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## China and North Korea: From Comrades-In-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length

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**CHINA AND NORTH KOREA:  
FROM COMRADES-IN-ARMS TO ALLIES AT ARM'S LENGTH**

**Andrew Scobell**

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## FOREWORD

The relationship between China and North Korea surely ranks as one of world's strangest. While on the surface, it might not seem surprising to have a formal military alliance between two communist neighbors that has endured more than 4 decades. After all, their armed forces fought shoulder-to-shoulder in the Korean War 50 years ago. However, Beijing's ties to Pyongyang have weakened considerably over time, and China now has much better and stronger relations with the free market democracy of South Korea than it does with the totalitarian, centrally planned economy of North Korea. In many ways Pyongyang has become a Cold War relic, strategic liability, and monumental headache for Beijing. Nevertheless, the China-North Korea alliance remains formally in effect, and Beijing continues to provide vital supplies of food and fuel to the brutal and repressive Pyongyang regime.

Since the ongoing nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, which emerged in October 2002, the United States and other countries have pinned high hopes on Chinese efforts to moderate and reason with North Korea. Beijing's initiative to bring Pyongyang to the table in the so-called Six-Party Talks and host them seems to substantiate these hopes. Yet, as Dr. Andrew Scobell points out in this monograph, it would be unrealistic to raise one's expectations over what China might accomplish *vis-à-vis* North Korea. Beijing plays a useful and important role on the Korean Peninsula, but in the final analysis, Scobell argues that there are significant limitations on China's influence both in terms of what actions Beijing would be prepared to take and what impact this pressure can have. If this analysis is correct, then North Korea is unlikely to mend its ways anytime soon.

The Strategic Studies Institute is pleased to offer a current analysis of this long-term relationship and its effect on the United States and the region.

DOUGLAS C. LOVELACE, JR.  
Director  
Strategic Studies Institute

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ANDREW SCOBELL is Associate Research Professor at the Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, and Adjunct Professor of Political Science at Dickinson College. Born and raised in Hong Kong, he joined the Strategic Studies Institute in 1999 and is the Institute's specialist on Asia-Pacific security. Prior to his current position, he taught at the University of Louisville, Kentucky, and Rutgers University, New Jersey. Dr. Scobell is the author of *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March* (Cambridge University Press, 2003), ten monographs and reports, and some twenty articles in such journals as *Armed Forces and Society*, *Asian Survey*, *China Quarterly*, *Comparative Politics*, *Current History*, and *Political Science Quarterly*. Dr. Scobell holds a Ph.D. in Political Science from Columbia University.

## SUMMARY

The China-North Korea relationship remains the most enduring, uninterrupted bilateral friendship for both the People's Republic of China (PRC) and Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). This brother-in-arms relationship was solidified early during the Korean War. Sharing a common border and ideology, both China and North Korea confront the frustration of divided nations. And while, on the one hand, each views the United States as hostile, Beijing and Pyongyang, on the other hand, appear to crave better relations with Washington.

Arguably, each clings to the other because they have nowhere else to turn—each believes that close cooperation with the other is vital to its own national security. No doubt each country would prefer to depend less on the other. China has a major stake in ensuring the continued survival of the North Korean regime and may be willing to go to considerable lengths to guarantee this. North Korea, meanwhile, seems destined to remain heavily dependent on China for morale support and material assistance.

Despite this type of relationship between Pyongyang and Beijing, there are significant limits to China's influence on North Korea—in part due to China's unwillingness to apply hard pressure and in part because, even if China did apply such pressure, North Korea might not respond in the desired manner.

China was spurred into action in early 2003 by heightened fears that North Korea might be the next target of U.S. military action after Iraq. China undertook an unprecedented diplomatic initiative to bring Washington and Pyongyang to the same table in Beijing thrice in the space of 10 months: three-party talks in April 2003, and then six-party talks in August 2003 and February 2004. China deserves considerable credit for these significant accomplishments.

Nevertheless, China may have reached the limits of its influence on North Korea in terms of what actions the United States can expect from Beijing and what impact Chinese influence is likely to have on Pyongyang. The most the United States probably can expect is for China to push on to continue the six-party talks.

Recommendations include:

- Don't expect too much from Beijing.
- Don't underestimate China's commitment to protect its own national interests.
- Don't force China to choose sides.
- Don't expect much movement from Pyongyang.
- North Korean distrust of outsiders may be almost insurmountable.
- Don't count on China to dissuade North Korea from going nuclear.

# **CHINA AND NORTH KOREA: FROM COMRADES-IN-ARMS TO ALLIES AT ARM'S LENGTH**

## **Introduction.**

The relationship between the People's Republic of China (PRC) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) remains the most enduring, uninterrupted bilateral friendship for both countries. This monograph examines the significance of the relationship from Beijing's perspective. First the author considers the logic of China's ties with North Korea, and then surveys the various dimensions of this multifaceted relationship. Next, he analyzes China's evolving views of North Korea and assesses its activist initiative in 2003 seeking to resolve the nuclear issue. Then he discusses Beijing's preferences for the future of the Korean peninsula, summarizes conclusions, and offers the implications for U.S. national security.

## **The Logic of the Relationship.**

From Beijing's perspective, the logic of the relationship between the PRC and DPRK is tied intimately to the two states' more than half-century of history of battlefield cooperation and military alliance, shared socialist divided nation ideology, the geopolitical balance of power both in Northeast Asia and on the Korean Peninsula, and ambivalent overlapping views of the United States.

The brother-in-arms relationship between China and North Korea was solidified early during the Korean War. Beijing's decision to enter the war in late 1950 was not taken lightly. While China's paramount leader Mao Zedong clearly was predisposed to intervene on the Korean Peninsula, many leaders had serious reservations, and others strongly opposed intervention. The consensus of several careful scholarly accounts is that "a high-level policy" debate took place in Beijing.<sup>1</sup> Mao's forceful personality won out, and the first units of the Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV) crossed the Yalu River on the night of October 19, 1950. China paid a tremendous cost as the result of this decision in terms of casualties and war-related expenses. By one official Chinese estimate, the CPV's "combat



losses were more than 360,000 (including 130,000 wounded) and noncombat losses were more than 380,000.”<sup>2</sup> Moreover, while the hot phase of the Korean War lasted 3 years, Chinese forces remained on the peninsula for an additional 5 years (until 1958), many assisting in national reconstruction projects.

This de facto alliance was formalized in July 1961 when Beijing and Pyongyang signed a Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance. This agreement committed one country to come to the aid of the other if attacked.<sup>3</sup>

### **Legitimizing Ideology.**

As fraternal socialist party-states, Beijing and Pyongyang share an ideological affinity. Moreover, both have weathered the collapse of communism of 1989-91 in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As two of the handful of the world’s “Last Leninists,” the continued existence and health of the other is considerably important. This is not simply a matter of China having a friendly (or at least nonthreatening) neighbor, but it is also linked to the regime’s political legitimacy. If Leninist regimes continue to be toppled, it will be much more difficult for the shrinking remainder to shore up their own legitimacy. Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought are crucial to the formal justification of the Chinese Communist Party’s continued right to rule, and Party leaders cannot renounce this mantle.

The frustration of divided nations is another ideological dimension that both Beijing and Pyongyang confront. In each case, national unification constitutes a core regime goal. Indeed, national unification should be considered a central tenet of each regime’s ideology, and for both China and North Korea, it is appropriate to speak of “divided nation ideologies.” Neither Beijing nor Pyongyang can afford formally to renounce or even downgrade this priority without fear of undermining its legitimacy. Significantly, neither Hu Jintao nor Kim Jong Il has seen fit to renounce the use of force to achieve unification with Taiwan or South Korea, respectively.

## Geopolitics.

Basic geography and modern history combine to make the Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia of major importance to Beijing. China and North Korea share a common 850 mile-long border. China recalls that Korea was the route by which imperial Japan launched its invasion of the Chinese mainland in the early 20th century. China's sense of vulnerability vis-à-vis the Korean Peninsula was reinforced by swift U.S. intervention in the Korean War, especially in late 1950 when General Douglas MacArthur's forces crossed the 38th Parallel and approached the Chinese border. Chinese leaders seemed to view the Korean Peninsula as a key bulwark. For the past 5 decades, the PRC has viewed the DPRK as a crucial buffer state.<sup>4</sup> Jiang Zemin reportedly told his North Korean hosts in September 2001, during his 3-day visit to Pyongyang, that because China is "close to the Korean Peninsula, [it] is always concerned about the development of the situation on the peninsula and has consistently worked to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula."<sup>5</sup>

For China, in balance-of-power terms, Korea figures prominently in two sets of configurations: a larger Northeast Asian one, and a smaller Korean Peninsula one. On the peninsula the power configuration is between two bilateral military alliances: the PRC and DPRK balanced against the United States and ROK. In the region the power configuration is a more grand strategic one whereby Beijing seeks to balance with Pyongyang and as much as possible with Moscow against the U.S. alliances with Tokyo and Seoul. Both configurations present enormous challenges to and headaches for China.

The United States in particular poses dilemmas for both the PRC and the DPRK. While, on the one hand, each views the United States as hostile, on the other, Beijing and Pyongyang appear to crave better relations with Washington. In 2004 both perceive the United States as threatening them: China sees this more in terms of a subversive plot to gradually undermine communist rule through a strategy of "peaceful evolution" and contain China by gradual encirclement, while North Korea sees this in terms of more direct military menace by U.S. forces positioned in Northeast Asia.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, Beijing and Pyongyang, somewhat paradoxically at the same time, desire closer ties with Washington. China wants this to reap the full benefits of greater integration into the world economic system. North Korea wants it to lessen the military threat and, relatedly, weaken and eventually break the U.S.-South Korean alliance. Pyongyang also wants to extract monetary aid from the United States and international financial institutions.<sup>7</sup>

## **DIMENSIONS OF THE RELATIONSHIP**

The bilateral relationship between Beijing and Pyongyang is multidimensional and one-sided. China makes all the sacrifices—providing crucial political and diplomatic backing, essential economic assistance, and limited military cooperation.

### **Politics/Diplomacy.**

Politically, relations are cordial on the surface, but ties between Beijing and Pyongyang have been strained since China's rapprochement with Seoul in the late 1980s and early 1990s. China sent a large delegation of athletes to South Korea for the 1986 Asian Games and followed, 2 years later, by attending the Seoul Olympics, increasing trade investment links with South Korea, and then formally establishing full diplomatic ties in 1992. All of this angered North Korea and resulted in cooler relations. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of Soviet economic and military aid, Pyongyang was forced to adopt a pragmatic and moderate approach to Beijing and exhibit a more conciliatory approach to Seoul.

