Abstract

Purpose: The re-occupation of Afghanistan by the U.S. troops and the Taliban gives many lessons to the security of the Korean Peninsula. As shown in Vietnam Communization, the poor Taliban troops beat the rich troops of the U.S.-backed Kabul regime, which lacks a will to fight and strategy. The purpose of this study is to discover the implications of the Biden administration’s withdrawal from Afghanistan with a neoliberal perspective and its implications for security and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.

Method: This paper analyzes the US withdrawal from Afghanistan with the theory of Radall Schweller’s neoclassical realism and explains political implications toward the Korean Peninsula. This paper will examine four major domestic factors in neoclassical realism focus on nationalism, military ability to mobilize, the influence of domestic interest groups, and nationalism and ideology. It suggests four implications over security and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula by using the theory of the Neo-classical realism’s perspective.

Results: First, the withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan can be seen as an expression of shrinking nationalism stemming from the U.S. priority that has emerged since the Trump era. Second, the continued burden of the war due to the worsening financial situation in the U.S. due to COVID-19 and the fatigue of the accumulated war was a cause for the US to withdraw from Afghanistan. Third, to win the votes of the white middle class in the Midwest of the United States, known as Trump’s supporters, President Biden decided to withdraw from the need to rebuild the middle class. Fourth, the U.S. Biden administration decided to withdraw troops to focus on checking China, an authoritarian regime, based on value diplomacy, that values democracy and human rights.

Conclusion: As the Biden administration put more weight on checking China, the declaration of the end of the war pushed by the Moon Jae-in administration has been put on the back burner. The end-of-war declaration pushed by the South Korean government is opposed by the U.S. government as it weakens the justification for the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea that is a strategic hub for checking China. The Biden administration is implementing a policy to actively intervene in human rights issues in China and North Korea, focusing on value diplomacy, and is tightening sanctions against those involved, worsening the atmosphere of dialogue for negotiations. South Korea needs quiet diplomacy to promote the peace process. The U.S. sanctions on North Korea are creating an atmosphere and cause for North Korea to provoke more militarily in the future, raising the need to maintain a military response posture to South Korea and the US.

[Keywords] Strategic Situation, Neoclassical Realism, Withdrawal, Political Implication, Peace Process

1. Introduction

President Joe Biden officially announced in May that the U.S. military in Afghanistan would have completed the withdrawal by September 11, 2021, as the Taliban rebels seized the presidential palace in Kabul by force on August 15. About five months after signing a peace treaty with the Taliban, Kabul government which has a population of 37 million and about three times the size of the Korean Peninsula (650,000 square meters) collapsed helplessly.
President Biden put an end to the 20-year war in Afghanistan and carried out a surprise withdrawal of U.S. troops, saying it was time for the Afghanistan people themselves to decide their future. The intention is to no longer sacrifice precious U.S. young people and assets in the Afghan civil war, which cannot be won. However, in the process of withdrawing troops, there is no proper strategy due to the rapid expansion of the Taliban forces. In response to the Taliban’s earlier-than-expected advance into Kabul, the U.S. military hurriedly staged a deja-vu of Vietnam’s Saigon escape case in evacuating U.S. citizens and Afghanistan comrades at Kabul Airport.

Despite the success of the U.S. occupation of Afghanistan, the failure to rebuild a democratic state in Afghanistan was due to the cultural climate of fundamentalists not allowing foreign troops on their soil. With the change of war goal to "state construction," the U.S. fell deeper into the mire of the Afghan civil war, entangled with various races and sects, rampant warlords and antipathy to foreign forces, and Afghanistan's national reconstruction goal has brought in naught.

The re-occupation of Afghanistan by the U.S. troops and the Taliban gives many lessons to the security of the Korean Peninsula. As shown in Vietnam Communization, the poor Taliban troops beat the rich troops of the U.S.-backed Kabul regime, which lacks a will to fight and strategy. It can also be found in common that the timing of the withdrawal was a period when the U.S. economic situation was not good. Currently, the United States suffers a huge fiscal deficit due to the COVID-19 outbreak and trade deficit.

