

Turn the Tables? From Colonial Subjugation to a Proactive Connect: Japan's position on North Korea

Lakhan Bir Meena*

Abstract- Japan and North Korea shared a cold, informal relationship until COVID-19 struck the world. Historically, as a colonial hegemon of the East Asian region, Japan subjugated the Korean peninsula, assimilating the inhabitants of the region. This facet allowed a nonchalant mix of individuals to generate durable ethnic communities. One such is the Chongryon community (ethnic North Korean sympathisers in Japan). While skirmishes prevailed between the two East Asian nations, North Korea gradually enriched its nuclear weapons proliferation programme, a concern that emerged as a major security predicament. Since 2006, while an informal communication channel muddled between the two, official diplomatic statesmanship has never been formalised. While surpassing itself as an economic giant, Japan has somewhat faltered fortifying the region's surveillance. The paper aims to analyse Japan's proactive position on North Korea. It is to be perceived that diasporic, economic, or Fumio Kishida's security strategy can sew policies onward while simultaneously addressing the consequences of an ever-changing global order.

Keywords *Chongryon*, Japan-North Korea relation, regional diplomacy, global world order, diasporic diplomacy.

* Centre for East Asian Studies School of International Studies Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. Assistant Professor (Guest), Delhi school of Journalism Delhi University. Email: lakhanbirs@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In the praxis of international relations, geographical proximity gives into either geopolitical interlinkages or coalitional differences. While dwelling in a globalised world, embedded factors such as security, technology, energy, environment, and economy become appropriate by yielding to complex interdependence (Criekemans, 2022). In this context of geographical proximity, Japan and North Korea are neighbours separated by the Sea of Japan also called the East Sea. North Korea utilises the open expanse provided by the Sea to test nuclear weapons. *Punggye-ri*, the nuclear testing site located in the northern region near Japan, threatens the northernmost Hokkaido Island region. As an immediate neighbour, South Korea is separated by the 38th parallel along the heavily demilitarised zone, where a minor provocation could escalate into a full-fledged catastrophe. Moreover, China serves as a lifeline for North Korea in very many ways. Given these proximities, North Korea blatantly utilises the East Sea for not-so-peaceful purposes, making brinkmanship the *modus operandi*.

1910 to 1945 marked the then imperial Japan's rule over the Korean peninsula as a 'protectorate'. Until the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, both nations remained adversaries. As a result, a channel of diplomacy or a construct of common ideology never concretised. Historically, the Meiji era period of Japan (1868-1912) spearheaded regional dominance by securing political and economic hegemony. As a result, ethnic communities such as *Chongryon* integrated into Japan's domestic environment.

As an Asian imperialist, the Western powers failed to recognise Japan's might and rejected it within the ambit of Western imperialism. What followed was Japan's intense quest for a regional hegemon colonising Taiwan (1894-95), Russia (1905-06), Korea (1910), China (1937), and French Indochina-Vietnam (1940). Therefore, as a subject (North Korea in this case) within the same Asian space, disconnected issues of suppression and full restitution of reparations continue to exist. An informal communication channel via diasporic entities such as *Chongryon* sticks around despite establishing formal contact.

North Korea was formally established in 1948 and recognised primarily by the socialist allies as a legitimate Korea. Accompanied by the constant flow of aid and support, North Korea dreaded a compromise over its sovereign legitimacy over a period. Consequently, by 1960, Kim Il Sung realised the importance of control over domestic affairs, engendering him to ideate and wield the notion of becoming a self-reliant nation. *Chongryon* (General Association of Korean Residents in Japan) was established to forge a connection with Japan in 1955 (Lie, 2009). As an entity present within Japan's physical space, North Korea allegedly utilised it as a platform to disseminate funding, build an informal conversation, and further

penetrate the idea of a self-reliant *Juche* policy, eventually exporting an ideology. In addition, North Korea's endurance and ability to conduct extravagant cultural and military diplomacy predominantly with the Third World countries campaigned for a global impetus.

While garnering international recognition, Kim Il Sung's *Juche* policy plausibly infiltrated as a foreign policy apparatus to be modelled by the leaders of the Non-aligned nations. Subsequently, what exhumed appeared to be an unparalleled boost of confidence propelling North Korea to supervise the abductions of foreign citizens for domestic interests. To this day, it remains a bizarre conduct for the world. Coupled with citizens of other countries, Japanese nationalities were abducted in more significant numbers (Chanlett-Avery, 2008). While the abduction controversy became a national proceeding for Japan, it defined political leadership and election mandates.

