

Uneasy Allies: Fifty Years of China-North Korea Relations

ABSTRACT: This Special Report examines the long uneasy China-North Korea relationship, and in doing so also illumines the current nuclear crisis on the peninsula. Three experts, representing different academic disciplines—Chen Jian of the University of Virginia, Samuel S. Kim of Columbia University, and Hazel Smith of the University of Warwick—agree that China is poised to play an important role in resolving this crisis. The authors also concur that the relationship is far more complex and contentious than once thought. China's motivations for seeking an end to the crisis are equally complex. While China wields some influence in Pyongyang, the authors contend that convincing North Korea to abandon its nuclear program and come out from its isolation will not be easy. By analyzing the genesis of the relationship, its more recent history, and the socioeconomic dynamics of the China-North Korea border regions, these essays help to better understand the current crisis, making this Special Report important and timely.

Introduction

Timothy Hildebrandt

Sunday, July 27, 2003, marked the 50th anniversary of the armistice agreement that ended the Korean War. With the unsurprising exception of a lavish parade in Pyongyang, commemorations of the anniversary were quite muted across Asia and in the United States. Given recent events, there is little reason to celebrate; the fragile peace on the Korean peninsula is in greater jeopardy today than at any other time in the past half century. Although all countries with an interest in the region have expressed concern for preserving peace in Northeast Asia, perhaps no relationship will be more critical in achieving this goal than that between North Korea (formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, or DPRK) and its only remaining ally in the region: China.

In recent months, China has markedly increased its involvement in Northeast Asia. At times mimicking the role played by the United States in the Middle East, Chinese envoys have shuttled between Seoul, Pyongyang and Washington, in attempts to initiate a meaningful

diplomatic process. In August, Beijing hosted six-party talks designed to jumpstart substantive negotiations, particularly between Washington and Pyongyang. North Korea has not necessarily welcomed this new Chinese role of "honest broker" and Beijing's conversations with Pyongyang have not always been easy. Of late, Beijing has been more forceful in its opposition to North Korea's nuclear aspirations.

As a sign of the dire state of affairs on the peninsula, countries traditionally wary of an increased role for China in regional politics—including the United States—have welcomed Beijing's efforts to maintain stability and assure a peaceful resolution to the most recent nuclear crisis. Yet China's task is made all the more difficult by a strained relationship with North Korea. Though for several decades an appropriate description, the "closer than lips and teeth" adage once used in propaganda to tout China and North Korea's relationship no longer rings true.

The PRC-DPRK relationship started off on the right foot: North Korean communists provided support and a strategic base for the Chinese communists in 1949. China reciprocated with massive military intervention saving

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Kim Il Sung's regime from collapse following his invasion of the South. Yet the honeymoon was short-lived, and tensions arose that last even until today. While both countries still occasionally offer rhetorical statements of solidarity, Beijing and Pyongyang clearly no longer share similar objectives. In practice, China has shown far more interest in cultivating its important economic relations with South Korea than in rejuvenating its ideological partnership with North Korea. Beijing's interaction with Seoul has not gone unnoticed by Pyongyang; official DPRK histories have now all but erased mention of past Chinese assistance.

This Asia Program Special Report offers three essays that analyze what has long been an uneasy alliance. These essays look back to historical instances of conflict and cooperation, examine more recent political events, and survey the relatively unexplored border relations between China and North Korea, in an effort to better understand the nature of the current crisis.

In the first essay, **Chen Jian** offers an historical review of China and North Korea's fifty-year relationship. He argues that history is littered with instances of tension and stress in the relationship. As early as the Korean War, Kim Il Sung angered China when he was closemouthed on his plans for war, and did not share his offensive plans with Beijing until three days after the war began. Even after the war ended, tensions between the two allies continued. A 1956 argument over North Korean political dissidents seeking refuge in China exploded into a crisis that has implications even today. What began as a

relationship of "big brother" China and "little brother" North Korea came to resemble something akin to bitter sibling rivalry. Beijing lost much of its influence over Pyongyang as China abandoned its revolutionary agenda in favor of economic development, while North Korea chose to languish in the past.

Therefore, in today's crisis, Chen suggests that Beijing no longer has ideological leverage and can rely only on its economic influence. Chen's essay includes previously unpublished details of the 1956 crisis, as well as new inside information on Beijing's refusal to support Kim's plans to invade the South in 1975.

Samuel S. Kim agrees that the relationship between the two countries has long been uneasy. In the second essay of this Report, he notes that the current nuclear crisis occurs at the same time as an unprecedented crisis of alliance preservation between China and North Korea. Both China and South Korea are drifting away from traditional allies: Beijing is moving closer to Seoul than Pyongyang, while Seoul appears more comfortable with Beijing than Washington. One of Beijing's greatest challenges is balancing economic and security concerns within this new triangular relationship. China knows that conflict on the peninsula could well put an end to its economic growth, and wants desperately to maintain stability in North Korea. It has thus adopted a proactive foreign policy that aims to avoid conflict escalation, collapse, or an influx of refugees, and to keep Pyongyang nuclear-free. It is worth considering, however, whether all Beijing's hopes for the peninsula are compatible. That is to say, if the situation continues to deteriorate, would China reluctantly accept an armed conflict if that were the only way to keep nuclear weapons out of Pyongyang's hands?

Because China remains an important North Korean ally, observers speculate that Beijing has great leverage over Pyongyang, making these goals more easily obtainable. Kim contends, however, that this leverage is very modest compared to the power that the United States wields in the region. Additionally, it is difficult for China to convince North Korea to stay off the nuclear path in light of its own nuclear weapons program. China's economic leverage is also very much constrained. Though cutting off massive Chinese aid could be used as a

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disincentive, the strategy could also backfire and provoke Pyongyang into a military confrontation. Kim further theorizes that while China does not have much leverage, it will make every effort to preserve the little influence that still exists, “to prevent tomorrow’s China from becoming today’s Soviet Union.”

The issue of refugees and immigration along the China–North Korea border is an important element in the discussion of instability on the peninsula. Many analysts believe that China’s motivation to keep North Korea from collapse rises from the fear of a flood of refugees into the country. **Hazel Smith** maintains in the third essay, however, that the issue of cross-border relations is not so easily understood. The nearly 1,000-mile border is surprisingly permeable, lacking the military fortification of North Korea’s southern perimeter. Nonetheless, the threat and existence of immigration is not relevant to the whole of the border. Profiling each of the North Korean border provinces, Smith notes that in areas with more economic stability and those near non-Korean speaking Chinese provinces, emigration is not strikingly high. Smith also contends that previous attention paid to the issue of refugees has relied on inaccurate and often misleading information. Notably, estimates of the number of North Korean refugees in Chinese border regions are rather inflated.

