

EVENT REPORT

Talk on

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS, EAST ASIA AND THE KOREAN PENINSULA PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

Guest Lecture by Dr Haksoon Paik



06th November 2023



ABOUT THE EVENT

A Guest Lecture on 'International Politics, East Asia, and the Korean Peninsula: Problems and Prospects' by Dr Haksoon Paik was hosted by the Centre for Public Policy Research (CPPR) in partnership with the Korea Centre at the School of International Relations and Politics, Mahatma Gandhi University. The purpose of the event was to explore the intricacies of East Asian international politics, with a particular emphasis on the Korean Peninsula. Specifically examining the intricacies of US foreign policy, the long-standing armistice on the Korean Peninsula, and the delicate geopolitical movement involving the US, China, and North Korea, Dr Paik's lecture offered a nuanced exploration of the challenges and potential trajectories in the region.

SPEAKERS



Dr Haksoon Paik

Korea Centre Scholar-in-Residence 2023, at MG University and Founding President of the Academy of Kim Dae-jung Studies, Republic of Korea

Dr Paik has written extensively on North Korean politics, inter-Korean relations, North Korea-U.S. relations, North Korean nuclear and missile issues, and East Asian international relations. He is author of 14 books and monographs and co-author, editor, and co-editor of 8 books written in Korean and English, including: *The Korean Peninsula Peace Strategy* (Co-Author, 2022), *Park Geun-hye Administration's Policy on North Korea and Unification: Comparison with Previous Administrations* (2018), *North Korean Politics in the Kim Jong Un Era, 2012-2014: Ideas, Identities, and Structures* (2015), *The U.S.-North Korea Relations During President Obama's Second Term, 2013-2014: Threat of the Use of Nuclear Weapons and the Collapse of Relationship* (2014), and *The History of Power in North Korea: Ideas, Identities, and Structures* (2010).

SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION

- The lecture on the significant characteristics of East Asian international politics by Dr Haksoon Paik highlighted the main dynamics at work. The discussion began with a detailed analysis of US foreign policy, explaining its complex relationship with North Korea and its wider regional implications.
- Dr Paik emphasised the paradigm shift and the apparent absence of a cooperative system of global governance, which is evidently visible with the permanent members (P5) of the UN Security Council being at war with each other.
- The talk focused on the evolving global landscape, which is characterised by disruptive geopolitics, rapid technological development, and the pressing issues triggered by climate change and other man-made disasters.
- US-North Korea Relations: US policy towards the region is essentially big power diplomacy. US policy towards the Korean Peninsula is defined and executed largely in the context of US policy towards China. Trilateral cooperation between the US, Japan, and South Korea is a key component of US policy towards China, Russia, and North Korea. The US has a deep distrust of the North Korean leadership and system, and peaceful coexistence with North Korea looks to many strategists as a distant policy goal.
- North Korea's 'Strategy of Survival and Development for the 21st Century' aims to engage the US in North Korea's strategic calculus as a counterweight to China in the absence of the Soviet Union. North Korea's 'balancing strategy' towards China and the US is to secure:
 1. diplomatic autonomy and
 2. room for negotiating and achieving the resolution of the Korean Peninsula problems with the US.
- North Korea's policy towards the US evolves under the 'Give and Take Offer' of North Korea. If North Korea ceases developing nuclear weapons and informally tolerates continued stationing of US forces in the South, then Pyongyang will be able to end the Korean War, sign a peace treaty, normalise relations, and receive economic cooperation.
- Kim Jong Un's negotiation with Donald Trump in 2018-2019 was North Korea's sixth attempt to implement the 'strategy of survival and development for the 21st century'.

- Negotiations between the US and North Korea are asymmetric, with distinct targets and negotiating psychology. Trust remains a major issue, with both sides seeking reciprocal actions to avoid being trapped. The summits in Singapore (2018) and Hanoi (2019) led to increased distrust between North Korea and the US.
- Both Koreas are vying to become the sole legitimate Korean nation-state on the Korean Peninsula. There is a significant asymmetry in military security (such as Weapons of Mass Destruction) and economic capabilities between the two Koreas.
- Dr Paik discussed the conspiracy theory that suggests the United States may not be genuine in its efforts to resolve the Korean Peninsula issues; rather, it is strategically leveraging North Korea's threat to fortify its position against China.
- South Korea's policy towards North Korea:
 1. Reconciliation and peaceful coexistence with North Korea
 2. Peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula
 3. Unification as a "process," not an event
 4. De facto unification through full-range exchanges and cooperation
- South Korea has not yet regained wartime operational control of its own military forces from the US, and that poses a challenge for Seoul.
- The US and North Korea must tackle and resolve their incongruence in vision and goals more realistically by taking a more balanced approach to the demands on both sides.
- The talk raised the possibility of the Korean divide collapsing, leading to a united Korea in the future.
- Denuclearization prospects and the shifting role of the US were addressed, emphasising the need for engagement to alleviate threats and promote positive changes.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Key insights received from the discussion shed light on the intricate forces shaping international politics in East Asia and the challenges on the Korean Peninsula.
- The liberal international order spearheaded by the United States is crumbling, necessitating the need to address the lack of a collaborative global governance framework.
- Disruptive technologies, disruptive geopolitics, and climate change have grown into prominent issues threatening the global order.
- The prolonged armistice between North Korea and the United States/South Korea and North Korea has been influencing East Asian politics geographically.
- US-North Korea relations have been characterised as a manifestation of big power diplomacy, intricately tying US policies towards China.
- South Korea is finding it difficult to pursue independent policies towards North Korea given the shifting dynamics between the United States and North Korea.
- 'Strategy of Survival and Development for the 21st Century' was North Korea's calculated attempt to use the United States as a counterbalance to China.
- It is important for North and South Korea to address and resolve their distinct visions and objectives in a more rational manner, underscoring the necessity of taking a balanced approach to the demands on both sides.
- There is a possibility of the potential collapse of the Korean divide, paving the way for a united Korea in the future.
- Prospects for denuclearization and the United States' changing role highlight the necessity of strategic engagement for constructive developments in the region.

