

Unravelling the US-ROK Alliance: Decoding North Korea's Strategy within the Six-Party Talks

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Abstract

Alliance formation is a calculated decision by parties to determine and affect the outcome of negotiations. Its success depends on several factors, most notably alliance members' cohesion and convergence of common interests, objectives, and tactics. The focus here is on the United States and South Korea's alliance during the Six-Party Talks on North Korea's nuclear programme. Despite early progress in the alliance's favour, the internal cohesion of the US-South Korea alliance was disrupted due to divergent interests, approaches, and positions regarding North Korea. This research provides a comprehensive analysis of the US-ROK alliance's impact on the Six-Party Talks. While previous studies have explored the negotiations, little attention has been given to the alliance's role and how it evolved over time, especially in the context of North Korea's manipulation and its consequences on negotiation outcomes. We assess the success of the alliance and its impact on the negotiation process, considering factors such as cohesion, common interests, objectives, and tactics. Our study adopts a qualitative research approach, utilising an extensive review of relevant literature, official documents, historical records, and primary sources from the Six-Party Talks. The findings underscore the importance of robust and well-coordinated alliances in addressing critical global security challenges. To achieve lasting success in future negotiations, it is imperative for allied parties to forge a shared understanding and strategic convergence in dealing with adversaries like North Korea. Moreover, this research calls for a re-evaluation of alliance dynamics and tactics to strengthen the collective resolve in pursuing international peace and security.

Keywords: US-South Korea Alliance; negotiations; North Korea; entrapment; Six-Party Talks; nuclear programme

Introduction

The alliance between the United States of America (US) and the Republic of South Korea (ROK or South Korea) emerged as a cornerstone of South Korean strategic thinking, providing a foundation for the nation's security and autonomy in the international arena. The US-ROK alliance entered into the Six-Party Talks with North Korea, aiming to address the latter's nuclear ambitions. However, as the talks progressed, signs of strain within the alliance surfaced, leading to conflicting interests and vulnerabilities that North Korea astutely exploited. Consequently, the alliance faced challenges in presenting a unified front and achieving its objectives regarding North Korea's nuclear programme. The US-ROK alliance is based on the idea that alliance ties with a distant great power would protect South Korea while maintaining autonomy over one's internal affairs. This is opposed to the options of strategic independence (usually regarded as attractive, but untenable) or bandwagoning with a nearby power, which potentially carries greater costs to national sovereignty (Snyder 2009, 3).

The range of bargaining space is typically reduced dramatically in alliances and multilateral negotiations since the agreement must serve the simultaneous interests of several parties (Hopmann 1996, 249). The negotiation environment thus becomes more fragile to the influence of outside sources aiming to undermine the alliance and derail negotiations. Although parties had an idea of what needed to be achieved, the sequence and way they sought to meet these objectives distracted from any progress. Washington's alliance with Seoul only made it possible for the groundwork to be formed in which North Korea could utilise their differing interests to suit its agenda regarding the nuclear programme. Even though the US-ROK alliance's participation together in the Six-Party Talks was not explicitly to blame for the failure of the Six-Party Talks, the fourth round multilateral setting created an environment conducive for Pyongyang to entrap the US by using South Korea indirectly.

Research Objectives

The objective of this paper is firstly to explore the nature and diplomatic role of alliances. This involves understanding the objectives and strategic considerations that influenced the alliance during the negotiation process with North Korea. Secondly, the objective is to investigate the alliance's approach to North Korea's nuclear ambitions within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. This includes understanding the alliance's shared goals, differences in negotiating positions, and how they coordinated their strategies to achieve mutual objectives. Thirdly, we aim to analyse the reasons for and effects of strained intra-alliance relations. This involves examining the factors that contributed to divergent interests, approaches, and positions regarding North Korea, leading to internal cohesion disruptions within the alliance.

The fourth objective is to explore how North Korea skilfully manipulated the diplomatic process and took advantage of the strained relations within the US-ROK alliance to further its own agenda. This includes analysing the tactics employed by North Korea to

measure alliance members against each other and weaken their collective bargaining power. The fifth objective is to derive valuable lessons from the US-ROK alliance's experience during the Six-Party Talks. This involves identifying best practices and pitfalls in alliance management, negotiation strategies, and countering adversaries' manipulation tactics. The study aims to provide practical insights for enhancing alliance effectiveness and negotiation outcomes in addressing global security challenges.

Significance and Contributions of the Study

The significance of this study lies in shedding light on the intricate dynamics of the US-ROK alliance during the Six-Party Talks concerning North Korea's nuclear ambitions. By analysing the alliance's formation, internal cohesion, and response to North Korea's tactics, the research contributes valuable insights to the fields of security studies and international relations. The findings help to advance the understanding of alliance behaviour, negotiation processes, and the impact of power dynamics in multilateral negotiations. Policymakers can benefit from the study's practical implications in strengthening alliances, countering adversarial manipulation, and promoting regional stability.