The issue of refugees, Smith concludes, is not as crucial to the current geopolitical situation as was once thought—it is less an issue of conflict and more a subject of irritation for China. Beijing’s motivation to put an end to the current crisis on the

peninsula cannot, therefore, be explained as a means to protect itself from a humanitarian disaster in its northeastern provinces. China should not, however, ignore the economic and humanitarian crises in North Korea. Smith suggests that China can use its geographic proximity to bring more foreign investment and transparency to the northern provinces of the DPRK. Such action might help China achieve its desires for economic and security stability in the region.

Though new developments in the current crisis on the Korean peninsula crop up daily, one constant does exist in Northeast Asia: the relationships of the significant players in the region—including those between China and the two Koreas—were from the beginning, and are still today, exceedingly complicated. China’s relationship with North Korea, once seemingly a logical union of like-minded communists, has turned more acrimonious over the years. As China has moved closer to South Korea, leaders in Pyongyang have come to view Beijing as a friend turned bad. Nonetheless, a bad friend is still a friend, and China is better situated to help bring peace to the peninsula than any other country, except of course, North Korea itself. Indeed, the level of complexity in this strained friendship demands study from many angles. This Special Report attempts to do just that. By analyzing the genesis of the relationship, its more recent history, and the socioeconomic dynamics of the China–North Korea border regions, these essays help us to better understand the current crisis, making this Special Report particularly important and timely.

Limits of the ‘Lips and Teeth’ Alliance: An Historical Review of Chinese-North Korean Relations

CHEN JIAN

Fifty years ago, on 27 July 1953, the Korean War ended with the signing of an armistice agreement. Peace, however, has never been firmly established on the Korean peninsula and the prospect for another “Korean War” seems never so close as it is now. On the one hand, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) is making noise that it intends to acquire nuclear weapons and, on the other, the United States is threatening to use all means to stop this from happening. Whether or not the Korean crisis will grow out of control depends upon many conditions, and a key factor is the People’s Republic of China (PRC). Indeed, the PRC was the DPRK’s main ally throughout the Cold War period—in October 1950, it was massive Chinese military intervention that saved the North Korean Communist regime from an imminent collapse. Since the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the PRC has become the sole big power from which the DPRK may receive substantial material support. Therefore, how the crisis situation on the Korean peninsula will develop, be controlled and, with any hope, resolved, is closely related to what Beijing will and can do.

Despite the fact that the PRC has been the DPRK’s key ally in the past half century, Beijing’s relations with Pyongyang are by no means without problems. While the ties between them seem to have been dominated by a discourse of “lips and teeth” solidarity, there were times that substantial differences in perception and practice existed between the two communist allies. In a sense, the legacies of the uneasy history of Chinese–North Korean relations are mirrored in the complexity of the PRC–DPRK relationship today, revealing the limits to which Beijing may influence the orientation of Pyongyang’s attitudes and policies. Therefore, an historical review of Chinese–North Korean relations will shed useful light upon some of the crucial aspects of the Korean crisis at the present time.



EARLY CONTACTS

Historically, the Korean Communists had intimate ties with the Chinese Communists. During the 1930s, Kim Il Sung, who later became the leader of Communist North Korea, waged an anti-Japanese guerrilla struggle in Manchuria. In the late 1930s and early 1940s, a group of Korean Communists (including Pak Il Yu, who would later become North Korea’s vice prime minister and a head of the “Yan’an faction” within the Korean Workers’ Party [KWP]) traveled to Yan’an, the “Red Capital” of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), to join China’s “War of Resistance” against Japan. During the Chinese civil war between the CCP and the Nationalists in the late 1940s, while Communist North Korea served as a strategic supporting base for the CCP in Manchuria, around 100,000 ethnic Korean residents in China joined the Chinese Communist forces. The 156th, 164th and 166th divisions, three of the best combat units of the Chinese People’s Liberation Army (PLA), were mainly composed of ethnic Korean soldiers.

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PRIOR TO AND DURING THE KOREAN WAR

In 1949, when the Chinese Communist revolution achieved nationwide victory and Kim Il Sung was planning to unify the entire Korean peninsula through a revolutionary war, the Korean Communists hoped that their Chinese comrades would return the favor. From summer 1949 to spring 1950, top Chinese and Korean Communist leaders had a series of discussions, resulting in the CCP sending 50,000 to 70,000 ethnic Korean soldiers in the PLA—with their weapons—back to Korea. These troops, forming a core part of the Korean People's Army's offensive capacity, would later play a crucial role in North Korea's invasion of the South. By doing so, the CCP virtually provided Kim with a green light to attack the South.

But even at this early stage of the China–North Korea relationship, significant problems existed between Chinese and Korean Communists. Kim Il Sung, in planning the war to invade the South, did not visit Beijing to consult with Mao Zedong and the CCP leadership about his ideas until mid-May 1950, only one month prior to the war's beginning. Furthermore, he failed to inform Beijing of the exact schedule of the invasion. During the war years, especially after Chinese troops entered the war to rescue Kim's regime in October 1950, China's relations with the North Korean Communists became extremely close, but problems continued between the two sides. According to Chinese sources available in the past decade, China and North Korea experienced four major disputes during the Korean War years: First, in January 1951, when Chinese troops had pushed the battle line from areas close to the Yalu River to areas south of the 38th parallel, PLA commanders believed that their troops were not in a position to continue the offensive, but Kim insisted upon bringing the war further to the South. Second, in spring 1951, when U.S. forces had begun a counteroffensive on the battle field, the Chinese commanders carried out a strategy of “positive defense” to win time and space to reorganize their troops. But Kim again pushed the Chinese to use a counteroffensive of their own to cope with the American offensive. Third, after the armistice talks began in July 1951, the Chinese found it necessary to continue to control North Korea's railway transportation system, but Kim

endeavored to resume Pyongyang's direct control of the railway system. Fourth, in June and July 1953, after South Korean leader Syngman Rhee ordered the release of more than 25,000 anti-communist North Korean prisoners, the Chinese believed it necessary to give the enemy “another bitter strike” before reaching an armistice. But Kim opposed the plan and argued that it was better for military operations on the battlefield to stop immediately.

