republic of China. Moreover, China actively supported its communist ally in the Korean War, and eventually, in 1961, signed the Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance with the DPRK, which is effective until 2021 (Nanto & Manyin, 2010). Mao Zedong described the relations between two countries at early stages as close as "lips and teeth" (Lee, 2014; Triplett, 2004). Apart from being geographic neighbours<sup>4</sup>, the PRC and the DPRK tied with the same ideology and military cooperation. In addition, China provided a significant help for recovery of North Korea from the wartime. Chinese leaders have perceived the DPRK as a strategic buffer zone between China and the U.S. (Wang, 2014). The bilateral relations became less crucial for China since the 80s, when PRC started its economic reforms and opened to the world. Additionally, in 1992, China established diplomatic ties with South Korea (Nanto & Manyin, 2010). Despite that, official ties between two countries have been maintained, economic and trade figures have been increased through the following years (Snyder, 2009). Due to the changing role of China in the world stage, Beijing has been altering its policy and attitude towards North Korea from unconditional support to condemning of its missile tests, even passing UN resolutions and implementing sanctions against it (Albert & Xu, 2016). Being a rising power, PRC wants to ensure a secure environment for its further development, moreover, it seems that China is more concerned with the deployment of THAAD

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<sup>4</sup> China and North Korea share 800 km of common border along the Yalu and Tumen rivers (DPRK Briefing Book: DPRK Geography, nd.)

in South Korea and the following ability of the USA to have control over China's nuclear development projects, rather than North Korean tests *per se* (Kim, 2017). This reason might be one of the explanations for Beijing's periodic condemnation of North Korea's actions. As long as the DPRK carries out the nuclear and missile tests, the USA and South Korea will have grounds for strengthening bilateral military cooperation and deployment of anti-ballistic system.

Since 2003, China has chaired the Six-Party Talks. Multinational negotiations have stopped in 2009 with North Korea's satellite launching. The attempts to come back to the table of talks were made in 2012 and 2014, however, eventually, they did not take place. The Six-Party Talks are deadlocked now (Asia Report № 269, 2015). China is interested in having the neighbor without nuclear weapons; however, it understands the situation faced by Pyongyang, which is surrounded by nuclear powers. Therefore, active promotion of the Six-Party Talks by Beijing is explained as a preference of China to let other countries take the lead on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula (Nanto & Manyin, 2010).

On the bilateral diplomatic level, the state and Parties' leaders of two countries meet each other several times in a year. As for economic relations, Chinese officials tried to convince Pyongyang to take a path of reforms as Beijing did, however, a substantial growth of the North Korean economy eventually did not happen. Nevertheless, China heavily supports the economy of its neighbour through trade, aid and investments (Scobell & Cozad, 2014). According to the available information, in 2014, trade between two countries was around \$6 billion to compare to \$500 million in 2000 (Albert & Xu, 2016; China-North Korea relations, 2015). More than 70% of North Korea's total trade volume is accounted for China (Chanlett-Avery et al, 2015). The deterioration of relations started in 2013 when the DPRK "unilaterally conducted a ballistic missile test"; China joined a range of countries that imposed sanctions on North Korea. Until now, the relationship is still unstable; however, both sides are willing to work on bettering the ties (Chen & Jin, 2016). It is clear that China will not leave the DPRK without providing aid. Moreover, with the deployment of THAAD system in South Korea and further strengthening of

relations between the USA, the ROK and Japan, China would likely seek for improving the relations with North Korea to re-establish a balance on the Korean Peninsula (Chen & Ji, 2016).

As for interests of China in North Korea, there are:

1. Security and stability on the Peninsula: China wishes to develop its country in a secure environment. If the situation on the Korean Peninsula was stable, even if North Korea continues the development of its nuclear program, China would not have any specific objections. Stability for China also means stability of the ruling North Korean regime, the collapse of the DPRK is the least preferable scenario for Beijing, as it would lead to many consequences such as refugee influx, destroy of the buffer zone and overall instability in the region.
2. Economic development of North Korea: China is interested in the economic development of North Korea. The economically strong neighbor would benefit the stability and security in the region. China does not wish to see another collapse of the economy of North Korea as it happened in the 90s because it would “severely tax the economic resources of China” (Nanto & Manyin, 2010, p.7).
3. Strengthening Chinese influence: China is concerned with its role and influence on North Korea. The government of PRC wishes to have a leverage with Pyongyang especially with the deepening of cooperation between the USA and its East Asian allies – South Korea and Japan.
4. Recovering Six-Party Talks: China attempted to persuade North Korea to come back to the table of negotiations; it seems that this is one of the priorities of the country in the Korean problem.

**Russia and North Korea: Any Chance for Russia to become a “big brother” for North Korea again?**

From the early Soviet diplomatic recognition of the DPRK and help in the Korean War to the lack of long-term policy towards the Korean Peninsula in 1990s, from providing economic, humanitarian and nuclear assistance to the minimum contacts after the collapse of the USSR, the leaders of the Soviet Union and, consequently, Russia treated North Korea differently. The internal changes in Russia has affected the country's foreign policy and this consequently led to disregarding the DPRK. However, since the 2000s, Moscow has been aiming to restore the old close ties with Pyongyang by providing humanitarian aid, participating in the multilateral negotiations and even sometimes protecting North Korea's interests in the UN. Although Russia is concerned with the security of its Far East, it currently wishes to maintain the status-quo on the Korean Peninsula. Russia does not need any additional problems in the Far East of the country in the case of radical changes in the Northeast Asia, especially on the Korean Peninsula.

The Soviet Union was the first country that established diplomatic relations with newly proclaimed the DPRK in 1948 (Denisov, 2009). The Soviet Union actively supported North Korea; it provided goods and technology Pyongyang needed. Moreover, the DPRK for the USSR was a practically useful ally because it has been a buffer zone in preventing expansion of American military troops and nuclear weapons to the Russian borders (Sokov, 2002). One of the most important and crucial events in the bilateral relations that until today has big impact, is the establishment of cooperation in the field of nuclear energy. In 1952, the Atomic Energy Research Institute was founded in Pyongyang; four years later two countries signed the Agreement on the cooperation in the peaceful use of nuclear energy (Chronology of North Korea's Nuclear Program, nd). In 1965, a Soviet IRT-2000 research reactor started its functioning in the Research Institute (Research Reactor Details – IRT-DPRK, 1996). In the 70s, the nuclear program of the DPRK became more independent; additionally, China started playing a greater role in the developing of the nuclear arsenal of North Korea. The increased Soviet assistance was observed in the mid-80s, when the USSR and the DPRK signed Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was one of the Moscow's condition for providing further

nuclear assistance to Pyongyang. North Korea also joined International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) (Sokov, 2002). However, the collapse of the USSR and establishment of the diplomatic relations between Russia and South Korea in 1992 completely minimized the Moscow-Pyongyang cooperation. Russia under Boris Yeltsin refused to assist North Korea; moreover, it could not afford to do so (Bazhanov, 2005; Sokov, 2002, Toloraya, 2002; Panin & Altov, 2004). The rapprochement began as a new president of Russia Vladimir Putin came to power in 2000. Two countries signed a new Treaty on Friendship, Goodneighbourliness and Cooperation<sup>5</sup>, which “became a political, legal, and formal base for the renewed relationship” (Toloraya, 2002, p. 153). Since then, the relations between two countries have been improving; however, due to new geopolitical and economic situation in the world, the level of contacts is not the same as it was before.

As for economic ties, the USSR was a key trading partner of the DPRK. In 1990, the share of the Soviet Union in the foreign trade of North Korea was 53.3% or \$2.2 billion. However, by 1995 this number decreased to \$83 million (Zaharova, 2015). According to the Federal Customs Service of Russia, in the third quarter of 2016, Russia’s trade with North Korea was around \$16 million. The main components of Russian exports to the DPRK are mineral fuel and oil. It is worth mentioning that almost 80% of bilateral trade consists of cooperation between different regions of Russia and North Korea (Zaharova, 2015). Russia is highly interested in the strengthening the collaboration with Pyongyang in the energy, transport and other fields of economy. One of the preferred directions is the establishment of trilateral cooperation between Russia, the DPRK and the ROK for further development of Siberia and the Far East of the country as well as the Korean Peninsula (Galushka, 2015). Moscow and Pyongyang have made some efforts for promoting bilateral cooperation: in 2014, the two countries have agreed to conduct all trade transactions in rubles; in 2014, Russia wrote off 90% of the North Korea’s

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<sup>5</sup> In 1961, USSR and North Korea signed Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Aid, which was abandoned in 90s by Russia (Armstrong, 2013; Toloraya, 2002).

debts; in 2015, both sides expressed their willingness to discuss issues related to the formation of advanced development zones in the Far East of Russia and North Korea (Mishin, 2016; Neyaskin, 2014; Samofalova, 2014; Gubin, 2015).

