

Geopolitical Implications of President Seretse Khama's 1976 State Visit to North Korea

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Abstract

Botswana and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) started diplomatic relations in 1974. Botswana severed its relations with North Korea in 2014. The United States (US) got worried when Botswana's first President, Seretse Khama (1966-1980), started diplomatic relations with North Korea's founding leader, Kim Il Sung (1948-1994). Kim was leading the fight against colonialism and imperialism globally. From 1956 to the 1980s, he supported the liberation struggles against colonialism in many African countries. Many African leaders looked to him for material and moral support. This paper focuses on the geopolitical implications of Seretse Khama's state visit to North Korea in 1976. It also comments on Botswana-North Korea relations during his presidency. Khama was a capitalist and liberal leader, who was pro-West and the US. In contrast, Kim was a communist trained in China and the Union of Soviet and Socialist Republic's repressive political systems.

Introduction and a Geopolitical Context

In August 1975, North Korea's first Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary (non-resident ambassador) to Botswana, and also his country's resident ambassador to Zambia, Jong Sung Gyu, presented his diplomatic credentials to President Seretse Khama (*Botswana Daily News* 5 August 1975, Figure 1). From 1974 until the 1990s, North Korea serviced Botswana through its embassy in Lusaka, Zambia. But it closed it in 1998 due to economic hardships (DuPre *et al.* 2016). Its embassy in Pretoria, South Africa, serviced Botswana until the relations were severed in 2014 (*Botswana Daily News* 31 March 2014). Botswana's embassy in China covered North Korea. Political and economic challenges may result in diplomatic relations not producing tangible economic benefits as our case study shows. In international law, Botswana-North Korea diplomatic relations ended on 19 February 2014.

Figure 1: North Korea's first non-resident ambassador to Botswana, Jong Sung Gyu, presenting his credentials to President Seretse Khama, August 1975.



Source: Courtesy of Daily News (5 August 1975)

Geopolitics is 'concerned with the interface of geography and politics and with their mutual interactions'

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(Parker 1985:1). The geopolitical environment under which Botswana became independent on 30 September 1966 influenced its foreign policy and engagement with the international community. This also applies to North Korea when it became independent on 9 September 1948. In 1966, the future looked bleak for Botswana. Just before independence, a British magazine, *Punch*, noted that it was either 'very brave or very foolish' for such a poor country to get independence (Makgala and Seabo 2017:305). However, diamond mining and a fairly well managed economy led to Botswana becoming an 'economic miracle'. Its second President, Sir Ketumile Masire (1980-1998), adopted *Punch's* phrase as a title for his memoirs: *Very Brave or Very Foolish? Memoirs of An African Democrat* (Masire 2006).

In 1966, Botswana's gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was a measly US\$83.7, making it the second lowest in the region (Statistics Botswana 9 May 2018). Her neighbours' GDP per capita was as follows: South Africa (US\$603.1), Zambia (US\$343), Zimbabwe (US\$281.5), Swaziland (191.6) and Lesotho (US\$59.5) (Statistics Botswana 9 May 2018). Nearly the entire population of Botswana was illiterate, and the economy was mainly agrarian-based (Masire 2006). Botswana was surrounded by hostile white-minority racist regimes in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe), South West Africa (Namibia), South Africa, Mozambique and Angola. Some of these regimes often violated its sovereignty in pursuit of freedom fighters, often called terrorists (Makgala and Seabo 2017; Kwante and Manatsha 2016). But with the wise leadership of Seretse Khama and later Masire, the liberal democratic Botswana survived amidst serious military and economic threats (Makgala and Seabo 2017).

It was in this context that Khama forged relations with communist North Korea to the discomfort and displeasure of the US (Botswana National Archives and Records Services (BNARS) OP/13/75, 6 May 1976; Grafeld 2006). Khama had set the tone of Botswana's foreign policy during his first address to the National Assembly on 6 October 1966, when he said that 'The foreign policy of my Government will also be dictated by reason and common sense rather than by emotion and sentiment' (Carter and Morgan 1980:15). He insisted that:

my Government will not accept aid from other countries which offer it with ulterior motives, and if any country which assists Botswana in any way whatsoever imagines that by so doing it will promote an interest which is not to the demonstrable benefit of the peoples of this country, it will be disappointed because my Government will frustrate its intention (Carter and Morgan 1980:14-15).