Since the 1960s, while North Korea availed itself of diplomatic relations with the Third World nations, the regime contemplated legality and acceptance as the 'original' Korean state of the peninsula—Japan's inception of diplomatic ties with South Korea in 1965 distressed Kim Il Sung. Regardless of the mediating efforts by South Korean leadership to unify the Korean peninsula, it did little to budge Kim Il Sung and his successors. In this fashion, Japan's leadership was emboldened by Roh Tae Woo's policy of Nordpolitik (1988), which determined South Korea's trading partners to pursue peace and security on the Korean peninsula (Chung, 1991). In stimulation, Nakasone Yasuhiro attempted to visit North Korea in 1990 to normalise relations (Taizo, 2018).

Diasporic diplomacy has been a fast-emerging concept within global politics. While diaspora mediates domestic and foreign policy, it further manufactures an association of territorial connect. In the ambience of Japan and North Korea, the *Chongryon* is the second largest ethnic minority in Japan (Hawon, 2019). They have been playing the role of crucial functionaries as empathisers and unofficial communicators between the governments. If harnessed on terms and conditions, the Chongryon community may fathom an impression.

In the current scenario, North Korea's 'prolonged reluctant approach' to determining the unification worry is primarily driven by several actors' interdependencies that profit from dialogue and diplomacy. China and Russia, for that matter, assume characteristics of all-weather allies as and when required to sustain each other's legitimacy. While North Korea is bolstering its nuclear arsenal with advanced technology, Japan is reinforcing regional security dimensions by engaging in an assertive role in the Indo-Pacific and supplementary strategic dialogues.

International sanctions from Western nations have proved little success on North Korea. Rather than suppress the regime, sanctions have vaulted commitment to counteract through technical advancements such as hacking and crypto-threats, ultimately shoring the state's 'self-reliant' capabilities (Zarate, 2022). As a repercussion, the provocative approach of missile burgeoning immediately threatens Japan's territorial dominion. It concerns Japan since subservience to the United States' security purview invalidates a self-sustaining projection of offensive power.

Nonetheless, Japan is a world eco-tech giant. The financing of mega infrastructural projects in the form of ODA (Official Development Assistance) in diverse countries stands testimony. Conversely, North Korea has been a padlocked economy primarily dependent on China. While Japan can tender economic trade-offs to North Korea, the latter has little to exhibit in return. The Kim regime today is nucleated on the *Byungjin* policy of parallel nuclear and economic development to bolster brinkmanship; however, Japan is a practical East Asian nation manoeuvring regional divergence with inter-regional strategic placements in QUAD and the Indo-Pacific.

Hypothesis

The study aims to test the following:

1. Japan will formalise relations with North Korea, given Japan's fomenting role in the Indo-Pacific.
2. Representatives of *Chongryon* should be available as catalysts to restart the communication channel.

Research Questions

Among several other questions, the study aims to understand and answer the following:

1. What is the scope of diasporic diplomacy in a closed country like North Korea?
2. How effective is Japan's rise as a regional powerhouse in the Indo-Pacific?
3. Will Japan's role as an assertive player bring about peace in the Korean peninsula?
4. How is the global change in world order affecting the regional security dimensions?
5. Will Fumio Kishida's diplomacy normalise relations with North Korea?
6. What is the scope of *Chongryon* as a tool of diasporic power diplomacy?

7. Has the nuclear weapons proliferation in North Korea led the regime to the point of no return?

Literature Review

The rise of Japan's subsequent leadership approach in formalising interrelation with North Korea has persisted as a complex subject of particular interest to scholars of international relations and area studies.

A historical interpretation is critical in shaping future interactions. Researchers such as Tanaka Hitoshi (Tanaka, 2020) delve into the colonial history of Korea and its impact on the formation of divergent national identities. The legacy of Japanese colonisation (1910-1945) and the use of Korean labourers during the Cold War period continue to prevail as one of the contentious issues regulating contemporary diplomatic advancements. Authors such as B. R. Myers (Myers, 2011) further explore Japan's colonial legacy and occupation of Korea on the historical grievances conditioning bilateral association.

The abduction turmoil is one of the most significant hurdles in Japan-North Korea relations. Scholars like Seung Hyok Lee (Lee, 2016) and Robert S. Boynton (Boynton, 2016) have considerably scrutinised the abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea during the 1970s. Markedly, the unsettled nature of the issue ceaselessly functions as a source of perpetual distress, hampering bilateral negotiations. In addition, Charles K. Armstrong (Armstrong, 2013) probes North Korea's stance on accomplishing an isolationist, unwavering exterior, simultaneously analysing the human rights dimension of North Korea's imperil on Japan.