Since 2003, Russia has been a member of the Six-Party Talks. Russia played a role of mediator and facilitator by constantly persuading and bringing Pyongyang back to the table of negotiations (Bazhanov, 2005).

Due to the nuclear program and missile tests of the DPRK, Russia has been one of the countries that supported UN Resolutions condemning North Korea and sometimes UN sanctions against it (Denisov, 2009). However, every time Russia shows an extremely low profile reaction limiting itself to formal phrases of criticism and a ban on export of goods to North Korea which are not the main components of bilateral trade. Moscow has to be reserved on this issue if it still wants to be in the game. Experience has shown that the worse relations Russia has with the DPRK, the less other countries give credit to Russian position and interests in the Korean problem (Toloraya, 2016).

Russia has the following interests on the Korean Peninsula:

1. Security and stability: Russia wishes to have a secure environment in the Far East of the country. Although officially Moscow calls for denuclearization of the peninsula, in fact, whether this security will be achieved with or without nuclear weapons, it wouldn't really matter for Russia because Moscow does not perceive nuclear North Korea as a direct threat to itself (Bazhanov, 2005). A more secure region will benefit development of eastern parts of Russia.
2. Economic relations: Russia is interested in the strengthening of economic relations with the DPRK and the ROK. The ideal situation for Moscow is to establish a successful model of trilateral cooperation for further development of the country and the region.

3. Influence: Russia wishes to improve its position in the Northeast Asia by putting diplomatic efforts to resolve the Korean problem and by promoting different projects in the region.
4. Some of the Russian experts also see the country's interest in the unification of two Koreas and creation of a strong unified ally in the Northeast Asia with whom Russia does not have any controversial issues. Such situation will also strengthen Russian regional political influence (Bazhanov, 2005).

As observed, the interests of the main players in the region are simultaneously identical and different. All five countries are concerned with the regional security; however, each of them has its own way to achieve this security. From the total prohibition of nuclear program of North Korea to its development for the peaceful use – with this difference of positions and opinions it is very difficult for the stakeholders to reach a consensus. In addition, each country pursues its own interests on the peninsula. Nevertheless, all these interests are difficult to achieve peacefully without cooperative attitude from Pyongyang. As for North Korea, the country has its own rationale of interactions with the outside world. Current isolation of the DPRK is a result of different factors, which will be explored in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4

### North Korea: An Isolated “Miracle” of 21<sup>st</sup> Century

“A nation’s greatness depends on its leader” – this is a quote from an American writer Suzy Kassem (Kassem, 2010). However, who can evaluate the greatness of a nation and how does this greatness measure? One of the answers to these questions most likely will involve people, who are supposed to be direct beneficiaries of their country’s greatness. Apart from the domestic population, in today’s globalized and interdependent world, it seems logical to have a recognition of this greatness from other countries. The case of North Korea, however, shows a different story. Highly censored domestic propaganda in the DPRK keeps Korean people in the dark about the fact that the outside world does not consider North Korea as great as it has been claimed inside the country. Being called “great” leaders, the members of the Kim family made North Korea look like politically authoritarian/totalitarian, economically backward and internationally isolated country (Jeffries, 2006; Scobell, 2006). Real political and economic situation in the DPRK is difficult to fully describe and evaluate due to the lack of related information, isolation of the country, however, can be justified through the analysis of its interactions with the outside world. Nevertheless, the question is how the leaders of North Korea have isolated the country and why the current ruler has no choice but to continue to be rogue? This chapter will look at the factors that made Pyongyang isolated from the outside world, by analyzing events and choices leading to its gradual alienation.

There are different factors that made North Korea the pariah state and in this paper, they are titled as follows: historical choice and evolutionary process, Juche Ideology, hereditary transmission of power within the Kim family, nuclear persistence. It is difficult to point out which factor is more or less important as the complex of these issues led the country to the current state of affairs. Moreover, they seem to be highly interconnected.

## **Historical choice and evolutionary process**

By looking at the history of the foundation of North Korea and considering its path, it seems that one of the factors that made the country isolated today is its historical choice as well as the evolutionary process that followed later, in which the DPRK's closest allies – USSR and China – were involved. The struggle of the Soviet Union against the Japanese invaders on the north of the Korean Peninsula as well as an appearance of ardent revolutionary communist Kim Il Sung initially predetermined the socialist path of North Korea's development as opposed to capitalism (Kim, 2015; Lankov, 2013; Smith, 2015; Rudolph, 1959). In the era after the World War II, to spread its influence, the Soviet Union was keen to keep a communist regime on the Korean Peninsula, that is favourable to the communist superpower (Smith, 2015). With the help of Moscow, Kim Il Sung created the Korean People's Army (KPA), Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), and, eventually, DRPK. In addition, the initial political and economic system of North Korea was partly based on the Soviet style; therefore, it has adopted such features as oppressiveness, authoritarianism and coerciveness (Hopkins, 2015; Savada, 1993; Smith, 2015; Lankov, 2013). The 1949 created communist China, which culturally was closer to North Korea than the USSR, became another strong ally of the DPRK with similar features. The Soviet model of development in North Korea as well as in China also came with the cult of personality, which has been helping Kim family to consolidate its power for decades (Becker, 2005; Savada, 1993; Lim, 2015; Lutz, 2015). Overall, the historical choice of communism, which was given to the northern part of the Korean Peninsula 70 years ago, laid some foundations to the present isolation of North Korea.

As for the evolutionary process, it is worth mentioning that with the economic reforms in China in the late 70s and the collapse of the Soviet bloc in the late 80s - beginning of 90s, North Korea has become more isolated without apropos adaptation to the world geopolitical changes

(Buzo, 2002; Koo, 2005). As interests over principles started dominating international relations<sup>6</sup>, Russia and China established the diplomatic relations with South Korea and other Western countries, which were considered hostile to the communist world (Zhang, 2015; Koo, 2005). Instead of following its closest allies and opening to the world, Pyongyang proclaimed its adherence to the official state ideology *Juche* (Oberdorfer, 2014).

### **Juche Ideology**

Another factor that contributed to the isolation of North Korea is the *Juche* ideology and its non-adaptiveness to the current world changes. Officially, the *Juche* idea became known in 1955 as a respond to Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism in the Soviet Union and Maoism in China. Kim Il Sung aimed to develop a “Korean” ideology, which by the mid-60s became a state ideology (French, 2014; Kim, 1982; Lankov, 2013; Smith, 2015). Three principles of *Juche* are political independence, economic self-sustenance and self-reliance in defence (Kim, 1965). These three features clearly show the nature of the main ideology, which has been self-oriented rather than opened to the outside world. With the interest to promote the *Juche* idea all over the world, Kim Il Sung made efforts to develop an effective system under his leadership (Lankov, 2013; Savada, 1993). However, by spreading the *Juche* ideology “the most important goal of Kim Il Sung was to legitimate and uphold” his autonomy in domestic and international affairs (Smith, 2015, p. 110) as well as get rid of pro-Soviet and pro-Chinese people in order to strengthen his own power in the country (Savada, 1993). Through education, arts, entertainments and other ways, this ideology also explained why there should be a Leader-dominated, Party-centric and mass mobilization approach in the domestic politics (Kim, 1965). According to *Juche*, ‘a man is the master of his destiny’ whereas the Leader is responsible for keeping and addressing people’s demands and needs, moreover, the Leader is the core of masses. As for

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<sup>6</sup> The article “By interests, not by Principles: An Analytical Anatomy into Contemporary China’s International Relations” by Yongjing Zhang talks about the types of international cooperation in the case of China. I think that the proposed argument “by interests, not by principles” can be used not only in relation to China, but also with regards to other countries, in particular Russia.