Khama's bold foreign policy position helped him manoeuvre his way out when faced with difficult foreign policy issues, such as the North Korean question. North Korea and Botswana established diplomatic relations on 27 December 1974 (Wertz *et al.* 2016:4). Then, the two Koreas were not yet members of the United Nations (UN). They became its members on 17 September 1991. Before 1991, each aggressively engaged in a global campaign to win support to be recognised as the sole and legitimate government in the Korean peninsula (Kalu and Kim 2012; Wertz *et al.* 2016). North Korea sought support from all and sundry. From 27 July to 13 August 1976, Khama, accompanied by Lady Khama, eldest son, Ian Khama (then a 23-year-old officer in Botswana's paramilitary Police Mobile Unit (PMU) and later President of Botswana, 2008-2018), a cabinet minister, top government officials and journalists, visited communist China and North Korea. They spent 14 days in China and four days in North Korea respectively (*Botswana Daily News* 27 and 28 July 1976 and 13 August 1976). State visits are critical in diplomatic relations: 'While the general aim is to develop and enhance bilateral relations, the focus may be on political issues, human rights, environmental protection, cultural contacts, or other themes' of global and national interests (Nitsch and Zurich 2007:1797). Seretse Khama's visit was not an exception.

Khama's historic state visits to China and North Korea, at the height of the Cold War between the Eastern and Western blocs, were considered pragmatic by his government. On 6 October 1966, Khama

had stated that ‘The foreign policy of my Government will be dictated by the interests of the peoples of Botswana’ (Carter and Morgan 1980:15). His Vice President (1966-1980) and later President, Masire, reiterated that ‘it was appropriate for us to recognise and cooperate with any country whenever we thought we might benefit from our relations’ (Masire 2006:300). Khama admired Kim’s *Juche* state ideology (self-reliance), which he likened to Botswana’s national principle of *ipelegeng/boipelego* (self-reliance/self-help) (BNARS OP 13/75, 23 August 1976). Khama’s entourage was warmly welcomed in North Korea and Kim praised Khama and Botswana (*Botswana Daily News* 13 August 1976).

Under Khama and Kim, Botswana-North Korea relations were cordial (BNARS OP 13/75, 23 August 1976; 30 September 1976 and 9 September 1977). North Korea needed friends who could vote in its favour at the UN General Assembly as it wanted to be recognised as the sole legitimate government in the Korean peninsula. It also wanted friends who could side with it in its condemnation of what it called aggression by the imperialist forces led by the US (*Botswana Daily News* 5 August 1975; Koh 1977:61-66; Wertz *et al.* 2016:4). Botswana was a poor country and it believed that many friends would aid it economically by buying its diamonds, and providing loans and grants (Manatsha and Malebang 2016). Botswana also had no army until 1977 and it needed many friends who could condemn, in the strongest possible terms, any military and economic aggression by its powerful neighbours. It also needed friends to send its students abroad for further studies (Carter and Morgan 1980:15; Masire 2006:300; Kwante and Manatsha 2016:91-94).

This paper examines the geopolitical implications of Khama’s state visit to North Korea in 1976. It also comments on Botswana-North Korea diplomatic relations during his presidency. It argues that the relations were mainly informed by geopolitical considerations. Khama’s administration called its approach ‘pragmatism’, and argued that ‘realism’ suggested strong ideological leanings. Khama and Masire insisted that they were not ideologues (Carter and Morgan 1980; Masire 2006). But Khama’s approach was that of a realist politician. Scholars of realism see the state as the ‘principal actor in international relations’ (Evans and Newnham 1998:465), and contend that national interests are central in state relations (Pham 2008). They insist that the main purpose of ‘statecraft is national survival in a hostile environment’ (Evans and Newnham 1998:465). A state pursues and protects its national interests at all costs. According to realists, states ‘cooperation is possible but only when it serves the national interest’ (Evans and Newnham 1998:466), as this paper shows.

Forging relations, without exclusion, was Botswana’s survival strategy. Khama’s successor, Masire, insisted that ‘our Four National Principles- Democracy, Development, Unity and Self-Reliance-laid strong emphasis on economic goals, not just political ones’ (Masire 2006:146). This allowed the pursuance of economic interests with all countries despite ideological differences (Kwante and Manatsha 2016). The next section historicises North Korea-Africa relations. It is followed by a look at the personalities of Kim and Khama. Khama’s visit to North Korea is analysed, so is the US response to Botswana-North Korea relations. The conclusion summarises the discussion.

