Abstract

Background/Objectives: The study describes the role of China as a diplomatic mediator in the six-party talks. The objective is to show how China deals with North Korean dispute employing preventive diplomacy. Methods/Statistical Analysis: The study of Chinese mediation in solving North Korean nuclear issue called for applying various methods of political science. The method of systemic analysis helps analyzing the political situation on the Korean Peninsula, illustrated in the publications of foreign authors. The method of statistical analysis was used to systematize data and to comprehend Chinese diplomatic actions focused on maintaining peace on the Korean Peninsula. Findings: There is an ever-growing division of opinions on how to deal with North Korea’s nuclear weapons program. The results of the study made it possible to identify the fact that China opposes the use of force and military means to resolve the conflict on the peninsula. The Chinese government reafirms that sanctions and military means are not effective solutions, but only exacerbate the situation. The authors of the study believe that Chinese diplomats and the government support effective dialogue on the objectives of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and consider it an effective way to solve the nuclear issue, notwithstanding a series of nuclear tests and ballistic missile launches over recent years. Chinese experts believe that after the end of the Cold War, diplomatic mediation has become an important element in the international practice of conflict prevention and resolution. Application/Improvements: Chinese officials support peaceful diplomatic solutions. Improvements should be focused on denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and a truce-to-peace mechanism should be pursued to resolve the concerns of all parties.

Keywords: China’s Mediation, Nuclear Tests, Preventive Diplomacy of China, Six-Party Talks, South and North Korean Authors, The DPRK Nuclear Issue

1. Introduction

For more than sixty years, the Korean Peninsula has been an important constituent part of the world geopolitics. The state of affairs in this region is characterized by permanently growing tensions in the relationships between the DPRK and the Republic of Korea, which has been illustrated by the events at the end of 2015 and the beginning of 2016 related to missile launches and nuclear tests in the DPRK. This subject has been intensively studied by both Russian and foreign researchers.

The authors have different opinions on the situation in the region of the Korean Peninsula; however, the majority agrees that, for the purposes of international security, it is crucially important to prevent a potential armed conflict and to resolve the current issues peacefully.
Within the framework of this study, the opinions shared by researchers from the People's Republic of China (the PRC) will be considered. Common for all Chinese authors is the opinion that, upon having finished with Cold War, diplomatic mediation became an important element in the international practice of preventing and reconciling the conflicts.

Thereat, Chinese researchers believe that, notwithstanding the outcomes of the mediation activities, the very process of diplomacy represents a process of conflict management and it makes the prerequisite foundations for settling crises. For example, Lu Suechen notes that, thanks to the diplomatic efforts of the great powers, it was possible to cease the DPRK nuclear program; the multilateral talks acted as a “gateway” during the North-South armed confrontation and prevented the potential large-scale war. According to the author, an important role in the negotiations on the Korean Peninsula is played by preventive diplomacy.

Official position of the PRC as regards the issues of preventing diplomacy has been declared within the report delivered by China representative in the Asia-Pacific Region, Shi Chunlai, at the second ASEAN Regional Forum in Singapore in 1999. He maintained that the practice of China’s preventive diplomacy was an important part of the new national security concept and, in the Asia-Pacific Region, it had to be founded on seven basic principles: 1) Agreements on friendship and cooperation between the states, the Charter of the United Nations Organization, the PRC, the Asia-Pacific Forum, the principles of peaceful co-existence and other norms of international law; 2) Mutual respect to sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity; 3) Non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries and implementation of cooperation in the sphere of security in relation to third parties; 4) Supporting direct connections with a conflicting party upon mutual agreement of both parties; 5) Non-use of force or threats to use force; applying peaceful methods for resolving international disputes; 6) Defense policy of one state should not pose a threat to security and stability of another country, and should be implemented without any detriment to other countries expressed in the use of force; 7) An important principle of preventive diplomacy is to develop friendly exchanges based on cooperation between the countries.

In 2016, in the course of Korean-Chinese top-level negotiations, the President of the Republic of Korea Park Geun-hye appreciated the contribution made by China to stabilize political climate on the Korean Peninsula and called for imposing tighter sanctions against North Korea. This statement has been made upon having preliminary been consulted by the President of the USA Barack Obama. During his speeches, the Head of the Foreign Office of the Republic of Korea, Cho June-hyuck has been emphasizing that the Republic of Korea expects that the PRC will proceed with its peacekeeping mission on the Korean Peninsula. According to a Korean analyst, Kim Don Uk, the Republic of Korea and the PRC have many points of common interest in political, economic and other spheres. He also highlighted similarity of opinions on solving the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula.