China encouraged North Korea to moderate its militarist stance and reform its economy. Chinese efforts, for example, seemed critical to persuading North Korea to join the United Nations simultaneously with South Korea in 1991.<sup>8</sup> Beijing appears to be having some success, and bilateral relations warmed with two visits within 8 months by Pyongyang's leader Kim Jong Il to China. These visits appeared to signal a softening of North Korea's hardline and increased interest in the Chinese experience with economic reform. The first visit, in May 2000, was made on the eve of the historic summit between

the leaders of the two Koreas held in the North Korean capital. The second visit, in January 2001, seemed to presage more steps to implement economic reform in the DPRK. However, viewed from the vantage point of early 2004, the results have been disappointing. The great promise of the June 2000 inter-Korean summit has not materialized, and a reciprocal visit by the North Korean leader to Seoul has yet to occur. Economic reform in the North appears, at best, to be sputtering and, at worst, virtually nonexistent.

Tensions reportedly emerged in the late 1990s over either unmet North Korean demands for Chinese aid or Chinese pressure on North Korea to reform. According to one account, in early 1996 Pyongyang asked for a substantial amount of grain and Beijing responded by offering only a tenth of this. Kim Jong Il was reportedly incensed and threatened to “play the Taiwan card” unless China was forthcoming on an even broader set of demands. Beijing regretted that it was unable to meet all these requests but did offer a more comprehensive package.<sup>9</sup> Pyongyang apparently was mollified. According to another account, a team of Chinese agricultural experts, who visited North Korea in the spring of 1997 under the auspices of the UN Development Program, recommended that their hosts adopt Chinese style reforms without delay. Pyongyang responded by calling Deng Xiaoping a traitor to socialism. Beijing took umbrage and threatened to halt its food aid. Pyongyang responded by initiating talks with Taiwan on the subject of opening direct air links between Taipei and Pyongyang. After the Chinese dropped its threat, the North Koreans broke off talks.<sup>10</sup> Significantly, but perhaps unrelatedly, Beijing also permitted Pyongyang to open a consulate in the newly acquired Special Administrative Region of Hong Kong. Although it is impossible to verify these reports, they indicate the existence of strains in the relationship. So far, these tensions have proved manageable.<sup>11</sup>

Nevertheless, relations between the PRC and DPRK appear to have warmed since 1999.<sup>12</sup> Efforts on both sides to be more cordial are evident in President Jiang Zemin’s September 2001 visit to Pyongyang—China’s first head of state visit to North Korea in a decade (the last was by PRC President Yang Shangkun in 1992) and the first since Beijing normalized relations with Seoul. The

term “friendly” now regularly is employed by top officials from both sides to characterize their relationship. Both Jiang Zemin and President Kim Yong Nam of the Supreme People’s Assembly used the adjective in their discussions during Jiang’s September 2001 Pyongyang visit.<sup>13</sup>

But the PRC-DPRK relationship continues to blow hot and cold. While Kim Jong Il reportedly is keen to have Chinese President Hu Jintao visit Pyongyang in the near future and has issued an invitation, no high-level Chinese leader was invited to attend the DPRK’s 55th annual national celebration in early September 2003. The PRC was represented by the President of the Chinese People’s Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, Chen Haosu. While media reports have suggested this was an intentional snub by China, it actually appears to be a snub by North Korea who did not invite any senior Chinese leader.<sup>14</sup> In any event, it probably suited Beijing not to have any senior leader photographed next to Kim Jong Il on such a nominally festive occasion.

## **Economics.**

North Korea is essentially an economic basket case—the result of wrong-headed Stalinist policies, bad weather, and the cut off of Soviet aid in 1991.<sup>15</sup> Estimates are that since 1990 the DPRK has registered negative economic growth. Since 1988 Pyongyang’s foreign trade has shrunk and has suffered an overall trade deficit every year since 1985. It has yet to recover from the sudden drop in two-way trade with the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), which stood at an estimated U.S.\$2.56 billion in 1990 and then a year later plunged to about U.S.\$365 million. Indeed, since 1995 two-way trade with Russia has remained well under U.S.\$100 million annually.<sup>16</sup>

China has failed to take the place of the Soviet Union for North Korea, although Beijing has become Pyongyang’s most important trading partner and economic patron. The PRC currently provides considerable aid. Two-way trade with China constitutes about one-third of North Korea’s entire trade, although this amount constitutes only about 3 percent of China’s trade with South Korea and approximately 1 percent of China’s total trade volume. Prior

to the Agreed Framework of 1994, shipments of oil and of Western aid and since the suspension of oil deliveries by the United States in December 2002, Beijing was thought to be providing about three-quarters of Pyongyang's petroleum and food imports.<sup>17</sup> Pyongyang's imports from China since 1985 have hovered between approximately U.S.\$329 million and U.S.\$600 million annually. Meanwhile, the DPRK's exports to the PRC have fluctuated wildly—a reflection of Pyongyang's erratic economic performance—from a low in 1999 of U.S.\$41.7 million to a high of U.S.\$297 million in 1993.<sup>18</sup> North Korea's trade deficits with China are sizeable and growing: estimated at U.S.\$4.5 billion between 1990 and 2002 (Pyongyang has imported U.S.\$6.1 billion from Beijing but only exported U.S.\$1.7 billion), with an average annual bilateral deficit since 1995 of more than U.S.\$350 million.<sup>19</sup> Smuggling and unofficial trade across the PRC-DPRK border seem commonplace, and this commerce may be equal to the value of at least half of the "official" figure.<sup>20</sup>

Illegal population flows are also common occurrences along the China-North Korea border. As many as 300,000 North Korean refugees currently live a perilous existence in China.<sup>21</sup> Some are temporary visitors—one member of a family earning desperately needed cash or food to take back to other family members remaining in North Korea; others are seeking more permanent sanctuary in China. A significant number of the refugees are children—either orphaned or abandoned by parents at their wits' end. Of those children who do remain north of the Yalu River, some are adopted by childless Chinese couples. A sizeable number of the refugees appear to be women, and many are either forced (or sold by their families) into prostitution or marriage to poor Manchurian peasants unable to find Chinese wives.<sup>22</sup> Other North Koreans provide a cheap source of factory labor for Chinese businesses in Northeast China. They tend to be exploited by factory managers who pay them extremely low wages and provide terrible living and working conditions because they know these unfortunates are powerless illegal aliens subject to immediate deportation from China.<sup>23</sup>

Many Chinese analysts stress the significance of multiple steps North Korea has taken in an apparent effort to make economic reforms.<sup>24</sup> In mid-2002, for example, Pyongyang lifted domestic price

controls and promised wage increases, but the result was a bout of severe inflation without any improvement in people's lives or an amelioration of the country's disastrous economic predicament. Conditions may not be as dire as they were in the mid-1990s, but malnutrition is still widespread and aid from foreign donors has declined.<sup>25</sup>

Then, in late September 2002, North Korea announced the appointment of Yang Bin, a flamboyant China-based entrepreneur and naturalized Dutch citizen, to run the Sinuiju foreign trade and investment zone on the border, overriding prior consultation with China. Beijing had made its opposition clear—reportedly telling Pyongyang that Yang was a criminal. When North Korea ignored its neighbor's wishes, China made its displeasure known—first detaining Yang in October 2002, and charging him with bribery, fraud, and illegally appropriating land the following month—effectively freezing the project.<sup>26</sup> Yang was sentenced to 18 years in prison for bribery, tax evasion, and illegal use of land in July 2003. His judicial appeal in September 2003 (shown on Chinese television) was rejected. While Yang's case should also be viewed as part of a larger crackdown on corruption, it was also undoubtedly aimed at registering China's displeasure with North Korea.<sup>27</sup>

## **Military.**

Relations between the Korean People's Army (KPA) and the People's Liberation Army (PLA) have declined precipitously in terms of the frequency, level, and substance since the days of the Korean War and, in particular, since the death of Kim Il Sung in 1994. While regular military-to-military visits continue, the close cooperation seems to have given way to symbolism and ceremony. Many of the PLA figures visiting North Korea in recent years are described as being on "goodwill delegations."<sup>28</sup> Beijing has simultaneously, over the past decade, in line with its "two Koreas" policy, developed noteworthy defense ties with Seoul: high level visits, functional exchanges, and research cooperation.<sup>29</sup> A key indication of this was the visit by the South Korean defense minister to China in August 1999, and his Chinese counterpart reciprocated the following January. Efforts to repair military-to-military ties with

North Korea are evident by PRC Defense Minister Chi Haotian's visit to Pyongyang in September 2000 to commemorate the 50th anniversary of China's intervention in the Korean War. More recently, in mid-August 2003, General Xu Caihou, Director of the General Political Department and vice chair of the CMC, journeyed to Pyongyang. While some Chinese analysts insisted this was a "routine visit," others have labeled it as far from an ordinary series of office calls. Xu reportedly met not only with Marshal Jo Myong Rok, vice chairman of the DRPK National Defense Council (and director of the KPA's GPD), but also with none other than Kim Jong Il. The Chinese used Xu's visit (along with other civilian visits) to gauge the climate in Pyongyang, while the North Koreans requested closer cooperation and exchanges between the KPA and PLA.<sup>30</sup>

Reportedly, China has provided some degree of technical assistance for North Korean satellite and missile programs.<sup>31</sup> Moreover, according to media reports U.S. intelligence believes that Beijing may have been providing indirect assistance to Pyongyang's nuclear program until very recently.<sup>32</sup> In response to these reports, since mid-2002 China has issued two sets of stricter export control regulations on the export of weapons of mass destruction (WMD)-related technologies and, on the heels of North Korea's October nuclear confession to the United States, tightened restrictions on an existing third set of regulations.<sup>33</sup>

## **THE CREEPING NUCLEAR CRISIS**

The current creeping nuclear crisis is the second such event on the Korean Peninsula in the space of a decade. The latest nuclear crisis emerged in October 2002 when DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Ju confessed to visiting U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia James Kelly that his country did have an ongoing nuclear weapons program. The first nuclear crisis ignited in March 1993 when North Korea announced its intention to withdraw from the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Negotiations between Pyongyang and Washington reached an impasse, and hostilities in 1994 were only averted by an 11th-hour deal. The outcome was the Agreed Framework of October 1994 whereby the United States agreed to help North Korea build two light water nuclear reactors



in exchange for Pyongyang scrapping its own effort to build graphite nuclear reactors which were thought to be more easily used to produce a weaponized nuclear capability. This accord led to the establishment of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) with the participation of South Korea, Japan, and the European Union to oversee the project.

The current crisis continues as of early 2004. The United States has adopted a low-keyed approach to the current situation. Responding to the revelation, President George W. Bush insisted on December 31, 2002, that the North Korean situation constituted a “diplomatic showdown” rather than a “military showdown” and hoped it would be resolved “peacefully.”<sup>34</sup> In the administration’s view, in contrast to the confrontation with Baghdad, handling Pyongyang required a political and multilateral approach. While there has been no escalation of conflict, at the same time there has been no resolution resulting in a “creeping” crisis.