These differences can be regarded simply as discrepancies in strategies and tactics that usually emerge in any alliance relationship. More serious, however, was Kim Il Sung's purge of several prominent members (including Pak Il Yu and Mu Chong, the highest ranked PLA commander in the Korean People's Army) of the Yan'an faction within the KWP. Indeed, Kim demonstrated an extraordinary ability to manipulate this issue under the circumstances that his own regime's very survival was at the mercy of 1.35 million Chinese troops who were fighting a war in Korea on his behalf. Ostensibly Kim was able to use Mao Zedong's promise that Chinese troops in Korea would under no circumstances interfere with Korea's internal affairs to keep the Chinese out of these inner-Party purges. In essence, however, this epitomized a more general pattern in Beijing's mentality—one that had been profoundly penetrated by the “Central Kingdom's” sense of moral superiority in dealing with its subordinate neighbors (such as Korea and Vietnam)—in perceiving and handling relations with Kim and North Korea. For Mao, to send Chinese troops to Korea was not for such an “inferior” purpose of pursuing China's direct political and economic control in Korea, but was for, among other aims, achieving the Korean Communists' inner acceptance of China's morally superior position. This was why, in late September 1950, Mao refused to help opposition factions within the KWP get rid of Kim when Chinese troops were to enter Korea; and this was why Beijing established a self-imposed principle on not interfering with North Korea's internal affairs throughout the war years.

THE 1956 CRISIS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

Yet Kim, a Korean nationalist in soul and increasingly a dictator in practice, neither tolerated the continuous existence of any remaining pro-foreign faction

within his Party nor felt comfortable with having to live under the shadow of a morally superior China. All of this formed one of the most important conditions under which Kim introduced in 1955 the “*Juche*” ideology, emphasizing that the Korean revolution must be carried out in an indigenous Korean way and must achieve “self reliance” in all spheres.

It was against these backdrops that a serious crisis erupted between Pyongyang and Beijing in late 1956. At an August 30–31 KWP Central Committee plenary session that was officially designated for Kim to give a speech on his recent visit to the Soviet Union and East Europe, several prominent Party leaders who belonged to the Yan’an and pro-Soviet factions stood up to criticize Kim’s personality cult and challenge his economic policies. Kim, informed of the attack in advance, organized effective rebuttals. This resulted in four top Party cadres—Yun Kong Hum (Minister of Commerce), So Hwi (Chairman of Trade Unions), Yi Pil Guy (Minister of Construction Materials), and Kim Kang—fleeing to China, and several other Party cadres (including Yi Sang Jo, DPRK’s ambassador to Moscow and a member of the Yan’an faction) seeking asylum in the Soviet Union. Kim responded by expanding the purge. In addition to expelling these cadres from the Party, two top Party leaders, Choi Chang Ik (head of the Yan’an faction after Pak Il Yu’s purge) and Pak Chang Ok (head of the pro-Soviet faction) were both expelled from the Party and arrested.

In response, those KWP cadres who had fled to Beijing and Moscow presented their cases to the Chinese and Soviet parties. Regarding the recent crisis within the KWP leadership as caused by differences in policies and opinions rather than, as Kim had claimed, “reactionary attacks on the Party,” Beijing and Moscow decided to step in to investigate and provide mediation. On September 19, in the middle of the CCP’s own Eighth National Congress, two Chinese marshals, Peng Dehuai (who had been the commander of Chinese troops to Korea) and Nie Rongzhen, together with the Soviet Union’s first deputy prime minister and Party politburo member Anastas Mikoyan, flew to Pyongyang to meet with Kim Il Sung. After intensive discussions lasting four days, Kim finally agreed to make some concessions. On the same day that Peng, Nie and Mikoyan left Pyongyang, September 23, another plenary session of the KWP Central Committee

decided to restore Choi Chang Ik and Pak Chang Ok to the Central Committee and to reinstate Yun Kong Hum, So Hwi, and Yi Pil Gyu as Party members.

But this was the last time that Beijing (and Moscow) was able to force Kim to change his course of action, and, as it soon turned out, Kim’s concessions were only temporary. A few months later, he not only waged massive purges of the “August factionists” but also, through carrying out a “concentrated guidance” campaign, established a more monolithic political structure with himself as North Korea’s undisputable paramount leader. Consequently, a face-to-face dispute reportedly occurred between Mao and Kim. In November 1957, when both Mao and Kim were attending a meeting by leaders of Communist and Workers’ Parties from socialist countries in Moscow, the North Korean leader suggested to Mao that Beijing should hand the Korean “traitors” taking refuge in China back to Pyongyang. Mao refused, advising Kim that he should not treat comrades with different opinions as “reactionaries” but should learn from the CCP’s practice of “while no one would be executed the majority would not be arrested” in handling inner-Party struggle. In doing so, Mao was expressing strong disagreement with Kim’s bloody purge within the KWP. Kim, reportedly, felt quite offended and in turn complained about Chinese troops’ continuous presence in North Korea, implying that this was a violation of the DPRK’s sovereignty and an interference of its internal affairs. Mao immediately said that all Chinese troops would withdraw from Korea. In February 1958, Chinese premier Zhou Enlai visited Pyongyang to work out the details of the withdrawal. By the end of 1958, all Chinese troops indeed had left North Korea.

The 1956 crisis and the ensuing troop withdrawal from Korea significantly transformed the foundation of Beijing’s relations with Pyongyang while, at the same time, changing North Korea’s position in the international communist movement. Up to that point, North Korea had been a “little brother” under Moscow and Beijing, and Kim Il Sung, in spite of his consistent efforts to maintain autonomy in Pyongyang’s own decision-making, would have to consult with the two Communist “big brothers” on many important occasions. As a consequence of the 1956 crisis, Kim achieved greater independence and



a more equal status in dealing with Beijing and Moscow. In the DPRK's official propaganda, accompanying the discourse of "solidarity with other socialist countries" was a highlighted emphasis upon "opposing flunkeyism" as a fundamental principle that the Party should follow in its external relations. As a result, when Kim further consolidated his absolute control over North Korea's Party and state through a series of massive purges at home, he also dramatically enhanced Pyongyang's capacity in resisting influences from Beijing and Moscow. In July 1961, when the PRC and the DPRK signed a treaty of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance, it symbolized that the Chinese-North Korean relationship, by its essence, was now one between two "equal partners."