While Japan's discharge of security aspiration conjoins the vocation of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy, North Korea proceeds with nuclear furtherance, generating implications for regional stability. Scholars such as Tae-Hwan Kwak (Kwak, 2018) and Sheila Smith (Smith, 2019) prospect over North Korea's broader regional dynamics and Japan's alliances with the United States and South Korea—the literature inquiries into procedures to unify the Korean Peninsula. Young-Ho Park (Park, 2014) examines the perceptiveness of unification diplomacy.

The paper attempts to teach a research frame of reference from authors of dissimilar opinions in the hope of a holistic examination. While authors and research scholars have significantly contributed to existing literature, the paper attempts to test whether Japan's increasing role as a regional contender can attain a renewal of normalisation. As apprehensions persist, ongoing research will be crucial for discerning the evolving nature of Japan-North Korea relations while identifying a direction towards a diplomatic resolution.

Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework of game theory (Morgenstern, 1944) situates strategic reciprocity between the two nations, stressing rational decision-making in an unsettled geopolitical environment. Game theory, also known as interactive decision theory, studies decision-makers behaviour in situations of strategic interdependence (Guner, 2012). The theory goes on to predict reactions based on decisions.

Under this theory, Japan and North Korea function as primary performers, disseminating a range of cooperative and non-cooperative measures. These measures range from geopolitical, economic, and security-related apprehensions to aggressive North Korean rhetoric attempts.

In juxtaposition, the theory aims to acquaint crucial elements of strategic decision-making by rational actors. Within this frame of reference, Japan's thematic integration of Korean elements will induce knowledge accumulation, a significant component in examining the bond. Also, North Korea's iterative nature of rhetoric fits well within the framework. As future predictions are based on past formulations, game theory aids in understanding the results of non-continuous engagements.

Game theory further studies the impression of decisions based on inadequate knowledge of evidence. Japan and North Korea have dealt within a framework that lacks transparency and trust. Therefore, acknowledging the incentives and disincentives is essential for foreseeing a likely conclusion.

North Korea possibly comprehends the rudiments of game theory well. The regime has maintained a rise in its nuclear weapons program by inching gradually towards a point of no return. This allows them to achieve their desired outcome of a self-reliant nation, infrequently deviating from the chosen route to nuclear supremacy. External players such as the United States, South Korea, China, and Russia further shape the geopolitical landscape. The framework will survey the involvement of external actors.

The paper also aims to inspect diaspora diplomacy through the assemblage theory. Relationships or assemblages accordingly advocate a process of societal relations in a transnational realm (Amelina, 2021). For a Korean living in Japan sympathising with North Korea, socio-cultural, political, and identity-related components reflect diasporic existence. Institutions like *Chongryon* (General Association of Korean Residents in Japan), schools, and community organisations will be estimated. This is to test whether such entities can be harnessed to reinvigorate discussion. Emotions and perceptions will be crucial elements to gauge the theory.

Historical Perspectives on Japan-North Korea Relations

The global world order is witnessing a solid tilt towards offensive realism, where the nation-state, as a unitary actor, decides in pursuit of national interest. While this applies to the global changes in the world order among competitors, it perfectly subsumes the current geopolitical divergences between opposing trilateral (US, South Korea, Japan v/S China, Russia, and North Korea) within the East Asian hemisphere.

North Korea, in particular, applies the 'overbalancing' subset of realism. That is to say that the regime is generally understood to be in a position where it perceives another state(s) as a threat and, therefore, uses more than the required resources to achieve a balance. This is evident from the fact that Juche's policy seeks to attain foreign, economic, and military independence, with a nuclear weapons programme as the cupola binding the others.

North Korean state's trajectory has often been elucidated as that of a sly-smart-impatient regime. In particular, be it the nuclear disarmament negotiations or discussions on transmitting data on the bizarre abduction demeanour, the regime anoints a 'prolonged strategy' that yields little success for the opponent. With a case study of a Libyan leader ousted by Western forces, it may be stated that the North Korean regime comprehends the repercussions of capitulating well. Over the years, Japanese leadership attempted to normalise the relationship, but the regime prolonged its non-cooperative disposition. In their defence, while the international community stresses total denuclearisation, the reign appears to have been calculatingly circumvented.

Three unresolved concerns have concealed correlations between the two nations. First, the subject of abductions has instilled such vehement opposition in Japan towards the North Korean regime that domestic entities such as *Chongryon* were allegedly interposed as probable contractors of the abductees.