### **The Limits of Chinese Influence.**

In the face of North Korean posturing and insistence on direct bilateral talks with the United States, Washington continued to insist that multilateral talks with Pyongyang involving other concerned capitals such as Seoul, Beijing, Tokyo and Moscow were the only way forward. The Bush administration pressed countries, notably China, to exert influence on North Korea. The assumptions were first that Beijing had significant influence on Pyongyang and was prepared to use it; and, second, that Beijing’s goals regarding North Korea were the same or at least similar to those of Washington. These assumptions are questionable. Indeed, while China probably has more influence on North Korea than any other country, this influence actually seems rather limited, and China’s priorities regarding North Korea have tended to be quite different to those of the United States.

The world may have witnessed the furthest extent of Beijing’s influence on Pyongyang in 2003 and early 2004. China facilitated, hosted, and participated in the April 23-25, 2003, talks between Washington and Pyongyang, and six-party talks on August 27-29,

2003, and February 25-27, 2004. The six parties are China, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. China deserves considerable credit not only for persuading North Korea to be more flexible on the format of the talks, but also for getting the North Koreans actually to show up. Pyongyang had insisted for months that it would only talk to Washington one-on-one, and Washington had been just as adamant that any talks must be multilateral. In mid-January 2003 China offered to host talks between North Korea and the United States. Beijing persisted in prodding and coaxing Pyongyang to be more open on its approach to dialogue with Washington. The result was that North Korea announced in mid-April 2003 that it was willing to consider various formats for the talks and shortly thereafter participated in three-party talks held in Beijing.

### **A Unique Confluence of Conditions.**

The outcome of Chinese pressure in this instance is due to what is very likely a unique set of conditions. It is important to put China's diplomatic efforts in 2003 in full perspective—Beijing's sustained efforts to bring Washington and Pyongyang to the same table are unprecedented. China has never before undertaken such an activist diplomatic initiative solely on its own initiative. Beijing literally stuck its neck out: by Chinese standards of excessive caution, it took an enormously bold and risky step well outside of its normal comfort zone. It could be argued that China had little to lose because even if this attempt to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis had failed miserably, Beijing only would have been widely applauded for its efforts. Nevertheless, China's efforts are nothing short of highly unusual. The closest Beijing has come to this kind of self-initiated diplomatic activism is in its leading role in the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in June 2001. But in this earlier case, Chinese efforts entailed bringing together neighboring countries that enjoyed good relations without a legacy of hostility and with a recent track record of confidence and trust-building measures including landmark steps at demilitarization. By contrast, in the case of North Korea, the primary actors had a long history of

hostilities and antagonisms, and substantial mutual mistrust and suspicion. Certainly, some analysts stress that in recent years China has become a more confident international actor, more willing to participate in both multilateral and bilateral settings.<sup>35</sup>

Nevertheless, prior to January 2003, China had displayed no interest in taking an activist and leading role on the Korean crisis. What brought on this sudden burst of high energy activity? The answer seems to lie in the unique confluence of three conditions. The first was the impending and then actual Iraq war. This had a significant and sobering impact on both China and North Korea. Both regimes were extremely concerned about what the United States would do next. The result was a sudden sense of urgency on the part of Beijing and Pyongyang to remove any excuse for the United States to use military power on the Korean Peninsula. China's perceived sense of crisis can be gauged by Beijing's reported decision in early 2003 to establish a leading small group on North Korea.<sup>36</sup>

Second, China had thought more seriously about the strategic consequences of a nuclearized North Korea and began to recognize the disturbing ramifications of this.<sup>37</sup> Some Chinese security analysts grasped that Beijing's hierarchy of priorities vis-à-vis Pyongyang might be illusory. That is, China's number one priority of keeping the regime afloat might be in doubt if North Korea went nuclear. A nuclearized Pyongyang could mean the end of the regime because this development could cause the United States to respond militarily and oust the regime. Moreover, if not, Pyongyang might even at some point engage in nuclear blackmail against China. Indeed, one Chinese analyst has raised this as a possibility.<sup>38</sup> At the very least North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons might trigger a "chain reaction" or "domino effect" [*duominnuo gupai xiaogai*] in Northeast Asia: Japan and perhaps South Korea might also go nuclear (rarely mentioned but certainly a concern to China is the possibility that Taiwan might reconsider its non-nuclear stance).<sup>39</sup> Moreover, unmentioned by Chinese analysts but a logical second order effect would be heightened U.S. enthusiasm for ballistic missile defense.<sup>40</sup>

Third, China was also beginning to realize the extent of the economic cost of continued tensions on the peninsula. This is not

only measured in terms of China's significant largesse to prop up North Korea's collapsed economy, but also in terms of the potential damage to China's economy of prolonged instability on the peninsula and the fallout on South Korea's economic performance.<sup>41</sup> The impact of the protracted Pyongyang nuclear crisis was being felt in Seoul, and Beijing feared this might impinge on South Korea's burgeoning economic relationship with China.

The Iraq war was almost certainly the most important condition, and the one that motivated both China and North Korea to act. But the further away from the end of major combat operations we get, declared by President Bush on May 1, 2003, the more the "shock and awe" value of the highly successful military victory in Operation IRAQI FREEDOM recedes. By the autumn of 2003, the sense of urgency in addressing the North Korean nuclear crisis that China exhibited in the spring and summer seemed to have evaporated. Chinese analysts in civilian and military research institutes in Beijing with whom the author held discussions in September 2003 seemed—with one notable exception—generally comfortable with a very gradual approach to resolving the crises. The consensus was that there was no reason to rush matters: the North Korean nuclear problem would take a long time to resolve, and patience was essential.<sup>42</sup> Negative economic impact and nuclear fallout from the creeping crisis, by themselves, are probably not sufficient to prompt a degree of alarm necessary for Beijing to rouse itself to exert direct influence on Pyongyang.

## **DIFFERENT PRIORITIES REGARDING NORTH KOREA**

President Bush has noted that the U.S. goal of a nuclear free peninsula is a "position shared by the Chinese." Speaking in April 2003, he emphasized that the United States and China have "common interests" on North Korea.<sup>43</sup> However, China's priorities have been considerably different from those of the United States: Beijing's has been to stabilize and strengthen the Pyongyang regime (i.e., prevent its collapse), while many in Washington desire the end of the regime.<sup>44</sup> However, since at least January 10, 2003, when North Korea declared that it was withdrawing from the NPT, China appears to have viewed the nuclear issue with increasing concern. Several

months earlier, on October 25, 2002, then PRC President Jiang Zemin, speaking at a joint press conference with President Bush, confessed that China was “completely in the dark” about North Korea’s nuclear program. China’s leaders and spokesmen repeatedly stress their country’s desire for a non-nuclear, peaceful, and stable peninsula and a negotiated solution to the crisis.<sup>45</sup> More recently China has also stressed that the “reasonable security concerns of the DPRK should be addressed.”<sup>46</sup> It seems very clear that China’s number one priority remains stability. According to a researcher at China’s National Defense University, “Preserving peace and stability on the peninsula is China’s number one and most important strategic interest there.”<sup>47</sup> For Beijing, this means the survival of the Pyongyang regime, and while preventing a nuclearized North Korea remains important, it is less vital for China.<sup>48</sup> Many analysts and journalists have concluded or simply assumed that Beijing’s primary concern (or at least a very high priority) is to prevent North Korea from going nuclear.<sup>49</sup> This is understandable given that putatively the crisis is nuclear (certainly in the view of the United States), and that Pyongyang’s words and deeds about going nuclear have spurred China to action. This mistaken perception of China’s nuclear concerns is reinforced by the readiness of Chinese academics to discuss in media outlets their fears about North Korea and proliferation.<sup>50</sup> But this should not be confused with China’s bottom line—stability and peace on the peninsula.<sup>51</sup> It was not the specter of North Korea’s entry into the nuclear club per se that mobilized China to action in early 2003, but rather the prospect of imminent U.S. military action prompted by Pyongyang’s course of action.<sup>52</sup> However, judging from writings by and interviews with Chinese analysts, most of whom are affiliated with Chinese government think tanks, Beijing appears able to live with a nuclear North Korea (although it would certainly prefer not to).<sup>53</sup>

## **North Korea.**

Many in Beijing would like to see the Pyongyang regime survive indefinitely, and China is doing what it can to prop up North Korea.<sup>54</sup> China would prefer to see this fraternal socialist state

endure rather than witness another loss in the handful of surviving Leninist regimes. Musings by Chinese academics about desirability of “regime change” in Pyongyang should not be equated with such transformed thinking by China’s top leaders.<sup>55</sup> The remarks of an unnamed Chinese analyst, speaking after the conclusion of the Three-Party Talks in April 2003, are very important: “A lot of us [academics] are telling the government that we . . . need to support regime change [in North Korea]. . . . But the government is afraid to change.”<sup>56</sup> Beijing fears that the process of Pyongyang’s collapse would be certainly unmanageable, probably destabilizing, and possibly cataclysmic, and the outcome would be a Northeast Asian power configuration not in China’s favor. Nevertheless, China desires a more stable “domesticated” North Korea, preferably without nukes.<sup>57</sup>

Thus Beijing viewed the defusing of the 1993-94 nuclear crisis with considerable relief and satisfaction.<sup>58</sup> The signing of the Agreed Framework heralded the establishment of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), through which Western countries agreed to bankroll and build two light water nuclear reactors for North Korea and provide the north with oil until the first reactor was completed. While Pyongyang can continue to stave off collapse without instituting thoroughgoing reform, Beijing believes that the current status quo is simply not sustainable indefinitely. At the same time, however, China desires gradual (not “dramatic”) change.<sup>59</sup> Therefore China seeks to nurture the emergence of a reform-minded North Korea that would resuscitate its economy, draw down its massive military, and initiate threat reduction and confidence-building measures on the peninsula.<sup>60</sup> How realistic this goal is and how far Beijing is willing to pursue it remains unclear.<sup>61</sup>

In short, North Korea presents China with a major dilemma: the status quo on the Korean Peninsula is problematic and fragile, not to mention unsustainable. But at the same time Chinese elites see change (resulting from direct external pressure) as worrisome because it is quite likely to unfold very rapidly, be highly destabilizing, probably tumultuous, and perhaps even cataclysmic. Although Chinese analysts and leaders seem largely convinced that the outcome of a unified Korea would be in China’s favor, it is *how* this end state might be achieved that alarms China. This is manifest

in the analyses of widely quoted academics such as Shi Yinong of People's University. Some of these scholars suggest that China could benefit in the long term from the collapse of North Korea.<sup>62</sup> Indeed this line of thinking is nothing new. However, it is the short and medium term phases of a collapse scenario that China's elites are most worried about: they fear that this will play out to China's detriment.

### **Status Quo Plus.**

Beijing appears to believe the best way to ensure Pyongyang's survival is to shape a kinder, gentler, more reform-minded North Korea, and for years China has actively encouraged North Korea to adopt Chinese-style market reforms. This, China's most preferred outcome, might be dubbed "status quo plus." In other words, no sudden major changes in North Korea are desired.