THE UPS AND DOWNS OF THE 1960S

In the early 1960s, Pyongyang further gained leverage in its dealings with Beijing when a great polemic debate concerning the nature of true communism emerged and intensified between China and the Soviet Union. In appearance, the North Koreans maintained neutrality toward Beijing and Moscow, but in reality they were more sympathetic to Beijing (this was largely due to Kim's resentment of Nikita Khrushchev's de-Stalinization campaign and criticism of Stalin's personality cult). When the CCP was increasingly isolated in the international communist movement with the deepening of the Sino-Soviet split, sympathetic support from Pyongyang became more and more important to Beijing. In a 1964 conversation with Choi Yong Kun, North Korea's second in command, Mao even asked him to comment on whether or not the Soviet Union would attack the PRC from the north, trying to win firmer support from Pyongyang. During this period, although Beijing's influence upon Pyongyang was further reduced, Chinese-North Korean relations—now based upon a foundation that was quite different from that of the early and mid-1950s—were very close.

The situation, however, changed in the mid-1960s. On the one hand, after Khrushchev's downfall in October 1964, the new Soviet leadership started providing more material support to the DPRK; on the other, the eruption of the "Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution" in 1966 sunk

China's Party, state and society into great chaos, causing the PRC's external relations in general—and its relations with the DPRK in particular—to be severely derailed. Consequently, Chinese-North Korean relations reached low ebb from 1967-1969, when the Cultural Revolution was experiencing its most hectic stage. The Red Guards in China widely made Kim Il Sung a target of criticism, proclaiming that North Korea, like the Soviet Union, had degenerated into a "revisionist country." And the Beijing leadership, which was by itself in constant disorder, did little to stop these activities. At some points it even seemed that the PRC-DPRK alliance was going to be undermined.

When both Beijing and Pyongyang strongly felt the negative impact caused by the deterioration of their relationship, they started to take action to improve relations. In January 1968, when a serious crisis erupted between the DPRK and the United States after the U.S. intelligence vessel *Pueblo* and its crew were captured by the North Koreans, the PRC government issued a statement on January 29, 1968 to provide "firm support" to the DPRK. Then a dramatic turn in Chinese-North Korean relations occurred on September 30, 1969, the eve of the 20th anniversary of the PRC's establishment. Although Beijing had decided in principle that no foreign delegation would be invited to attend the celebrations for the anniversary, at 3:20 p.m. on September 30, "for the purpose of improving Chinese-Korean relations," Beijing issued an invitation for a top North Korean leader to visit Beijing. At 6:25 p.m., Pyongyang replied that Choi Yong Kun would travel to China, and Choi arrived in Beijing at 11:30 that evening. The next day, Mao met with him atop the Gate of Heavenly Peace, telling him that "the relations between our two countries are special and our aims are identical, so we should improve our relations."

THE LIMITED RECONSOLIDATION OF THE 1970S

Mao issued these statements at a time when China was not only engaged in a two-decade-long confrontation with the United States but also, and worse, faced serious security threat from the Soviet Union—indeed, reportedly Moscow even considered conducting preemptive strikes on China's

nuclear facilities. It would have been unwise if Beijing had failed to take action to improve relations with the DPRK as a neighbor and a Communist ally. But this also meant that Beijing's leverage upon Pyongyang became even more limited than before. When both Beijing and Pyongyang again emphasized the solidarity between them in the early 1970s, the alliance, along with a shared belief in communist ideology, was supported by a series of shrewd security agreements. One important element was that Beijing, by standing together with North Korea in the "armistice regime" on the peninsula, naturally occupied a crucial position to prop up the security of the DPRK, whereas North Korea served as a security buffer on China's northeast border. Mutual political support, such as Beijing contending that the DPRK legally represented the entire Korea and Pyongyang firmly supporting the notion that the PRC was China's sole legal government, formed another important aspect of the alliance. Furthermore, the personal ties between top leaders of the two sides—who by then had known each other for over a quarter-century—played another key role to make the relationship stable.

One of the most important turning points during the Cold War was the Sino-American rapprochement in the early 1970s. Compared with the resentment from Albania and North Vietnam, two of China's other Communist allies, Pyongyang demonstrated a willingness to understand and support Beijing on this issue, to which Chinese leaders were grateful. However, this did not mean that Beijing would be willing to stand on Pyongyang's side on any matter that was important to the North Koreans. The limitedness of the Chinese–North Korean alliance was most clearly revealed in April 1975, when Kim Il Sung traveled to Beijing to try to gain China's backing for his renewed interest in using a "revolutionary war" to unify the Korean peninsula. Kim's visit occurred against the background of impending Communist victories in Vietnam and Cambodia and the U.S. withdrawal from Indochina. Kim delivered a highly belligerent speech after arriving in Beijing, contending that Asia was approaching "a new era of revolution" and that if a revolutionary war were to break out in Korea "we will only lose the Military Demarcation Line and will gain the country's reunification." But, Beijing showed little interest in Kim's ideas.

Reportedly, in Kim's meeting with Mao, the CCP chairman referred him to Deng Xiaoping for discussions of "issues related to Korea." Deng, on his part, emphasized that China was facing the great challenge of promoting socialist economic reconstruction at home, and therefore would not be in a position to commit itself to Kim's "revolutionary war" plans.

WIDENING THE GAP IN THE 1980s AND AFTER THE COLD WAR

As it turned out, the discrepancy demonstrated in the 1975 Deng–Kim meeting was with a meaning much deeper and broader than the issues under discussion. It indicated that Beijing, after persistently pursuing a Korea policy aimed at bringing about revolutionary changes on the peninsula, was willing to live with the status quo. This new tendency in Chinese policy became more evident after Mao's death in September 1976. With Deng Xiaoping ascending in the late 1970s to become China's paramount leader, a profound derevolutionization process swept across China. When Deng placed on top of his agenda modernizing China's industry, agriculture, national defense, and science, the unfolding of a new era of "Reform and Opening to the Outside" also made China depart from the path as a "revolutionary country" in international politics. Consequently, Beijing, even before the end of the global Cold War, began to consider the feasibility of normalizing relations with South Korea, further revealing that its Korea policy as a whole was increasingly taking the maintenance of the status quo as a basic aim.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War completely changed the context of East Asian international politics. It also brought about new and important differences to the PRC and the DPRK. The most outstanding among them has been the different ways in which Beijing and Pyongyang have coped with their respective legitimacy crises. Beijing chose to enhance the "Reform and Opening" process by establishing a Chinese-style "socialist market economy" so that China would be incorporated into the international community, whereas Pyongyang opted to remain closed to the outside world and stick to its own codes of behavior in every sense. Thus emerged a new funda-



mental difference between Beijing and Pyongyang that had not existed during most of the Cold War: While the PRC has gradually changed into an international actor *within* the existing international system, demonstrating a general willingness to be bound by the rules and regulations widely accepted by other actors, the DPRK has persistently stayed *outside* the existing international system, refusing to act in accordance with the widely accepted rules and regulations. In addition to all the reasons that had contributed to China's limited influence over North Korea in the past, this new difference makes it even more difficult for Beijing to affect the orientation of Pyongyang's attitudes and policies in the post-Cold War age.