North Korea-Africa Relations in Historical Perspective

Japan occupied Korea in 1905 and colonised it until 1945. Japan got defeated in 1945 by the Allied Powers and Korea was occupied by the US (in the south) and the Soviet Union (in the north). In 1948, two separate governments were formed, and each claimed the sole legitimacy in the Korean peninsula (Koh 1977). The impasse led to the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950. The US sided with the ‘democrats’ in the south, while the Soviet Union supported the communists in the north. The UN, led by the US, was drawn into the war. About twenty UN members sent soldiers to defend the ‘democrats’, while the Soviet Union and China sided with the communists. With no winner, an armistice was signed on 27 July 1953, dividing Korea along the 38th parallel (Koh 1977). Since then, North Korea is a closer ally of China and the Soviet

Union, while South Korea is aligned to the US and the capitalist bloc.

From 1948 to 1991, the two Koreas tried hard to be recognised as the sole legitimate government in the Korean peninsula. They used various tactics to win global support. Africa became part of this global crusade (Kalu and Kim 2012). North Korea adopted a realist approach and worked 'with any country, regardless of its political ideology, as long as it recognised [it] as the legitimate government of Korea' (DuPre *et al.* 2016:9). Initially, South Korea refused diplomatic relations with any country which recognised North Korea as an independent state. North Korea's *Juche* state ideology stressed autonomy, independence and self-reliance (Armstrong 2009). North Korea considers itself a 'Third World' country that can influence its peers through *Juche*. For many countries which battled colonialism, 'North Korea's apparent success at self-reliant development—held a powerful allure' (Armstrong 2009:3). Kim Il Sung once said '[W]e should actively support the Asian, African and Latin America peoples struggling to throw off the imperialist yoke, and strengthen solidarity with them' (Armstrong 2009:5). In 1964, North Korea hosted the Asian Economic Conference attended by delegates from 34 Asia-Pacific and African countries. It was at this conference that Kim Il Sung boldly proclaimed *Juche* 'for the entire Third World' (Armstrong 2009:6). In the 1950s and 1960s, the North Korean economy was stronger than that of its rival, South Korea (Kim *et al.* 2007:573; Kimura nd). North Korea was also militarily powerful.

In April 1955, the inaugural Afro-Asian Conference was held at Bandung, Indonesia. Twenty-three Asian and six African countries attended to discuss decolonisation, economic-cooperation, self-determination and peace. Except for the Gold Coast (Ghana), all the five African countries, which attended were independent: Egypt (1922), Ethiopia (1941), Liberia (1847), Libya (1951) and Sudan (1955). The participants issued a declaration stating that 'colonialism in all its manifestations is an evil which should speedily be brought to an end' (Lumumba-Kasongo 2015:7). Both Koreas were not invited because 'in Asia at large [and in the Korean peninsula in particular], the political situation was still very tense, volatile and extremely complex at the time of the conference' (Lumumba-Kasongo 2015:7). Nonetheless, North Korea endorsed the conference's resolutions by actively supporting the decolonisation struggle. Its media had also positively covered the conference, which laid the foundation for the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Belgrade in 1961 (Armstrong 2009). In 1975, North Korea was admitted to the NAM, while South Korea was rejected (Wertz *et al.* 2016) since it was seen as aligned to the domineering US (Kalu and Kim 2012).

In 1956, North Korea sent economic assistance to the Egyptian government during the Suez crisis. The first non-Marxist liberation movement that it forged full relations with was the Algerian National Liberation Front (FNL) in September 1958. It supplied the FNL with military hardware and provided technical support until the FNL's victory four years later. In October 1958, North Korea started diplomatic relations with Guinea (Armstrong 2009:10). In 1961, North Korea and Mali issued a joint communiqué on 'Afro-Asian solidarity against US imperialism' (Armstrong 2009:6). Most African countries gained independence in the 1960s and 1970s, and joined the UN. Most openly supported North Korea and shunned South Korea each time the UN discussed the Korean question (Kalu and Kim 2012; Wertz *et al.* 2016:3).

In the 1980s, North Korea had full diplomatic relations with 40 African countries compared to South Korea's 28. It presented South Korea as America's stooge. Most African leaders saw North Korea as a 'trustworthy partner... compared to South Korea's capitalist leaning and alliance with the US' (Kalu and Kim 2012:284). For instance, influential African leaders, who espoused Marxist-Leninist and Socialist ideologies and some liberals, embraced Kim Il Sung's administration to varying degrees (Koh 1977). North Korea did not always support African liberation movements based on ideological imperatives, but its national interests (Armstrong 2009:11; Kasprzyk and Stott 2016). Realists contend that national interests are central in state relations (Pham 2008). In the 1970s, North Korea supported the brutal regime of Mengistu Miriam of Ethiopia (Armstrong 2009:12). In Uganda, it initially supported the notorious