The purpose of this study is to discover the implications of the Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan with a neoliberal perspective and its implications for security and de-nuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. Chapter 2 describes the literature review. Chapter 3 describes the implications of the US withdrawal from Kabul toward the Korean Peninsula and Chapter 4 suggests policy options for the peace process and security of the Korean Peninsula.

2. Literature Review

Park Sang-hyun argued in his paper "Prospect Theory and U.S. Foreign Policy: U.S. War in the Power of the Threat" that the U.S. is unlikely to expand the war on terrorism to the North Korean region unless North Korea carries out terrorist attacks on the U.S. mainland[1]. In the paper "Study Against War of Strategic and Operational Levels," co-authored by Yang Soon-il & Choi Yoon-chul, the following three things were highlighted in preparation for a stabilization operation against North Korea in the Future Korean War Against North Korea[2].

First, a stabilization operation plan should be established that takes into account the cultural characteristics of North Koreans and their values. Second, he argued the need for an information import, analysis, convergence, and distribution system at the national strategic level. Third, he stressed the need to organize and strengthen the expertise of organizations that carry out the mission to stabilize the future.

Choi Yun-chul argued in his paper "Lessons from the long-term cause of the Afghan war on the Korean Peninsula." that some aspects of the fourth-generation war could emerge in the future unification of the Korean Peninsula[3]. If the North Korean regime is ousted, war by rebels can be carried out on a regional basis. The Fourth Generation War means an asymmetrical war between regular and irregular forces[4].

They stressed the importance of gaining the upper hand at the psychological and moral level in the Fourth Generation War for victory in the above-mentioned Review. This paper suggests the implications of the Biden administration's withdrawal from Afghanistan and its implications
for security and demuclearization on the Korean Peninsula by using the theory of the Neoclassical realism’s perspective.

According to Randall Schweller's theory of Balance of Interest, a neo-classical realist, the driver of state action is the pursuit of national interest[5]. Therefore, neoclassical realists view that the state becomes a country that maintains the status quo or seeks to balance or take advantage by comparing the benefits of maintaining the status quo with the benefits of breaking down the status quo. The United States is comparing the benefits from the Middle East with the security benefits from checking China. After all, the US has put its weight on checking China.

While realists believe that the nation’s foreign policy is determined by the international system and the country’s relative material capabilities. Neo-classical realists argue that the impact factors on foreign policy are a domestic factor due to their indirect and complexity[6].

The neo-realist point of view is that it is a neo-realist point of view to define the relationship between the state through structural realism and interaction of domestic reality. Neoclassical realists illustrate that foreign policy is determined by the government’s political power and its interaction with parameters such as domestic ideology and identity <Table 1>.

Table 1. Frame of analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>International system (Independent variable)</th>
<th>Domestic factors (Intermediate variables)</th>
<th>Foreign policy (Dependent variable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neo-classical Realism</td>
<td>Pursuit of the balance of interest between countries (The Balance of Interest)</td>
<td>-Nationalism -Ability to mobilize military power -influence of domestic actors and interest groups -Perception of politicians -Identity, ideology</td>
<td>-Foreign policy tendency (Engagement or expressed as isolationism) -Pursuing the core interest of the nation -Military Doctrine -Foreign economic policy -Preference of Alliance -Action in times of crisis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Therefore, from the standpoint of neoclassical realism in analyzing the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, I would like to argue that the withdrawal was driven by U.S. nationalism, the influence of the middle class in the United States, and the leader’s ideological interests. In particular, this paper explains that the core security interests of the United States are checking China’s rise.

First, the cause of the Biden administration’s withdrawal from Afghanistan is an expression of shrinking U.S. nationalism from Trump’s declaration to give up the role of world police[7].

Second, after a 20-year-long war of attrition, the U.S. spent a huge amount of money on Afghanistan. The accumulated fatigue of war put a heavy burden on the U.S.

Third, the Biden administration made a bold withdrawal because it could receive domestic support by reducing overseas spending to protect the interests of the middle class by reducing taxes.