Professor of Donso University and former Ambassador of the Republic of Korea to the PRC, Mr. Sok Chva laid stress on considerable improvements in the relationships between the Republic of Korea and the PRC over the last two years. The authors believe that, in addition to other factors, it proved to be possible due to the peacekeeping role of the PRC in reconciling the nuclear conflict on the Korean Peninsula.

2. Concept Headings

Chinese authors abiding by the official stance of the PRC government on the contents of preventive diplomacy and with due respect to the attempts of the great powers in the course of the negotiations dedicated to solving the issues on the Korean Peninsula, at the same time, highlight that “…today, China is the only country whose voice is, at least, heard by Pyongyang”. Chzhu Fen is convinced that “not a single state can produce influence on both the USA and North Korea as China can, who plays a crucially important role in developing and building the six-party mechanism of talks. Presently, the consensus achieved by the international community is as follows: the six-party talks are the best form for resolving the nuclear issue on the Korean Peninsula”.

In the context of this study, there is hardly any necessity to refer to the history of the origins of North Korean nuclear issue; however it should be noted that the government of the PRC, since the mass media announced clandestine supplies of Chinese nuclear technologies to other countries (Algeria, Iran, etc.) has officially declared that “China did not cooperate with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea in the sector of developing its nuclear program”.

Meanwhile, China, from the very beginning of North Korean nuclear program, has been counteracting any
3. Results and Discussion

In this regard, it should be noted that, within an expert community, there are different opinions on North Korean nuclear program. Thus, the Dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University, Shen Dinlee, in his article “The world will have to come to terms with nuclear North Korea” emphasized that “developing nuclear program is an internal affair of North Korea and, as long as it does not export its nuclear technologies, the severe pressure put on Pyongyang because of this problem can hardly be deemed justified” and he also expressed an opinion that the provisions of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) could not be applied to DPRK due to two reasons. First, participation in NPT is not obligatory and, second, the international pressure did not prevent China, India, Israel and Pakistan from developing their nuclear weapons. Therefore, according to Shen Dinlee, there is not a single reason for the DPRK refusal to develop its nuclear program; moreover, in his opinion, it was exactly by commencing the nuclear program that North Korea has escaped the threat of fast aggression from the USA and gained greater respect in the international community.31

According to Khe Tszinven and Shen Yantsze, since the very beginning of the North Korea crisis, China has been striving to mediate peaceful settlement of the nuclear issue employing various diplomatic methods, carrying out “a careful piece of work” to pursue the DPRK and expostulating with all parties to preserve peace and quiet in order to facilitate “the tree-party”, “the four-party”, “the six-party” talks and it ultimately achieved the result: “it became possible to prevent severe degradation of the situation, so that the North Korean nuclear crisis started developing peacefully. The Celestial Empire gained approval from the international community”32.

Never failing to highlight that the government of the PRC has its own opinion and its own strategic and political choice as regards “the North Korea crisis”, the authors also note six cardinal points. First, denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is necessary; North Korea has to refuse its program of creating nuclear weapons. Second, the PRC does not approve of the DPRK abandoning NPT. Third, maintaining the regime of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons satisfies the interests of the international community as a whole. Fourth, the lawful interests of the DPRK should be observed. Fifth, it is very important that each of the engaged parties should keep calm, avoid any activities deteriorating the situation, and try to reconcile the North Korea crisis by non-use of force or any war-like remedies: “the most efficient way to solve the nuclear problem is to establish dialogue, and then, through this dialogue, to eliminate the problems existing in the relationships between the USA and the DPRK, and to maintain peace and stability in the region”. Sixth, “thanks to the efforts of the PRC and of all the participants of the crisis, quite soon, it will be possible to move to the ultimate resolution of the nuclear issue, the stance of the Celestial Empire as regards the DPRK nuclear issue implies considering and rethinking the deeper interests of North and South Korea, including interests of China and the interests of all states of Northeast Asia, maintaining common interests in preserving peace all over the world”33.

The history of establishing multilateral talks on the North Korean nuclear issue has been very profoundly studied by Chzhu Fen3. The analysis undertaken by the author is in sync with the official definition of the preventive diplomacy of China that was accepted as foundational in the official documentation of ASEAN. Preventive diplomacy presents “peaceful diplomatic activities performed by sovereign states in order to prevent armed conflicts between the states of the region upon the agreement of all the countries directly involved in this dispute”33.

As it is well known, initially China insisted on three-party format of the talks on the nuclear issue engaging the DPRK, the Republic of Korea and the USA, refusing to take part in those talks directly. However, such format of
negotiations did not produce any positive results, though in the process of negotiations North Korea admitted that it developed a nuclear program and was hoping to play this “nuclear card” during the talks aimed at normalizing the relationships with the USA, lifting economic sanctions, solving a number of issues of security. But, when Bush Administration refused to enter into direct dialogue with the DPRK, suspended the “frame agreement” on oil supplies, and, moreover, when it classified North Korea as the country belonging to the “axis of evil”, the response reactions followed and there was an official announcement about the DPRK pulling out of NPT.