THE DIFFICULT CHALLENGES OF THE 1990S

Not surprisingly, during most of the 1990s—especially after the PRC normalized diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK) in 1992 and Kim Il Sung's death in 1994—China–North Korea relations sunk into another cold period. In almost seven years (1992–1999), top leaders from the two countries did not visit the other. In response to the PRC–ROK normalization, Pyongyang intentionally demonstrated an interest in developing economic and cultural ties with Taiwan. It has been widely speculated that in 1993 the North Korean member of the International Olympic Committee did not cast a supporting vote for Beijing in its unsuccessful bid for 2000 Olympic Games. In February 1997, when Beijing allowed Hwang Chang Yop—a KWP secretary and, as widely perceived, a main architect of the *Juche* ideology—to defect to the South through seeking refuge at the ROK embassy in Beijing, tension became further intensified between the PRC and the DPRK. This was only to be followed by the disastrous consequences of the North Korean food crisis in the mid-1990s, which caused flows of refugees to enter Manchuria. Accompanying all these tensions was a steady decrease in the volume of PRC–DPRK trade. After the two abolished their barter system for bilateral trade in 1992, the value of Chinese–North Korean trade reduced continuously in the following seven years, from \$899 million in 1993 to \$370 million in 1999. In the meantime, Beijing's relations with Seoul developed rapidly and comprehensively.

Throughout the 1990s, the trade relationship between the PRC and the ROK maintained a two-digit annual rate of increase, which made Pyongyang feel genuinely offended. The difficulty of handling the relationship was further augmented, as personal ties among top leaders in Beijing and Pyongyang were no longer operative following the deaths of Kim Il Sung and Deng Xiaoping. Beijing's leaders, like concerned policymakers in other parts of the world, at times seemed unable to understand the new North Korean leader Kim Jong Il's behavior.

Despite these numerous problems, Beijing's leaders endeavored to maintain the “traditional friendship” with Pyongyang. They had reasons to do so. In addition to the strategic consideration that North Korea would serve as a buffer for China, they also understood that the DPRK's political and economic collapse would result in a geopolitical earthquake in northeast Asia, thus bringing about detrimental impact upon China's own plans for economic modernization. Even with the dramatic decrease in overall trade with North Korea, China remained the DPRK's largest outside supplier for food and oil. In the mid-1990s, Beijing's emergency food aid to Pyongyang probably had saved the North Korean society from a disastrous collapse. In the meantime, Beijing had tried to play a constructive role in international diplomacy about issues related to the Korean peninsula (such as participating in the Four Party Talks process beginning in 1997), while, at the same time, trying every channel to advise Kim Jong Il that for North Korea's own sake it should pursue its own path of “reform and opening to the outside world.”

THE SHORT-LIVED “ROSY HOPES” OF 2000–2001

Finally, a turning point came in 1999. In June, Kim Yong Nam, then a KWP politburo member and chairman of the DPRK's Supreme People's Assembly, visited Beijing. In October, Chinese foreign minister Tang Jiaxuan visited Pyongyang. The next year, Kim Jong Il shocked the world by agreeing to attend the North–South summit. Right before the meeting, he visited China in May 2000. Seven months later, in January 2001, he traveled to China again—this time to Shanghai, China's model case for reform and opening policies. Beginning in

2000, Chinese–North Korean trade started increasing. At the moment it seemed as if Kim Jong Il was willing to develop a reform strategy of his own version. Meanwhile, high-level talks were waged between Pyongyang and Washington, revealing the possibility that the 1994 Geneva Agreement Framework, together with the result of the North–South summit, could be transformed into a new peace structure that would replace the unstable “armistice regime” that had existed on the Korean peninsula for almost half century.

But this period of rosy hopes was short-lived. While Kim Jong Il failed to demonstrate a willingness and ability to stick to the course of reconciliation initiated by the June 2000 North–South summit, Washington’s inclusion of Pyongyang as part of the “axis of evil” further interrupted the process designed by Seoul, Beijing and Washington during previous years to engage North Korea. When the atmosphere of confrontation had replaced that of reconciliation on the Korea peninsula, a crisis situation emerged. Now, as is well known, the crisis is still developing, demonstrating the potential of another “Korean War.”

CONCLUSION

What will Beijing do to control this crisis? There is no simple answer. Beijing has plenty of reasons not to allow the crisis to grow out of control. Since the mid-1970s and certainly during the post–Cold War era, a fundamental feature of Beijing’s policy toward the Korean peninsula has been the maintenance of the status quo. If any transformation in the region were to happen, Beijing would prefer it to happen through negotiations between the two Koreas and through international diplomacy involving Beijing as a main East Asian power. Beijing’s leaders need North Korea to continuously serve as China’s strategic buffer on its northeastern border, and need a stable and peaceful environment in East Asia that will help promote China’s plans of economic modernization. Therefore, Beijing certainly has a strong desire to help resolve the Korean nuclear crisis.

However, the real problem is not what Beijing is willing to do, but what it is in a position to do.

Beijing’s relationship with Pyongyang in the past half century, though close in a general sense, has not been harmonious. And Beijing’s ability to influence the orientation of Pyongyang’s attitudes and policies has been quite limited. Even during the Korean War years, when large numbers of Chinese troops were present on Korean territory, Beijing failed to stop Kim Il Sung from purging outstanding members of the Yan’an faction within the KWP. Kim Il Sung’s shrewd handling of the 1956 crisis further demonstrated that he was capable of sticking to his own course of action in face of pressures from Beijing. Since then, Pyongyang has developed a policymaking structure, as well as a rationality associated with it, that is highly independent (epitomized by the *Juche* ideology). In the post–Cold War age, Beijing and Pyongyang have been further driven apart by their different attitudes toward the existing international system and as a result of the passing away of the old generation of leaders who communicated with each other through special “personal ties.” In these senses, Beijing has not occupied a more privileged position than others in dealing with Pyongyang’s leaders. Indeed, given that Korea historically had been China’s sphere of influence and both Chinese and North Korean leaders have been extremely sensitive toward the impact of that tradition, Beijing’s leaders will have to show real caution in trying to advise, let alone applying pressure on, Pyongyang.

