

The Reliability of Alliances on Korean Peninsula in Post-Cold War Period: Democracies vs. Non-democracies

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Abstract: Alliance building has been an important feature of international relations in all the international systems. During Cold War in international system alliances were formed on ideological basis. Some of them came to an end in post-Cold War, while others exist even today. The US-ROK alliance and PRC-DPRK alliance can be taken as good examples of these alliances. Although these alliances were formed to balance each other, yet the commitments are dependent upon the form of government in each of the ally state, in the wake of post cold war. This article examines the alliance formation through theoretical prism and contributes to the role of democracies and non-democracies in strengthening or weakening the asymmetric alliances through examination of Democratic Peace Theory. This paper argues that the shared identities (democracy) strengthen the asymmetric alliance whereas the absence of shared identities (non-democracies) weakens asymmetric alliance. The paper deals with the US-ROK alliance and PRC-DPRK alliance in post cold war international system and concludes that mutual trust, strong institutions, cooperative bargain and aversion of conflicts leads democracies to assure and maintain levels of commitment.

Keywords: Alliances, China, Korea, security, The United States

Introduction

The roots of DPRK-PRC and ROK-US alliances are embedded in the Cold War. Both the United States and the PR China committed a lot of resources to their allies and fought hard against antagonistic alliance. Period of the Cold War witnessed no categorical change in these alliances, and levels of commitments from both parties to their client state persisted. In the post-Cold War period however, the levels of commitment and pledges changed a lot. After some considerable periods of tension on Korean peninsula, the potential level of ROK-US alliance was upgraded through growing strategic and comprehensive alliance cooperation including nuclear umbrella. DPRK-PRC alliance remained satisfied with their past achievements, as if it had not weakened, but there is less evidence that point at enhanced cooperation, since the United States was able to constrain and limit the PR China to distance itself from DPRK. This paper explores the causes which made the reliability of alliances on Korean peninsula so different even when they face the same condition of military tensions after the Cold War. According to a Neo-realist assumption the states have to strengthen their own alliance when the axis of rival states does the same by increasing its military ability even when they are not eager to do so. This is the security dilemma which determines the behavior of states. But according to our argument the alliances on Korean peninsula between the United States and ROK, China and DPRK react differently to same condition of tensions due to their democratic and non-democratic models. The core idea of this paper is that alliance between democracies on Korean peninsula is more durable and reliable than the alliance between non-democracies. For this

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simple reason, the states in contrast to the Neo-realist assumption are likely to react differently when they face the security dilemma. Accordingly an attempt has been made to qualify leading IR theories for the explanation of this contradictory behavior by the PR China and the United States over the issue of post-alliances engagements and commitments.

Through the application of ‘Democratic Peace theory’ the paper tries to solve the following puzzles: Why in the post-cold war scenario, despite sharing same military tensions and security arrangements in the region, DPRK-PRC alliances witnessed low level of commitment in contrast to high level of commitments by ROK-US alliances? What is the crucial difference of response to security dilemma by democratic and non-democratic alliances? How the shared identities in one sphere influence other domains of interest by solidification and formulation of bond of understating among democratic communities?

Dynamics of Security Relations from the Cold War to Contemporary International System

Post-World War II, the Korean Peninsula became independent of Japan’s Suzerainty. In post-war settlement, the United States and the Soviet Union divided the peninsula into two spheres along the north and south of the 38th parallel. The eastern command of the United States army took control of the south of the parallel while the Soviet Union military took hold of the area north to the parallel. Guaranteed and pledged for the national elections by the two super powers, the peninsula witnessed a dramatic change when the Soviet Union installed a communist government and closed the border in northern territory. In response to this the United Nations (UN) proclaimed southern part, designated Seoul as the capital and the only legitimate government in the peninsula with the consent of its new constitution. Both parties the UN and the Soviet Union denied legitimacy of each resulting deadlock, consequently elections were never held.

Finally, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) invaded the Republic of Korea’s (ROK) territory by crossing the 38th parallel towards south on June 25, 1950. This action provoked the beginning of the Korean War as the UN declared this as an act of aggression and the United States through the UN forces went to the defense of the ROK. Having the arms support of the Soviet’s, the PR China (dispatched its own troops for the defense of the DPRK. The situation turned into a full scale war which lasted for three years from 1950-1953, official armistice signed in 1953 which reinforced the 38th parallel bordering the two sides (Scott, 2001; Wenger & Zimmermann, 2003).