Second, the role of the United States is that of a persistent antagonist. Undoubtedly, North Korea has nominally been a genuine rival to US objectivities on the peninsula. While South Korea and Japan, as mighty allies, possess numerous US military bases in their territories separately, North Korea is unswervingly opposed to the US's presence by way of a 'foreign influencer'. This indication propels an anti-neighbour attitude toward South Korea and Japan.

Third, the amplifying nuclear arsenal and ballistic missile tests over the region. This condition protrudes from the second element. That is to say, while a direct atomic confrontation with Japan dwells little, an incidental intercontinental nuclear threat to the US directly impends the regional atmosphere, leaving Japan as a front burner.

Delineating the first concern, abductions of foreign citizens have been a stale practice for the regime. It was in the course of rapid economic development and expropriation of the self-reliant policy of Juche that North Korea augmented abductions. It essentially occurred from the 1970s to the early 1980s. The state brought about abductions to acquire technology and expertise by compelling individuals to slog as infiltrators. The abductions were specially carried out to get hold of either students or skilled professionals (Myong-Hyun, 2018).

Consequently, around 17 Japanese citizens were abducted. In all likelihood, it appeared that capturing citizens satisfied North Korea's desire to deemphasise the international rules-based order. Notwithstanding that it concluded in disguise, it was undoubtedly a dishonest gain for the regime. It remains a consequential, far-reaching national matter stockpiling international and United Nations assistance in Japan. However, when Kim (Kim Jong Il) assumed responsibility for North Korea in 2002, it acknowledged the actions of the nations on abduction. What followed next was the genesis of a grudge-bearing period in the two nations' relationship. Andrei Lankov mentions: "Kim Jong Il's honest acceptance of abduction during the phase to better relations with Japan backstabbed North Korea during the deliberations of Japan –Pyongyang declaration 2002. Even though mutual recognition of each other's sovereign territory and promotion of economic cooperation was sought, having learnt about the confirmation of the abducted citizens, Japan pulled back" (Hanssen, 2011). Subsequently, Japan stressed the need for a scrupulous inspection.

The abduction issue persisted until 2014. While the North Korean regime continued a fraudulent inspection, nuclear expansion intimidated further discussion. For Japanese citizens and the political leadership, it continues to remain contemptuous. Despite the Japanese government establishing headquarters on the Abduction Issue, minuscule reclamation has emerged. Relatively, the establishment continues to exist as a mnemonic of the distressing deed.

Leadership at work

Colonial nations, in many cases, are prompted by their exploits no matter how reformist the day of the government is. Initially, the Japanese Socialist Party that briefly held power reinforced the North Korean leadership on the ideals of a socialist inclination. However, an expeditious culmination of the government into the Liberal Democratic Party's ideals bolstered a stringent anti-North Korean positioning.

However, with time, Japan's subsequent leadership cast around a persistent channel of discussions. In 1989, Takeshita Noboru acknowledged North Korea as DPRK (Democratic People's Republic of Korea—official name), the first

Japanese to do so. He even conveyed remorse and regret over conflicting circumstances to improve relations (Hong-Nack, 1992). However, it was a short-lived attempt. The Takeshita government collapsed.

Tomiichi Murayama, the Prime Minister from 1994-96, was appointed with the aspiration to integrate talks with North Korea (Rose, 2018). While also being a leader of the Japanese Socialist Party, regardless of the energetic efforts to inaugurate a non-government organisation to reinstate an alliance, the issue of abduction relinquished efforts.

In succession, Junichiro Koizumi made a historic visit to Pyongyang to hold a summit with Kim Jong-Il in September 2002. It coincided with the after-effects of the 9/11 attack on the United States. Following this, the then US President George W. Bush declared Iran, Iraq and North Korea in an “axis of evil” (Olsen, 2002). As a result, this particular visit amidst emerging pressure against North Korea internationally holds weight. The summit was a partial success. Koizumi and Kim Jong Il agreed on a range of issues, including the repatriation of the abducted Japanese citizens. Meanwhile, surmounting ostracisation by sanctioning the Kim regime on nuclear parameters plunged the regime to arrogate nuclear strategies as the sole prerogative to bridle international coercion.

In 2006, North Korea conducted a series of missile tests, consequentially threatening Japan. In response, however, debarring development on summit agreements, the Japanese administration imposed heavy economic sanctions.

In the intervening period, Shinzo Abe was a politician who acquired experience from previous deliberations and negotiations as a deputy chief cabinet secretary. For Abe's election campaign, the abduction issue became a nationalist promise endearing as a prime objective. When he was appointed the Prime Minister, the government established the ‘Headquarters on the Abduction issue’. However, as political developments would have it, Abe held the office of Prime Ministership for a record 2,822 days, the longest in Japan's constitutional history, but not a single additional captured victim was retrieved (Atsuhito, 2022).

