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North Korea's construction of power: the six party talks, Morgenthau's elements of national power, 'realist-constructivism' and the eternal revolution - the domination of a narrative

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Abstract

The Six Party Talks is a multilateral forum created to facilitate the DPRK's (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or North Korea) denuclearisation, between 2003 and 2007. This paper will look at how the character of the relationship that North Korea had with other states allowed the North to manipulate the Talks in such a way that it managed to continue with its nuclear weapons programme. The content of these Talks makes them unique and shows how power perception (heightened in negotiations that involve a focus on deterrence, state survival and regional stability) dictates outcomes. The intent of the study is to explore how 'power' can be manipulated because it has to be mediated by perception. In essence, 'perception' creates a space for North Korea to manipulate the 'reality' within which all the states involved function. This study aims to show that it can build on currently existing assumptions that relate to negotiation and power, specifically Zartman's explanation of power as a perceived relation. The paper argues that within the context of denuclearisation, the understanding of power perception needs to be qualified. It explores whether, in the context of the Six Party Talks in particular, 'power' can be analysed with a purely realist paradigm. Constructed meanings for resources that seem to exist purely within an objective reality (for realists) can alter the value of these resources. The argument therefore builds onto the realist foundation of Zartman's approach to the analysis of negotiations, by showing how a state like North Korea can change the value of an objective reality by creating certain meanings for the elements that comprise this reality. It is interested in building on certain assumptions made by realists (including Hans Morgenthau (1993)), as well as certain assumptions concerning a structural approach to the analysis of negotiations (Zartman 2008: 100); in order to provide a more nuanced perspective regarding North Korea's behaviour during the Six Party Talks, in relation to its interactions towards the other parties in the Talks (specifically the US, China and South Korea), as well as their reactions to the North's provocations. To create this nuance, it uses constructivist elements to show how North Korea, during the time in which the Six Party Talks took place, manipulated reality to such an extent that it dictated the options that the other states had in relation to the DPRK's nuclear weapons programme.