With the changing characteristics of the international system in the post-Cold War era, the disposition of security arrangements also changed in the East Asia. This new shift in security arrangements resulted in a visible change to alliance patterns between ROK-US and DPRK-PRC. The nuclear posture, missile program and open rhetoric of use of these weapons produced circumstances of strife for the PR China to back and stand with the DPRK as it had stood in the Cold War times. The United States named the DPRK “Axis of Evil”, and its posture as an irresponsible state by the DPRK led the PRC to distance itself from the ally, and the absence of common grounds created a vacuum in the relations resulting in fading alliance whereas the ROK-US alliance grew stronger on common grounds and shared identities. See figure 1 & 2.

Alliances Formation: An understanding from the Realist paradigm

The realism coherently explains need, desire and formation of alliances. Among leading scholars of realism Hans J. Morgenthau has contributed a lot for understanding the motivations and logic of alliance formation, Morgenthau (1978) argues that alliances are a necessary function of “Balance of Power” operating within a multiple-state system. According to Kenneth Waltz (1969: 175) with

more than two states, the politics of power turns to the diplomacy by which alliances are made, maintained, and disrupted.

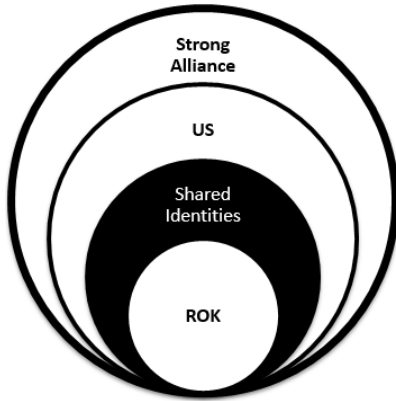


Figure 1: ROK-US Alliance: strong

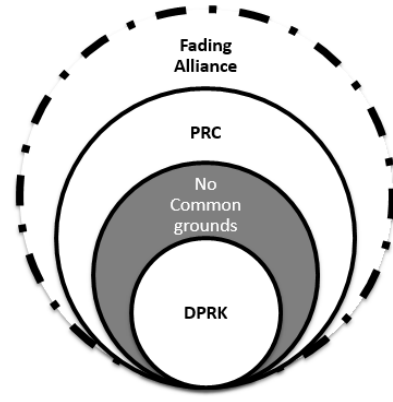


Figure 2: DPRK-PRC Alliance: Fading

The game of power politics, if really played hard, presses the players into two rival camps, though so complicated is the business of making and maintaining alliances that the game may be played hard enough to produce that result only under the pressure of war (Waltz, 1969:175). Although his theory provides an insightful analysis about alliance formation, the logic is extracted more from power politics of bipolar and multi-polar systems than anything.

The collapse of the Soviet Union caused a very complicated matrix of relations since it was the only global power, the United States and others, which were not global, continued to compete among themselves for power and influence. A real Balance of Power doesn't exist anymore since the United States is acting among un-equals by trying to manage the asymmetric relations. Under such conditions the situation is changed and the alliances are made to secure one's security or benefits out of Balance of Power. This can be best understood in the prevalent alliances between the PR China and DPRK as per assumptions of theory of Balance of Power; the PR China should have strengthened its alliance with DPRK and tried to balance ROK-US alliance through enhancing the commitments to its alliance with DPRK which the PR China didn't do.

This different and recent pattern of alliance is subject to debate, and to understand let us consider Stephen Walt's argument as he argues (1985) "Rather than allying in response to power alone, it is more accurate to say that states will ally with or against the most threatening power. For example, states may balance by allying with other strong states, if a weaker power is more dangerous for other reasons" (pp.8-9). He further goes on and evaluates in his "Balance of Threat" theory that defines four sources of threat that are likely to be identified by states deciding to balance against perceived threat.

Firstly he identifies the aggregate power as a source of threat. The growing strategic alliance between the United States and Republic of Korea itself is an aggregate power. Consider for example, the new commitments and joint exercises which can shape aggregate power. After the Cheonan and the Yeonpyeong incidents, the ROK and the United States conducted several joint military exercises in the peninsula and nearby sea areas, including routine military exercises such as Key Resolve and Ulchi Freedom Guardian and also exercises in direct response to the above mentioned two incidents (Gong, 2012).