Beijing is not willing to push too hard for reforms or more moderate international behavior for fear of losing all influence in Pyongyang and/or being shown to have little or no influence.<sup>63</sup> First, if China pushes very hard, negative consequences could result for China: North Korea might simply sever ties with China or even become hostile to China. On the other hand Beijing is secretly worried that China's pressure may have no impact—that Pyongyang will simply ignore Beijing's efforts, and China will look peripheral, if not inconsequential, to the North Korea situation. Chinese analysts frequently admit that Beijing's influence is limited and lament the challenges of dealing with Pyongyang—a proud and difficult regime that does not readily listen to, let alone heed, advice.<sup>64</sup>

In fact, Pyongyang still views Beijing with a significant amount of suspicion although China probably has more influence with North Korea than any other country because of its history of steadfast morale support and material assistance.<sup>65</sup> For both China and North Korea, their relationship in the past decade has been close but uncomfortable (as noted earlier in this monograph). The Kim Jong Il regime does not want to depend heavily on any one country and would almost certainly prefer not to rely on China. As one Chinese academic observed: the North Koreans ". . . believe we [Chinese]

betrayed them. We embraced the U.S. and the enemy in the South.”<sup>66</sup> To put it mildly, China’s motives are suspect in the eyes of many North Koreans.

Finally, in early 2003, Beijing appeared to realize that some kind of action was needed. But after the latest round of U.S.-North Korean talks in August, what follow-up steps might China be prepared to take vis-à-vis North Korea? At most, Beijing will continue to encourage Pyongyang and Washington to keep talking. This is because China’s thinking on North Korea continues to be shaped by three major factors: a “lingering buffer mentality,” a conservative and risk averse Chinese mindset, and a tendency to scapegoat the United States. All three predispose Beijing to shy away from bold new initiatives. Moreover, now that the major combat phase of Operation IRAQI FREEDOM is over, and both U.S. forces and the Bush administration’s attention seem to be focused on rebuilding Iraq, China perceives the likelihood of U.S. military action against North Korea in the near future as unlikely. In short, as of late 2003, Beijing no longer felt a sense of urgency, and China remains focused once again at efforts to prop up Pyongyang.<sup>67</sup>

## LINGERING BUFFER MENTALITY

China has long tended to view North Korea as a “buffer” between China and the military forces of the United States and its ally, South Korea. Since July 1953 Pyongyang has served as a *cordon sanitaire*. This made sense in the 1950s and 1960s and even in the 1970s, but by the 1980s and 1990s, the “buffer” was becoming an anachronism. China now has good relations with South Korea and cordial ties with the United States, and no longer sees either country as a direct military threat.

Yet, the buffer mentality lingers in Beijing. One Chinese analyst observed the persistence of a “very powerful . . . [and] enduring” mentality “forged by war” and noted that it was very difficult for people accustomed to this to envision proactive change of the status quo.<sup>68</sup> Korea is still seen as a sensitive border region: the route of Japan’s military invasion of China in the early 20th century and possible invasion by the United States in late 1950. Chinese leaders



and analysts continue to refer to the relationship between China and North Korea as being one of “lips and teeth”: if the Korean “lips” are gone, then China’s “teeth” will get cold. Some still cling to this conception.

### **From Lips to Lipstick.**

Today, however, many in Beijing appear to view Pyongyang as “lipstick” (rather than “lips”) to China’s teeth and lips. This lipstick is red, increasingly expensive, of questionable quality, but looks good to a cursory glance.

The red color of the lipstick signifies that the relationship has an important ideological component. Both China and North Korea are fraternal socialist party-states—two of only a handful of Leninist regimes in the world today. The continued existence and health of the other is important to each and not simply because they are neighbors. The issue of domestic political legitimacy for both communist regimes is exacerbated if this group of countries shrinks further.

The lipstick is expensive, that is, it exerts a significant economic drag on Beijing. China is North Korea’s most important trading partner, and as much as half of all Pyongyang’s imports come from Beijing. China provides vital stocks of food and fuel to its needy neighbor. The economic relationship is very one-sided as North Korea exports very little to China. In contrast to this aid donor relationship with the north, China has a thriving and prosperous economic relationship with South Korea. While China’s annual one-way trade with North Korea is estimated at hundreds of millions in U.S. dollars, China does tens of billions of dollars in two-way trade with South Korea. Moreover, China is the beneficiary of billions of dollars in foreign direct investment from South Korea.

The lipstick is now of dubious quality: that is, for at least a decade, it has not been working as effectively as advertised and has created significant headaches for Beijing. North Korea historically has offered China a kind of security blanket. North Korean leader Kim Il Sung had good personal relationships with successive generations of China’s top leaders: Mao Zedong, until the latter’s death in 1976, and

then with Deng Xiaoping, until Kim's own death in 1994. However, relations have not been as good between senior Chinese leaders and Kim's son, Kim Jong Il, who succeeded his father as Pyongyang's top leader. Nevertheless, Beijing appears to have rationalized that while the younger Kim might be a difficult son of a gun to deal with, he can at least be considered China's son of a gun. In short, China has influence over a truculent but known quantity. Pyongyang's actions in early 2003 have only provided Beijing cause for greater frustration and distress. On January 10, North Korea announced its withdrawal from the NPT; on February 18, North Korea threatened to void the 1953 Korean Armistice Agreement if economic sanctions were imposed; and then on March 2, 2003, North Korean fighters intercepted a U.S. surveillance aircraft flying in international airspace over the Sea of Japan.

Although China and North Korea are technically allies, bound by a 1961 treaty to come to each other's aid in the event of war, the defense relationship might be dubbed a "virtual alliance" because since the mid-1990s Beijing has made clear to Pyongyang that China will not come to North Korea's aid if Kim Jong Il gets himself in hot water. Privately and sometimes publicly, Chinese officials and analysts make this point.<sup>69</sup>

Nevertheless, this is the only formal bilateral military alliance China has—one sealed in blood by fighting shoulder-to-shoulder in the Korean War—and Beijing has not seen fit to abrogate it officially. The war ended with an armistice that celebrated its 50th anniversary on July 27, 2003. Many Chinese are proud of their country's role in the Korean War and resist to any suggestion that the sacrifices of almost three million Chinese soldiers who served, including hundreds of thousands killed and a comparable number wounded, might have been in vain.<sup>70</sup> Moreover, Chinese are angered by how North Korea downplays or outright ignores China's essential contribution to the war. A Chinese visitor to North Korea was devastated to find no acknowledgement or reference to China's massive wartime contribution in a DPRK museum at Panmunjom.<sup>71</sup> It is no exaggeration to say that many Chinese view the North Koreans as ingrates.

Speaking in 1997, Premier Li Peng reportedly told a group of Americans "North Korea is neither an ally of the PRC nor an enemy,

but merely a neighboring country.”<sup>72</sup> His words can be taken as reflecting Chinese frustration with Pyongyang, but they cannot be taken as an accurate indication of Beijing’s views. Clearly North Korea is not “merely” another neighbor; arguably China sees North Korea as its most important neighbor, simply because it is so fragile and has the real and imminent potential to cause Beijing problems of such severe scope and intensity. In short, Pyongyang may not be easily classified as a friend or foe of Beijing, but its fate is crucially important to China’s leaders.

The lipstick looks good at a cursory glance; that is, it appears to have geopolitical benefits for China, but upon more careful examination, it actually might be construed as more of a liability. On the positive side, the Korean issue puts China in demand: Beijing is viewed as having a key role to play on the peninsula. It is an issue upon which China can cooperate with the United States and makes China look like a responsible and influential major power.<sup>73</sup> But North Korea now also looms as a serious liability. For one thing, the negative side is that “the emperor may have little or no clothes.” In short, the world might discover that China has virtually no influence in North Korea after all. In such a situation where China is unable (or unwilling) to deliver results vis-à-vis North Korea, relations with the United States might be adversely affected, and at the very least China might lose face internationally.<sup>74</sup> Indeed, Beijing has influence on Pyongyang, but this is almost certainly “soft” influence that is limited and largely “potential” rather than “hard” and “actual” because only two outcomes are likely. If China chooses to apply direct pressure to North Korea, it is quite possible that Pyongyang will not be influenced (at least in the desired manner). In fact, Chinese analysts regularly state that while China has influence this is limited, the kind that can only be exerted softly and subtly via suggestions or encouragement behind the scenes instead of blunt and direct admonishments in public view.<sup>75</sup>

## **RISK AVERSE MINDSET**

China likely will never exert substantial hard influence because it fears the result—only a negative outcome is likely: either no

result or a bad result. No result would mean North Korea does nothing except to pull away from China. China would then lose any possibility of influence. If this happens, China might also gain a dangerous and unpredictable foe on its doorstep. A bad result of China's pressure would be the possible collapse of North Korea, the emergence of a more paranoid and militant regime, or result in war on the peninsula—Beijing's worst nightmare.

China is risk averse under the best of circumstances, but this is especially true in 2003. In its actions over the past year or so, China has stepped about as far outside of its comfort zone on Korea as it is likely to go. The predominant tendency has been for Beijing to keep a low profile and adhere to what Samuel Kim has dubbed the "maxi-mini principle," whereby China seeks to maximize the benefits of a policy initiative, while at the same time minimizing the costs it expends. Beijing's current foreign policy priority is to maintain peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific, and its domestic priority is to ensure continued economic growth and prosperity in China.<sup>76</sup> This risk averse tendency was most pronounced in 2003 because of the leadership succession underway in China.<sup>77</sup>

A transition is currently in progress from the so-called third generation with Jiang Zemin (aged 78) at the "core" to the fourth generation spearheaded by Hu Jintao (aged 62). This change began with the 16th Congress of the Chinese Communist Party in November 2002 and continued with the 10th National People's Congress (NPC) held in March 2003, but the succession is incomplete because the new slate of leaders remains as yet largely untested, and Jiang remains paramount leader retaining the crucial post of chair on the powerful Central Military Commission. But by the 10th NPC, Hu had apparently assumed responsibility for China's foreign affairs, and it was reportedly Hu who launched the major Chinese diplomatic initiative to bring the United States and North Korea together for talks. The Chinese leader reportedly was alarmed that U.S. military action against North Korea might be imminent in the aftermath of Iraq and believed Beijing had to act promptly to avert war on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>78</sup>

Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) proved enough of a challenge for China's leaders in 2003, and this experience does not dispose them to tackle another tricky issue if they can avoid it.

China strongly desires peace on its periphery and good relations with neighboring states and the major powers, especially the United States. Beijing is averse to any new policy initiative that would put these desirables at risk. China's six-party talks efforts (as mentioned earlier), while bold by Chinese standards, carried few risks for China: it actually has little, if any, downside. But additional steps likely will be seen as extremely risky by Beijing and not justified unless the creeping crisis dramatically worsens.