Party, it is vital for gathering people, inculcating them with the main ideas and mobilizing them around the Leader (Smith, 2015, p. 121). Therefore, apart from the three main principles, the ideology mainly teaches that the Leader is an essential and vital figure in the survival of people. Moreover, according to Armstrong, a combination of historically adopted Confucian values of filial piety and “political religion” in the form of *Juche* in North Korea resulted in the development of understanding that Kim Il Sung was a “father” and Korean people are his children (2005). Based on the Confucian value, children must respect and obey the father (Confucius, 2014). The importance of Kim Il Sung was also stressed by attributing to him such definitions as anti-Japanese nationalist and hero of the Korean nation (Lim, 2015). Eventually, Kim Il Sung was praised as the “son of the nation” and the “eternal President of Republic” (Kim, 2001, p. 14). With time, the cult of Kim Il Sung has developed to the cult of the Kim family pushing forward an idea that only members of the Kim family can be state authorities (Lim, 2009). Serving as a strong brainwashing tool to keep the population under control of political leadership, this ideology, which seems highly nationalistic, has kept the regime in power (Bymand & Lind, 2010). In the opinion of the North Korean spy Kim Hyon-Hui, *Juche* can be compared to the Bible, and Kim Il Sung was Jesus for Korean people (Lim, 2015). It is worth mentioning that this ideology contributed to the development of the personality cult of Kim Il Sung and cult of the Kim family. Referring back to the main principles, although *Juche* claimed the political independence in international affairs, it does not necessarily mean that North Korea will not cooperate with other countries; on the contrary, it will if it needs to (Smith, 2015), however, the cooperation is limited. *Juche* can be seen as a factor of isolation of the country in its “brainwashing” power, “stickiness” to the Kim family and its right for the endless “legitimate” leadership. This leads to another factor for alienation of the country, which is a transmission of ruling power within the Kim family.

### **Heredity Transmission of Power within the Kim family**

The personality cult of the Leader and the cult of the Kim family led to the occurrence of the hereditary succession in North Korean politics (Kim, 2015; Koh, 1993; Lim, 2012, 2015; Scobell, 2006; Hong, 2011). Until now, the DPRK has experienced political succession two times from Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Il to Kim Jong Un. Each case shows the transmission of ruling power from father to son (Lim, 2012).

Generally, a ruler in the autocratic states seeks a successor “who will recognize and maintain his legacy” (Zhang, 2011, p. 674), moreover, leadership succession is very important for the stability of one state as a radical change might bring unforeseen or unexpected consequences for the country (Lim, 2012). Since the time of de-Stalinization in the Soviet Union, Kim Il Sung understood the potential threat to its legitimacy. He emphasized a necessity of successor’s loyalty to the predecessor, as the political succession, in his view, was a crucial for continuing the social revolution (Kim, 1999). In fact, most likely he was afraid to become the second Stalin after his death and lose his greatness in the eyes of Korean people (Koh, 1993). Kim Il Sung, as well as Kim Jong Il, chose sons as their inheritors or heirs because they believed that “a son would be more loyal” than any other person in the country, they could not trust others (Lim, 2012, p. 551). As a result, the Kim family has been ruling North Korea for the last 70 years. Among the implications of the hereditary succession in the DPRK, there is an obvious tendency in the form of the continuation of the main political line of the previous rulers. It seems that even if the current leader would like to make changes, he will not be able to do structural or radical ones, which might transform or open the country, as it will mean a denial of everything that has been formed for decades or made by the preceding leaders. Thus, now Kim Jong Un can only continue the same line of actions, follow his grandfather and father’s path, otherwise, he would destroy the legacy of the ruling Kim family, which eventually would lead to the overthrow of this regime. From this point of view, it can be assumed that the isolation of North Korea will last as long as the Kim family will be at the helm of the country.

## **Nuclear Persistence**

Apart from the fact that *Juche* ideology limits the cooperation with the outside world, the relations between North Korea and other countries have deteriorated due to the DPRK's nuclear program. Having adopted a "military-first" policy and seeing its nuclear program as the only guarantor of its security<sup>7</sup>, North Korea continues increasing its nuclear arsenal and conducting ballistic missile tests.

Surrounded by the nuclear powers such as Russia, China and the USA, Pyongyang is concerned with its own security (Lankov, 2013). Although China and Russia are traditional allies and they will not likely harm North Korea, the USA and its allies South Korea and Japan are eager to see the denuclearization of the DPRK. However, North Korea considers its nuclear program vital as the destructive role of nuclear weapons can virtually guarantee the security of the country (Ji, 2009; Lankov, 2013; Lim, 2012). Security concerns have been presented in the North Korean agenda for decades. The U.S. nuclear attacks on Japan, the weakening military ties with Soviet Union and China, the collapse of the Soviet bloc and economic reformation of PRC, Washington's aggressiveness towards Iraq and Libya only assured Pyongyang that the development of nuclear weapons would secure the country and the regime (Lankov, 2013; Ji, 2009; Jeffries, 2006). It seems that the North Korean leaders tend to believe that other states will not likely respond to their provocative acts using nuclear capability (North Korea Preparing the Third Test, 2010). Therefore, nuclear weapons play a deterrent role against external rivals as well as "enhance Kim's regime internal security" (Bymand & Ling, 2010, p.53). Due to its nuclear program and constant tests, North Korea has become subject to sanctions. Since 2006, the United Nations Security Council has passed more than 10 resolutions regarding the nuclear activity of the DPRK (UNSC, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2016). Numerous calls of different countries, particularly five members of the Six-Party Talks, to abandon the nuclear program, were not successful. Sanctions followed by each nuclear weapons' test only further distance North Korea from the outside world. It should also be mentioned that under Kim Jong Un, the DPRK

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<sup>7</sup> For the "military-first" policy see more Smith, 2015; Byman & Lind, 2010; Songum politics, nd, etc.

conducted three nuclear tests (Seib et al, 2016). Apart from that, North Korea is very active in developing its ballistic missile program. One of the last missile tests was conducted on February 12, 2017; it landed in the Sea of Japan (Kim Jong Un Guides Test-fire, 2017). Although North Korea officially stated that the last firing was a “self-defensive measure” (Foreign Ministry Spokesman of DPRK Slams U.S., 2017), the test was conducted while Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was paying his state visit to the USA, and this was considered by Seoul and Washington as a sign of threat from North Korea (Dillow, 2017; N. Korean Test Missile Flies 500 km, 2017; North Korea shoots missile 500 km in “show of force” to Trump, 2017). Another, in the opinion of Kim Jong Un, “great event of historic significance” was the test of the newly developed by the DPRK rocket engine, which was conducted March 19, 2017 (“Kim Jong Un Watches Ground Jet Test”, 2017). This “event” showed a substantial progress of North Korea in the developing technology for obtaining engines useful for an intercontinental ballistic missile (Choe, 2017; Park, 2017).

It seems that the isolation of the DPRK is highly connected to the maintenance of internal political regime thus guaranteeing the security of the country. Therefore, due to this situation, two assumptions could be made: first, the isolation of North Korea will continue as long as the Kim family will be in power; second, the isolation of North Korea will keep going as long as other countries, specifically the United States and its allies South Korea and Japan, will refuse to adjust and conduct a more favourable approach towards Pyongyang by finding grounds to accept the North Korea’s nuclear program. However, the latter assumption is difficult to implement due to the possible domino effect in acquiring nuclear weapons by other countries.