dictator, Idi Amin, but later became a close ally of President Yoweri Museveni. In 1982, Libya became the only country, apart from the Soviet Union and China, to sign a Mutual Defence Treaty with North Korea (Armstrong 2009). In 1980, President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe, who came into power in 1980, visited North Korea. Thereafter, he became a close ally of the North Korean leaders.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, North Korea offered free scholarships to African students to study at its universities. It insisted on the teaching of its *Juche* ideology to these students in addition to their majors. North Korean students also studied in some African countries such as Ethiopia (Armstrong 2009:13). In the 1970s, *Juche* Study Groups were formed across Africa with the help of the North Korean embassies in the continent. Some still exist in Benin, Ethiopia, Nigeria, Tanzania and Uganda (DuPre *et al.* 2016). In the late 1970s, North Korea's global image crumbled due to its economic woes (Koh 1977). This was a big blow given that in 1976 it had received state visits from five heads of states: these were of Mali, Pakistan, Madagascar, Benin and Botswana. These state visits came just before the NAM summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka, from 19 to 13 August 1976. At the NAM summit, heads of state, including Khama, endorsed North Korea's political desire to reunify Korea (Koh 1977).

Seretse Khama and Kim Il Sung: Contrasting Personalities

Khama was born a *Kgosi* (chief) of the *Bangwato* chieftom in Botswana. He studied Law at Oxford University in England in the mid-1940s, and married a British woman in 1948. The marriage was opposed by some of his tribesmen and the neighbouring racist governments in South Africa and Rhodesia. A self-declared non-racialist and liberal, Khama refused to divorce his wife and opted for a life in exile in 1951, which the UK government lifted in 1956 (Parsons *et al.* 1995). He then returned to Botswana as an 'ordinary' citizen. In February 1962, Khama teamed up with those who shared his values and formed the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP). The BDP preached non-racialism, free-market economic policies, respect for property rights and pluralistic politics (Masire 2006). Its rival, the radical Pan-Africanist leaning Botswana Peoples Party (BPP), formed in 1960, preached anti-colonial and anti-West slogans (Edge 1996), and revered the North Korean leader too. In 1965, the BDP won the first general elections because it appealed to all social classes across the country. The rural masses shunned the BPP because its radical Marxist-Leninist politics was alien to them. For instance, it denounced the chieftaincy, *bogosi*, seeing it as a form of oppression. Its radical position on the revered *bogosi* displeased many traditionalists, who aligned with the moderate BDP (Edge 1996). Khama endorsed a multi-party democracy.

Born in 1912, in today's North Korea, Kim was a complete opposite of Khama. He did not complete his schooling. At 17-years-old, he joined a communist youth organisation in Manchuria, and was arrested and jailed from 1929 to 1930. Upon his release, he joined a Korean guerrilla resistance movement against the Japanese occupation (Ji 2001). He first fought alongside the Chinese communists, and together with Mao Zedong/Mao Tse-Tung (Chairman Mao) and Deng Xiaoping, 'formed a relationship of brotherhood' (Ji 2001:388). Mao would later describe his relationship with Kim/North Korea 'as close as lips and teeth' (Wertz *et al.* 2016:3). Kim later switched sides and embraced the Soviet Union, who helped him purge 'his peers one after another' (Ji 2001:388). In 1948, Kim assumed power and ruled his country like a personal property. He abhorred divergent views and ruthlessly crushed his opponents (Hunter 1999:13). The Soviet Union influenced his foreign policy and domestic politics (Szalontai 2005). Under the Kim's dynasty, 'North Korean society is very much a cult society' (Hunter 1999:13). Kim endorsed a one-party political system and stifled freedoms. He rejected free market economic principles by sticking to his *Juche*. Despite the fall of the Soviet Union and global decline of the communist/socialist ideology in the early 1990s, Kim remained defiant and a sworn enemy of the US until his death in 1994.

President Seretse Khama's State Visit to North Korea, August 1976

Botswana forged diplomatic relations with both Korea. Khama was inspired by Presidents Nyerere (Tanzania) and Kaunda (Zambia) to forge relations with North Korea and China. In 1974, Botswana severed diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan), which claimed sovereign status from the Peoples Republic of China (PRC), and embraced the PRC (Parsons *et al.* 1995; Edge 1996). Yet, Botswana was very cautious not to annoy the US and Great Britain in its relations with communist nations. Masire explains that at the beginning, Great Britain was 'our only source of financial and technical assistance. Therefore, our relationships with the British government were extremely important.... The Americans were helpful from the outset' (Masire 2006:298). In 1972, the US embraced the PRC conforming to One-China policy. Like many of his peers, Seretse openly associated with African projects, which had a strong Chinese involvement (Carter and Morgan 1980).