Beijing’s real leverage on Pyongyang is North Korea’s economic dependence upon China. But this certainly does not mean that Beijing’s leaders are in a position to impose certain policy decisions upon North Korea at will. In actuality, Beijing’s leaders are facing a major dilemma in this regard: if they do not apply the economic means, it is likely that their voice will go unheard by Pyongyang’s ears; but if they do use economic means—such as cutting off China’s aid to North Korea—this might backfire and, in the worst case scenario, might even cause North Korea’s economic and societal collapse and thus result in a huge blow to China’s own interests. Therefore, Beijing will have to act cautiously in designing and implementing its policies toward Pyongyang. It seems that Beijing is yet to develop a satisfactory strategy to cope with this dilemma.



China and North Korea in a Changing World

SAMUEL S. KIM

THE EMERGING DOUBLE PARADOX

At the locus of the “last glacier of the Cold War,” there is a double paradox at work on the Korean peninsula, as it is structured and symbolized by two competing alliances: PRC-DPRK (1961) and ROK-U.S. (1954). The peninsula is experiencing an unprecedented crisis of alliance maintenance, and even survival. For better or worse, the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK), or North Korea, is the only country with which the People’s Republic of China (PRC) maintains its 1961 Cold War alliance pact. Yet, amidst Chinese worries that the U.S.-DPRK nuclear confrontation may spiral out of control, and an indicator of this crisis, in March 2003 Beijing established a Leading Group on the North Korean Crisis (LGNKC). Headed by President Hu Jintao, the Group intends to improve assessment of the intelligence “black hole” over Pyongyang’s nuclear capabilities and intentions, as well as to construct a cost-effective conflict management strategy.

There is no mistaking that the half-century-old U.S.-Republic of Korea (ROK) alliance has also recently been mired in unprecedented disarray, especially since the coming of the hard-line Bush administration in 2001. Even more tellingly, Sino-ROK relations in political, economic, cultural, and perceptual terms have grown by leaps and bounds over the past decade. According to a major public opinion survey conducted by the ROK Ministry of Information in 1996, 47.1 percent of South Koreans chose China as Korea’s “closest partner for the year 2006,” in striking contrast to only 24.8 percent selecting the United States. In a major multinational citizens’ opinion survey jointly sponsored by *Tong-a Ilbo* (Seoul) and *Asahi Shinbun* (Tokyo) and conducted in the fall of 2000, 52.6 percent of South Korean citizen-respondents predicted China to be the most influential Asian power in ten years, compared to only 23.3 percent for Japan and 8.1 percent for the United States. Similarly, according to the



Beijing Area Study’s feeling thermometer (0-100 degrees), the mean degree of positive feeling toward South Korea was 58 degrees, in contrast to 47 degrees for the United States and 35 degrees for Japan.

Against the backdrop of rising anti-Americanism—more accurately anti-Bushism—in recent years there has also been a “China vogue” (*Hanfeng*) underway in South Korea, just as there is an “ROK wave” (*Hanliu*) in China. In the context of the unfolding nuclear crisis on the Korean Peninsula, Beijing is moving closer to Seoul than to Pyongyang or Washington, just as Seoul is moving closer to Beijing than to its superpower ally in Washington or even Pyongyang. To some Chinese analysts, Seoul’s stand is rational and sensible, constituting one of the biggest safeguards that have prevented the U.S.-DPRK nuclear confrontation from escalating into war.

MANAGING ASYMMETRIC SECURITY INTERDEPENDENCE

A brief review of the creation of the complex and evolving Beijing-Pyongyang-Seoul triangle recog-

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nizes the ineluctable truth that the shift from a one-Korea to a two-Koreas policy is one of the most momentous changes in China's post-Cold War policy. In contrast with China's 1950 decision to intervene in the Korean War, the Joint Communiqué of 1992 that normalized China-South Korea relations lacked all the hallmarks of a foreign policy crisis. By fits and starts, Beijing's Korea policy in the long Deng decade evolved through several phases—from the familiar one-Korea (pro-Pyongyang) policy to a one-Korea de jure/two-Koreas de facto policy and finally to a policy of two-Koreas de facto and de jure. The normalization decision was the culmination of a process of balancing and adjusting post-Mao foreign policy to the logic of changing domestic, regional, and global situations.

For China, the greatest challenge to smooth management of the new Beijing-Pyongyang-Seoul relationship has remained Pyongyang's security behavior, which has varied from nuclear brinkmanship to missile-coercive diplomacy. The North Korean security predicament, along with the question of how to manage it in a cost-effective way, has remained one of the most important challenges confronting China's foreign relations in the post-Cold War world. An unstable North Korea with inordinate potential to destabilize Northeast Asia with the threat of its conventional and non-conventional military capabilities has extraordinary refractory ramifications for China's foreign policy in general and its two-Koreas policy in particular. Whether Beijing likes it or not, Pyongyang's brinkmanship has already become an important security issue in regional and global politics, especially in America's East Asian policy and Sino-American relations.

Although Beijing's relations with North Korea began to be renormalized in recent years (1999–2001), due in no small part to shared threat perceptions emanating from the America-led Kosovo war, there remains just beneath the surface a highly asymmetrical interdependence in all political, military, and economic issue areas. This is still a fragile relationship of strategic convenience fraught with the underlying tensions and asymmetries of mutual expectations and interests. Thanks to growing enmeshment in the global community, China's concept and practice of "security" has experienced considerable modification in the post-Mao era of

reform and opening, while North Korea remains an insecure hermit kingdom, a country with seemingly fatal contradictions on the verge of explosion or implosion.

What then explains the paradox of North Korea's survival as it continues to muddle through with China as its only formal ally, even while Beijing finds Pyongyang increasingly difficult to deal with? Indeed, the single greatest challenge confronting Beijing is the weakness, not the strength, of post-Kim Il Sung North Korea.