### **How Is It Inside?**

From the above analysis, one logical question can arise: How is it inside? The DPRK is considered to be one of the “poorest countries in the world” (Shim, 2016, np.), and the potential reason for that among others might be the isolation of the country. Why don’t people of North

Korea try to make changes in the country by uprising against the authoritarian regime? There are a number of assumptions that could be made. First, it might be possible that people in North Korea are satisfied with their situation being under the ruling Kim family and living in the centrally planned economy with goods, services and jobs distribution by the government; otherwise, they most likely would not tolerate this style of living for 70 years. Second, they might not be content with their current situation but they cannot do anything against the government due to the existing economics of shortage in the country and occurring fear to loose the minimum that they have (Kemme, 1989; Kornai, 1980; Wintrobe, 1998). Centrally planned economies have always had a problem of shortage of goods and services; however, it is the government, which creates such scarcity (Wintrobe, 1998). By controlling the economic development of the country and distributing the goods and jobs to the population, the North Korean regime puts its people in a subordinate position creating an illusion that the North Koreans cannot survive without the government. Therefore, the population of the DPRK has to respect and obey the ruling authorities because they are the ones who give the basic needs to people. The reality of the economic shortage in North Korea is combined with some assumptions of the dictator's dilemma. As Wintrobe stated, the more the ruler threatens the people, the more people are afraid of speaking out or doing anything that would upset the ruler (1998). Moreover, there is also a paradox of the dictator's dilemma, which can also "be called the subject's dilemma" (Wintrobe, 1998, p. 22). According to the dictator-subject dilemma, the ruler wishes to be loved and praised by the people, however, the people also strongly hope that the ruler knows about their love and loyalty. The population would wish so in order to guarantee its security (Wintrobe, 1998). North Korean situation with highly obedient (until now there was no any significant attempt of revolt) and extremely "dramatic" (widely known images of crying North Koreans on the occasions of the death of the leaders or people happily praising the leaders when they meet them) population could be an empirical example of theoretical assumptions proposed

by Wintrobe. The combination of these reasons (the economics of shortage, subordination and fear-based loyalty), as well as others, diminishes the likelihood of revolution in North Korea.

## **Chapter 5**

### **Rationale of Interactions: “Pentagon” and Hermit Kingdom<sup>8</sup>**

After scrutinizing the position and interests of each country individually, it is necessary to look at the rationale of interactions on the Korean Peninsula collectively. Interaction is a process through which parties understand objectives and interests of each other, mutually test commitments as well as push each other to alter or adjust positions (Buszynski, 2013). Despite the fact that all the players seek to achieve their own goals in the region, there is a common area of concerns as well as common reasons that form a rationale of interactions between the USA, China, Russia, South Korea, Japan – “pentagon” of countries and North Korea. To explain that, this chapter will focus on the security, the issue of isolation and descriptive figure of interactions between all the players in the region. In addition, the chapter will also present two existing frameworks of interactions between the main players on political level – the Six-Party Talks, and on economic level – Economic sanctions against North Korea. All these assumptions can be partly explained through the implications of the main theories: Neorealism, Regional Security Complex theory, Rogue State theory and Game theory in international relations, however, none of them individually can cover the complexity of this issue.

### **Security Concerns**

Security is the most common area of concerns for all players on the Korean Peninsula, and precisely this area is a zone of unachievable agreements. The ROK and Japan are mostly concerned with their national security; the USA seeks to protect its Asian allies, ensure global security, and, eventually, its own security; China and Russia strive for regional stability to foster

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<sup>8</sup> Some scholars call North Korea as “Hermit Kingdom” due to its isolation (Jeffries, 2006; Akaha, 2002; Endo, 1997). This term originates in Joseon Dynasty of Korea (1392-1897), when the first isolated policies were implemented (Kim, 2014; Bartas & Ekman, 2015).

their own economic development, North Korea intends to secure itself, which also means survival of the ruling regime. Security discourse in the case of the DPRK complies with the Neorealism theoretical framework. As Waltz (1979) supposed, the countries try to ensure their survival, and this is precisely what North Korea is seeking to do. Moreover, the DPRK needs to develop weapons and conduct tests to frighten others and show them its power, which is crucial to security according to Neorealists (Rudolph, 2003). Therefore, survival and self-preservation can be attained through strengthening military capabilities, which is actually what North Korea does. As security concern on the Korean Peninsula is highly connected to the nuclear program of the DPRK, and Pyongyang is not willing to abandon its ambitions in this field, the nuclear card will be always in the play for as long as possible. However, this card is not as dangerous as it may seem because until now North Korea has been using it quite wisely, only for deterrence and getting aid. Indirect confrontation on the Peninsula has formed a relatively stable situation in the region with already familiar ballistic missile tests by the DPRK and following sanctions by the international community. This mechanism was widely implemented since the first nuclear test of North Korea in 2006, and it has functioned until the present time, which gives it a 10-year of vitality. Although the current state of affairs is not a resolution to the Korean problem, it seems a better situation for the time being rather than potential insecurity due to the possible direct confrontation on the Peninsula, collapse of the present Kim regime and further geopolitical tensions between the main players. As for now, the situation is changing with the arrival of the American anti-missile THAAD system<sup>9</sup>, which will certainly bring instability to the region.

### **Six-Party Talks: Temporary Success with an Unknown Future**

Associated with the security concerns, one of the existing but currently not functioning frameworks of interaction between all the players involved in the crisis on the Korean Peninsula is the Six-Party Talks. The main aim of these political negotiations was to find a peaceful

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<sup>9</sup> It has been reported that the first elements of the USA missile defense system have arrived in South Korea on 6<sup>th</sup> of March (Hancocks & Berlinger, 2017).

solution for the North Korean nuclear program (Buszynski, 2013; Choo, 2002; Chu & Lin, 2008; Cossa, 2012; Grzelczyk, 2009; Liang, 2012; Kwak, 2010; Pardo, 2012). The six main participants the USA, North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan conducted six rounds of talks from 2003 to 2008 (Grzelczyk, 2009; Liang, 2012), all current attempts to revive the process of negotiations have not worked out. The talks were chaired by China. Six-Party Talks can be seen as an empirical example of Regional Complex Security Theory. Geographically closed countries are linked due to the common security concerns, which is the nuclear program of the DPRK. The USA, North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia and Japan form a Northeast Asian security complex, which has “historical and geographical roots” (Buzan, 1991, p. 192). Moreover, the lines of amity and enmity between the countries, which is also typical for the RSCT, can be tracked and revealed through the process of negotiations under the Six-Party Talks. The obvious confrontation was viewed between the USA, Japan and North Korea, less between Seoul and Pyongyang. As for the amity, more supportive position towards the DPRK during the process of the Talks was shown by China and Russia. Although presently it is still uncertain whether or when the next round of negotiations would take place, the Six-Party Talks appeared to be a good way to know the interests and positions of each participant as well as to understand the rationale of their interactions.

With the collapse of the Agreed Framework between the USA and North Korea and the withdrawal of the DPRK from the Treaty of Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, the Trilateral Talks between the USA, North Korea and China initially took place in 2003. China for the first time became a mediator between the USA and the DPRK (Buszynski, 2013). However, the lack of success and progress during the tripartite meeting made it clear that this mechanism would not help to solve the existing problem. China, which remained dissatisfied with the situation as well as with the U.S. rejection of the trilateral format, started to work on attracting other regional players to the negotiations and search for solutions. The Six-Party Talks “were a logical extension of the Trilateral Talks” (Grzelczyk, 2009, p. 99). Thus, the Six-Party Talks

were formed as a response to the impossibility of reaching common grounds between the United States and the DPRK in the first place, the occurred line of enmity between these two countries has tracked through all rounds of the Talks.

***First Round (27 – 29 August, 2003)***

Officially motivated by the same aim of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and starting the first round of the Talks, the six parties, especially the USA and North Korea, had different views on the process of dismantlement of the nuclear program of North Korea. The DPRK offered a plan of actions, which was meant to be implemented simultaneously by Pyongyang and Washington (Buszynski, 2013; Butler, 2003). However, the main obstacle was the non-acceptance of North Korea and the USA on each other's demands. The DPRK requested to sign a non-aggression pact with the U.S. before the possible dismantling of the nuclear program, and Washington was unwilling to do so, moreover, the USA demanded a complete destruction of the nuclear program of North Korea in order to get American assistance and cooperation (Buszynski, 2013; Butler, 2003; Grzelczyk, 2009; Liang, 2012). The North Korean proposal seemed acceptable for Russia and China, but not for the U.S. Simultaneously, an offer of Russia and China to secure North Korea collectively appeared to be a way out from the deadlock, however, it was not supported by Pyongyang (Buszynski, 2013). As for other parties, it seems that South Korea was less active in the negotiations and interactions; Japan was more concerned with the abduction issue and missile tests (Grzelczyk, 2009). During the first round of the Talks there was no concrete practical progress resolving the nuclear program of North Korea, however, it could be considered a significant move forward on the crisis on the Korean Peninsula as for the first time in the history, the six regional countries came together in attempt to find a political solution for the concerning issues. Moreover, parties have known the positions and bottom lines of each other. The rationale of interactions during the first round was based on the enmity between North Korea on one side, the USA and Japan on the other side. Russia and China played a role of mediators trying to accommodate the interests of the parties within their

acceptable frameworks. South Korea appeared to be less active than other states most likely trying to understand the positions of every party. The first round of the Talks looked like an “introduction” to future collective attempts. It ended with the desire of the participants to continue the dialogue and their willingness to resolve the problem, to make the Korean Peninsula a nuclear-free territory, and at the same time to ensure the security of the DPRK. Parties also agreed that they should prevent any actions that could worsen the situation (Grzelczyk, 2009; Liang, 2012).