What pressure can China exert on North Korea? China could publicly criticize North Korea in the United Nations, but this would only make North Korea more militant and paranoid, and destroy any influence Beijing has over Pyongyang. The same would be true if China were formally to revoke the 1961 treaty of alliance. Beijing also appears unwilling to cooperate vigorously in the Proliferation Security Initiative launched by the United States, fearing that measures such as blockading and interdicting North Korean exports to check proliferation of WMD would only exacerbate the problem. The Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs said in mid-August that these steps "could make a bad situation worse."<sup>79</sup> China could also impose sanctions: withhold food and fuel, for example. However, China adamantly opposes the implementation of sanctions. In Beijing's view, this would make Pyongyang more desperate and probably lead to regime collapse.<sup>80</sup>

China could throw open its border to North Korean refugees, but this act might very well hasten the collapse of regime. Beijing is highly unlikely to do this, fearing the consequences both in terms of the scale of humanitarian crisis China would face, not to mention being at odds with Beijing's consuming priority: Pyongyang's survival. Since the early 1990s, Beijing has faced an unwanted humanitarian problem, with hundreds of thousands of North Korean refugees seeking safe haven in China. And China was embarrassed by a high profile wave of at least 130 North Korean asylum seekers, during spring and summer 2002, trying to break into diplomatic missions in Beijing and Shenyang.<sup>81</sup> A larger inflow of refugees from North Korea would not only threaten to swamp Northeast China but also increase international pressure on Beijing to permit access to the UN

High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) eager to provide humanitarian assistance. China has resisted efforts by the UNHCR or NGOs to gain access to the individuals, insisting they are economic, rather than political, refugees. Beijing is extremely reluctant and/or averse to taking any of these steps because it perceives only negative consequences for China.<sup>82</sup>

### **Pipeline Shutoffs and PLA Deployments.**

Journalists and analysts have pointed to two episodes in 2003 as proof that China is willing and capable of applying pressure on North Korea. Perhaps the most frequently cited incident as evidence is an oil pipeline shutoff for 3 days in late February 2003 allegedly for “technical reasons.” There is considerable speculation that this was a deliberate act by China intended to apply pressure to North Korea. The author’s assessment is that the shutdown **really** was due to technical problems, but it was definitely to Beijing’s advantage to let both Pyongyang and Washington believe this was done expressly to apply substantive pressure to North Korea. When Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with North Korea Foreign Minister Paek Nam Sun in Beijing in mid-February, he warned Pyongyang to moderate its behavior. Coming on the heels of this meeting, the North Koreans concluded the pipeline shutoff was the application of Chinese pressure, but China claimed this was not the case. The effect was to help convince Pyongyang to sit down with Washington 2 months later. Meanwhile, Beijing can encourage Washington to believe that China is heeding U.S. calls to apply pressure to North Korea and win credit for merely doing what it had to do anyway.

It is impossible to verify the real reason behind the temporary shutdown of the pipeline, but the belief that China’s action was carried out to exert pressure on North Korea is enormously appealing to many observers. This is because, first, the shutdown appeared to get results. Second, this interpretation offers a glimmer of hope to many observers desperate to believe there is a peaceful way to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis. Third, the pipeline shutoff seems to be consistent with an assumed Chinese preference

for subtle tactics. Whatever observers would like to believe, given the environment in Beijing on the eve of the 10th NPC with the difficulty of getting a high-level consensus decision to go forward with such a move, it is improbable that the shut off was a conscious pressure tactic.

The second episode concerns the deployment of PLA units close to the border with North Korea. Several Hong Kong newspapers reported in mid-2003 that Beijing had moved as many as 150,000 soldiers to signal its displeasure with Pyongyang over its efforts to develop nuclear weapons and to pressure North Korea to continue to participate in the six-party talks.<sup>83</sup> Also noted but receiving less attention was that the move may have been aimed at dealing with a deteriorating law and order situation in the border region. Increased crime and unrest have been blamed on North Korean refugees and rogue soldiers of the Korean People's Army.<sup>84</sup> Foreign Ministry spokesman Kong Quan denied the troop moves were an effort to pressure North Korea. He stressed this was a "normal adjustment carried out after years of preparation." He declined to confirm numbers and insisted that the border was "relatively stable." Indeed, the move seems to be part of a larger ongoing reorganization of police and military forces in the area rather than designed specifically to send a particular signal to Pyongyang—indeed similar troop adjustments were made along China's border with Burma (Myanmar) at about the same time.<sup>85</sup> As with the pipeline report, there is no way to state with certainty what Beijing intended. Once again, it is in China's interests to let the United States, North Korea, and other countries perceive this as pressure.

## **THE BLAME GAME**

In addition to a lingering buffer mentality and a risk averse mindset, a third element makes Beijing hold back from pressing Pyongyang to the extent it otherwise might: a tendency to blame Washington for either creating, or at least exacerbating, the crisis. Although Chinese leaders and analysts appear to recognize that North Korea lies at the root of the problem, they cast blame on the United States partly out of a sense of frustration and partly because they believe that the Bush administration has the potential to defuse

the crisis.<sup>86</sup> Moreover, they seem to believe that the U.S. potential has a greater probability of being realized than does North Korea's.

That is, Washington is more likely to change/moderate its stance than Pyongyang is.<sup>87</sup> In other words, Chinese analysts do not appear to anticipate much flexibility from North Korea and have pinned their hopes for progress on moderation on the United States.<sup>88</sup>

At its most extreme, this scapegoating amounts to heaping the blame on Washington. According to one PLA analyst, "the United States concocted [or manufactured] the Korean nuclear issue [*Meiguo baozhi chaoxian he wenti*]."<sup>89</sup> A more moderate and more pervasive view seems to be that the United States, by its hostile attitude manifest in harsh rhetoric and a refusal to make concessions/compromises with North Korea, is inhibiting progress and a resolution of the crisis. Speaking a week after the six-party talks, PRC Vice Foreign Minister Wang Yi announced to the media: "America's policy towards the DPRK: this is a main problem we are facing."<sup>90</sup> The Chinese military analyst quoted above phrased this sentiment more strongly: "The greatest obstacle is the hostile policy and military pressure of the United States as well as U.S. restrictions on the foreign policies of South Korea and Japan."<sup>91</sup> Certainly some of this U.S. scapegoating rhetoric is aimed at reassuring North Korea that China is still on its side. Nevertheless, these words also seem to be manifestations of an underlying assumption that for progress to be made in resolving the crisis, the United States must take the first step.<sup>92</sup>

To sum up: a U.S. expectation that China will apply strong pressure on North Korea to move Pyongyang towards complying with Washington's demands is problematic. This expectation is grounded in the assumption that China actually has significant influence with North Korea, is willing to use it, and Beijing shares the same policy priorities on Pyongyang as Washington. The reality seems to be that China's influence to push for major change in North Korea is quite limited and in a sense merely potential (i.e., never to be used) because China will not apply direct pressure. Because of a lingering buffer mentality, an entrenched risk averse mindset, and a tendency to make Washington the scapegoat, Beijing believes any direct Chinese pressure is extremely unlikely to have significant positive impact on Pyongyang and likely to produce unfavorable



results for China. Even if China applies additional pressure, North Korea is likely to either not respond or react negatively—in any case, not to alter its behavior in the desired direction.

In any event, China and the United States continue to have different priorities. Beijing's top priority is Pyongyang's survival, while Washington's aim is preventing Pyongyang from possessing and proliferating WMD. In the author's view, getting North Korea to the negotiating table probably represents the outer limits of China's influence. While this is not an insignificant outcome, it appears to be the result of a unique set of conditions and the unintended consequence of an oil pipeline temporarily shutoff due to mechanical problems. Progress from this point in the creeping Korean nuclear crisis will depend on Pyongyang and Washington, with only qualified support forthcoming from Beijing.

## **BEIJING'S PREFERRED OUTCOMES FOR THE KOREAN PENINSULA**

Discerning China's preferences for the future of Korea is complex. This section examines Beijing's thinking regarding unification, and then its position on the continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula.

### **Korean Unification.**

China has officially tended to maintain its support for peaceful Korean reunification. Interestingly, this position dates back at least 4 decades. Article VI of the bilateral treaty Zhou Enlai and Kim Il Sung signed in July 1961 states: "The Contracting Parties hold that **the unification of Korea must be realized along peaceful and democratic lines** and that such a solution accords exactly with the national interests of the Korean people and the aim of preserving peace in the Far East." Behind this formal position, there is no strong desire to see this happen in the near future because Beijing assumes this would mean the South absorbing the North.<sup>93</sup> Unification on these terms would mean the emergence of a stronger, larger, and democratic Korea with a modern military at China's borders. A

unified Korea, according to one analyst, might have designs on Chinese territory populated by approximately two million ethnic Koreans or at the very least exert a strong pull on the heart strings of the Korean minority to unite with their ethnic kinsmen across the border.<sup>94</sup> Other analysts see no evidence of interest or enthusiasm on the part of ethnic Korean Chinese citizens to join with their brethren in either Korea.<sup>95</sup> In the short and medium terms, Beijing ideally would prefer a reconciled rather than a unified Korea in which the south could bankroll and otherwise facilitate the rejuvenation of the north without controlling the entire peninsula. This scenario would tend to lead to Korea shifting into a Chinese sphere of influence.<sup>96</sup>

### **U.S. Military Presence.**

And what of China's attitude toward a continued U.S. troop presence after reconciliation or unification? The conventional wisdom is that China desires eventually to have American forces withdrawn.<sup>97</sup> Chinese strategic thinking about the peninsula and presence of U.S. troops varies according to analyst, research center, and bureaucratic affiliation and fluctuates according to changing regional and international conditions.<sup>98</sup> Some Chinese analysts—mostly military ones—express the view that no reason exists for American forces to remain after the dissipation of tensions on the peninsula.<sup>99</sup> However, other analysts appear to assume that U.S. forces will stay for the foreseeable future and accept this as a positive constant.<sup>100</sup> One Chinese Koreanist explained that a continued U.S. military presence on the peninsula prevents North Korea (or South Korea) from taking rash military action. North Korea officials reportedly confide to Chinese counterparts that with American forces off the peninsula, North Korea will have clear military superiority over South Korea.<sup>101</sup> A concern also exists that a likely consequence of a U.S. pullout from the Korean Peninsula would be a resurgence of Japanese military power.<sup>102</sup> But what will ultimately determine China's position at any given point regarding the presence of U.S. forces on the peninsula—and elsewhere in the Asia-Pacific—"is U.S. policy toward Taiwan and Beijing's confidence in that policy." Or to put it another way: ". . . the more that the PRC suspects that the

U.S. presence in Asia is directed toward intervening in the Taiwan problem, the more China will favor the removal of U.S. forward-deployed forces.”<sup>103</sup>

The recently announced plans to reconfigure U.S. forces in the Republic of Korea have received attention in China. Some analysts have assumed that the purpose of the pull back from the demilitarized zone (DMZ) of the U.S. Second Infantry Division is to make it easier for the United States to launch a strike against North Korea.<sup>104</sup> At least one observer has expressed concern that the pullback of the division from the DMZ and towards the western coast of the peninsula would place U.S. forces much closer to China.<sup>105</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Arguably China and North Korea cling to each other because they have nowhere else to turn—each believes that close cooperation with the other is vital to its own national security. According to the closing paragraph in a recent article from the official *Beijing Review*:

A strengthened China-DPRK friendship is . . . vital to the economic and social development of both countries in the 21st century. China needs peace and stability along its border, in order to ensure its rapid modernization. Likewise, the DPRK needs China’s cooperation, in order to press ahead with its socialist construction. Since both countries need each other for these economic and social purposes, stronger bilateral relations are inevitable.<sup>106</sup>

If anything, this quote understates the significance Beijing places on the relationship.