STABILITY VERSUS SURVIVAL

Faced with asymmetrical interdependence realities on the ground, Beijing seeks to achieve multiple, mutually competing goals on several fronts. These goals include maintaining peace and stability on the Korean peninsula, promoting economic exchange and cooperation with South Korea, helping North Korea's regime survive, halting the flow of North Korean refugees into Jilin Province, stopping the rise of ethnonationalism among ethnic Chinese-Koreans, and enhancing China's influence in Korean affairs. Put simply, China's foreign-policy wish list with respect to its northeast neighbor includes at least five "no's": no instability, no collapse, no nukes, no refugees or defectors, and no conflict escalation.

Nonetheless, China's geopolitical calculus must also be understood in a larger context of grand strategic goals and practical means of international conduct that Chinese leaders have pursued. Viewed in this light, China's foreign policy forms a double triangulation: domestic, regional, and global levels interact in the pursuit of three overarching demands and goals. The first is economic development, with an eye to enhancing domestic stability and legitimacy. The second is promotion of a peaceful and secure external environment free of threats to China's sovereignty and territorial integrity in Asia. And the third overarching goal is cultivation of its status as a responsible great power in global politics. In order to compensate for growing domestic security and legitimacy deficits, Beijing's foreign policy faces intense demand to accelerate economic development and restore China's great-power status in the world. China's fourth-generation leadership now officially proclaims the maintenance of domestic stability, or the successful establishment of a "well-off



society” (*xiaokang shehui*) as the single greatest challenge in the years ahead.

For the DPRK, however, the most daunting challenge is how to survive as it seeks more aid as an external life-support system, without triggering a cataclysmic system collapse. According to the ROK Ministry of Unification, over 20 percent of food and over 50 percent of fuel in North Korea comes from foreign aid. The end of the Cold War, the demise of the Soviet Union, and the end of Sino-Soviet rivalry have transformed both the context and the condition for maintaining the traditional “lips-to-teeth” strategic ties. Still, North Korea has earned a reputation as “the power of the weak,” creating and using crises to extract concessions to compensate for growing domestic failings. With continuing asymmetries of needs and expectations, Beijing’s foreign policy objectives coalesce, clash, or compete with those of Pyongyang in situation-specific ways.

MANAGING ASYMMETRIC SOCIO-ECONOMIC INTERDEPENDENCE

From the perspective of post-Mao reform, the South Korean economy has represented opportunities to be more fully exploited, whereas North Korea’s economic troubles have posed a burden to be lessened without damaging geopolitical ties or causing system collapse. In the wake of the 1990 Soviet-ROK normalization, China’s status as North Korea’s biggest trading partner and principal economic patron has become a mixed blessing. In the process of the geopolitical and geoeconomic transformations of the early post-Cold War years, a highly asymmetric Beijing-Pyongyang-Seoul triangular economic relationship has emerged.

China’s economic relations with the DPRK over the years is notable in several respects. First, Sino-DPRK trade seems closely keyed to and determined by turbulent political trajectories. Second, North Korea’s trade deficits with China have been chronic and substantial, amounting to a cumulative total of \$4.45 billion between 1990 and 2002—\$6.1 billion imported from China and only \$1.7 billion exported to China. While China remained North Korea’s largest trade partner in the 1990s in terms of total value, Beijing has allowed Pyongyang to run average annual deficits of approximately \$358 million since 1995. China’s role in the DPRK’s trade is even larg-

er if barter transactions and aid are factored into these figures. In contrast, South Korea’s trade with China in 2002 amounted to \$44 billion—60 times greater than that of North Korea—with a huge annual trade surplus of \$6 to \$10 billion. For the first time since the collapse of Sinocentric order in East Asia in the late 19th century, in 2002 China reasserted its historic role as the largest trade partner of the Korean peninsula as a whole.

The third notable characteristic of PRC-DPRK economic relations is that North Korea’s aid dependency has grown unabated. Although the exact amount of China’s aid remains unknown, support for North Korea is generally estimated at one-quarter to one-third of China’s overall foreign aid. By mid 1994, China accounted for about three-quarters of North Korea’s oil and food imports. More recently, China is reported to be providing 70 to 90 percent of North Korea’s oil and a third of its imports and food aid. With the cessation of America’s heavy-fuel oil delivery in December 2002, China’s oil aid and exports may now be in excess of 90 percent of North Korea’s energy aid. Whether intentionally or not, Beijing has become more deeply involved, playing a crucial role year to year in the politics of regime survival by providing more aid in a wider variety of forms: direct government-to-government aid, subsidized cross-border trade, and private barter transactions.

Paradoxically, Pyongyang’s growing dependence on Beijing for economic and political survival has led to mutual distrust and resentment. Just as Mao demanded and resented Soviet aid for China’s nuclear development, first Kim Il Sung and now Kim Jong Il have demanded but also resented Chinese aid. Indeed, Pyongyang’s seeming inability to rework its national identity in the face of a changing geopolitical context has engendered intense behind-the-scenes bargaining amidst an atmosphere of mutual suspicion. In every high-level meeting between the two governments, the North Korean request for economic aid dominates the agenda. Nonetheless, Beijing continues to provide minimal necessary survival aid in order to lessen the flow of refugees into China, to delay a potential North Korean collapse, and to enhance China’s own leverage in Pyongyang and Seoul. However, since North Koreans realize that China’s aid is given for Beijing’s own self-interest, it has not actually

increased China's leverage with Pyongyang, much to Beijing's growing chagrin and frustration.

The rapid growth of Sino-Korean interactions at all levels involving political, economic, educational, religious, and humanitarian actors has also created a mixture of emerging challenges for identity politics in the complex web of asymmetrical interdependence. There has already emerged a Pyongyang-Beijing-Seoul triangle of human movements, involving flows of some 200,000 to 300,000 refugees from North Korea to northeast China, more than 400,000 Chinese middle-class tourists and about 135,000 Chinese-Korean (*chosonjok*) illegal migrant workers from China to South Korea, and almost a million South Korean tourists to China in 2000, reaching 1.72 million visitors in 2002. In 2001, there were for the first time more Chinese visitors (some 444,000) to South Korea than Americans. Against this backdrop, the North Korean refugee question, hitherto a much ignored potential time bomb for both Koreas, has brought into sharp relief Beijing's abiding concerns about a North Korean collapse leading to Korean reunification by Southern absorption.