### ***Second Round (25 – 28 February, 2004)***

The second attempt to find a political solution to the nuclear issue of North Korea aimed to “expand common grounds” between the parties despite the existing differences in the positions (“The first day of the second round of Six-Party Talks”, 2004). The United States came to the table of negotiations with the policy aiming to provide security assurance to North Korea. Moreover, according to the then president of the USA George W. Bush, the country did not intend to attack the DPRK (Disarmament Documentation, nd). However, the main demand of Washington remained the same, American representatives were stressing and insisting on “complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement” (CVID) of the nuclear weapons of North Korea (Grzelczyk, 2009, p. 103). As for Pyongyang, it had shown some adjustment of its position by reportedly offering to dismantle its nuclear program but continuing its peaceful nuclear development (Liang, 2012). On this issue, Russia and China appeared to be more supportive of North Korea as it was considered to be a move from the deadlock in achieving some practical results out of negotiations. However, the USA, Japan and South Korea were within the line of enmity demanding a complete abolishment of any nuclear activity, although South Korea was still willing to provide energy to the North (Segell, 2005). During the second round of the Talks, Seoul showed a more active approach comparatively to the first one by revealing a plan of possible actions. The three-step proposal included a necessity for Pyongyang to express its willingness to abandon the nuclear program in order to prevent threats to the

security of the country from other states. South Korea was willing to work on corresponding to the first proposal policies and measures making it more attractive to North Korea by attaching descend supportive packages to it (Liang, 2012). Despite the fact that there was some softening in the positions of the United States and North Korea, this round of Talks ended without any practical result.

### ***Third Round (23 – 26 June, 2004)***

The third round of the Talks, which was discussed during the previous one, was going on the background of progressing bilateral negotiations between South Korea and North Korea, Japan and North Korea (Pritchard, 2005). The main line of enmity between Washington and Pyongyang was preserved although both sides proposed their programs of renouncing North Korea's nuclear activities. It seems that during the third round of the Talks the main principle underlining the proposal of the DPRK was "compensation". Pyongyang was ready to let international inspectors check its nuclear facility as well as showed its willingness to "freeze" the nuclear program, however, in exchange for compensation. For instance, in order to suspend the nuclear activities, North Korea asked for 2 million tons of energy per year and the withdrawal of all sanctions put on the country. In addition, Pyongyang expressed a demand to be removed from the list of the "terrorism-sponsoring states" of the USA (Grzelczyk, 2009, p. 103). Washington also did its proposal, which included a three-month preparation period before the ultimate removal of the nuclear program of North Korea (Pritchard, 2005). Both sides agreed to examine each other's proposal, however, Pyongyang was not satisfied with the American plan as it did not see the commitment of the U.S. in the provision of heavy fuel oil in case North Korea "froze" its nuclear activities (Pritchard, 2005). As it was observed, except for the submission of proposals, the parties have not achieved any practical result. Among the outcomes that might be considered positive, there was the consent of the parties on the necessity to follow "word for word" and "action for action", the principle in the mutual interactions and agreement to have the fourth round of the Talks ("Chairman's Statement", 2004). Three rounds of negotiations did not

bring any practical results in terms of actual denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula; however, at this stage, they became a good platform for the parties to understand the positions and demands of each other for possible future adjustment of their plans and proposals.

***Fourth Round (1<sup>st</sup> phase: 26 July – 7 August, 2005; 2<sup>nd</sup> phase: 13 – 19 September, 2005)***

After three rounds without any practical results, the fourth round had become a breakthrough in the negotiations. However, a year has passed before the six states could meet up and discuss the crisis on the Korean Peninsula. From the rejection of all agreements reached during the third round by North Korea to the enrichment of uranium in South Korea and the accusation of Pyongyang against Washington about having double standards towards North Korea, the situation that preceded the fourth round of negotiations did not inspire hope for a favourable outcome (Grzelczyk, 2009). Nevertheless, the fourth round of the Talks was conducted and even went into two phases. September 19, 2005, was marked by issuing the joint statement on principles and steps leading to the nuclear-free peninsula. According to this document, the DPRK committed to abandon its nuclear activities, return to NPT and cooperate with IAEA. However, Pyongyang reserved the right to peaceful use of its nuclear energy. As for the U.S., it ensured that it did not have any nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula; moreover, Washington also confirmed that it did not have any intention to attack North Korea. Seoul also committed not to have, receive or deploy nuclear weapons within the country (“Joint Statement”, 2005). All the parties decided to discuss “at an appropriate time the subject of the provision of light-water reactor to the DPRK”. In addition, six states were willing to provide North Korea security, political and economic assurance and assistance (“Joint Statement”, 2005, np.). According to the Joint Statement (2005), the DPRK and the U.S. also committed to respect the sovereignty of each other and put efforts to peaceful coexistence. The principle of “commitment for commitment, action for action” was an underlying base of this document. The next day after the issuing of the Joint Statement, North Korea urged the United States to provide a light-water

reactor as soon as possible, moreover, it threaten Washington by continuing its nuclear activities until it received the reactor (Grzelczyk, 2009; Liang, 2012).

The Joint Statement of agreed provisions has shown a reached balance for the first time between all the parties. It seemed that the countries within the Northeast Asian security complex have moved forward to the ultimate goal of the denuclearization of Peninsula. However, the statement of North Korea the following day after the issuance of the joint document indicated that there was an issue of mistrust among the parties. Although the obvious line of enmity between the U.S. and North Korea was blurred by the agreements and assurances in the Joint Statement, the invisible or hidden line of enmity still existed.

***Fifth Round (1<sup>st</sup> phase: 9 – 11 November, 2005; 2<sup>nd</sup> phase: 18 – 22 December, 2006; 3<sup>rd</sup> phase: 8 – 13 February, 2007)***

A one-year and half long fifth round of the Talks was aimed to implement the Joint Statement in the real practice. The hostility between the U.S. and North Korea has become more evident than during the previous round of negotiations. Washington was insisting on providing a light reactor only after conducting inspections of nuclear facilities in North Korea. Pyongyang was willing to do so; however, it did not like the fact that the American president George W. Bush was talking about the leader of the DPRK Kim Jong Il as a “tyrant” in one of his speeches, moreover, North Korea strongly demanded for lifting economic and financial sanctions of the USA (Joo & Kwak, 2016). The situation has deteriorated due to the pressure of the USA on the Banco Delta Asia (financial institute) in Macao, which froze around \$25 million of funds related to North Korea, and the following boycotting of the Six-Party Talks, conducting missile and first nuclear test by the DPRK on October 9, 2006 (Joo & Kwak, 2016; Liang, 2012; Lague & Greenlees, 2007). The second phase of the Talks did not bring any substantial results either. Although the six parties came to the table of negotiations, five of them doubted the willingness of North Korea to abandon its nuclear program after conducting the first nuclear test. Moreover,

the DPRK wished to be recognized as a nuclear power (Grzelczyk, 2009). Through the process of the fifth round of the Talks, it could be observed that until the end of the second phase the USA and North Korea could not find common grounds. Washington was not willing to lift its sanctions; Pyongyang showed inconsistency from the past agreements to abandon the nuclear program, to conduct the first nuclear test and defend the right to be a nuclear power. These attitudes and positions of the parties did not help to solve the existing problems; the formed hostile situation only deepened the mutual mistrust. Nevertheless, the six parties were back to the negotiations for the third time under this round on February 8, 2007, and the experts gave different reasons for the restoration of the Talks. Some of them pointed out that the deadlock situation was not favourable for the USA as well as North Korea; Washington did not want the further proliferation of nuclear weapons from the DPRK, Pyongyang was eager to revive its economy (Joo & Kwak, 2016). Others stressed out that North Korea agreed to the third round because the U.S. expressed its willingness to discuss the issue of frozen funds in the Banco Delta Asia through bilateral channels (Kwak, 2010). February 13, 2007, was marked by the adopting of the agreement between the parties about the future steps towards the implementation of the reached Joint Statement during the fourth round. According to the Initial Actions (2007), North Korea agreed to close the Yongbyon nuclear facility within 60 days and let inspectors of IAEA have control over the process. As it was pointed out, the DPRK would receive 50000 tons of heavy fuel oil. The second step: Pyongyang would provide “the list of all nuclear programs and disable all existing nuclear facilities”. As a result of this step, North Korea would get “economic, energy and humanitarian assistance up to the equivalent of 1 million tons of heavy fuel oil” (Initial Actions, 2007, np). As for the United States, Washington agreed on the process of removing the DPRK from its list of the states that sponsors the terrorism and Trading with the Enemy Act as well as bettering the bilateral relations and resolving the existing problems. Additionally, in order to implement all reached provisions, there was a formation of five working groups. Despite the long duration of the negotiations, the fifth round could be considered as a

breakthrough during the whole process of the Six-Party Talks as a substantial systematic plan of actions was agreed between the countries. How successfully, efficiently and strongly the countries managed sticking to this plan is however another debatable question.

