

Current Affairs

What's the Fuss about North Korea?

By Musafir



Of late North Korea and China have dominated the world news. Many of us are mystified about the affairs in that part of the world. This article is an attempt to clarify the present situation.

A Brief History of Modern Korea: Korea was one country known as the Korean Empire in the late 19th century. Korea, also referred as the Korean

Peninsula, was occupied and ruled by Japan until the end of World War II. The division of Korea between North and South Korea was the result of the Allied victory in World War II in 1945, ending the Empire of Japan's rule over Korea. The United States and the Soviet Union occupied the country with the boundary between their zones of control along the 38th parallel. As a result, the Korean peninsula was divided between Russian and American influence. The northern area, protected by the Soviets became Democratic People's Republic of Korea, a communist state and the south protected by the USA became the Republic of Korea or ROK, a democratic state. The new premier of North Korea, Kim il-Sung launched the Korean War in 1950 in an attempt to reunify the country under the Communist rule. The conflict ended with a cease-fire in 1953.

Present Korea: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, North Korea (although an independent country) is under China's influence. North Korea has maintained a militarized dictatorship rule, with a cult of personality constructed around the Kim family. Kim Jong-un, the grandson of the first Kim is the present ruler of North Korea. Economically, North Korea has remained heavily dependent on foreign aid. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, that aid evaporated. The country's economic situation has been quite marginal since. North Korea is nuclear and heavily militarized because it fears an attack from the USA and its ally, South Korea and feels that it needs nuclear capability to survive.

On the other hand, the South Korean economy has prospered under the U.S, influence and the country is now considered to be fully developed, with a similar per capita economic standing to Western Europe, Japan, and the United States. However, it is costing the U.S.A. an arm and a



leg to maintain its influence in South Korea. The U.S. spends approximately 1.4 to 1.5 billion dollars per year to protect South Korea against the North. The U.S. deploys approximately 26,000 service members

distributed between all US military branches (Army, Navy, Air Force and Marine Corps) primarily to repel any military offence from North Korea and China.

USA's Position: The situation is very precarious for the USA in that region in the face of growing economic and military power of China. China wants the USA to demilitarize South Korea. Due to China's proximity and growing power, South Korea has started warming up to both North Korea and China. The new president of South Korea is listening more to China than USA. The USA has only limited options. They have to somehow maintain influence on South Korea without upsetting China.

USA's Diminishing Influence: President Trump during his recent Southeast Asian visit was obsequiously yielding to Xi of China. At a joint speech with Xi, Trump heaped praise on the Chinese leader, saying his people were "very proud" of him and hailing the "very good chemistry between the two of us." Xi was less generous in his praise, thanking Trump but stopping short of personal compliments.

"The Pacific Ocean is big enough to accommodate both China and the US," Xi added.

Later, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson told reporters Trump and Xi had "frank, open and productive" discussions behind closed doors which covered disputes in the South China Sea. "

On trade disparity Mr. Trump said, "I don't blame China. Who can blame a country for being able to take advantage of another country for the benefit of its citizens? I give China great credit."

At a press conference with South Korean President Moon Jae-in, Trump said Xi "has been very helpful" on the North Korean issue.

In return, China is going its own merry way increasing trade with North Korea and supplying them the much needed oil.

USA is trying to make an axis with Australia, Japan, South Korea and India to counter the Chinese power and influence. However, most of those countries are heavily dependent on China for trade. They are a part of Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) which the USA is not anymore. Withdrawal of USA from TPP is good for China. USA is losing its market and influence with those countries in favor of China.

The reality is that the USA is trying to hang on, not sure for how long. Like dominoes, country after country in the region is turning away from the United States accepting China as its leader. If Mr. Trump can turn the tide, he will go down in history as one of the most able presidents of the United States. Here is your chance for greatness, Mr. Trump!