During his four days state visit to North Korea in August 1976, Khama was accompanied by the First Lady, Lady Khama, Ian Khama, Daniel Kwelagobe (Minister for Public Broadcasting and Information), Festus Mogae (Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning and later Botswana's President, 1998-2008), Simon Hirschfield (Botswana Police Commissioner), among others (*Botswana Daily News* 11, 13 and 27 August 1976). Kim and Khama had a cordial relationship. Kim sent a special Korean jet to fetch Khama and his entourage from Peking, China, to Pyongyang –North Korea's capital city. They were warmly welcomed in Pyongyang as the Botswana government-owned *Daily News* reported on their arrival at Pyongyang Airport on 9 August 1976 as:

eloquently symbolised by the warmly rousing and red carpet welcome given by hundreds of thousands of Koreans in the Pyongyang Airport. President Kim Il Sung and his wife, Madame Kim Sung, warmly shook hands with the President and lady Khama immediately after alighting from a special Korean plane which carried them from Peking. [Khama] and his delegation also received warm handshakes from the high cadres of the [Korean Workers'] party and government members of North Korea as well as from members of the diplomatic corps and other dignitaries who were at the airport. The President's welcome was thunderous amid warm and jubilant shouts, drumming, chanting and blowing that echoed the airport (*Daily News* 11 August 1976).

Figure 2: Khama and Kim Il Sung at a state banquet held at the Cultural Palace of the Peoples in Pyongyang, August 1976



Source: Courtesy of *Daily News* (27 August 1976)

Khama's visit to North Korea came a week before the NAM summit in Colombo, Sri Lanka,

held from 16 to 19 August 1976. From North Korea, he travelled to Colombo to attend the summit. Kim had organised several activities throughout the country to celebrate Khama's historic visit. For instance, Pyongyang's streets were decorated with the official portraits of Kim and Khama and the national flags of both countries. The North Korean local newspapers showed deep interest in Khama and Botswana. *Rodong Sinmun*, a newspaper owned by the Workers' Party of Korea, the only political party, profiled Khama. In its editorial, headlined 'Envoy of Botswana, People Coming with Friendly Sentiments Towards our People', it praised Khama's visit:

the visit to our country by Sir Seretse Khama will be a momentous event in further consolidating and developing the relations of friendship and cooperation forged between the peoples of Korea and Botswana. It is a very auspicious event for our people and will mark a new milestone in expanding and strengthening mutual support and solidarity between our people in the struggle for accelerating the socialist construction in the northern half of the republic and achieving the country's independence and peaceful re-unification (*Botswana Daily News* 13 August 1976).

Rodong Sinmun's editorial also praised Botswana's four national principles: democracy, development, self-reliance and unity. It credited Khama's government for firmly upholding these values. It also commended Botswana's membership to the NAM, seeing it as Khama's resolve to fight 'imperialism, colonialism and racism, and for the complete liberation of Africa' (*Botswana Daily News* 13 August 1976). At the state banquet organised for him, Khama spoke on the Korean question. He also talked about the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. His speech praised Kim's 'dynamic leadership, great vision and self-dedication to the cause of human liberty and freedom' (*Botswana Daily News* 13 August 1976). He also told Kim 'that all peace-loving people admire his country and people for the great victories which have characterised the period of social reconstruction following the imperialist aggression' (*Botswana Daily News* 13 August 1976).

For his part, Kim restated his position on the Korean re-unification. He thanked Botswana for supporting his country's demands to have all foreign forces withdrawn from the Korean peninsula at the 29th and 30th sessions of the UN General Assembly. He said this was 'a striking evidence that Sir Seretse bravely maintains a just and principled stand in defiance of any threat or pressure' (*Botswana Daily News* 13 August 1976). He told Khama that the situation in his country was 'strained as ever before.' He also lamented that the US 'has prepared itself fully for large-scale invasion against the northern half of our republic and a critical situation has been created before us in which war may break out any moment' (*Daily News* 13 August 1976). Kim was being prophetic because on 18 August 1976, two American soldiers were axed to death by Kim's soldiers near/in the demilitarised zone (a border that divides the Koreas) over a minor quarrel (Koh 1977). This nearly sparked an all-out war, but Kim diffused the situation by assuring the US that no similar incident will ever recur (Koh 1977). This happened during the NAM summit, a week after Kim and Khama had met.