Almost certainly, each country would prefer to depend less on the other. Indeed, Beijing seems to view Pyongyang as a troubled teenager lacking adult supervision who lives right next door in a decrepit old house with a large arsenal of lethal weapons and exhibiting strong self-destructive tendencies. A confrontation, or—heaven forbid—battle between the teen and the police threatens to damage China’s newly remodeled mansion, and worse case scenario could lead to the complete destruction of other homes in the Northeast Asian neighborhood, including China’s. The DPRK looks to balance against total reliance on the PRC in the aftermath of

the collapse of the Soviet Union. In any case, the DPRK leadership has probably realized that there is a limit to what the PRC is willing or able to provide for it. Since the late 1990s the DPRK has engaged in an unprecedented flurry of diplomatic activity and established official ties with more than two dozen states. Pyongyang has made efforts to seek a rapprochement with the United States, including hosting then U.S. Secretary of State Madeleine Albright in late 2000 and sending Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok to Washington. More recently, Kim Jong Il paid a visit to Russia in mid-2001.

In the final analysis, China has a major stake in ensuring the continued survival of the North Korean regime and may be willing to go to considerable lengths to guarantee this. North Korea, meanwhile, seems destined to remain heavily dependent on China for moral support and material assistance. This is unlikely to change unless Pyongyang more actively re-engages with Seoul and/or pursues a thoroughgoing rapprochement with the United States, and undertakes a major reorientation of its economy toward market reforms and external trade and investment. Thus, for the foreseeable future, China and North Korea seem destined to remain close to, but uncomfortable with, each other.

Three possible paths may lie ahead for China-North Korea relations: (1) no change in the relationship, (2) a warmer and closer relationship, or (3) a cooler and more distant relationship. What is the likelihood of any of these coming to pass, and what would each of these mean for the United States? To start with the third possibility, frostier ties between Beijing and Pyongyang are a distinct possibility. The most likely way for the relationship to sour further would be for North Korea to pursue brinkmanship with the United States and continue its nuclear weapons program, and discard any pretense of making reforms. This would likely create more opportunities for cooperation and consultation between the United States and China. The result would also likely be a more isolated and desperate North Korea which would make it more unpredictable and dangerous.

An improved relationship between Beijing and Pyongyang would be the best turn of events for the United States because it would signal real, positive change. This would likely come about if North Korea became more moderate and reasonable in its relations

with the United States, took tangible steps to discontinue its nuclear program, and permitted foreign inspectors wide access to its facilities. Pyongyang would also likely embark on significant thoroughgoing economic reforms.

However, the most likely path ahead in China-North Korea relations is no significant change. This might prove the most disappointing outcome for the United States. Nevertheless, there should be some consolation that this is probably a better outcome than a worsening or severing of the Beijing-Pyongyang link. However, at least persistence of the status quo in its relationship with China provides North Korea with some level of reassurance and a dissuasion against irresponsible and erratic behavior. And the status quo also holds out the possibility of positive future change. From the U.S. perspective, more of the same in Beijing-Pyongyang relations at least permits China to play a role in encouraging North Korea to moderate its stance, contemplate ending its nuclear program, and continuing a multilateral dialogue.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. NATIONAL SECURITY**

The foregoing analysis leads to some important implications for U.S. national security. The overall theme of the following six points is to keep expectations realistic. The United States must operate under the basic assumption that a dramatic change for the better in the North Korean nuclear crisis in the near future is unlikely. Maintaining low expectations is not only prudent but will also ensure that Washington does not set itself up for disappointment.

### **Don't Expect Too Much from Beijing.**

While China should continue to be very helpful in handling the North Korean nuclear crisis, it is unlikely to move much beyond sustained support for talks among North Korea, the United States, and other concerned parties. Beijing has played a key role and, as the U.S. *National Security Strategy* published in 2002 states, China does “cooperate well” with the United States “in promoting stability on the Korean Peninsula.” But as the *National Security Strategy* also

notes (and this monograph has stressed), while U.S. and Chinese interests “overlap” on Korea, they are NOT identical.<sup>107</sup> For this reason, Beijing is not likely to participate in the Proliferation Security Initiative. While Beijing serves as a stabilizer and balancer on the Korean Peninsula and, as such, provides crucial reassurance to Pyongyang, it continues to proffer key morale and material support to a regime that has virtually no other trusted friends (Moscow may be the one exception). China is also useful conduit and source of information about North Korea. Nevertheless, China is extremely risk averse and unlikely to apply strong pressure to North Korea, unless it perceives a sudden, dramatic, and alarming change to the fragile status quo – imminent U.S. military action.

### **Don't Underestimate China's Commitment to Protect Its Own National Interests.**

While Washington should not expect too much from Beijing, the United States must not underestimate China's readiness to leap into action to protect what it perceives as its vital national interests in a critical situation. As Beijing's December 2002 *Defense White Paper* noted: “China takes all measures necessary to safeguard its national interests. . . .”<sup>108</sup> It is quite likely that Chinese military forces would intervene in North Korea in the event of an implosion or military conflict north of the DMZ. China would cross the Yalu River to protect its vital interests—not to prop up a crumbling regime or fight shoulder-to-shoulder with Pyongyang. The goal of Chinese military intervention most probably would be to establish a buffer zone along its border. In a Korean contingency where U.S. forces might find themselves operating in North Korea—say, for example, assisting ROK forces in restoring order and providing humanitarian assistance—the overriding assumption ought to be that China will conduct a limited intervention.<sup>109</sup> It would be advisable for Washington to engage in a confidential dialogue with Beijing about the roles and missions of their respective militaries in various hypothetical North Korea scenarios.

## **Don't Force China to Choose Sides.**

China continually seeks to position itself as an impartial balancer in the crisis. It has criticized not only North Korea but also the United States. In fact, as noted earlier, Beijing continues to lay a major, if not the lion's, share of the blame for the current crises at Washington's door. In part, this likely reflects actual Chinese thinking, but it is also important for Beijing to demonstrate to Pyongyang that it is indeed impartial. Efforts to pressure China openly to support the U.S. position are likely to be unsuccessful and probably counterproductive.

## **Don't Expect Much Movement from Pyongyang.**

China is the most influential country where North Korea is concerned, but this has had limited impact. Beijing's efforts to encourage economic reform in North Korea have seen very limited results, and the pace has been glacial. Significant changes have occurred in North Korea in recent years, such as a 2000 summit between the leaders of the two Koreas in Pyongyang and the establishment of full diplomatic relations with a host of Western states. However, these steps have come in fits and starts, and it is unclear if these represent tactical measures or strategic changes.

## **North Korean Distrust of Outsiders May Be Almost Insurmountable.**

Pyongyang possesses a deep-seated distrust of outsiders. Even China is viewed with deep suspicions. If North Korea's sole remaining military ally is treated with such suspicion, then one can only imagine the level of paranoid alarm reserved for a country such as the United States, which is viewed as hostile to the regime. Establishing a basic level of trust is likely to be an extremely challenging but important prerequisite for getting beyond the current crisis. (Of course this works both ways since deep distrust and suspicion are held on the part of the United States regarding North Korea.) To this end, President Bush's offer at the Asian-Pacific

Economic Cooperation Summit in Bangkok in October 2003 to sign off on a multilateral document guaranteeing North Korea's security is an important step. Pyongyang may warm to this proposal since it would include fairly trustworthy North Korean friends, Beijing and Moscow, who could be relied upon to help balance North Korean deep distrust of the United States.<sup>110</sup>

### **Don't Count on China to Dissuade North Korea from Going Nuclear.**

Following from the above points, it is extremely difficult for this author to envision a scenario in which Pyongyang voluntarily would abandon completely its nuclear program. There seems to be little incentive for North Korea to divest itself of the program. The degree of paranoia and distrust Pyongyang holds for even its closest friend (i.e., China) suggest it will not give up what is seen as a crucial defensive weapon. Moreover, as noted earlier, Beijing's top priority is propping up Pyongyang, not preventing the regime from acquiring nuclear weapons. Therefore, pressure from China of the sort to make North Korea give up its program is unlikely to be forthcoming. While China's latest *White Paper on Nonproliferation* (issued in December 2003) states: "China has always . . . resolutely opposed the proliferation of [WMD] and their means of delivery," the document also states: "China stands for the attainment of the non-proliferation goal through peaceful means . . . through dialogue and international cooperation."<sup>111</sup> In other words, Beijing is unwilling to apply heavy-handed pressure, not to mention participate in blockades and embargoes, against Pyongyang. North Korea appears to fear military action from the United States and considers its nuclear program as an essential deterrent. The idea of North Korea possessing a nuclear device is extremely unsettling, if not downright disturbing. This is not to mention the serious proliferation challenges this outcome would pose. And this outcome would be likely only to exacerbate Pyongyang's status as the "world's principal purveyor of ballistic missiles" and include WMD technology.<sup>112</sup> In such circumstances, China's willingness to cooperate in counterproliferation and nonproliferation efforts would become even more critical.



However, one positive outcome of a nuclear North Korea might be to make Pyongyang a little less paranoid. In this limited sense, going nuclear might help stabilize the situation on the Korean Peninsula by making Pyongyang feel more secure. This could make North Korea more open to the possibility of extensive reform, as well as conventional and WMD arms control. Under these circumstances, Beijing, at the very least, would continue to play a key, albeit circumscribed, role in steering Pyongyang in the right direction.

## ENDNOTES

1. Andrew Scobell, *China's Use of Military Force: Beyond the Great Wall and the Long March*, New York and London: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 83.

2. Zhang Aiping, Chief Compiler, *Zhongguo Renmin Jiefang Jun* [China's People's Liberation Army] Vol. 1, Contemporary China Series, Beijing: Dangdai Zhongguo Chubanshe, 1994, p. 137.

3. "Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation and Mutual Assistance Between the People's Republic of China and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," *Peking Review*, Vol. 4, No. 28, 1961, p. 5.