By analysing the US-ROK alliance's experience during the Six-Party Talks, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of alliance dynamics, negotiation processes, and the impact of great power politics on regional security issues. It opens avenues for further research and scholarly inquiry into alliance behaviour and multilateral negotiations in the context of global security challenges. Furthermore, the paper's significance lies in its valuable insights into alliance dynamics, diplomatic strategies, and negotiation outcomes. The research not only contributes to academic scholarship but also provides practical implications involved in addressing complex security challenges and fostering cooperation among allied nations. Ultimately, the findings aim to enhance the effectiveness of alliances and diplomatic efforts in promoting regional stability and global peace.

Methodology

This research employs a qualitative approach, drawing data from a literature review of academic articles, books, policy papers, official documents, and primary sources related to the US-ROK alliance and the Six-Party Talks. A comparative analysis is used to assess the alliance's cohesion and interests during different negotiation rounds. Thematic analysis identifies recurring themes and factors influencing the alliance's behaviour and negotiation strategies (Boyatzis 1998, 1). The paper identifies themes related to alliance cohesion, North Korea's manipulation tactics, and the impact of internal divergence on negotiation outcomes. The study adopts a case study approach to examine specific instances of the US-ROK alliance's response to North Korea's nuclear ambitions.

Literature Review

After the Second World War, the US established the so-called San Francisco System, i.e., the establishment of a series of alliances (followed by treaties to the effect) across the globe (Tow and Limaye 2016, 7). The US-South Korea alliance that subsequently emerged focused on, among other areas, security and regional order-building and balancing. An alliance can be defined as “a formal or informal commitment for security cooperation between two or more states” (Walt 1997, 157). From this, it can be deduced that an alliance requires states’ credible and enduring commitment to cooperate. Besides this, other significant principles of an alliance include consensus on threats and challenges, and how to respond to them; thus, internal coherence. A second principle relates to the adaptability and agility of an alliance in response to changing conditions and challenges. In the third instance, alliance members must be able and capable of delivering on the material and non-material requirements to sustain the alliance (Tow and Limaye 2016, 7–8).

Cha (2011, 5) asserts that alliances are about shaping participants’ behaviour and power. Asymmetries within alliances affect how control operates within the alliance. In other words, alliances serve as mechanisms to influence the behaviour of their members and coordinate their actions in pursuit of common objectives. In the context of the US-ROK alliance, their behaviour during the Six-Party Talks was meant to shape the behaviour of the other. The aim of the alliance was to coordinate its efforts, strategies, and policies regarding how to handle North Korea during the negotiations, but this was not the case, considering how the alliance had diverging interests. It can be argued that alliances in negotiations may be utilised as a means to put pressure on and restrain a non-alliance member (like North Korea), leading to the influencing of behaviour during negotiations. Conversely, North Korea might exploit any internal divergences within the alliance to amplify its influence and advance its own interests in the negotiation process.

Buszynski (2013, 14) argues that states exploit relations by adopting a deliberate strategy of sabotage in which the rivalries between parties may be exploited, and supporters are played off against opponents by resorting to tactical bargaining techniques. For example, a state like North Korea may use the difference in opinions between the US-ROK alliance members to its own advantage. It can be argued that having an alliance partner in a negotiation could have an unwarranted effect on the alliance, such as how South Korea’s role in the negotiations influenced the outcome or direction and was eventually used by North Korea to affect the entire negotiation process.

The central elements of a negotiation process are the actions of participating negotiators (Jeong 2016, 12). Here, several factors that determine the diplomatic and negotiating success of alliances are outlined, namely the role, status, and position of alliance members; an agreement on the nature of the threat; the approach to negotiations and the negotiation process; and the nature, position, and approach of the alliance’s opponent(s) and the opponent’s tactics. The focus is also on the realignment of alliance partners and

the restoration of the alliance when divergence occurs. Hence, the aim is also to determine the impact of the US and the ROK's divergence on the credibility and endurance of the alliance, its internal coherence, and its adaptability.

The US-ROK Alliance

The Role, Status, and Position of Alliance Members

The role of South Korea in the Six-Party Talks remains contested and debated as either being non-proactive or proactive, resulting in South Korea's status in the negotiations as both a privilege and a handicap (Vogelaar 2008, 49). Statements from and policies of the South Korean government, such as the Sunshine Policy, suggested that the Roh administration perceived the need to blunt or block US pressure on the North. This had an underlying implication that South Korea had more to fear from US policy than from the misdeeds of North Korea. South Korea miscalculated what the threat to any possible nuclear agreement was during the fourth round. The miscalculation led North Korea to insist that it had a right to a nuclear arsenal and further put the security of the Korean Peninsula at risk.