Following Abe's leadership, Yasuo Fukuda, Taro Aso, and Yukio Hatoyama—succeeding Prime Ministers—highlighted resolving the abduction matter as a prerequisite to conversations between the two nations. The achievement was nonetheless scanty.

In 2020, Yoshihide Suga reiterated the precondition to meet Kim Jong Un. However, while Japan's position towards North Korea has been that of discussion and dialogue, North Korea, by 2020, accomplished record-breaking missile tests. It was a nudge to the world that the nation had reached a point of no return. Until now, the North Korean government has managed as a non-perturbed neighbour, in

addition to registering the fact that there is a lot to lose if it capitulates.

At the keynote speech of the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Fumio Kishida emphasised the vision for peace emanating through “humane diplomacy” (MOFA, 2022). Although Japan has since revamped its structural progression to seek a pragmatic federation on peace and growth, Kishida fears North Korea’s blatant negligence impedes progress.

Analysing Japan’s fomenting security paradigm

With alliance building in international relations, opposing forces reinforce methodologies to counteract. In the East Asian context, a clear dichotomy exists between two global forces: the US and China. While the US assists South Korea and Japan, North Korea conveniently latches on to China and Russia.

Trilateral and multilateral security dialogues are customary procedures within the US-led group. Although China does not brazenly conduct similar military manoeuvres, it does so in an elicit fashion that further binds unanimous nations like North Korea. As evident, Japan and North Korea are members of conflicting groups. However, as geographically proximate, regional foreign policy is practised independently of alliance-based diplomacy. In consequence, consensual bilateral debates seek to normalise Japan-North Korea relations.

Post Covid-19 conditions, nations have plunged to extremity. While some countries have unveiled greater oneness in conquering the health hazard, others with flawed allocation of resources have had to bargain for requisite donations. Therefore, in terms of the economy, protectionism as an operation proliferated. The ones with resources could tweak political demands and save thousands of lives. So, when the economy needs momentum, fundamentals such as trade agreements and related political decisions can be operated by military strength. This demonstrates an inherent kinship uniting soft and hard power, a suitable attribute compelling credence to geopolitics.

As a new theatre of power dynamics, repositioning from land politics to ocean politics is rising. The Indo-Pacific region, amongst other maritime regions, has witnessed a shift in power attention, cooperation and contestation (Luthra, 2022). Japan, as an able regional competitor, is not merely a spectator. Instead, it provides military grants to developing nations of the Indo-Pacific as an assessment of countering China’s rise, articulating regional peace, stability, and the rule of law (Jain, 2024).

Under the US’s military endorsement, Japan possesses Tomahawk missiles, Aegis ballistic missile defence system, Terminal High Altitude Area Defence (THAAD) system, military tech software, support equipment, spares and other technical support. While principally intended to counter short-range and intermediate

ballistic missiles from North Korea, it also assists Japan's obligation to enlarge the defence budget in response to dynamic global strategic conditions.

Article 9 of the Japanese constitution mentions:

“Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as a means of settling international disputes. To accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as another war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognised” (PMO, 1946).

However, during Shinzo Abe's Prime Ministership, a draft to amend Article 9 to counter imminent North Korean threat and legitimise the Self Defence Forces (SDF) was conscripted. Apart from the legislative majority, an additional majority of a national referendum is mandatory to warrant changes. Therefore, an amendment to Article 9, if not done with sufficient tact, could increase regional tensions and cause more harm than good to Japan's security situation (ISDP, 2018).

As the centre of debate, the Indo-Pacific culminates into a zone of ideological conflicts. The region also houses the East Sea and the South China Sea, which are controversial owing to China's aggrandisement. While China's expansionist nine-dash line offensive is seizing numerous islands installed within other countries' territorial jurisdiction, the nation is further strategising the Indian Ocean with ambitious BRI plus GSI ingenuity (Belt and Road and Global Security Initiative). Based on this, Japan's introduction of a new National Security Strategy substantiates a resolution to counter China and North Korea's mounting belligerence. The strategy dictates specific areas such as integrated air and missile defence capability, cross-domain operations, force mobility, civil defence and intelligence, and resilience (Narushige, 2023).

Additionally, Japan is expanding its aid statesmanship. Apart from traditional humanitarian development assistance, there is a shift towards military aid—official Security Assistance (OSA), specifically to nations surrounding the Indo-Pacific. This is increasing Japan's calibre as a regional competitor. Grants to the Philippines, Malaysia, and Vietnam will help the nations counter China's nine-dash line claim while adding to coastal surveillance and common communication infrastructure (Ryall, 2023). Even though new security objectives will contradict China's rise, they will magnify Japan's durability.