4. Samuel S. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy in the Era of Reform," in David M. Lampton, ed., *Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Reform Era*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001, p. 401; Chae-Jin Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*, Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press, 1996, p. 71.

5. Lee Dequan and Huang Hanmin, "Jiang Zemin Meets with President Kim Yong Nam and Hang Song Nam of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea," Xinhua Domestic Service (in Chinese), September 4, 2001, in Foreign Broadcast Information Service (FBIS)-CHI, September 4, 2001.

6. The Global War on Terrorism (GWOT) has produced improved U.S.-China relations and a period of cooperation between Washington and Beijing. But China's leaders still believe that the United States is working to bring about the collapse of Chinese communism, keep the country weak, and use the GWOT to encircle China strategically. Today, while the rhetoric about peaceful evolution and strategic encirclement is muted, Beijing continues to stress internal stability and unity. This reflects not just unease in Beijing over domestic discontent and current concern over perceived movement toward Taiwan independence, but also the strong belief that U.S. support, or at least encouragement, is behind these problems. Two of China's main national defense goals—articulated in the December 2002 *Defense White Paper*—are "safeguarding social stability," and "stopping separatism and

realizing unification." See *China's National Defense in 2002*, Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, December, 2002, pp. 11-12. North Korea's leaders appear to be alarmed about the military threat from the United States and these fears were heightened during 2003. According to two analysts: "the [North Korean] regime perceives itself facing a highly threatening and deteriorating security environment" and fears "U.S. military preemptive strikes." See Daniel A. Pinkston and Phillip C. Saunders, "Seeing North Korea Clearly," *Survival*, Vol. 45, No. 3, Autumn 2003, pp. 79-102 (the quotes are from pp. 90 and 92, respectively). See also, for example, "U.S. Intention to Launch Nuclear War in Korea Under Fire," Korean Central News Agency, April 3, 2003.

7. See Stephen Bradner, "North Korea's Strategy," in Henry D. Sokolski, ed., *Planning for a Peaceful Korea*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, February 2001. On the aim of weakening the alliance, see p. 37; on seeking aid, see pp. 32-33, 38.

8. Lee, *China and Korea: Dynamic Relations*, Stanford, CA: Stanford, pp. 121-122; Ilpyong Kim, "China in North Korean Foreign Policy," in Samuel S. Kim, ed., *North Korean Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era*, Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1998, p. 100.

9. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy," pp. 386-387.

10. Andrew S. Natsios, *The Great North Korean Famine: Famine, Politics, and Foreign Policy*, Washington, DC: U.S. Institute of Peace, 2002, p. 139.

11. The course of PRC-DPRK relations has been filled with constant tensions and frequent strains. Disagreements have been frequent, yet the relationship has survived. For a good overview that highlights these difficulties, see Chen Jian, "Limits of the 'Lips and Teeth' Alliance: An Historical Review of Chinese North Korean Relations," in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korean Relations*, Asian Program Special Report no. 115, Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, September 2003, pp. 4-10.

12. Tom Hart, "The PRC-DPRK Rapprochement and China's Dilemma in Korea," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2001, pp. 247-259; Jonathan D. Pollack, "China and a Changing North Korea: Issues, Uncertainties, and Implications," paper presented to Conference on North Korea's Engagement-Perspectives, Outlook, and Implications," held in Washington, DC, February 23, 2001, accessed at <http://www.nwc.navy.mil/apsg/papers/Pollack%20NORTH%20KOREA%20PAPER.htm>.

13. Lee Dequan and Huang Hanmin, "Jiang Zemin Meets with President Kim Yong Nam."

14. Interviews, September 2003; and “China cools its ties with neighbour: only a minor dignitary attended the state’s 55th birthday party,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), September 2003.

15. There are several excellent and comprehensive overviews of North Korea’s economic morass. For a relatively optimistic assessment, see Marcus Noland, *Avoiding the Apocalypse: The Future of the Two Koreas*, Washington, DC: International Institute for Economics, 2000; and Marcus Noland, “Why North Korea Will Muddle Through,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 26. No. 4, July/August 1997, pp. 105-118. For a more pessimistic assessment, see Nicholas Eberstadt, *The End of North Korea*, Washington, DC: AEI, 1999.

16. Kongdan Oh and Ralph C. Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2000, pp. 42-45.

17. Kim, “The Making of China’s Korea Policy,” p. 385; Samuel S. Kim, “China and North Korea in a Changing World,” in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korean Relations*, p. 13.

18. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, pp. 44-45; KOTRA, “Trade Between DPRK, China Reached Over \$370 Million in 1999 . . .,” *Seoul Yonhap* (in English), March 7, 2000, in FBIS-CHI, March 7, 2000.

19. Kim, “China and North Korea in a Changing World,” in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korean Relations*, p. 13.

20. Oh and Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, p. 178.

21. Estimates vary widely, and reliable estimates are difficult to come by. See *The Invisible Exodus: North Koreans in the People’s Republic of China*, New York: Human Rights Watch, November 2002; Andrew Scobell, “North Korea on the Brink: Breakdown or Breakthrough?” in Carolyn Pumphrey, ed., *The Rise of China in Asia: Security Implications*, Carlisle Barracks, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2002, pp. 197-227, at p. 205.

22. Hazel Smith, “Asymmetric Nuisance Threat: The Border in China-DPRK Relations,” in *Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korean Relations*, pp. 23-24. Panel discussion at 2001 March Association for Asian Studies in Chicago; Natsios, *The Great North Korean Famine*, chap 4. According to one South Korean NGO, as many as three-quarters of the North Korean refugees in China are female—and many of these are forced into prostitution, marriage, or slavery. *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

23. See, for example, Benjamin Neaderland, “Quandry on the Yalu: International Law, Politics, and China’s North Korean Refugee Crisis,” *Stanford Journal of International Law*, forthcoming 2004. See also David Shambaugh, “China

and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2, Spring 2003, p. 47.

24. See, for example, Lu Guangye, "Chaoxian he wenti: zongneng zhaodao jie jue banfa" [Korean nuclear issue: a solution can be worked out eventually] *Guoji zhanlue yanjiu*, No. 3, 2003, pp. 35-36; Xu Xianzhong, "Jiedu suowei 'xin de Chaoxian he wenti'" [an interpretation of the so-called 'new Korean nuclear issue'] *Guoji zhanlue yanjiu*, No. 3, 2003, pp. 42-43; author's interviews with civilian and military researchers in Beijing, September 2003.

25. "North Korea's economy: Desperate Straits," *Economist*, May 3, 2003, p. 26; John Larkin, "North Korea: Why Refugees Flee," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, March 6, 2003, pp. 14-17. For a good overview and analysis of economic reform efforts in North Korea, see Bradley O. Babson, "Economic Cooperation on the Korean Peninsula," paper presented for the Task Force on U.S. Korea Policy, presented on January 9, 2003, and available at [http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special\\_reports/Babson-EconomicCooperation.txt](http://www.nautilus.org/pub/ftp/napsnet/special_reports/Babson-EconomicCooperation.txt).

26. Joseph Kahn, "China Seizes Entrepreneur Named to Run North Korean Enclave," *New York Times*, October 4, 2002; Peter S. Goodman, "China Arrests Head of N. Korea Project," *Washington Post*, November 28, 2002; "China Says North Korea Was Warned," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 31, 2002, p. 30; Interviews, Beijing, September 2003. According to one published report, the Sinuju zone was "at a standstill." However, Beijing and Pyongyang appear to be near an agreement on a more suitable executive for the zone. See Chiang Hsun, "Chinese American Favored to be New Head of Sinuju," *Yazhou Zhoukan*, Hong Kong, September 7, 2003, translated in FBIS-CHI.

27. Smith, "Asymmetric Nuisance Value," pp. 21-22; Peter S. Goodman, "Chinese Energy Executive Vanishes: Disappearance Pegs Gao Yan as Possible Target of Corruption Probe," *Washington Post*, October 16, 2002.

28. See, for example, Zhang Jinfang, "Vice Chairman of DPRK National Defense Committee Meets China's Military Goodwill Delegation," *Xinhua Domestic Service* (Beijing) September 25, 2001, translated in FBIS-CHI; and Zhang Jinfang, "The DPRK National Defense Vice Chairman Meets a Chinese PLA Goodwill Delegation," *Xinhua Domestic Service* (Beijing), November 3, 2002, translated in FBIS-CHI.

29. Kenneth W. Allen, and Eric A. McVadon, *China's Foreign Military Relations*, Report No. 32, Washington, DC: Henry L. Stimson Center, 1999, pp. 66-67.

30. Interviews, Beijing September 2003; Zong Hairen (pseud.), "Hu Jintao Writes to Kim Jong Il To Open Door to 6-Party Talks," *Hsin Pao* (Hong Kong), August 28, 2003, in FBIS-CHI.

31. Hart, "The PRC-DPRK Rapprochement and China's Dilemma in Korea," p. 249.
32. At the very least China appears to have served as a conduit or transshipment point for nuclear technology and hardware provided to North Korea by Pakistan nuclear scientist A. Q. Khan.
33. "North Korea's nuclear programme: Getting the genie back into the bottle," *Economist*, October 26, 2002, p. 38; Murray Hiebert, John Larkin, and Susan Lawrence, "North Korea: Consequences of Confession," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, October 31, 2002, p. 19.
34. "President Discusses Iraq and North Korea with Reporters," accessed at <http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2002/12/20021231-1.html>.
35. See, for example, Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 82, November/December 2003. The authors argue that China has "embraced regional and global institutions" and has willingly taken on the "responsibilities that come with great power status."
36. On the establishment of the leading small group on Korea, see Kim, "China and North Korea in a Changing World," pp. 11; and Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Secret Petition Submitted to Hu Jintao for 'Military Support' for North Korea," *Sapio* (Tokyo), May 28, 2003, translated from Japanese by FBIS-CHI. On China's fears, see *ibid.*, p. 14. On North Korea's fears, see Howard W. French, "North Korea Says Its Arms Will Deter U.S. Attack," *New York Times*, April 7, 2003; Willy Wo-Lap Lam, "Time to act, China tells N. Korea," August 25, 2003, [cnn.asia.com](http://cnn.asia.com); and Oh Young-jin, "Fear of U.S. Attack Forced North Korea to Come to Negotiating Table," *Korea Times*, August 27, 2003.
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40. Phillip C. Saunders and Jing-dong Yuan, “Korea Crisis Will Test Chinese Diplomacy,” *Asia Times Online*, January 8, 2003, at <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/EA08Dg03.html>.

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42. See also Ruan Zongze, “Six Party Talks in Beijing and Regional Security,” *Liaowang* (Beijing), September 1, 2003, in FBIS-CHI.