Although Kim's actions sounded reconciliatory, he had firmly told Khama that his forces shall 'resolutely counter with war and annihilate the aggressors to the last man' (*Botswana Daily News* 13 August 1976). Khama had also told the North Koreans that 'Botswana would like to see the Korean people given the chance to determine the destiny of their country without interference from any quarter' (Carter and Morgan 1980:247). He was indirectly telling the US to leave North Korea alone. Geopolitically, Khama's state visit and the NAM conference were very important to North Korea. The conference endorsed its wish to reunify Korea and Khama backed this (BNARS OP/13/75, 23 August 1976; Koh 1977). In 1976 alone, North Korea received visits from five heads of state. State visits may not be followed by tangible agreements and economic relations, but are regarded as critical in diplomacy.

The US was unhappy about Kim-Khama relations. Botswana's Minister of External Affairs, Archie Mogwe, expressed this during a meeting with North Korea's non-resident ambassador to Botswana, Jong Sung Gyu, on 6 May 1976: 'We can assure you the question of Korea comes up frequently when we are with the Americans. We always remind them of it. We say with Angola we see eye to eye but not on Korea' (BNARS OP/13/75, 6 May 1976). As if Khama was mocking the South Koreans, he had told the North Koreans, during his visit, that 'The externally defended country, as history has shown, more often becomes a vassal of its defender thus losing its independence and its national pride' (Carter and Morgan 1980:246). This was a very significant statement in the context of the Korean question.

Khama Interaction with Ordinary North Koreans

Whilst in North Korea, Khama addressed a mass rally in Pyongyang on 12 August 1976. He praised Kim's *Juche* ideology, and noted that it is similar to Botswana's *Ipelegeng/Boipelego* principle. He hinted that the North Koreans' struggle against colonialism had similarities with Africa's struggle against the same. Khama told his audience that:

As the *Juche* ideology clearly suggests, the people's power is inexhaustible. The broad masses are the foundation on which the future of my country is based. This has been our experience in Botswana where we are encouraging our people, the majority of whom live in the rural areas, to participate actively in the shaping of the future of our country in the spirit of self-reliance. We will no doubt derive a great of inspiration from the *Juche* idea much as it focuses on those aspects of national life with which every developing country is preoccupied (Carter and Morgan 1980:246-247).

While in Korea, Khama met with Korean farmers, ordinary people, pupils and workers in factories. In one of the photos (Figure 3), Khama, Kim, their wives and Daniel Kwelagobe are seated with a group of nine to 12 year-olds pupils. This is cultural diplomacy, and it was not peculiar to Kim's North Korea. Khama was impressed by what he saw in the Korean countryside (BNARS OP/13/75, 23 August 1976). He had informed a mass rally in Pyongyang that he was impressed by the industriousness of the peasants who tilled the land (Carter and Morgan 1980:246). One event which certainly left an indelible mark on Khama and his team was when a group of pupils did a rendition of a popular Botswana song, '*Dintlenyane tsa Botswana*' ('The Beauty of Botswana') (Figure 3), that was composed by Riecks Morake, a former broadcaster with *Radio Botswana* (*Daily News* 27 August 1976).

Figure 3: Korean pupils' rendition of 'Dintlanyane tsa Botswana'



Source: Daily News (27 August 1976)

Khama, who loved dancing, is seen in another photo (Figure 4) dancing alongside a Korean Cooperative Farm Revolutionary Workers Group band. His dancing theatrics, care-free attitude and jovialness shocked most Koreans, who were/are used to 'repetitive and cultic reverence of their own "great leader", Kim Il Sung' (Parsons *et al.* 1995:334).

Figure 4: Khama dancing alongside a Korean Cooperative Farm Revolutionary Workers Group



Source: Courtesy of Daily News (27 August 1976)

How President Khama's Entourage Viewed the North Koreans

The Koreans did their best to warmly welcome Khama and his entourage, but Khama's team found them 'stiff' and 'humourless' compared to the Chinese (Parsons *at al.* 1995:334-335). Khama and his entourage had stayed in China for 14 days and only four days in North Korea. It is difficult to imagine that within

a mere four days, Kim's intensely reclusive society would have freely displayed its humour too (Hunter 1999:13). Worse, unlike the Chinese, the North Koreans were deeply engaged in a bitter territorial and political power struggle with South Korea and the US. 'North Korean society is very much a cult society' (Hunter 1999:13), and it is not surprising that Khama's entourage found it tense compared to the Chinese.