As a potential regional influencer, one must ponder Japan's Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) membership. QUAD comprises four tactically located nations. While Australia and India avow to deepen maritime and security paradigms, the

US and Japan, as traditional associates, will complement military and maritime perseverance. Nevertheless, QUAD need not remain US-dominated but instead amass the non-traditional weak links distressing North Korea and China, furnishing a course of action for Japan to draw North Korea (Hitkari, 2022).

Considering North Korea's stature, a foreign ministry spokesperson warned of military action in response to Japan's development of a new security strategy that envisions counter-strike capabilities (Shin, 2022). Nonetheless, it is bound to fade in rhetoric.

It can be argued that a rise in Japan's military budget will fortify a retaliatory frame of stance that may disallow dialogue and discussions. Moreover, given the contemporary geopolitical dilemma of complex interdependence, the situation neglects responsiveness as an instrument of praxis in international relations. Therefore, while Japan is budding a taste of offensive realism, a strategy-oriented leadership decisiveness will pave the way for future proceedings.

The Way Forward: A Move Towards Normalisation?

The two nations must work on three necessities to achieve a functioning relationship. First, a communication channel should be opened post-pandemic—even if it is informal. Second, there is an urgent need to grow a bilateral understanding bereft of foreign influencers. Third, utilising a common entity as a catalyst—*Chongryon* in this case—to restart diasporic communiqué.

In engaging the diaspora as a foreign policy tool, *Chongryon* holds relevance in this particular context. While studying diaspora and migration, Fiona Adamson referred to *Chongryon* as political agents, not mere actors or agents of diasporic consequence (Adamson, 2012). Literature refers to them as effects rather than causes. However, the study considered them as entities proficient in begetting structural transformation. However, diplomacy with a closed state like North Korea demands a set of engagements that astutely assimilate the regime's conditions.

Out of over six lakh Koreans in Japan, around 25 percent are *Chongryon* (McBride, 2008). This particular entity sympathises with North Korea on account of two reasons. First, during the 1950s, North Korea was economically better off than its southern counterpart. Second, Kim Il Sung had promised reparations to the Koreans living in Japan. However, Japan's ratification of the International Covenants for Human Rights (ICHR) and the UN Refugee Convention in 1981 permitted permanent residency to the stateless Koreans, assimilating them within the civil society of Japan (Lie, 2009).

Referred to as long-distance nationalism, diasporic diplomacy, in this case, has fostered growth for both reactive and diasporic nationalism (Shipper, 2010).

Engagements with civil society have allowed *Chongryon* to manifest around forty-nine regional headquarters in Japan that have functioned as politico-regional divisions. Pre-pandemic, *Chongryon* functioned as North Korea's de facto embassy in Japan (Takahashi, 2020) - from running educational institutions and political participation of members to organising cultural and sports activities in association with business enterprises. *Chongryon* was influential since it governed banks, medicine and health companies, and tourism facilities, disseminating North Korean discourses and ideology (Residents, 2024).

Supposedly, *Chongryon's* involvement in capturing Japanese citizens dismantled its validity. Despite this, it still would be premature to declare the group's demise (Surdek, 2020). While it can still facilitate the exchange between both nations, the onus of earnest rapprochement can disintegrate the stalemate. Meanwhile, for North Korea, *Chongryon* has unfashionably been an opening in Japan; the latter should claim regional peace using it. This, in particular, is conceivable if *Chongryon's* anti-nuclear disposition and a Korean unification bid are proposed as a stratagem.

In opposition to the North Korean regime, a mandate on denuclearisation clamours for a peaceful resolution. Nuclear weapons, despite being exploited as a defensive contraption, function exceptionally as visual deterrents, entailing high risks if put to use (McGlinchey, 2022).

Reiterating Shinzo Abe's position in a welcome address on May 27 2023, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida declared his intent on a comprehensive resolution of the twin abduction-nuclear issue, securing relations by the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration. However, North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister Park San-Gil retorted sharply about Japan's historical apprehensions. He urged Japan to 'forget the past' and be willing to crystallise the shifting global context. He emphasised: "There is no reason why DPRK and Japan should not meet. Japan has to show its resolve to settle the problem by deeds, not just words" (Haruki, 2023).

Trailing the build-up, Camp David Accord, commanded by the US, joined by South Korea and Japan, soon followed. Despite chiefly congregated to profess a free and open Indo-Pacific, the meeting admonished nuclear North Korea's weapons programme, reiterating to configure a peaceful peninsula. Now, while PM Kishida roots for a consensual two-sided discussion with North Korea, he also ropes in the trilateral objectivities pointed against North Korea. As a result, it demonstrates uncertainty about Japan's ability to de-recognise North Korean sovereignty (Fujita, 2023).