43. Cited in Mike Allen, “Bush: Iraq War Drove N. Korea to Concede,” *Washington Post*, April 14, 2003.

44. Key figures in Washington—both inside and outside the administration—have expressed a preference for regime change in Pyongyang. For a recent articulation of this view, see David Frum and Richard Perle, *An End to Evil: How to Win the War on Terror*, New York: Random House, 2003. See also, Robert Marquand, “US Strategy: Isolate Kim Jong Il,” *Christian Science Monitor*, August 1, 2003. Moreover, many Washington policymakers, including President Bush, reportedly harbor a strong dislike for North Korean leader Kim Jong Il. See, for example, Bob Woodward, *Bush at War*, New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002, p. 340.

45. See, for example, “Foreign Ministry Spokesman Kong Quan Answers Journalists Questions at New Conference on 26 June 2003,” Beijing PRC MFA text on World Wide Web in Chinese, posted June 26, 2003.

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47. Xu Weidi, "Resolving the Korean Peninsula Nuclear Crisis and Moving the Korean Peninsula out of the Cold War," *Shijie Jingjiyu Zhengzhi* (Beijing), September 16, 2003, in FBIS-CHI.

48. Interviews, Beijing, September 2003. See also the hierarchy of interests outlined in Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," pp. 44-46.

49. This includes leading newspapers and news magazines. See, for example, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons: China Starts to Worry," *Economist*, July 26, 2003, pp. 38-39.

50. A prime example would be the publications and interviews given by Shi Yinhong of People's University.

51. This is an important theme running through a recent article by a perceptive and well-informed Shanghai-based academic. See Ming Liu, "China and the North Korean Crisis: Facing Test and Transition," *Pacific Affairs*, Vol. 76, No. 3, Fall 2003.

52. Interviews in Beijing, September 2003.

53. Beijing, September 2003 interviews; and "North Korea's Nuclear Programme: Getting the genie back into the bottle," *Economist*, October 26, 2002, p. 38.

54. Larry M. Wortzel, "China's Goals and Strategies for the Korean Peninsula: A Critical Assessment," in Henry Sokolski, ed., *Planning for a Peaceful Korea*, 2001, pp. 215-226.

55. On the musings of Beijing academics, see John Pomfret, "As Talks Begin China Views North Korea as Risk," *Washington Post*, August 27, 2003; and David M. Lampton, "China: Fed Up with North Korea?" *Washington Post*, June 4, 2003.

56. Glenn Kessler and John Pomfret, "North Korea's Threats a Dilemma for China: Ally's Nuclear Gamesmanship Rankles Beijing," *Washington Post*, April 26, 2003.

57. Lorien Holland and Shim Jae Hoon, "China's Korea Game," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 15, 2000, p. 17; "Interview with Wu Dawei, Chinese Ambassador to the ROK," *Hanguk Ilbo* (Seoul), Internet version, January 17, 2000, in FBIS-CHI, January 21, 2000. See also Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula."

58. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy," pp. 392-394.

59. Xu Weidi, "Resolving the Korean Peninsula Nuclear Crisis." This is also noted by Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy," p. 400; and Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," p. 52.

60. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy," pp. 402-403.

61. Pollack, "China and a Changing North Korea: Issues, Uncertainties, and Implications."

62. See, for example, Pomfret, "As Talks Begin China Views North Korea as Risk."

63. Philip P. Pan, "China Treads Carefully Around North Korea," *Washington Post*, January 10, 2003.

64. Interviews in Beijing, May 2002 and September 2003; Pan, "China Treads Carefully Around North Korea."

65. Interviews in Beijing and Seoul, May 2002; discussions in faculty seminar at APCSS, Honolulu, March 2003.

66. See the quote in Charles Hutzler and Gordon Fairclough, "The Koreas: China Breaks With Its Wartime Past," *Far Eastern Economic Review*, August 7, 2003, p. 27.

67. Interviews, Beijing, September 2003.

68. Epstein, "China Debates Greater Role in N. Korean Crisis."

69. Interviews, Beijing, May 2003. See also Oh and Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, p. 156.

70. See the source cited in endnote 2 for casualties. On the total number of Chinese troops who served in Korea, see Zhang Wannian and Chi Haotian, "Great Victory, Valuable Asset—Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Chinese People's Volunteers' Participation in the War to Resist U.S. Aggression and Aid Korea," *Qiushi* (internet version), November 1, 2001, translated in FBIS, November 13, 2001.

71. Hutzler and Fairclough, "The Koreas: China Breaks with Its Wartime Past," p. 27; David J. Lynch, "Some Chinese Feel Resentment Toward N. Korea," *USA Today*, August 28, 2003.

72. Cited in Oh and Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, p. 158.



73. Interviews, Beijing, September 2003. See also Medeiros and Fravel, "China's New Diplomacy."
74. Indeed, prior to China's efforts in early 2003, U.S. officials were considerably frustrated at China's "failure to assertively pursue a solution to the crisis." John Pomfret and Glenn Kessler, "China's Reluctance Irks U.S.: Beijing Shows No Inclination to Intervene in N. Korea Crisis," *Washington Post*, February 4, 2003.
75. Interviews, Beijing, May 2002.
76. *China's National Defense in 2002*, Beijing: Information Office of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, December 2002, p 1.
77. Pan, "China Treads Carefully Around North Korea."
78. "Hu Jintao Already Heads CPC Group for Security, Foreign Affairs," *Asahi Shimbun* (Tokyo), internet version, March 14, 2003, translated in FBIS; and Mashiro Ishikawa, "The Start of President Hu's 'New Generation Diplomacy': The Materialization of the US-DPRK Talks," *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* (Tokyo), internet version, April 25, 2003, translated in FBIS.
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80. Interviews, Beijing, May 2002; Pomfret, "Powell: U.S.-China Relations Entering 'New Dimension'."
81. On the numbers of asylum seekers, see John Pomfret, "China Cracks Down on North Korean Refugees," *Washington Post*, January 22, 2003. For details of the asylum incidents, see "China and North Korea: The Close But Uncomfortable Relationship," *Current History*, Vol. 101, No. 656, September 2002, pp. 280-81.
82. Still there would be some positive outcomes for China if Beijing was more open to addressing the humanitarian crisis and more willing to cooperate with NGOs and international organizations. See Neaderland, "Quandry on the Yalu."
83. *Sing Tao Jih Pao* and *Sunday Morning Post* reported in "China 'sends 150,000 troops to North Korea border'," *The Straits Times* (Singapore), September 15, 2003, accessed at <http://straitstimes.com.sg>.
84. "China 'sends 150,000 troops to North Korea border'"; Philip P. Pan, "China Deploys Troops on N. Korean Border," *Washington Post*, September 16, 2003; Joseph Kahn, "China Moves Troops to Area Bordering North Korea," *New York Times*, September 16, 2003. On the security problems, see Cortlan Bennett and Melinda Liu, "North Korea: Nukes and Crimes—China's Borderline Troubles," *Newsweek*, September 1, 2003.

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86. Hence a researcher at China's National Defense University claims that the "United States is . . . the main obstacle preventing the Korean Peninsula from moving out of the Cold War . . ." but admits "There is no denying the crux of Korean Peninsula crisis in the DPRK." Xu Weidi, "Resolving the Korean Peninsula Nuclear Crisis."

87. This is a questionable assumption. While the Kim Jong Il regime may be capable of greater pragmatism and flexibility than many observers give it credit for, the Bush administration may be less pragmatic and more dogmatic than Chinese elites realize. See, for example, Andrew Scobell, "Crouching Korea, Hidden China: Bush Administration Policy Toward Pyongyang and Beijing," *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXXII, No. 2, March/April 2002, pp. 344-345.

88. The Chinese expectation that North Korea will not show flexibility first appears to be based on the belief that Pyongyang is extremely stubborn AND fearful of the United States. Interviews, Beijing, September 2003.

89. Lu Guangye, "Chaoxian he wenti," p. 36. See also Xu Xianzhong, "Jiedu suowei 'chaoxian he wenti'," p. 44.

90. "China faults U.S. on nuclear negotiations: Washington is called a hindrance in talks with North Korea," *International Herald Tribune*, September 6, 2003.

91. Lu Guangye, "Chaoxian he wenti," p. 36.

92. Interviews, Beijing, September 2003.

93. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy," p. 400.

94. *Ibid.*, pp. 403-404.

95. Oh and. Hassig, *North Korea Through the Looking Glass*, p. 177-178.

96. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy," p. 404.

97. Kevin Platt, "Beijing Reunification Priority: Get US Troops Out of South Korea," *Christian Science Monitor*, June 21, 2000; Holland and Hoon, "China's Korea Game"; Lorien Holland and Chester Dawson, "What If?" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, June 29, 2000, p. 18.

98. Kim, "The Making of China's Korea Policy," p. 400.

99. Zhang Jinbao, "Changes in the Situation on the Korean Peninsula and Their Impact on the Strategic Pattern in Northeast Asia," *Guoji Zhanlue Yanjiu* [International Strategic Studies], No. 59, January 2001, pp. 28; Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," p. 51.

100. Eric McVadon, "China's Goals and Strategies for the Korean Peninsula," in Henry D. Sokolski, ed., *Planning for a Peaceful Korea*, Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2001, pp. 131-214.

101. Interviews, Beijing, May 2002; and summer 2002 interviews with a well-placed Chinese Korean specialist.

102. On North and South Korea, summer 2002 interviews with a well-placed Chinese Korean specialist; on Japan, see Richard Halloran, "The Three No's of East Asia," *Journal of East Asian Studies*, Vol. XIV, No. 2, Fall/Winter 2000, pp. 197-215.

103. David M. Lampton, *Same Bed Different Dreams: Managing U.S.-China Relations 1989-2000*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001, pp. 106-110 (quotes on pp. 109 and 107).

104. Xu Weidi, "Resolving the Korean Peninsula Nuclear Crisis"; Interviews, Beijing, September 2003.

105. *Ibid.*

106. Xiao Zan, "Beijing and Pyongyang Get Closer," *Beijing Review*, September 27, 2001, pp. 9-10.

107. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, September 2002, p. 27.

108. *China's National Defense in 2002*, p 11.

109. While it is impossible to say what China would do with complete certainty, I believe that the key question is not "if" China would intervene, but rather "when" and "how." My thinking is strongly colored by the influence of the "lingering buffer mentality" identified in this monograph. For an "if" statement on the subject, see Roger Cliff and Jeremy Shapiro, "The Shift to Asia and U.S. Landpower," in Lynn E. Davis and Jeremy Shapiro, eds., *The U.S. Army and the New National Security Strategy*, Santa Monica, CA: RAND/Arroyo Center, 2003, p. 93.

110. Mike Allen and Glenn Kessler, "Bush Says Pact with North Korea Possible," *Washington Post*, October 20, 2003. Of course Pyongyang would prefer other formats: it demands a peace treaty directly with the United States and has recently insisted that Tokyo be dropped from the Six-Party Talks. Still, North Korea appears to desire improved ties with the United States and so may be receptive to this proposal.

111. *China's Non-Proliferation Policy and Means*.

112. *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*, p. 14.