*Sixth Round (1<sup>st</sup> phase: 19 – 22 March, 2007; Resumption: 18 – 20 July, 2007; 2<sup>nd</sup> phase: 27 – 30 September, 2007)*

The sixth and currently the last round of the Six-Party Talks took place according to the schedule outlined during the previous round of negotiations. However, the implementation of the first step of the February 13 agreement was not accomplished within 60 days as it was supposed to. One of the main reasons for the delay was a demand of the North Korean side to get access to the frozen funds in Macau and unwillingness of the Bush administration to lift the financial sanctions from Banco Delta Asia (Nakato, 2009). Subsequently, only in June 2007, the IAEA confirmed that the 5-megawatt nuclear reactor at Yongbyon was closed and sealed, and after that, the USA unfroze North Korean financial assets (Kwak, 2010; Liang, 2012). According to the Joint document of the second session of the Sixth round (2007), Pyongyang committed to “disable all existing nuclear activities, provide a complete list of its nuclear programs” by the end of the year. It also ensured that it would not transfer nuclear materials or technology to other parties. As for the U.S., Washington confirmed that it would work on the removal of the DPRK from the list of the states sponsoring terrorism as well as from the Trading with the Enemy Act. The United States would take appropriate measures simultaneously with the North Korean actions. Regarding other parties, all of them agreed on providing economic, energy and humanitarian assistance to the DPRK (Kwak, 2010; Joint Document, 2007).

Despite the obvious progress, mistrust between Washington and Pyongyang still persisted. The implementation of the agreed step was delayed and eventually failed due to different issues mainly connected to mutual suspicion. There were difficulties with the providing by North Korea and accepting by the USA with a “complete and correct” list of nuclear

activities, issues with the verification system, delisting of North Korea from the category of the terrorism-sponsored states of the USA, just to name a few. Eventually, the DPRK provided a document with its nuclear activities, two parties signed a verification protocol and only in October 2008, North Korea was removed from the terrorism list (Kwak, 2010). However, this breakthrough did not solve the problem. A series of agreed but not fulfilled commitments by the parties continued until April 2009, when North Korea fired a Taepo Dong-2 three-stage rocket and later refused to take part in the Six-Party Talks as well as rejected to follow all the achieved agreements (Liang, 2012).

The Six-Party Talks was a first organized and systematic collective attempt to solve the crisis on the Korean Peninsula as well as a political mechanism of interactions between the six parties involved in the issue. Through the whole process of the Talks, the main line of enmity and incompliance between the USA and the DPRK was present periodically and was becoming more or less obvious. As it was observed, the progress of the Talks mostly depended on the positions of Washington and Pyongyang, their willingness and commitment to compromise. North Korea has always seen the hostility and disrespect towards its sovereignty from the United States, the U.S., in its turn, was wishing that North Korea would be more “cooperative”, less “tyrannical”, in other words, would satisfy all its demands. Apparently, the mutual mistrust overweighed the desire to find a peaceful resolution of the denuclearization issue on the Peninsula. Moreover, it seems that North Korea found out that the nuclear “game”, and rogue status serve it better than the concession to the U.S.

### **To Isolate and to Remain Rogue**

The indirect confrontation between the international community and North Korea due to the DRPK’s nuclear deterioration only further isolate the country. There is no state that seeks to be too close to North Korea. As it was observed, even China in the past few years moved a little bit away from its “troublesome” neighbor. The unpredictable and intractable behaviour of North

Korea, as well as highly suspicious attitude towards the world, do not present any more credibility for other countries. The question of how long and how sincere North Korea will be able to carry out agreements in case if countries reach them remains unknown. Inability or unwillingness of the DPRK to play by the same rules of international politics as other states do in accordance with the commonly recognized international and legal norms put North Korea under the category of the Rogue states. Based on the Rogue State theory assumptions, the DPRK has almost all, if not absolutely all of the features of this type of countries: authoritarian regime, restriction of human rights, development and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, etc. (Meer, 2009). Moreover, according to the theoretical framework, this category of states tend to undermine the formed and functioning international rules and norms (Preble, 2005), North Korea shows exactly this behaviour by refusing to listen to calls from the international community and being non-cooperative. However, Pyongyang is not suffering, as it does not seek to be too close to any state. The reluctance of North Korea to be under the supervision of any other country and desire to pursue the line of actions in accordance with the core interests (or ideology) of the ruling regime have been observed throughout the history of this country. One of the obvious examples could be the maneuver between USSR on one side and China on the other side. Apparently, it cannot be completely isolated from either of them, as it still needs external assistance for survival. Nevertheless, today the DPRK still follows the rogue path at its own will because it perfectly works for the current leadership. North Korea manages well to stay pariah, as it knows its *value* for all players in the region as well as the *boundaries* of these players that it should not overpass, otherwise, it will be doomed to destruction.

### **Economic Sanctions: How effective are they for North Korea?**

Sanctions are another way of interactions between the countries involved in the crisis on the Korean Peninsula. This type of interactions is connected to the collective restrictions imposed on the economic, commercial and/or financial activities of the DPRK. According to the theory of economic sanctions, imposed sanctions would make the target country face economic

difficulties, which would lead to political instability further forcing leaders of that state to adjust or change relevant policy (Galtung, 1967). The case of North Korea, however, did not completely comply with this theoretical framework. The DPRK, as observed is in fact experiencing economic difficulties, but it has not changed its line of actions in order to meet demands or requirements of countries that imposed sanctions on it. North Korea continues remaining rogue, making economic sanctions of other states look ineffective. Economic sanctions towards the DPRK could serve as an empirical example partly of repeated game theory (Powell, 2003) and coordination problem (Haggard & Noland, 2012; Kydd, 2005), the assumptions that would be analyzed below. Regional players impose economic sanctions on North Korea unilaterally and multilaterally (Anguelov, 2015; Beal, 2011; Chang, 2007; Haggard & Noland, 2012; Kim, 2007; Rennack, 2007; Rhyu & Bae, 2010; Park, 2014; Taylor, 2010; Whitty et al, 2007). The USA, South Korea and Japan impose both unilateral and multilateral sanctions whereas China and Russia mostly carry multilateral sanctions under the UN Resolutions.

### ***Unilateral Sanctions against North Korea***

#### **USA**

The United States of America started imposing sanctions on North Korea since the formation of the DPRK. According to Washington, North Korea threatens national security of the U.S.; it has a communist government relying on the Marxist-Leninist ideology; the DPRK was designated by the USA as a terrorism-sponsored country; it has nuclear weapons and conducts nuclear-proliferation activities (Chang, 2007; Rennack, 2007; Rhyu & Bae, 2010; Taylor, 2010). Due to these and other motives, historically and presently, the USA has imposed economic and financial restrictions on North Korea. Among the most serious ones, Chang mentioned three: the first one is the suspension of the trade status of the DPRK in 1951 (2007). Until now, North Korea cannot export its products to the USA. Another one is enlisting North

Korea along with other states sponsoring terrorism in 1988 (Chang, 2007). 20 years later, in 2008, Washington removed the DPRK from that list; however, after the assassination of Kim Jong Il's half-brother, calls to relist the country have only increased ("US Lawmakers want North Korea put back on terrorist blacklist", 2017). The third one was freezing the funds of North Korea in the Banco Delta Asia; they were released to the DPRK through a Russian bank in 2008 (Taylor, 2010). Despite the fact that some of the American sanctions were lifted at different times, the relations between the USA and North Korea do not experience any improvements due to the existing sanctions, there are still restrictions on trade, aid, arms sales and transfers and other (Rennack, 2007). By imposing sanctions, the U.S. pursues different goals as influence on North Korean decision-making process, impact other parties – states or international organizations, conduct some American strategies (presence of the USA in the region), form Sino-US strategic ties as China plays a pivotal role in the North Korean issue (Taylor, 2010). If Washington can affect its allies and international organization as well as pursue elements of its strategies, it has not been successful in changing the political leadership of North Korea or stopping the nuclear program of this country. Nevertheless, the United States continues its hard line of sanctions against North Korea.