As a result, according to Chzhu Fen, by January 2003, a threat of another nuclear crisis emerged and the potential possibility of an armed conflict increased considerably. In addition to this, nuclearization of the Korean Peninsula generated a latent threat to East Asia Region in general. Taking all this into account, Chinese political government not only agreed to join the negotiation process, but it also offered its territory for holding the talks on the Korean nuclear issue. Consequently, in April 2003, in Beijing, the mechanism of “the three party talks” transformed into the format of “the six-party talks” by the August of the same year and involved the DPRK, China, the Republic of Korea, Russia, the USA and Japan; and during the fifth round of talks “…Chinese diplomacy proved very helpful in political reconciliation of the DPRK nuclear issue; its role was very important”, which “resulted in creating the mechanism of “the six-party” talks”. The arguments of Chzhu Fen are quite notable in justifying his statement about China, who took “the role of a responsible great state” in solving North Korean nuclear issue and who made great diplomatic efforts to maintain the six-party talks. According to the author, diplomatic engagement of China in the six-party talks facilitates, first, “establishing the environment, the character and contents of talks within the framework of bilateral and multilateral meetings and consultations, satisfying the interests of each participating country”. Thereat, the officials of the PRC Diplomatic Mission demonstrated “a firm commitment to political resolution of the Korean nuclear issue”.

Second, Chinese diplomats “…always took the responsibility during especially dangerous moments, kept on being objective and steered the six-party talks into another round, trying to bring together different views and to smooth any mutual counterclaims and accusations. Assisted by Chinese diplomats, each new round of talks used to be forestalled by special meetings, where the short-term and the long-term interests were juxtaposed and compared, the international non-proliferation principles were discussed together with the issues of security control and economic development. “When troubles occurred during the negotiation, the PRC managed to bring harmony into the relationships with the United States, a supreme state, uncompromising towards other participant countries in matters of solving the nuclear issue”.

Third, according to Chzhu Fen, China revealed certain features of “new diplomacy”, combining “firmness and softness”, and, notwithstanding the occurring problems, Chinese diplomacy managed to avoid “pressure and isolation strategy”; diplomatic cooperation of the PRC in the process of the six-party talks represented a key compromise to the benefit of the international community”.

The author dedicated a special chapter of his study to the analysis of the difficulties in the PRC diplomatic mediation in the six-party talks. He described the contradictions existing between the USA and China ideas about the interests of the DPRK that made it impossible to unite the efforts of the two countries to formulate the program for fast “denuclearization” of the DPRK. “China and the USA have common policy of denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula; however they do not have a common vision of the DPRK politics”.

On the other hand, the author contradicts his own statements declared at the beginning of the study, when he maintains that “another difficult issue during the talks is that there are no real influence on the politics of the USA and no policy adopted in relation to North Korea accordingly, that results in insufficient power to influence the DPRK”, and as a result, “…on the platform of the six-party talks, the contacts often have to be established, the discussion has to be guided, etc., instead of bringing all the parties to any considerable compromise”.

This was noted not only by Chinese but also by Russian researchers, in particular, the authors of a scientific report “Inter-Korean relationships and politics of regional powers” believe that perpetual systemic crisis together with missile and nuclear ambitions of the DPRK incite “negative reaction” of the PRC government and in 2013-2014 it resulted in notable cooling in relations between the two countries, in establishing customs restrictions on behalf of the PRC, in restrictions on energy supplies, in China’s
supporting the Resolution of the United Nations Security Council, in condemning the DPRK activities\textsuperscript{14}.

The authors of the report believe that the state visit of the PRC Chairman to the Republic of Korea on July 3-4, 2014, was of great political importance. The visit of the PRC higher state authority to Seoul and not to Pyongyang was an “unambiguous signal of the critical attitude of Beijing to the current external and internal politics of Pyongyang”, testifying to the fact that “the absence of any comprehensible strategy of development in the DPRK at the background of aggressive rhetoric combined with a number of experiments of missile launches and nuclear tests gave rise to grave concerns of the PRC”\textsuperscript{14}.

At the same time, Chinese diplomacy has undertaken certain steps to find the possibility to restart the six-party talks on the North Korean nuclear issue. Particularly, the mass media in many countries paid attention to the fact that, for the first time since 2009, a higher rank official of the PRC, a member of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Liu Yunshan, visited Pyongyang to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Labor Party of Korea. During the meeting with the highest official of the DPRK, Kim Jong-un, he declared that “China is ready to cooperate with the DPRK to restart the six-party talks on the nuclear issue as soon as possible. ... Maintaining peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula will serve the interests of all countries, so that all interested parties should make joint efforts”\textsuperscript{15}.