In response to the Camp David Accord, prominent civil society democrats from Japan and South Korea raised protruding questions. While calling for abolishing

the US-South Korea-Japan military alliance, they believe the trilateral will deteriorate the prevailing stiffness on the Korean peninsula (Haruki, 2023). Therefore, the Camp David Accord has etched a delicate conjunction of allied rivalry in contradiction to the long-desired goal of uniting the Korean peninsula.

Pending tangible evidence-based resolution, Japan shall continue to face repercussions. While the latest Camp David Accord sought to toughen a trilateral cognisance, formerly concluded Singapore and Hanoi summits failed to remove de-nuclearisation. China and Russia, in that matter, rejoiced for a continuous deadlock that fuels common affinity.

At present, the North Korean regime is edging near a point of no return with consecutive missiles fired. So far, from 2012 to 2023, North Korea orchestrated more than 214 missile tests and debuted various missiles with increasing ranges (CACNP, 2024). Moreover, obtruding sanctions has diminutive constraining results in today's complex interdependence among nations. The sanctions instead metamorphose into subterranean routes, renegading like-minded nations. Besides, to further insulate North Korea, it will endure inefficacy.

Conclusion: What can be done

One effective way to avoid war is through dialogue and cooperation diplomacy. While bilateral relations have plummeted to a new low, definite practical and meticulous progressions can resuscitate dialogue.

First of all, North Korea as a nation must be re-examined. The regime has retained deceptions to manoeuvre sanctions and ostracisation. So, it is solely in Japan's interest to 'practically engage' North Korea independent of external players like the US. While little value is conferred upon North Korea, it is noteworthy as a remaining bastion of the Cold War era. Therefore, the regime will contemplate reverence.

Secondly, *Chongryon*, as an entity of shared interest, should be rejuvenated as a catalyst as the paper deliberates upon its importance in linking Japan's administrative-civil society to North Korea's rule. Also, as an institution, it can further Japan's plans. As history witnessed *Chongryon*'s active presence in the 'policy-making participative approach', it could permeate sagacity with persistent observation. If operationalised, *Chongryon* can catalyse cultural interactions that yield substantial quotient for foreign policies.

Third, the prolonged matter of abductions must be given credence, compensated, and repatriated. Therefore, the situation demands distinct clarification, accountability, and an empathetic tactic. A concluding agreement on an autonomous investigation must be presided over.

Fourth, cultivating contemporary economic interdependency within Japan and

North Korea. Despite flourishing in remoteness, the North Korean regime is destitute of financial aid and material resources to last. In this context, Japan, as an economic giant, ought to engage a policy-oriented channel of trade and immediate necessities. Moreover, if efficacious in functioning unaided, Japan will secure an attribute of stateliness.

For the progress mentioned above to crystallise, Japan and the international community must stop seeking instantaneous denuclearisation. In the existing conditions, while Japan is gathering a forward-moving military-industrial complex within the Indo-Pacific, it ought to comprehend that denuclearisation in its entirety will entail a structural dismemberment of the North Korean regime.

Therefore, the engagements will apprise of a difference only if they are made pertinent.

References

- Adamson, F. (2012). *Constructing the Diaspora: diaspora identity politics and transnational social movements*. London: Hurst and Co.
- Amelina, A. (2020). Theorizing large-scale societal relations through the conceptual lens of cross-border assemblages. *Current Sociology*, 69(3), 352–371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011392120931145>
- Armstrong, C. K. (2013). *Tyranny of the Weak: North Korea and the World*. Cornell University Press.
- Atsuhito, I. (2022, October 26). *The japan-north korea summit: 20 Years on*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/10/the-japan-north-korea-summit-20-years-on/>
- Boynton, R. S. (2016). *The Invitation-Only Zone*. Atlantic Books.
- Schumann, A. (2024). Fact sheet: North korea missile test activity. *Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation*.
- Chanlett-Avery, E. (2008, March). North Korea's Abduction of Japanese Citizens and the Six-Party Talks. Washington (DC): Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress.
- Chung, T. D. (1991). Korea's Nordpolitik: Achievements & Prospects. *Asian Perspective*, 15(2), 149–178. <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.1991.a921259>
- Criekemans, D. (2022). *Geopolitics and international relations: Grounding World Politics Anew*. BRILL NIJHOFF.
- FUJITA, Y. (2023, October 2). Japan still wants summit with North Korea: Foreign minister. *Nikkei Asia*.