Second source of threat identified by Walt is proximity of power, as he (1985) says, "States will also align in response to threats from proximate power" (p.10). The Korean peninsula shares

common border with PR China has historically been important to Chinese national interests and in strategic calculations of its leaders. Any concentration of rival forces in Korean peninsula could become a source of threat from Northern part and make PR China more vulnerable. Consider for example, the decision of Mao Zedong to fight against American troops from 1950 to 1953 was derived from possibility of vulnerability if rival troops could dominate Korean peninsula. Many Chinese scholars argue that the PRC's decision to enter the Korean War in October 1950 was largely based on concern for Chinese national security and a reaction to the imminent threats to the physical security of Chinese territory (DeJong, 2002).

Walt's third source of threat is offensive power, although there were a lot of announcements that the fortification of American missile system on Korean peninsula or around it has defensive purpose against North Korea, the missiles can be used for both offensive and defensive goals but this is not the whole story. The United States has always supported the tri-lateral contact and strategic cooperation among ROK, Japan and itself. They also have enough offensive capability under their control. Consider for example, the huge number of Multiple Launch Rocket Systems (MLRSs), submarines, attack helicopters, fixed-wing Attack aircraft, interceptors etc., though Japan's military is robust but is constrained by a pacifist Constitution that entitle this military to engage only in national self-defense. The Self Defense Forces have dozens of naval surface ships, 16 submarines and three helicopter carriers, with more vessels under construction. Japan is also buying 42 advanced F-35 stealth fighter jets (Kubo, 2014).

Fourth and lastly Walt identifies offensive intentions as a source of threat. By strengthening the alliance, the ROK and the United States intend to have an early military advantage over the PR China. This will check and contain China's diplomacy and national defense, and even hinder its development. Moreover, the intentions are always unknown and even in the case of democratic states they are not open to public due to concerns of national security. White paper is the announcement of strategy but it cannot cover all the intentions of the states. Additionally, it can be used to manipulate against the state by its opponents. The DPRK is the imminent and visible target, while the PR China is possibly an implicit and long-term target (Gong, 2012).

The presence of American troops on Korean peninsula, the accumulation of power between the United States and the Republic of Korea, the growing strategic and stronger alliance between them intends to use all the necessary sources of threat to the PR China but it is hard to find a real balancing act by the PR China, which is in contrast to theory.

Kireyev (2004) identifies state alignments and realignments as primary intra-systemic movements of actors within the international system. By far, the key factors for such movements are identified by the scholars as conflicts. The influencing attraction of the superior power of a core state comes as a result of repulsion of the weaker state by another core state, and in its turn, the core state benefits from getting access to weaker state's resources and from restraining its adversary from exploiting those resources.

Smith (1995) helped to understand the role and impact of alliances in international relations. For example he suggests that a potential aggressor is more likely to attack an unreliable defensive alliance than a reliable one. His model also suggests that costly alliances are formed between nations that have a commonality of interests. It means they invest a lot or jeopardize even their own security, since their expectations are a lot.

Bergsmann (2001) suggested that alliances are explicit agreements: it does not matter if the agreement is made explicit by a hand-shake between statesmen or by a formal treaty. The important thing is only that the participating parties themselves know with certainty that an agreement exists.

Kaplan argues that Alliances are made with no regard to ideology, cultural affinities, relations among monarchs and other elites; and in particular, each alliance is independent of past alliances and alignment patterns. Each is based solely upon present state interest and current threats to the Balance of Power (McGowan & Rood, 1975). But the identity which a state shares with others helps

to increase its power as it become mutual strength and offer a new paradigm of shared interests. Thus, identity can be pursued and valued as a tool for power maximization. Great powers are not really great powers as long as other small states don't speak their language as language facilitates the aggregation of power in science, education, diplomacy, business and even military. Therefore, identities in an alliance can be used to exploit domestic politics and disrupt public support in partner states.

Alliance Formation: A Neo-liberal Perspective

Neo-liberals (Joseph S. Nye, Jr., Robert O.Keohane) look at alliances as institutions. Alliances also fit the widely accepted Neoliberal definition of institutions as "persistent and connected sets of rules (formal and informal) that prescribe behavioral roles, constrain activity, and shape expectations" and Neoliberal institutionalist's explicitly state that alliances are institutions (Hemmer & Katzenstein, 2002) If they treat the alliances as institutions they should also provide explanation of why the alliances don't act like institutions. The behavior of the states within the institutions is constrained by rules and procedures and the states in institutions took responsibility instead of promise.