Agreement on the Nature of the Threat

The "special allied relationship" between the US and the ROK was threatened by a lack of agreement on the nature of the North Korean threat and an appropriate conflict management approach (Kim 2010, 124). An unstable or rather strained ROK-US alliance arguably presented an opportunity for North Korea to control the process so that it could frame the negotiation agenda.

Approach and Process

Events during round four made it clear that there were differing and competing opinions between Seoul and Washington on how to move further with the negotiations. There was increasingly less accord between South Korea and the US in dealing with North Korea: the US viewed the nuclear problem through a post-11 September 2001 lens, while South Korea viewed it through the lens of a summit reconciliation (Cha 2004, 139).

On 12 September 2005, South Korea asserted that North Korea did not specifically call for a provision regarding light water reactors during the talks, but that Pyongyang stated that it wanted to have access to peaceful nuclear activities (Grzelczyk 2009, 105). It should be noted that South Korea's agreeing to the provisions of allowing North Korea to have a light water reactor—even though the US advocated for Complete Verifiable and Irreversible Dismantlement (CVID)—was a clear sign that the Roh administration was willing to appease North Korea at the expense of its alliance with Washington.

South Koreans perceived that the US was sabotaging North-South interactions, viewing the US's Bush policy toward North Korea as too aggressive and unaccommodating to

South Korea's interests. The South Korean Foreign Minister even warned that if the US were not more forthcoming during the Six-Party Talks, his government might not support the US in Iraq (Moon 2008, 86). South Korea's threats were not only misdirected but were a demonstration that it was willing to put its alliance on the line for North Korea. South Korea did not take into consideration that its actions were in favour of North Korea, which wanted to weaken the US-ROK alliance to maintain its nuclear ambitions.

While the US-South Korean coordination and cooperation (particularly at the Six-Party Talks) were at an all-time low, the South Korean President Roh and some of his political appointees' efforts to raise Seoul's foreign policy profile in the North Korean nuclear dispute, came at the expense of US policy. Roh even went as far as to state publicly that Pyongyang's nuclear weapons ambitions were "understandable considering the environment they live in," thus implicitly blaming confrontational US policies for the nuclear standoff while backing Pyongyang (Lee 2008, 2). North Korea only had to sow the seeds that they wanted nuclear power for peaceful purposes so that South Korea could act as its advocate to the US.

The decision of the Blue House and national-level Korean leaders not to publicly voice the same concerns, left the US on its own without an ally within the negotiations, and painted the US as overly hawkish and aggressive. Going further, the relationship between the US and South Korea would suffer due to their differences regarding North Korea. These differences were a contributing factor to the Six-Party Talks process ending in entrapment. Both the US and South Korea's consistent failure to be amicable on how to handle North Korea limited their options as an alliance, which became a weakness that Pyongyang could take advantage of. In this regard, Habeeb (1988, 133) argues that a weak state does not possess aggregate structural power resources. Therefore, it must rely on tactics whose effectiveness and credibility derive from other sources, for example, coalition-building based on the ability to find allies and persuade them to join their case; threats of disruption based on commitment; and threats to veto negotiations, based on the nature of the negotiation process (Habeeb 1988, 133).

The Nature, Position, and Approach of the Alliance's Opponent

South Korea blamed the US for the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)'s stalling tactics and for cementing North Korea's advantage of blaming the failure of progress on the US, knowing full well that the ROK would not take kindly to a slow negotiation process that could hamper any progress in the nuclear talks. Furthermore, North Korea realised that the lack of progress in the negotiations resulting from its time delay tactics would create division in the US-ROK alliance and weaken the alliance's resolve to solve the nuclear dilemma as a coalition. This isolation forced the US to accept the September 2005 Joint Statement that allowed the DPRK eventual access to such technology as the light water reactors (LWRs) (Pritchard 2007, 114). Therefore, North Korea's use of South Korea as a pawn to influence the decisions of the US was working, favouring its goal of straining the alliance.

Even though the US was mainly blamed by North Korea for its actions, South Korea was also used to justify why Pyongyang wanted to maintain a nuclear arsenal. South Korea had enriched uranium in 2000, and although Seoul had argued that it was developing experiments out of scientific curiosity, the experiments could still technically be considered a violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) provisions. This led North Korea to accuse the US of maintaining a double standard concerning the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula (Grzelczyk 2009, 104).