Fourth, Biden tries to check the global expansion of the Chinese authoritarian regime’s influence for the US national interest, putting strategic weight on suppressing China by strengthening its democratic alliance network rather than expanding its influence in the Middle East <Table 2>[8].
Table 2. Neo-classical realist’s analysis of the US withdrawal from Afghanistan.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Division</th>
<th>International system (Independent variable)</th>
<th>Factors in the United States (Mediating variable)</th>
<th>U.S. foreign policy (Dependent variable)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Neo-classical Realism</td>
<td>Pursuit of the balance of interest between countries (The Balance of Interest)</td>
<td>- The Transition of national core interests (War on terrorism → Checking the Communist Regime of China)</td>
<td>- Withdrawal from Afghanistan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Nationalism</td>
<td>- Selective intervention strategy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- The Worsening financial situation for military mobilization</td>
<td>- increase of strategic flexibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Biden’s targeting middle class voters</td>
<td>- Check China by strengthening democratic alliance network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Strengthening democratic state’s networks</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Implications of the US Withdrawal from Afghanistan toward the Korean Peninsula

President Biden no longer wanted to continue the US financial waste and sacrifice of young Americans in the long war on terror. The Biden administration is making diplomatic efforts to restore the alliance, breaking away from Trump’s shrinking nationalist global strategy, but it has not achieved a remarkable outcome[9]. The U.S. has declared selective intervention because it has reached a critical point in dealing with the economic recession caused by the Covid-19 and the sky-rocketing cost of war[10]. This chapter analyzes the US withdrawal from Afghanistan with the theory of Radall Schweller’s neoclassical realism and explains political implications toward the Korean Peninsula. This chapter will examine four major domestic factors in neoclassical realism focus on nationalism, military ability to mobilize, the influence of domestic interest groups, and nationalism and ideology.

3.1. The manifestation of America’s shrinking nationalism

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the U.S. exhausted its power due to the war on terrorism and the Iraq War and began to withdraw U.S. troops stationed around the world. In particular, the Trump administration demanded an increase in defense spending to wealthy countries such as Germany, the EU, South Korea, and Japan in terms of burden sharing[11].

This sparked introverted nationalism in the United States against the backdrop of ‘America first policy’, with self-reflection on why the United States protects a wealthy country. This introverted nationalism seems to be inherited from the Trump administration, which was tired of the war on terror and carried out the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan. The U.S. intended to cease the sacrifice and financial waste of precious young Americans in the mire of a losing war on terror in Afghanistan.

3.2. Deterioration of military mobilization due to the financial situation

The U.S. has spent a huge amount of money on Afghanistan after 20 years of war on terror in Afghanistan, but the results were poor. At the same time, the continued burden on the United States due to the worsening financial situation of the United States and the fatigue of the accumulated war caused by the COVID-19 pandemic[12]. The U.S. has spent $2.3 trillion on war terror in Afghanistan for 20 years, and the U.S. paid 50 times more than South Korea’s one-year defense asset for the war on terror in Afghanistan. This is all the money that American citizens have to pay with taxes[13].
Approximately 243,000 people were killed in the Afghan War, including 2,324 U.S. soldiers, 70,418 Afghan civilians, 78,526 Afghan soldiers and police officers, and 85,731 anti-American armed guerrillas including the Taliban. The number of U.S. civilian deaths in Afghanistan exceeds 3,800, many of whom are former U.S. special forces.<Table 3>.

**Table 3.** Estimated direct war deaths in Afghanistan and Pakistan[14].

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Afghanistan</th>
<th>Pakistan</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>US Military</td>
<td>2,324</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2324</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US DOD Civilian</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US Contractors</td>
<td>3,917</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>4007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Military and Police</td>
<td>69,095</td>
<td>9431</td>
<td>78,526</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Allied Troops</td>
<td>1,144</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civilians</td>
<td>46,319</td>
<td>24,099</td>
<td>70,418</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opposition Fighters</td>
<td>52,893</td>
<td>32,838</td>
<td>85,731</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Journalists and Media Workers</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>87</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Humanitarian Aid Workers</td>
<td>446</td>
<td>105</td>
<td>551</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>176,206</td>
<td>66,650</td>
<td>242,856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Rounded</strong></td>
<td>176,000</td>
<td>67,000</td>
<td>243,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

They are veterans who retired from the military before 9/11 and went to Afghanistan under a contract as armed guards or agent guards of a private service company to make money[15].