Everywhere they visited, Khama's entourage saw Kim's portraits hung on the walls, a common feature among many communist leaders and dictators. Some of the portraits showed him encircled by adoring and attentive plebeians. Khama's entourage would point to the portraits and teasingly ask their Korean guides and interpreters: "What is that?" They would instinctively respond: "That is our honoured and respected leader giving some on-the-spot advice" (Parsons *et al.* 1995:335). Ironically, the Koreans found Khama and his entourage weird too. For instance, the way Khama informally related with his juniors shocked them. One evening, Khama's team played billiards and the contest became intensely heated leading to wild cheers and jeers. Unused to such disorderliness, their Korean interpreter went to inspect only to find 'His Excellency the President of the Republic of Botswana stretched out full-length along the table to the cheers of his compatriots, attempting to deal with an awkward shot into a corner pocket' (Parsons *et al.* 1995:334). In his entire life, the Korean interpreter had never seen anything like that. Confused, he asked: 'What is all this?' Mockingly, Simon Hirschfield responded by saying: 'That is our honoured and respected leader giving some on-the-spot advice' (Parsons, *et al.* 1995:334). Khama's team exploded into laughter. This further shocked the interpreter, who 'was still more horrified when Seretse was allowed to lose the game to his juniors' (Parsons *et al.* 1995:334). Nonetheless Khama was impressed by Kim's leadership. Upon his return, he wrote to Kim thanking him for the hospitality:

It is with great pleasure that I write to you to express my deep-felt gratitude to you, and through you, to the government and people of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea for the hospitality which was accorded us during our brief visit to your country. The friendly spirit with which we were received was heart-warming and symbolic of the very close relations which have always existed between our two countries (BNARS OP/13/75, 23 August 1976).

The US Position on Botswana-North Korea Diplomatic Relations, 1974-1980

The US was irked by Botswana's decision to forge relations with communist North Korea and China. It considered Botswana an ally. Botswana's decision to embrace North Korea and China coincided with the intensification of the liberation struggle in Southern Africa. The presence of the Cubans and Soviets in Angola aroused the socialist-communist euphoria in the region to the irritation of the US. The main opposition political parties in Botswana, the BPP and the Botswana National Front (BNF), formed in 1965, were close friends of the Soviets and Chinese (Edge 1996; Kwante and Manatsha 2016). Masire notes that 'we were concerned that [the] Chinese might be disruptive' (Masire 2006:300). This partly explains Khama's pragmatic decision to dump Taiwan and embrace China in 1974. North Korea supported the liberation struggle in the region as argued. Its *Juche* was hated by the capitalist bloc (Armstrong 2009), but was popular across Africa, including in Zimbabwe, Botswana's neighbour. This may explain why the US was alarmed by Khama-Kim relations.

In 2006, Margaret P. Grafeld, the Director of the Office of Information Programs and Services in the Department of State, wrote about a declassified 1976 US State Department cable in which the Americans demonstrated concern about Botswana's decision to forge relations with North Korea and China:

There has been some increase in communist information and cultural activities in Botswana. There has been an increase in film showing by the resident PRC [People's Republic of China] Embassy since its establishment about a year ago [1975]. Also the North Koreans have increased their film showing effort [in Gaborone] during their infrequent visits to Botswana (Grafeld 2006).

In 1977, the Soviet Union invited members of all political parties in Botswana to attend a meeting in Cuba. The flight tickets it issued to the BNF representatives were to take them directly to Cuba, while those issued to the BDP would take a longer route. The government of Botswana suspected some political chicanery, and it 'suspended the passports of some opposition members so they could not make the trip to Cuba' (Masire 2006:119). The North Korean ambassador and government officials infrequently visited Botswana (BNARS OP/13/75, 6 May 1976). This does not imply that the two countries had no cordial diplomatic relations. North Korea had no embassy in Botswana, and, by the late 1970s, it had started experiencing economic hardships (Koh 1977). As part of cultural diplomacy, North Korea, like many countries, uses festivals, films, literature and language to spread its ideologies. This is soft power: 'the ability to affect others to obtain the outcomes one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payment. A country's soft power rests on its resources of culture, values, and policies' (Nye Jr 2008:94). Across Africa, North Korea had established *Juche* Study Groups to spread its ideology. In Botswana, the US State Department had noted that the North Korean cultural diplomacy was weak compared to the Chinese (Grafeld 2006).