## **ROK**

One of the most prominent unilateral sanctions of the ROK against its northern neighbor were 5.24 measures initiated in response to the sinking of the South Korean corvette *Cheonan* (Choe, 2010; York & Choi, 2015). These measures were aimed at halting bilateral trade, forbidding travels of South Koreans to the DPRK and forbidding North Korean ships to sail on South Korean waters. Moreover, the then president of the ROK Lee Myung Bak asked the UN Security Council to take appropriate punitive measures (Choe, 2010). Overall, historically Seoul has not been as active as the U.S. in imposing unilateral sanctions on North Korea. South Korea as the closest neighbor is concerned with all possible negative outcomes due to tough sanctions

on North Korea including the most obvious one – the influx of refugees (Niemann, 2005; Noland, 2004; Wrobel, 2007).

## **Japan**

Before 2003, Japan was quite reluctant to impose sanctions on North Korea and did it under the U.S. pressure. However, since 2003, Tokyo has administrated different restrictions against the DPRK mostly due to the nuclear tests and the abduction issue (Taylor, 2010).

Recently, February last year, Japan unilaterally imposed sanctions following the North Korean satellite launch. Tokyo bans remittances, travels of Japanese to North Korea as well as forbids navigations of the North Korean ships near Japan (Pollmann, 2016). The effectiveness of these sanctions are not that prominent as Japan has never been close to North Korea, therefore, the impact of restrictions is quite limited.

## ***Multilateral Sanctions against North Korea***

The USA, ROK, Japan, China and Russia “interact” by imposing sanctions under the Resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. Since 2006, UNSC adopted a number of Resolutions, which have imposed sanctions against North Korea (UNSC, 2006, 2009, 2013, 2016). The earlier ones have aimed at ceasing nuclear testing, forbidding the export of heavy weapons and luxury goods, inspecting and destroying suspicious cargo (UNSC, 2006, 2009). Since 2013, the restrictions became tougher influencing the financial system of North Korea and banning the export of different minerals. Despite the sanctions, the DPRK continues launching missiles, conducting nuclear tests and operating without changing its behavior. This type of interaction reminds of the imperfect repeated game theory. According to this theoretical framework, if one player deviates from the agreed order, other players collectively punish violator as many times as it infringes rules. The cost of punishments should outweigh the gains to ensure the players are afraid to break the order and be punished (Powell, 2007). In the case of sanctions against North Korea, regional players have constantly punished the DPRK; however,

this country continues its “deviations”. Thus, one possible assumption is that the gains of not following the common rules are higher than costs, which means that the effectiveness of sanctions is not as strong as it should be. The logical question arises: Why are the sanctions not effective? Apart from the ardent supporters of sanctions – the USA and Japan, a moderate player – South Korea, there are also China and Russia, which have always been relatively reticent to tough sanctions against North Korea (Taylor, 2010; Haggard & Noland, 2012). Therefore, unilateral or multilateral sanctions of the USA and Japan will not have the prominent impact as North Korea highly relies primarily and mostly on the Chinese support, the relations with Russia, as well as the trade and other ties with South Korea (Haggard & Noland, 2012; Park, 2014). Due to the different interests of regional players on the Korean Peninsula, it is difficult for all of them to agree on the same level of severity of sanctions. Moreover, geographical neighbors of the DPRK – South Korea, China and Russia, certainly, are not interested in occurring of complete destabilization of the region, refugee influx and other consequences due to the collapse of North Korea because of continuous strong sanctions. The clash of different interests reveals a coordination problem among players on the peninsula. Because of this problem, in order to get a certain outcome in multilateral interaction, all actors should agree on the same point (Kydd, 2005). Thereby, the effectiveness of economic sanctions against North Korea would be significant only when all five states would see the problem the same way, which currently seems impossible.

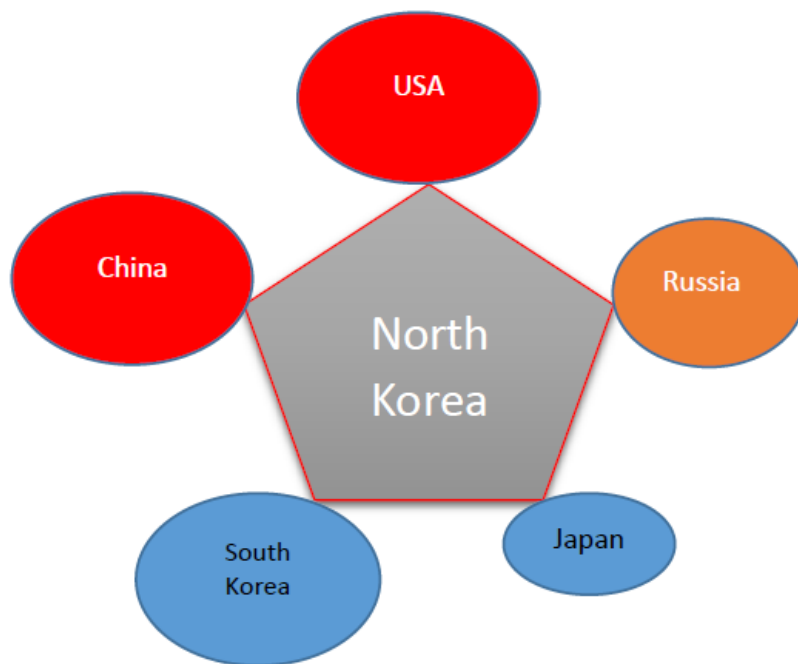
### ***How Does North Korea Play with Sanctions?***

The DPRK being under unilateral and multilateral sanctions uses their negative effect positively. North Korean regime has used all restrictions exercised against it to strengthen the principles of *Juche* – self-reliance, and “military first” (Anguelov, 2015). From the North Korean point of view, by conducting nuclear tests, the country is exercising its right of self-defense as well as showing its dissatisfaction of nuclear threat and sanctions imposed by the U.S. and other hostile countries (UNSC “Resolution on Sanctions” 2321 Rejected, 2016). As the director of the

U.S. - Korea Institute at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies Jae Ku said: “No amount of sanctions will stop North Korea; nuclear weapons are their sole survival strategy” (Francis & Hudson, 2016, np.).

The two existing frameworks of interaction between regional players on the Korean Peninsula, on one side political in the form of the Six-Party Talks, and economical on the other side presented by the Sanctions, are not as effective as they are supposed to be. Mistrust, the clash of interests, coordination problem among the players prevent them from finding appropriate ways to solve the North Korean issue. However, precisely the inability to have common grounds has formed the current delicate regional balance.

### **Regional Balance**



**Figure 1. Rationale of Interactions: Regional Balance**

Figure 1 illustrates the core rationale of interactions shaped as a “pentagon” of countries around North Korea. Geographically, historically and according to the empirical evidence observed in this paper, the DPRK is surrounded by these five countries. Among five players,

China, the USA and South Korea are the most active ones on the Korean Peninsula; however, Seoul has been highly dependent on the support of the U.S. on this issue, therefore, the positions of Beijing and Washington on the Korean problem have a decisive role and importance. Thus, China, the USA and the ROK denoted by the same size on this figure, however, only China and the USA marked by the same color, which is red, whereas South Korea marked as blue. As for Japan, great ally of the United States, it relies heavily on the position of Washington on this issue; therefore, Japan is marked by the same color as South Korea but by smaller size because it is not as prominent as the ROK. Russia labelled by different color and size comparatively to other players due to its zigzag pattern of participation in the Korean crisis and presence on the peninsula. The main player – North Korea – placed into the pentagon and limited by the “red alert” boundaries. This figure vividly and descriptively reflects the actual situation with North Korea in the center.