### 3.3. Gain support for domestic interest groups

The withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan is aimed at focusing its financial and energy for building domestic infrastructure, which may lay the foundation for support for the middle class. Biden is going to use it as an opportunity to gain domestic support from the middle class in the upcoming mid-term election which is scheduled to hold in November. To win the votes of the white middle class in the Midwest of the U.S., known as Trump's supporters, Biden needs to lessen the tax burden for them. This is because they believe that this can strengthen the foundation of American democracy. The U.S. foreign policy is called for a "less ambitious" and humble policy that benefits the middle class in the US, rather than being obsessed with a war with a rogue regime[16].

The Biden administration did not abandon Trump's shrinking nationalism but has inherited some of Trump's populism by putting middle-class reconstruction at the center of U.S. foreign policy. Biden recognizes that the best way for political victory is carrying out the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, and reducing the tax burden on the middle class.

### 3.4. Checking China through strengthening the democratic network

President Biden has strengthened the democratic state work to check China by launching a new security partnership AUKUS, which focuses on traditional allies, Britain and Australia in the
wake of withdrawal from Afghanistan[17]. The exceptional U.S. support of nuclear-powered submarine technology to Australia can be interpreted as strengthening its blockade against China in the Indo-Pacific region. The U.S. is strengthening its security cooperation with a high-level network, following the existing Five Eyes and Quad. Biden holds a democratic summit triggering an ideological war against Authoritarian regime like China and Russia.

The strategic meaning of the democratic summit appears to be aimed at restoring U.S. global leadership, which had been tarnished during the Trump administration. The Biden administration said it will invest $514.4 million (about 499.3 billion won) to promote democracy around the world to defend and maintain democratic values[18]. These budgets will be supported in five areas: free and independent media activities, eradication of corruption, democratic reform, technical support for democracy, and support for a free and fair election. After the withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan, the strengthening of the democratic state’s network is seen as a global strategy by the U.S. to keep China in check.

3.5. Implications of the U.S.-China hegemonic competition toward the Korean Peninsula

In response to China’s move to expand its authoritarian influence globally through the Belt and Road Initiative, the U.S. is keeping China’s economic expansion in check by sanctioning China economically. U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken outlined key details of the Indo-Pacific strategy in Indonesia on January 14, 2022. The five key elements proposed by Secretary Tony Blinken are free and open Indo-Pacific development, building a strong network with the alliance, promoting prosperity in the economic sector, cooperating in pandemic and climate change, and strengthening security[19].

Blinken once again used the word "integrated control" mentioned by Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin to stress the need to strengthen military power in the U.S. Indo-Pacific region. It is needed for freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and Taiwan security issues.

At the same time, he stressed the role of the alliance, vowing to adopt a strategy that combines more closely with allies and partners. Referring to the establishment of an alliance network, he mentioned the need to deepen three-way cooperation between the ROK, U.S., and Japan, along with strengthening solidarity with five treaty allies in the region, including South Korea, Japan, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand.

The keywords for the U.S. are alliance, military, and economy to check China. In economic terms, the U.S. is focusing on preventing the inflow of high-tech technologies related to semiconductors and autonomous driving into China. It also condemned China’s human rights abuses in Hong Kong and the Xinjiang Uyghur region and tightened individual sanctions on human rights abuses, including a ban on imports of goods produced by forced labor in the Xinjiang Uyghur region[20].

The U.S. is strengthening its human rights intervention policy against China and North Korea, while China and North Korea are protesting the U.S. human rights intervention as interference in domestic affairs.

Biden’s value-oriented diplomacy is a stumbling block to the peace process on the Korean Peninsula for negotiations to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula[21]. As the competition for the U.S.-China hegemony intensifies, ROK’s strategic value increases, but the pressure on the camp selection is increasing by both sides. The U.S. is going to expand the role of U.S. troops in South Korea beyond the Korean Peninsula as a natural evolution of the alliance[22]. However, South Korea’s position has a kind of politically burdensome to join the US-led anti-China military alliance.

Therefore, South Korea is trying to maximize its national interests by conducting balanced
diplomacy between the United States and China. This is because the Korean Peninsula is geographically connected to the continent and economic security is as important as military security.