There are also other factors, such as the Operational Plan (OPLAN) 5029, which need to be investigated to find out how these affected the US-ROK relationship concerning North Korea. The OPLAN is a joint military plan of the US-ROK alliance in dealing with North Korea. Roh's National Security Council rejected OPLAN 5029 in January 2005, warning that it might constrain South Korean sovereignty because they did not want the US Army to make the sole military decisions against the North (Bae 2010, 337–338). Arguably, the main reason South Korea rejected OPLAN was that they felt it would not be in line with their engagement policy with North Korea. OPLAN presented a threat to everything (non-hostile relations with Pyongyang) that the Roh administration had hoped to achieve with the negotiations.

Roh stated his views to Bush at a summit in June 2005, making it clear that South Korea insisted on keeping the initiative in any military operation on North Korean territory (Bae 2010, 337–338). South Korea's failure to agree to initiatives that were hardline towards North Korea made North Korea more powerful in resisting talks, delaying talks, and walking back from previous agreements because they realised that South Korea, a US ally, did not approve of aggressiveness towards them. Rozman (2010, 145) argues that hard evidence revealed that there were strained relations during the Six-Party Talks between the US and South Korea due to differences over how to deal with the North. This damaged not only coordination in the Six-Party Talks, but also prevented three-way alliance-building among the US, the Republic of Korea, and Japan. The US could not respond to North Korea's nuclear test in 2005 because South Korea opposed the OPLAN. South Korea's stance influenced the US to continue with the negotiations instead of seeking a hardline reaction to North Korea's nuclear test.

Seoul no longer feared allied abandonment of its security interests in Washington's pursuit of a separate deal with Pyongyang. Seoul's main security dilemma centred on allied entrapment in the Bush administration's evil state strangulation strategy sucking South Korea into a military conflict escalation, not of its own making (Kim 2010, 124).

Time Delay Tactics

The Mt. Kumgang tours and the Gaeseung Industrial Complex were part of South Korea's Engagement Policy. However, the continuation of the projects was putting further strain on the US-ROK alliance, and this largely benefited North Korea, which wanted to see the coalition fail to put pressure on the DPRK. Furthermore, both projects undermined what the US sanctions hoped to achieve, and South Korea had taken to

attach itself to North Korea because it believed (as North Korea had stated the US's hostility) its ally did not seek to resolve the challenges. Kim (2010, 264) notes that the Sunshine Policy (engaging Pyongyang with several major economic cooperation projects, such as the Mt. Kumgang Tourism Project and the Gaeseung Industrial Complex Project) was meant to build trust in its relations with North Korea and to jump-start the North's moribund economy as a prelude to reunification. The Mt. Kumgang Tourism Project and the Kaesong Industrial Complex Project were enacted before the economic sanctions on Banco Delta Asia (BDA). South Korea should have stopped giving North Korea a direct financial lifeline, a move that served to intensify the conflict of interest between Washington and Seoul. South Korea was not well prepared to encounter the unintended consequences of its engagement policy, which added greater complexity to the ideal of solidarity between Seoul and Washington by creating lines of division over how best to deal with Pyongyang (Kim 2010, 264).

The US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, added to the chorus of US voices on 16 and 19 October 2006, reminding South Korea of the importance of its participation in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI). The South Korean government's responses were defiant because officials insisted on keeping these two projects moving forward without interruption, and in the case of the Gaeseung project, even attempting to enlarge it while again refusing to join the PSI fully (Bae 2010, 339). The US was discontent with South Korea's actions. According to the US, South Korea was supposed to back the policies that were imposed by Washington and not find a way to support policies that would undermine the agenda of the US.

The deceptive nature of many strategies may lead to an enhancement of conflict when their use is discovered (Gruder 1970, 136). Pyongyang used the Six-Party Talks platform to drag its feet in the negotiations while building its nuclear capability. Therefore, South Korea's view that "carrots were better than sticks," in the case of North Korea, was a strategy that had only seen North Korea increase its nuclear missile capability. South Korea's stance of being against US sanctions was exactly what the DPRK wanted because this illustrated how the alliance was speaking with different voices. This is not to say that "sticks" are better than "carrots" but to illustrate how the US-ROK alliance was strained due to its failure to speak with one voice in the negotiations, considering that the US wanted South Korea to support the sanctions it had imposed on North Korea.

Seoul declared coercive pressure unacceptable to bring Pyongyang to heel in the nuclear dispute (Schneider 2010, 93). North Korea had sowed the seeds by labelling the US as the party that was not willing to cooperate, that was causing the delay in the negotiations, and that had a hostile policy towards North Korea. Given its past track record, it is virtually impossible to change North Korea's behaviour through dialogue and negotiations, and the only credible way to disarm North Korea's nuclear arsenal is either to transform the regime through isolation and containment or to reply with military options (Moon 2012, 3). Negotiating with North Korea without the use of

punitive measures when it uses escalatory tactics, only serves the interests of North Korea's nuclear programme. However, due to the manipulation, South Korea did not see this and went on to put its alliance in a vulnerable position due to its utterances.