The logic behind this figure appears to be that the DPRK is situated in the net woven by the surrounded five countries. They keep North Korea inside this net occasionally constricting or expanding it, but until now, they have not broken it. The constriction can be seen through limitations imposed on the DPRK by sanctions and other restrictive policies whereas the expansion can be understood through providing humanitarian aid and assistance to Pyongyang as well as partial cooperation with it. North Korea, being inside the net, can do whatever it wants as long as it does not overpass “red alert” boundaries. Overpassing would presumably lead to a direct confrontation with one of or a number of players and, subsequently, to the collapse of North Korea. Therefore, until the present time, Pyongyang has not overpassed the designated boundaries, in other words, has not broken this net, for the sake of its own survival. Moreover, it will most likely continue functioning and acting within the pentagon net as it serves and works the best for the current North Korean leadership. Empirically, overpassing the boundaries would directly be connected to the security of the players, namely, a nuclear test of the DPRK that would kill people and/or destroy the territory of surrounded country or countries. Therefore,

status-quo or remaining inside the net is the optimum situation for North Korea because it can guarantee its existence. Status-quo or keeping North Korea inside the net is also better for the surrounding countries at least for now because a breach into the net would lead to the regional instability, geopolitical tensions, humanitarian crisis and refugee outflows.

### **No Status-Quo = No Balance**

It seems that there could be a number of scenarios, which can upset the current shaky balance. Some of them are more aggressive, other seem more pacific.

*Assumption 1: Other players break the net.* It means that other surrounding countries will start military invasion into North Korea. The likelihood of this to happen now is quite low because currently each of the players of the game is concerned with their own domestic issues, they do not need unnecessary costs, troubles and instability. The United States of America have just chosen its new president; the policies of the country are still in the process of formation and groping. It is anticipated that China is more concerned with its slowing economy (Bryan, 2015) and is not interested in the deterioration of the situation in the region. As South Korea and Japan are highly dependent on the position and support of Washington, without full confidence that the U.S. will back them up, Seoul and Tokyo will not go into war against North Korea. Moreover, the ROK is facing uncertain domestic political situation after the impeachment of the president Park Geun-Hye (Campbell, 2016). Being under the sanctions imposed by the Western countries and experiencing economic problems domestically, Russia is more interested in the stability on its eastern borders rather than the escalation of military conflict.

*Assumption 2: North Korea breaks the net.* As it was earlier stated, North Korea is interested in its own survival, thus it will stay inside the net as long as it is possible without breaking it.

*Assumption 3: Miscalculation in the actions.* One possible reason for the escalation of the military conflict could be a miscalculation in the firing of a ballistic missile by North Korea that

would bring catastrophic consequences. Certainly, it is difficult to predict what will exactly happen, but in the case of Pyongyang's firing by mistake, the international community would have more reliable base and reasons to invade North Korea. However, one important consideration could be that the world has never experienced a military invasion into a country that possesses nuclear weapons.

*Assumption 4: Collapse of North Korea from inside.* This means the end of the Kim regime and the government of the country by inner force (military or people). This option was expressed by a number of different scholars such as Lankov (2013), Terry (2014), Bennett (2013), Bennett and Lind (2011). However, China and Russia would try to avoid this scenario, as it is unfavorable to their interests (Chanlett-Avery et al, 2016; Deluro et al, 2014).

If any above-mentioned scenario happens now it would lead to several consequences that should be taken into consideration:

1. *Humanitarian crisis:* Due to the stagnant economy and relatively poor population in the DPRK, the North Korean people would need food supplies and other essentials (Bennett, 2013; Chanlett-Avery et al, 2016).
2. *Refugee flows:* Surrounding countries would face a situation with a flood of the North Korean refugees (Snyder, 2011; Bennett & Lind, 2011).
3. *Geopolitical Tensions:* The pattern of interactions would change; the roles of the players would also be modified. One of the obvious tension would occur between China and the USA, as there would be a possibility of deployment of American troops at the Chinese borders (Chanlett-Avery et al, 2016).
4. *Regional Instability:* All above-outlined consequences would result in the regional instability affecting all the neighbouring countries, leading to undesirable chaos.

Therefore, the status-quo or the existing regional balance is the best option not only for North Korea but also for other countries involved in the Korean crisis, giving that favourable conditions to peacefully resolve this issue have not formed yet.

## **Chapter 6**

### **Conclusion**

#### **The Main Points**

This study attempted to scrutinize the crisis on the Korean Peninsula, present the rationale of interactions between the main players involved in the problem and justify that the status-quo is the optimum situation for all regional players. In order to carry on the study, this paper has looked at different existing theories and approaches to explain the crisis on the Korean Peninsula. A great number of theoretical frameworks helped to understand the issue from different perspectives; however, they still have shortcomings and cannot exclusively explain the current situation in the region. Therefore, this paper has adopted a complex approach and studied the history of relations between the main players on the Korean Peninsula, namely, the USA, the ROK, Japan, China, Russia and the DPRK, interests of these countries as well as the patterns of their collective interaction.

By using some assumptions of Neorealism, RSCT, Rogue State Theory and Game theory in international relations, this paper has analyzed that the security is the common area of concerns for all the players in the region, and it is directly connected to the nuclear program of North Korea. South Korea and Japan are mostly concerned with their national security whereas China and Russia are interested in the regional stability for their further economic development. The United States seeks to guarantee the security of its East-Asian allies as well as regional and global safety. Perceived as the main “troublemaker”, North Korea uses nuclear threat to secure its state and, ultimately, the ruling regime. The nuclear card of Pyongyang will be in play for as long as possible. All the countries desire to overcome security concerns, however, precisely this

area is the sphere of unachievable agreements. The failed Six-Party Talks are an illustrative example of it.

Reaching reconciliation requires cooperative attitude, which is not the case on the Korean Peninsula. The unwillingness and reluctance of the players to step back from their positions or to be too close to North Korea only leads to further distance between them. The unpredictable and intractable behaviour of the DPRK makes it difficult for other states to foster a deeper cooperation with it. Additionally, the clash of interests poses coordination problem among the other five players; therefore, the multilateral sanctions cannot prove their effectiveness. As for North Korea, it does not bother itself to be too close to any of other involved players because the rogue behaviour serves well the interests of the ruling Kim regime.

Historically, geographically and based on the empirical evidence, North Korea has been always interacting with the above-mentioned five countries. This study has released the figure, which descriptively presents a “pentagon” net with the DPRK in the center. All five players keep North Korea inside this net and Pyongyang can do whatever it wants within the pentagon as overpassing the boundaries would lead to its destruction. North Korea is aware of its value for each surrounding country; it also knows the designated framework. Maintaining the formed net, in other words, sustaining the status-quo on the Korean Peninsula for the time being appears to be the most favourable option for all actors as a dramatic change of the situation would possibly result in the regional instability in form of humanitarian crisis, refugee flows and geopolitical tensions. Being busy with their domestic issues, the regional actors are not interested in the deterioration of the external neighboring environment. Nevertheless, the crisis on the Korean Peninsula remains unresolved. Moving from the dead point would require a commonly acceptable ground for negotiations as well as assistance in the economic development of North Korea.

### **Limitations and Prospects for Future Studies**

This study has a number of limitations. Firstly, the most prominent one is the absence of primary sources. The paper is only based on secondary sources. Conducting independent interviews, surveys and field research would certainly add a great value to this paper and, perhaps, give a new and different “breath” to the study of the Korean problem.

Secondly, it seems reasonable to look more closely at the triangle of relations between the USA, China and the DPRK, as it was observed, they have a decisive role and importance on the Korean Peninsula.

Thirdly, it would be useful to explore more the internal political situation in North Korea by scrutinizing a range of domestic issues, which would help understanding better the behaviour of the country.

Fourthly, this paper mostly explains the current situation and clarifies the existing rationale of interactions on the Korean Peninsula. However, the crisis remains unsolved. It is important to examine the conditions under which the players would be able to go back to the table of negotiations or/and compromise in order to get on the track of resolving the Korean problem.

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