- Guner, S. (2012, June 26). A short note on the use of game theory in analyses of international relations. *E-International Relations*.
- Hanssen, U. A. (2011, Spring). Changes in Japanese attitudes toward North Korea since “9/17”. Oslo, Norway.
- Haruki, W. (2023). Normalization Of Relations Between Japan And North Korea: Why Is It Necessary And How Could It Be Accomplished? *The Asia-Pacific Journal: Japan Focus*, 21(12).
- Hawon, J. (2019). The special permanent residents in Japan: Zainichi Korean. *Yale Review of International Studies*.
- Hitkari, C. (2022). *The Pyongyang*. Sydney: The Interpreter. The Lowy Institute.
- Hong-Nack, K. (1992). North Korea's Policy toward Japan and the United States in the Post-Cold War Era. *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, 6(2), 246-283.
- ISDP. (2019, January 10). Amending Japan’s pacifist constitution - Article 9 and prime minister Abe. *Institute for Security and Development Policy*.
- Jain, P. (2024, January 8). Japan’s new security assistance to the Indo-Pacific region. *ORF*.
- Kwak, T. H. (2018). *The Korean peace process and the four powers*. Routledge.
- Lee, S. H. (2016). *Japanese Society and the Politics of the North Korean Threat*. University of Toronto Press.
- Lim, Y. (2010). *Zainichi (Koreans in Japan): Diasporic nationalism and postcolonial identity*. University of California Press.
- Luthra, G. (2022). The Indo-Pacific Region, Maritime Focus, and Ocean Governance. *ORF, January, 22, 2022*.
- McBride, B. (2008). Young Zainichi Koreans look beyond Chongryon Ideology. *The Japan Times*.
- McGlinchey, S. (2022). Nuclear Weapons and International Relations. *E-International Relations*.
- MOFA, J. (2022, June 10). *Keynote address by prime minister Kishida at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2022*. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. https://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page3e_001212.html
- Neumann-Morgenstern, J. V. (1944). *Theory of Games and Economic Behavior*. Princeton University Press.
- Myers, B. R. (2011). *The Cleanest Race: How North Koreans See Themselves and Why It Matters*. Melville House.
- Myong-Hyun, G., & Forney, B. (2018). Kidnapping as foreign policy: North Korea’s history of state sponsored abductions. *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*.
- Narushige, M. (2023). *Strategic Japan 2023: Japan’s realism diplomacy*. CSIS Events.
- Olsen, E. A. (2002). "Axis of evil": impact on US-Korean relations.

- Bae, J.-H. (2014). The perceptions of Northeast Asia's four states on Korean unification. *CiNii Research*.
- PMO. (1946). *The Constitution of Japan*. Retrieved from PMO Japan: https://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html
- Residents, C. S. (2024, January). *What kind of activities does Chongryon carry out? A milestone for the Korean movement in Japan in the 21st century*. Retrieved from Chongryon.com: <http://www.chongryon.com/j/cr/index5.html>
- Rose, H. D. (2018). The After Lives of Japanese Prime Ministers. *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, 49(1), 127–150.
- Welle, D. (2023, November 24). *Japan Military Aid Expands Southeast Asia footprint*. The Indian Express. <https://indianexpress.com/article/world/japan-military-aid-expands-southeast-asia-footprint-9040977/>
- Shin, M. (2022, December 21). North Korea warns against Japan's New Security strategy. *The Diplomat*. <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/north-korea-warns-against-japans-new-security-strategy/>
- Shipper, A. W. (2010). Nationalisms of and against Koreans in Japan. *Asian Politics and Policy*, 2(1), 55–75. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1943-0787.2009.01167.x>
- Smith, S. A. (2019). *Japan rearmed*. Harvard University Press.
- Surdek, S. (2020). *Chongryon: North Korea's outpost in Japan*. The Cornell Diplomat.
- Taizo, M. (2021, July 20). Thirty Years of Japan's diplomacy toward the Korean Peninsula. *The Asan Forum*. <https://theasanforum.org/thirty-years-of-japan-diplomacy-toward-the-korean-peninsula/>
- Takahashi, K. (2020, November 26). *North Korea appointed next leader of its de facto embassy in Japan*, sources say: NK News. NK News - North Korea News. <https://www.nknews.org/2020/11/north-korea-appointed-next-leader-of-its-de-facto-embassy-in-japan-sources-say/>
- Tanaka, H. (2020). *Historical Narratives in East Asia of the 21st Century*. Routledge.
- Zarate, J. C. (2022). *The North Korean crypto threat*. Crypto Council for Innovation.