Due to the tightened U.S. policy on China, issues such as the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the declaration of the end of the Korean war, which are part of the peace process on the Korean Peninsula, has been put on the back burner, making it difficult for negotiations to take place in the near future. A new Cold War is on the rise as the U.S. is taking issue with the ideology and human rights abuses of China and North Korea[23].

4. Conclusion

This paper tries to analyze the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan with the theory of Randall Schweller’s neoclassical realism of four major domestic factors: nationalism, military mobilization capacity, the influence of domestic actors just as interest groups, and ideology.

First, the withdrawal of the U.S. from Afghanistan can be seen as an expression of shrinking nationalism stemming from the U.S. first policy that has emerged since the Trump era. The Trump administration has publicly stated that the United States is no longer the world’s police force. It argues that rich countries such as the ROK, Japan, and Germany have to pay more defense costs. This introverted nationalism of the U.S. has been inherited by the Biden administration, which is tired of the war against terrorism.

Second, the continued burden of the war due to the worsening financial situation in the U.S. due to COVID-19 and the fatigue of the accumulated war was a cause for the US to withdraw from Afghanistan.

Third, to win the votes of the white middle class in the Midwest of the United States, known as Trump’s supporters, President Biden decided to withdraw from the need to rebuild the middle class.

Fourth, the U.S. Biden administration decided to withdraw troops to focus on checking China, an authoritarian regime, based on value diplomacy that advocated democracy and human rights.

After the withdrawal from Afghanistan, Northeast Asia is entering a new Cold War era due to the U.S.-China hegemony competition. The Biden administration is trying to restore the alliance under the banner of value diplomacy advocating democracy and human rights.

In Checking China’s rise, the U.S. is operating a network of a small security alliance called AUKUS, Quad, and Five Eyes to keep China in check. The political implications of the US-China rivalry toward the Northeast Asia and Korean Peninsula are as follows.

First, the Biden administration recommends that diplomacy between South Korea and Japan need to be normalized to ensure security cooperation among the ROK, the U.S., and Japan. South Korea needs to actively cooperate in natural disasters, infectious diseases, and climate change, in the US-led security alliance. As competition for the U.S.-China hegemony intensifies, there will be a lot of pressure to choose the camp, but South Korea should maintain balanced diplomacy between the US and China.

Second, the US' putting too much emphasis on checking China may hamper the ongoing peace process on the Korean Peninsula. This is because it needs China's constructive role in the peace process of the Korean Peninsula.

Third, as the Biden administration put more weight on checking China, the declaration of the end of the Korean War pushed by the Moon Jae-in administration has been put on the back burner. The end-of-war declaration pushed by the South Korean government is opposed by the
U.S. government as it weakens the justification for the presence of U.S. troops in South Korea that is a strategic hub for checking China.

Fourth, the U.S. Biden administration is implementing a policy to actively intervene in human rights issues in China and North Korea, focusing on value diplomacy, and is tightening sanctions against those involved, worsening the atmosphere of dialogue for negotiations. South Korea needs quiet diplomacy on human rights issues to promote the peace process on the Korean Peninsula.

Fifth, the U.S. sanctions on North Korea are creating an atmosphere and cause for North Korea to provoke more militarily in the future, raising the need to maintain a military response posture. If North Korea crosses the red line set by the US, the security crisis on the Korean Peninsula could happen again. There is a need to strengthen South Korea's military capability to support the peace process on the Korean Peninsula due to increased U.S. strategic flexibility to regions such as the South China Sea and Taiwan. The case of Afghanistan reaffirmed that South Korea's independent operational capability to respond to North Korea's military provocations is a crucial factor for national security.

5. References

5.1. Journal articles


5.2. Additional references


6. Appendix

6.1. Authors contribution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial name</th>
<th>Contribution</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| SL           | -Set of concepts ☑
|              | -Design ☑
|              | -Getting results ☑
|              | -Analysis ☑
|              | -Make a significant contribution to collection ☑
|              | -Final approval of the paper ☑
|              | -Corresponding ☑
|              | -Play a decisive role in modification ☑
|              | -Significant contributions to concepts, designs, practices, analysis and interpretation of data ☑
|              | -Participants in Drafting and Revising Papers ☑
|              | -Someone who can explain all aspects of the paper ☑