Across Africa, the North Koreans trained police officers, elite armies and specialised forces, and were paid by African governments (Wertz *et al.* 2016). Botswana also engaged them to train its police officers on unarmed combat at the Gaborone Police Training Centre in the early 1980s. They trained them *taekwondo* (martial arts) (Grafeld 2006; Franklin 1996). *Taekwondo* teaches self-defence tactics and discipline. Botswana terminated the North Koreans' contracts for inciting junior officers against their superiors, and trying to convince them to demand more democratic police reforms (Franklin 1996:157). The US was worried about the North Koreans' activities in the Botswana police force. Its embassy in Gaborone contacted Ian Khama, who was a paramilitary police officer before joining the Botswana Defence Force (BDF) at its formation in 1977. He told the US embassy that 'he has received an invitation to visit North Korea. This may take place about May or June next year [1977]' (Grafeld 2006). Nonetheless, he appeared unimpressed by the Koreans, and did not go. After the formation of the BDF, Botswana initially struggled to secure weapons from the US and the UK due to stringent legislative and parliamentary processes. It looked to the East, and China was readily available (Merafhe 2015). In 1984, North Korea shipped a consignment of weapons to Botswana as a gift to the people of Botswana (OP/13/75, 29 August 1984).

The US State Department report on North Korea-Botswana relations noted that the 'North Koreans [were] working to assure support particularly of the Korean issue at the UN by gaining broader public acceptance of North Korea itself and its politics' (Grafeld 2006). In July 1974, before the establishment of diplomatic relations, North Korea sent a delegation to Botswana. It met with the Minister of External Affairs, B. Kgari, and requested Botswana's support to North Korea 'at all fronts of international intercourse' (OP/13/75, 9 July 1974 1984). In August 1975, five North Korean government officials, led by the Chairperson of the Education Committee, visited Botswana and stayed for five days. The aim was to strengthen bilateral relations (*Daily News* 20 August 1975). North Korea had worked very hard to canvass support from African countries whenever the Korean question was discussed at the UN General assembly as noted. Naturally, her solidarity with the 'Third World' appealed to most African

leaders, including Seretse Khama. The heads of state at the NAM summit in Colombo endorsed North Korea's demands for the immediate cessation of 'the imperialist war provocation manoeuvres in South Korea, removal of nuclear weapons and foreign troops from South Korea, and replacement of the Korean Armistice Agreement by a peace agreement' (Koh 1977:64). The endorsement worried the US to the core. Generally, the US considered Botswana as facing less threat from communist forces:

Communist influence has not increased per se over the government of Botswana... The Government of Botswana has been willing to consider 'Third World' positions particularly in the OAU [Organisation of African Unity] FORA. Korea is a case in point... Events in Angola have tended to strengthen pro-Soviet feeling at least among Botswana student population. A specific example is: A student in the private secondary school recently told [his teachers and peers]... that because of the events in Angola the male students are 'on a Pro-Soviet kick' (Grafeld 2006).

In November 1974, the North Korean embassy in Zambia began sending unsolicited biographies of Kim Il Sung to numerous people in Botswana, within and outside the government, including politicians. Philip Matante, the leader of the BPP, was the first to receive it (*Daily News* 14 November 1974). This was part of soft power/cultural diplomacy. Seretse Khama's death, in 1980, coincided with North Korea's global decline owing to its economic woes. Using desperate measures to deal with this, the North Korean government used its diplomats to engage in illicit activities, such as smuggling of cigarettes, drugs and wildlife products worldwide (Koh 1977; Armstrong 2009; DuPre *et al.* 2016). On the contrary, South Korea was doing well economically such that the 'Third World' countries, including Botswana, turned to it for technical aid and loans (Kalu and Kim 2012). In international law, Botswana-North Korea diplomatic relations existed until 2014. Botswana severed the relations following the United Nations Human Rights Council Commission (UNHRC) of Inquiry report in February 2014, which detailed grave human rights violations in North Korea under the leadership of the defiant Kim Jong Un (in power since 2011) (UNHRC 2014).

Conclusion

Khama's state visit to North Korea had significant geopolitical implications. Khama-Kim's relationship has been analysed using a realist approach. The two leaders were sharply contrasts. Khama was an avowed liberalist who embraced capitalism, while Kim was a self-confessed communist. The two, however, realised that their countries needed each other. North Korea was in a global political crusade to canvass support in its bid to be recognised as the sole legitimate government in the Korean peninsula. Its survival was in the balance as it faced an aggressive and hostile forces led by the US.

Botswana was a very poor country, which also faced military and economic threats from its hostile neighbours. Its survival largely depended on the international community, friends and a pragmatic foreign policy. It had no army until 1977, a year after Khama's trip to China and North Korea. His trip to North Korea worried the US, but pleased North Korea. Immediately after this trip, Khama attended the NAM summit in Colombo, which endorsed its support for Kim. Using pragmatic foreign policy, Khama was able to maintain good relations with both Kim and the US. In 2014, Khama's son, Ian, and Kim's grandson, Kim Jong Un, severed what their fathers started.

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