Proactive Diplomacy and the Chances of Entrapment

South Korea was manipulated, not because North Korea was strategic in its bid to manipulate South Korea, but because South Korea was a willing participant, which presented the opportunity and gave the means to North Korea. Kim Jong-il agreed to a summit meeting with South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun. Meeting with South Korea on a bilateral level was motivated by the need to get an ally in the negotiation, since North Korea had been isolated following its underground low-yield nuclear device test of 2006. The bilateral meeting was also strategic in that it would put strain on the US-ROK alliance because Seoul's decision to meet with Kim Jong-il contradicted Washington's decision not to hold bilateral meetings with North Korea. This was not the first time that Seoul's "proactive diplomacy" had diverged from US policy.

The intentions of the Roh administration could have been positive; however, the weakness in coordination within the alliance was only made worse by North Korea's ways of creating a rift between the US and ROK. It can be argued that to avoid manipulation of one alliance member by the other; alliances should at least enter into negotiations with the highest level of coordination to avoid the fate that the US-ROK alliance suffered during the fifth round of the Six-Party Talks. Round five exacerbated the uncompromising and even incomprehensible attitude of North Korea and the politics of spoilership by South Korea, which contributed to the stalemate (Moon 2012, 2). South Korea continued to play the so-called "advocate in chief" of North Korea, which allowed for a lack of coordination between Washington and Seoul in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue.

South Korea was eagerly willing to play a central role in influencing the future of the Korean Peninsula and inter-Korean relations. It experienced a period of rapprochement and reconciliation during the decade when South Korea was under the leadership of President Roh Moo-hyun (2003–2008), with their policies of vigorous engagement with North Korea (Kim 2010, 264). The eagerness from the South had not gone unnoticed, and North Korea had not forgotten the role that Seoul had played when sanctions were imposed on BDA. North Korea had much to win if South Korea took a more proactive role in round five, because South Korea would encourage the US to continue in an entrapped negotiation while also putting strain on the alliance. Jeong (2016, 3) argues that negotiators can deploy a diverse set of strategies either to influence the other's motives and calculations, or to minimise the negative effects of an opposing party's actions. Kim Jong-il was aware of how South Korea could influence the decisions of the US. Therefore, warming up to Seoul when it wanted to influence the direction of the negotiation was part of its strategy of getting what it wanted.

Compared to earlier rounds, Seoul had taken a more proactive role during round five. Even though Washington and Seoul did not agree with each other on how to handle the North Korean nuclear issue, they both had to be part of the negotiations so as not to disrupt the structure of the negotiations. To some extent, they were “self-entrapped” in a negotiation whereby neither of them could discontinue the process without the input of the other. This could be due to the expectancy value and face-saving forces of the parties. In as much as this move by negotiating parties might appear somewhat irrational, this paper contends that the conflicting interests between Washington and Seoul were much more trivial when compared to the goal of solving North Korea’s nuclear programme.

Impact of the 2006 North Korean Nuclear Crisis

North Korea’s decision to escalate the nuclear crisis illustrated that the Six-Party Talks were going nowhere and that both Seoul and Washington had become entrapped by North Korea, who had gone as far as test-firing a nuclear weapon during the negotiations process. However, North Korea was not only able to test a nuclear weapon, but it was also able to show that Seoul’s so-called “engagement policy” was not enough to persuade them not to pursue a nuclear programme. Negotiations are meant to de-escalate a conflict (Zartman 2001, 3–4), which begs the question of why there was a need to continue with a process that was showing signs of failure.

Pyongyang has historically escalated tensions to define negotiating parameters and extract maximum benefits for minimal concessions (Klingner 2012, 7). The US-ROK alliance should have realised that by escalating, North Korea knew that South Korea would continue downplaying North Korea’s nuclear build-up, which would put further strain on its alliance with the US. The alliance should have been prepared for North Korea’s escalation tactics to avoid entrapment, mostly because—as the paper has shown—there were opposing views on how the negotiations should be handled. When looking at the tactics used during the Six-Party Talks, either deliberately or unintended, the question arises of why the participants continued with negotiations even if there were clear signs that the negotiation process was creating an environment conducive to entrapment.

The ROK-US alliance was still not on the same level regarding the North Korean nuclear issue. They had differing views, which made a clash of interests within the talks imminent. The failure of the US-ROK alliance to mutually align on a strategy to deal with the nuclear crisis played right into North Korea’s intention of wanting to weaken the negotiations.