However, the situation in Northeast Asia has been exacerbated after the DPRK has tested a thermo-nuclear bomb (January, 2016)\textsuperscript{16,17} and launched ballistic missiles (March, 2016)\textsuperscript{18}. The United Nations Security Council condemned nuclear tests in the DPRK and demanded that their nuclear and missile program should be ceased immediately, thereat issuing threats to impose new sanctions. Many countries made similar announcements. In the context of this study, the stance of the PRC and the opinions of Chinese researchers are most important.

An official declaration of the Foreign Office of the PRC appeared on January 6, 2016. It announced that North Korea, notwithstanding the large-scale international protest, had carried out another nuclear test and the government of China resolutely opposes this fact. The stance of China is adamant: denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, non-proliferation of nuclear weapons and maintaining peace and stability in Northeast Asia. The PRC strongly urges that the DPRK should observe its obligations in terms of denuclearization, should cease any activities directed at deteriorating the situation in order to maintain peace and stability in Northeast Asia to the benefit of all parties\textsuperscript{16}. At the same time, it was pointed out that China would remain resolute in facilitating the process of denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula, and to this end, it would abide by the principles of solving the nuclear issue peacefully within the framework of the six-party talks\textsuperscript{19}.

It should be noted that the researchers in the PRC support the official position of the Chinese government and believe that nuclear tests pose a threat to security in Eastern Asia; however, some authors think that the real reasons for this threat are not the nuclear tests, but the long-term strategies of the USA and the South Korea. A researcher from the Institute of World Politics at Modern Academy of Science of the PRC, Zhen Veydun, notes that in 1953, the USA and North Korea signed an armistice, and not a treaty of peace, and thus “theoretically, the DPRK and the United States were still at war and that represented the root cause of the threat to the whole region. More than once, North Korea urged the USA to sign a treaty of peace and to cease hostilities officially, but the United States ignored this invitation”\textsuperscript{20}.

Zhen Veydun believes that the DPRK develops nuclear weapons as the last resort, because the USA and the South Korea deploy contingent of troops at the DPRK borders and hold military exercises every year trying to put military pressure on the DPRK, and thus, the government of the country, quite naturally, considers that creating and possessing nuclear weapons “is the most economically efficient and the most effective option for ensuring security”. Besides, undoubtedly, the government of the DPRK knows very well what happened to Libya when Kaddafi, the leader of the country, turned down his nuclear program of his own free will in exchange for the thaw in relations with Western countries.

According to a researcher from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Professor Liu Chao, the nuclear tests and missile launches in the DPRK “negatively affect Chinese-Korean relationships and the “tolerance” of China; they surely would prove detrimental to developing the economies of both countries, but at the same time, it is vital "to persuade North Korea to return to the table of the six-party talks and even to "take additional measures as soon as possible to conciliate North Korea”\textsuperscript{16}.\hspace{1cm}
4. Conclusion

After analyzing the research of Chinese and Korean experts, we came to the following general conclusions.

To solve the North Korean nuclear problem is now becoming ever more topical and crucial, since it is of great interest for the world scientific community. Analysis of studies made by Chinese and Korean researchers proves that Chinese diplomatic mediation in solving the North Korean nuclear issue on the Korean peninsula has not become a subject of wide discussion for the world community. Further studies of approaches and proposals of the Chinese authors, mediation activities and practical measures in the diplomatic mediation in solving the problem of the Korean peninsula denuclearization are of great importance for researchers.

First of all, North Korea’s official stance is that according to the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty, the treaty accession and withdrawal is voluntary, i.e. a member state may independently withdraw there from without securing approval of other states, which was done by North Korea. The First Secretary of the Workers’ Party of Korea Kim Jong-un noted that the right to deliver preventive nuclear strikes ceased to be the U.S. monopoly and declared that North Korea needs to develop its nuclear industry to defend DPRK.

Secondly, the North Korean leadership recognizes the efforts of China’s leaders in solving the problem of tensions on the Korean peninsula. The official position of South Korea coincides with the position of its strategic partner – the United States of America. However, in South Korea, a number of politicians do not agree with this stance and believe that the approach with regard to DPRK should be more flexible, since it entails economic losses to South Korea. This refers primarily to the Hasan-Rajin Project, as the South Korean corporations had to opt out of participation in it because of sanctions which had been imposed.

Thus, according to the Chinese researchers, North Korea is the only state which is able to encourage the leadership of DPRK using political, diplomatic, economic and financial measures to resume the six-party talks.

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