Though the logic of absolute gains is a possible motivation for most institutions but for most alliances the relative gain is the primary motivation since the states make alliance or join them by taking into consideration their own gains. Within the institutions the disagreements are often resolved through issue linkage models and compromises are made. The application of issue linkage models in alliances is out of question since the states ally to ensure their survival and it is hard to imagine a compromise on survival.

According to Keohane (1989) the concept of international regimes suggests the ability of actors, notwithstanding the realist baseline assumption of a 'state of war', to cooperate and achieve mutual benefits to some significant degree. It is clear that institutions have the primary role for maintaining and holding those regimes. But if the institutions are called to promote the peace and cooperation in the world then alliances are made to wage successful wars in spite of the fact that sometimes they prevent the war when they are really able to pacify the aggressor. Consider for example, the history of ROK-US and DPRK-PRC alliances which were formed to wage successful war against the enemy. Only due to their goals the alliances cannot be identified with institutions. But if the alliances can rarely be an institution like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), then we have to make an exception and say that the alliances can serve as an institutions under specific conditions. In North-east Asia there are no military institutions. Instead, the bilateral or trilateral ties come to form alliances. Therefore Neo-liberals have a little to say or argue about alliance formation and their reliability and commitment in North-east Asia.

Alliance Formation: A Constructivist Approach

In contrast to the Realist approach some other prominent scholars (Wendt, Katzenstein, Finnemore, Risse-Kappen) argue that collective identity serves for emergence of alliances. Identification, as Martha Finnemore notes, "emphasizes the affective relationships between actors" and "is an ordinal concept, allowing for degrees of affect as well as changes in the focus of affect" and (as cited in (Hellmann & Wolf, 1993). Collective identities matter because they help shape the definition of actors' interests (Hellmann & Wolf, 1993).

Risse-Kappen (1996) argues that democracies not only restrain from war among but are also likely to develop a collective identity facilitating the emergence of cooperative institutions for specific purposes. In contrast to the Realist approach that Balance of Power should be explanatory variable for understanding of alliance formation, Alexander Wendt argues that identities lead states to particular alliance since the threat and interests of the states are socially constructed. He noted that

states act differently toward enemies than they do towards friends because enemies are threatening and friends are not. If predation occurs right after the first encounter in the state of nature, it will force other with whom it comes in contact to defend them, first individually and then collectively if they come to perceive a common threat (Wendt, 1992).

Weitsman (2010) developed well the idea about the war time alliances by noting that: “Wartime alliances are formal or informal agreements between two or more states intended to further (militarily) the national security of the participating states, usually in the form of joint consultation and cooperation to prevail in war against a common enemy or enemies” (p.115). The different levels of commitment which she specified for alliances is tremendous investment for analytical purposes about regional security since the type and nature of allying behavior can vary from region to region. Consider, for example, promises of military assistance and other aid in event of war, but unilateral and without pre-prepared or explicit conditions specified or a promise to come to the active assistance of an ally under specific circumstances.

Conclusion

We examined the general claim of Democratic Peace Theory that democratic governments make strong alliances and trustworthy along with reliable partnership. This sense of trust and reliability is developed by the universal values of democratic principles and beliefs. Communication barriers and obstacles vanish owing to the uniform nature of patterns and process in democratic system, thus improved relations between democratic states are inevitable. The features of democratic governance go a long way toward resolving the commitment and information problems that bedevil all international relationships. Overcoming these problems allows democracies to reassure each other strike cooperative bargains and aver costly conflicts. They can make more tenable long-term commitments and effectively signal that they do not pose security threats (Lipson, 2013).

With The logic of DPT it can be argued that the different levels of commitments by the United States and the PR China to ROK and DPRK respectively are the outcome of higher level of commitments between democracies and the lower commitments between non-democracies especially in long-term period. Though initially ROK-US alliance was formed to fight against the North Korean threat but it was strengthened by mutual democratic commitments and shared identity. The trust and efficiency of alliance grew through shared norms, values, ideas and the efficient work of institutions in both countries, while in contrast DPRK-PRC alliance could not manage to transform into more a reliable and potentially strong alliance which does not fade during long periods. In its alliance system in the Asia Pacific, ROK-US alliance is the one with the most regulations, the best mechanisms, and the best command systems comparatively (Gong, 2012).

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