The 2006 nuclear test did not happen by chance, but as a reaction to the Bush administration’s refusal to have bilateral talks with North Korea on the issue of sanctions that were imposed on the BDA. It was consequential to Pyongyang’s years of stalling the negotiation process meant to stop them from pursuing their nuclear ambitions. South Korea had mated with the leaders of North Korea. Its decision to break

away from its alliance partner did not stop North Korea from test-firing the nuclear missile underground, but could rather have motivated North Korea to do it because this would have strained the alliance even more. The US had shown North Korea, when it backtracked from the Joint Statement of 2005, that there would be consequences for their actions. South Korea was entertaining North Korea by meeting with them on a bilateral level, even though the US-ROK alliance was meant to be one unit within the negotiation, with one goal and voice.

In 2007, following North Korea's 2006 underground low-yield nuclear device test, the US Treasury Department 2007 finally relented and allowed the BDA accounts to be returned to North Korea, a test of good faith in Pyongyang. It can be argued that the Bush administration's decision to show "good faith" towards Pyongyang (by allowing the BDA accounts to be returned to North Korea) might have been rewarding North Korea's bad behaviour. The Bush administration was now doing what it had accused South Korea of doing, opening a financial lifeline for North Korea. The issue of the BDA sanctions had been used to create a rift or disagreement between South Korea and the US, which had affected the alliance. The US's decision to relent on the issue of the sanctions could have been influenced by South Korea, which had argued for more "carrots" instead of "sticks," which was exactly what North Korea wanted from South Korea. The North's use of crisis escalation was an attempt to influence dialogue with Washington, as well as efforts to get concessions, preconditions, and responses from the US at the negotiating table (Snyder 2009, 60). The US had acted the way Pyongyang had expected it to act when it (Pyongyang) decided to test-fire a nuclear missile, and South Korea influenced the change in direction from the US.

Even though the 2006 nuclear test ironically worked as a catalyst for renewed Six-Party Talks negotiations, the nuclear test was a strategic failure since Pyongyang came back to the talks more isolated than ever (Snyder 2009, 67–68). The North's strategy was to delay the negotiations but not necessarily end the negotiations before the alliance had been weakened.

North Korea's low-yield underground nuclear device test of 2006 was a result of a well-oiled tactical machine that has become a conduit for North Korea's negotiation strategy of playing one alliance member against the other to weaken their resolve. The North Korean leadership has relied on a variety of familiar approaches in the initial rounds of talks, including calculated efforts to utilise tactics and threats, crisis escalation tactics, and creating situations where other parties feel obliged to take action to "save face" (Snyder 2009, 48, 60). The primary reason why Pyongyang is taken seriously at the negotiating table is because of its track record for violence and because the stakes are usually too high and the consequences too dire for others (not necessarily the negotiators) if diplomacy fails.

The US-ROK alliance lost focus on what had made them enter into the negotiations together, which now made them weaker against North Korea. As mentioned above, the

alliance was supposed to pressurise North Korea, but the opposite happened. Decision-makers have a real choice in deciding whether to persist or withdraw from a previously chosen course of action that could have entrapped them (Brockner 1992, 40). Not only did the nuclear test entrap the parties, but it illustrated that the ROK-US alliance was too weak to do anything about it as a cohesive force, which the alliance was supposed to be.

In hindsight, and to maximise its chances for success, Washington should have: 1) combined measures to convince North Korea that it was unwilling to accept Pyongyang's nuclear status with progressively tighter negotiated limits on its programme; 2) not reached for too much progress too soon, since that would lessen the chances of success and endanger any incremental gains already made; and 3) avoided the Bush administration's mistake of setting ambitious objectives not supported by adequate means. Therefore, setting deadlines for the negotiations is very important in dealing with the Korean nuclear issue. The lack of time limits on the negotiations made it possible for North Korea to delay the negotiations to a point where they had the upper hand and the capability to test-fire a nuclear weapon.

The involvement of South Korea highlighted its views as different from those of the US, which worked against the ROK-US partnership. Therefore, future negotiations with North Korea should involve a combination of both cohesive messages between the alliance and time limits if Pyongyang decides to again slow down the negotiation process.

Round Six: South Korea's Pivot/Re-alignment with its Alliance Partner

During round six, there was a pivotal point in South Korea's attitude towards North Korea and the US. Unlike in previous rounds, round six showed a different attitude from South Korea towards North Korea's actions and a realignment between the US and South Korea. The re-alignment of the US-ROK alliance in round six illustrates how an alliance can still salvage the survival of its relationship. Although the Lee government had been complying with American leadership in round six, domestic supporters of Lee had been critical of the Bush administration's conciliatory posture towards North Korea. This represents a complete reversal of the first Bush administration, when hardline US policies clashed with South Korea's softer approach (Moon 2012, 103). Seoul had been frustrated with Washington's hardline policy, which was viewed as a deterrent to the success of the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, but once the tides had turned, it was willing to show discontent with Washington's soft-line policy.

When the Six-Party Talks reconvened in Beijing on 10 July 2008 for three days (after a nine-month hiatus and dynamics among Six-Party members since the previous round of talks had changed dramatically) the two Koreas had become more hostile toward each other, and the US and the DPRK more open for active dialogue (Kim 2010, 113). This was the first time that South Korea had become critical of North Korea during the Six-Party Talks. South Korea had been pro-engagement since the beginning of round four.

Snyder (2009, 1) explains this by pointing out that during his election campaign, South Korean President Lee (2008) pledged to restore the alliance with the US and campaigned on a policy of conditional engagement with North Korea. The incoming South Korean government realised how the Roh administration's engagement policy had strained relations between Washington and Seoul.

There was also a change in "policy" dynamics, especially from the alliance. The US, which had opposed engagement, was now the one initiating engagement, and South Korea, which had put engagement as a focal point of its policy towards the DPRK, was now against engaging their neighbour to the North. The alliance appeared to behave more like unitary and rational actors rather than plural and diffused ones (Kim 2010, 284). Change in South Korean behaviour towards Pyongyang can be attributed to the election of a new government in Seoul and the sinking of South Korea's navy Corvette, Cheonan, near the North Limit Line (NLL).

The Lee government pursued a two-track approach that proposed "De-nuke, Open 3,000." This meant that if North Korea denuclearised, the South would lift its per capita income to \$3,000 within 10 years by facilitating opening and reform in the North. This largely followed the American lead in round six (Moon 2012, 103). South Korea was moving towards adopting a pragmatic approach with less appeasement of Pyongyang, since the Roh administration's appeasement approach towards North Korea had not worked. On the other hand, North Korea was changing its strategy toward South Korea, and, at the same time escalating tensions on the peninsula, which could have made it even more difficult for the Lee administration not to follow the US's lead, as it had done in the previous rounds. North Korea severed ties with South Korea and shut down the Consultative Office on the DMZ in retaliation to South Korea's cancellation of almost all trade and aid to North Korea. They also went on to cut in half the number of workers employed in the Gaeseung Industrial Complex. Lee's policies represented a return to a traditional South Korean strategy of closely cooperating with the US and maintaining a cautious and defensive approach toward North Korea (especially compared with the active engagement approaches of Kim Dae-Jung and Roh Moo-hyun) (Snyder 2009, 1–2).

South Korea's diplomacy of facilitation aimed at moving through the horns of the dilemma—no nukes and no war—which often created an image of a pro-North Korea, anti-US South Korean position; bandwagoning with China to show how impressive South Korea was as a facilitator of the Six-Party process (Moon 2012, 102). However, the differing approaches (non-engagement and engagement, respectively) that both Seoul and Washington had during the final round of the Six-Party Talks, should be a testament for future negotiations that alliances are most likely to adopt different approaches at different times in a negotiation, depending on the situation or the negotiation climate.

Since the Roh administration had come into power, South Korea had pursued policies that threatened the almost 50-year alliance between Seoul and Washington. The alliance was stronger when it was aligned in policy because this did not present North Korea with a tool that could be used to manipulate the relationship. During his first stop in the US in April 2008, Lee (2008) declared that the “politicization of alliance relations will be behind us” and pledged that the alliance should be based on the principles of “common values, trust, and peace.” There was only one option for Seoul: to return and mend its alliance with the US, since it was a source of defence security against North Korea.

Major Findings

The study reveals that the US-ROK alliance experienced significant strains during the Six-Party Talks. Divergent interests and approaches regarding North Korea created internal cohesion disruptions. South Korea’s pursuit of a reconciliation-oriented engagement policy clashed with the US’s more aggressive stance, leading to challenges in coordinating their negotiation strategies. North Korea skilfully exploited these strained relations to manipulate the negotiation process, impacting the outcomes of several rounds. The erosion of alliance cohesion weakened the alliance’s ability to influence North Korea’s nuclear disarmament. Addressing these challenges is crucial for strengthening alliances and promoting effective multilateral negotiations.

The findings have policy implications for dealing with North Korea’s nuclear ambitions and countering adversarial manipulation in future negotiations. The study emphasises the need for proactive measures to address internal divergences and avoid being exploited by adversaries during negotiations. In other words, the major findings underscore the complexities and challenges that alliances face in multilateral negotiations, especially when dealing with adversaries like North Korea. The study’s insights contribute to a deeper understanding of alliance dynamics, negotiation processes, and the impact of internal cohesion disruptions and external manipulation on negotiation outcomes.

The Implications of the Study for the Field

The implications of this paper for the field of international relations, arms control and nuclear non-proliferation are significant and multifaceted. The research offered valuable insights that can shape both academic scholarship and practical policymaking. The study’s findings contribute to a deeper understanding of how alliances function in multilateral negotiations. By examining the US-ROK alliance’s experience during the Six-Party Talks, scholars gain insights into the complexities of managing alliances, addressing divergent interests, and fostering internal cohesion. This knowledge can enrich existing theories on alliance behaviour and help researchers develop more nuanced models of alliance dynamics. Policymakers and diplomats can draw practical lessons from the research to improve alliance management strategies. Understanding the challenges faced by the US-ROK alliance in dealing with North Korea’s nuclear

ambitions provides valuable guidance for fostering alliance coherence and aligning negotiation approaches.

The study's insights into North Korea's skilful manipulation tactics have direct implications for countering adversarial influence in negotiations. Policymakers can develop measures to identify and respond to attempts by adversaries to exploit internal divergences within alliances. By being aware of such tactics, policy practitioners can mitigate the impact of adversarial influence and work towards more cohesive and successful negotiation outcomes. The research sheds light on the impact of internal cohesion disruptions on negotiation outcomes. Policymakers can use this understanding to refine negotiation strategies and improve coordination among alliance partners. By avoiding uncoordinated approaches and addressing divergent interests, diplomats can strengthen their collective bargaining power and increase the chances of achieving successful negotiation outcomes.

The study's analysis of the US-ROK alliance's response to North Korea's nuclear ambitions has implications for future North Korean policy. Policymakers can learn from the mistakes and successes of the alliance's engagement strategies and take a more informed and coordinated approach in dealing with North Korea's nuclear programme. This can lead to more effective efforts in denuclearisation and regional stability. Ultimately, the research contributes to efforts aimed at enhancing regional and global security. By understanding the complexities of alliance behaviour and the challenges of negotiating with adversaries, policymakers can develop more informed and coherent strategies to address critical security issues. Strengthening alliances and improving negotiation outcomes can contribute to peace, stability, and cooperation on the international stage.

Conclusion

The US-ROK alliance's participation in the Six-Party Talks was marked by divergent strategies and policies toward North Korea. North Korea astutely exploited these differences to its advantage. The alliance's lack of unity provided North Korea with a window to restrict options and influence the negotiation process. The alliance's choices, alternatives and options were limited by the DPRK exploitation, and these are factors that Meerts (2005) identifies as signs of entrapment. This underscores the importance of entering negotiations as a cohesive alliance, with mutually reinforced objectives to prevent adversarial parties from exploiting division. However, the contribution does not assume that alliances should not enter into negotiations with a potential adversary, but seeks to illustrate that when an alliance enters a negotiation, they should stand firm on their mutual goals so that they do not show signs of weaknesses that an adversarial party in negotiation might use to its advantage.

South Korea's role evolved into a pawn serving North Korea's strategy to weaken the US-ROK alliance. Driven by hopes of the Korean peninsula's reunification, South Korea's alignment with North Korea inadvertently isolated it from the US, playing into

North Korea's hands. Meerts (2005, 114) argues that the party that is used as a pawn does not know the intentions of the instigator, because the instigator hides its true intentions until the party it wants to entrap is sufficiently entrapped so that it can no longer escape from the process. To prevent this scenario, alliances should approach negotiations with a shared perception of potential threats, thwarting attempts to manipulate divisions.

The case of the strained US-ROK alliance cautions other alliances against entering negotiations divided, as it can undermine the negotiation process without necessarily breaking the alliance. President Lee recognised the need to recalibrate the alliance amidst escalating tensions, highlighting its dynamic nature. South Korea's alignment with North Korea during the negotiations demonstrated the far-reaching impact of negotiation actions, emphasising the need for alignment with long-term alliance goals.

Being entrapped weakens a party's negotiating position, as exemplified by the US-ROK alliance's experience. A party that is entrapped (or that entraps itself) is in an unenviable position because it loses out on a deal it had hoped to achieve (Meerts 2005, 115). North Korea manipulated South Korea to influence US decisions, fostering a group-think dynamic. Thus, an alliance sometimes might be more prone to entrapment than individuals, whereas in other instances, the opposite might be true. However, future studies could explore how the outcome might have differed if the US had engaged in the negotiations without its ally, South Korea. The Six-Party Talks showcased the intricate interplay between alliances, negotiation strategies, and the broader geopolitical landscape.

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