AVOIDING THE NUCLEAR APOCALYPSE

Beijing's uncharacteristically proactive conflict-management role in the latest U.S.-DPRK nuclear standoff suggests China's changing strategic calculus and reprioritization of the many competing interests and goals. At least until the end of 2002, China maintained a "who me?" posture, trying hard to keep out of harm's way with a strategy of calculated ambiguity and equidistance. As a way of maximizing its influence over Korean affairs, China often sought to be all things to all parties—which raises questions about their true intentions. In short, Beijing followed Deng's foreign policy axiom of "hiding its light under a bushel" by not placing itself on the front lines of the Korean conflict as either a mediator or peacemaker for fear it might get burned if something went wrong.

All of this has changed in the heat of the second nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, in several dramatic and unprecedented ways. In the first quarter of 2003, Beijing was busy at long-distance telephone diplomacy, reportedly having passed over fifty messages back and forth between Pyongyang and

Washington. For the first time, Beijing successfully initiated and hosted a round of trilateral talks involving the United States, the DPRK, and China in Beijing (April 23-25). Despite, or perhaps because, of the inconclusive ending of the Beijing talks, China's sudden burst of conflict-management activity in the form of jet-setting preventive diplomacy accelerated. In July 2003, Beijing dispatched its top troubleshooter—Deputy Foreign Minister Dai Bingguo—to Moscow, Pyongyang, and Washington to seek ways of "finding common ground while preserving differences" (*qitong cunyi*).

Despite the recurring and somewhat nebulous reassurance that China seeks a denuclearized Korean peninsula and that the crisis must be solved peacefully, it is becoming increasingly obvious that China's status-quo seeking diplomacy is no longer tenable because the status quo on the ground is changing rapidly in dangerous directions. One small but still inconclusive example of China's changing geostrategic calculus on the Korean peninsula is that in the spring of 2003 some Chinese analysts were openly beginning to question the strategic value of the Sino-DPRK alliance with American interlocutors, while others were espousing the need for a new thinking, a new strategy, and a new preventive diplomacy.

Nonetheless, the major catalyst for Beijing's hands-on preventive diplomacy is growing security concerns about possible U.S. recklessness in trying to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis through military means. Some Chinese analysts argue that the Bush administration is more interested in resolving the North Korean nuclear crisis with smart weapons than with dialogue and negotiations. Indeed, the conventional wisdom that the second U.S.-DPRK nuclear crisis began in October 2002, when Pyongyang admitted the existence of a secret highly-enriched-uranium (HEU) program, is only partly right. In fact, this crisis was long in the making. In June 2000, the Clinton administration announced its decision to expunge the term "rogue state" from the U.S. foreign policy lexicon, explaining that the category had already outlived its usefulness. Yet candidate Bush continued to use the term "rogue state" to refer to North Korea, Iran, and Iraq. Then came the "axis of evil" state of the union speech in January 2002, which upgraded the rogue-state strategy to the evil-state strategy. It became



increasingly evident that this was more than rhetorical posturing, as shown by a series of radical shifts in America's military doctrine (e.g., the Quadrennial Defense Review that called for a paradigm shift from threat-based to capability-based models, the Nuclear Posture Review lowering the threshold of use of tactical nukes, and the Bush doctrine of pre-emption).

From Beijing's perspective, the perverse and self-defeating consequences of the evil-state strategy are seen as aiding and abetting hard-liners in Pyongyang and fueling the compensatory brinkmanship/breakdown/breakthrough (BBB) behavior of the first U.S.-DPRK nuclear standoff in 1994. Faced with such a clear and present danger, along with the U.S. decision to stop sending the monthly heavy fuel supplies that were part of the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, Pyongyang did what most countries under similar circumstances would do. What particularly unnerved Chinese leaders was the news on April 2003 that Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld had circulated a memorandum proposing that the United States ally itself with China to isolate and bring about a collapse of the North Korean regime. Thus, China's "cooperative behavior"—to go along with America's regime change strategy—became the litmus test for enhanced Sino-American cooperation. Beijing's proactive preventive diplomacy seems designed to preempt America's evil-state coercive strategy. After all, "evil" is something to be destroyed, not something to negotiate with. Indeed, the Bush administration has boxed itself—and North Korea—into a corner.

The Chinese leadership, faced with the harsh realities on the ground, is giving the crisis the highest priority. As Pyongyang continues to command what former Commander of United States Forces in Korea Gen. John H. Tilelli, Jr., called "tyranny of proximity," in early 2003 President Bush shifted gears toward non sequitur diplomacy—he is willing to talk but never negotiate. Meanwhile, Pentagon hawks are working overtime concocting all kinds of strangulation strategies, such as Rumsfeld's Operations Plan 5030 and the eleven-nation Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI) to establish an air and naval blockade/sanctions regime. China's challenge, therefore, is to navigate between the Scylla of allied abandonment, with the potential for instability and/or collapse in North Korea, and the

Charybdis of allied entrapment, with the continuing danger of being caught in conflict escalation not of its own making.

CHINA'S CONFLICT MANAGEMENT ROLE

The U.S.-DPRK nuclear standoff has triggered an agonizing reappraisal of the strategic value of the Sino-DPRK allied relationship. Some Chinese scholars have begun to discuss, for the first time, whether Pyongyang is an asset or liability in China's grand strategic calculus, in comparison to the costs and benefits of enhanced cooperation with Washington. While both Pyongyang and Washington, according to Shi Yinhong of Renmin University, are to blame for the current terrible and dangerous situation on the Korean peninsula, the former holds more direct responsibility than the latter. Shi sees three worst-case scenarios looming over the North Korean issue: (1) North Korean nuclear blackmail directed at China; (2) Japan going nuclear; and (3) a U.S.-DPRK war. China must therefore move away from tactical maneuvering to grand strategic restructuring and reprioritization, breaking free from moral constraints to seek and supplement diplomatic mediation efforts with economic sanctions.

The question for Chinese leaders and policy analysts is still whether the costs of a dramatic change—refugees, possible war on the peninsula, and the loss of a strategic buffer, among others—sufficiently outweigh the benefits of regime change in the North. To date, China's official position remains the same: it is opposed to any coercive sanctions measures since they only lead to more provocative and potentially destabilizing countermeasures. China is more committed to the immediate challenge of maintaining stability than it is to pursuing its long-term objective of nuclear disarmament on the Korean peninsula. Apart from maximizing its leverage as a balancer, the greatest danger is from two alternative possibilities: conflict or collapse. China's junior socialist ally in the strategic buffer zone could feel so cornered that it fights back, triggering a full-blown armed conflagration. Alternatively, economic sanctions could work so well as to produce another collapsing socialist regime on China's borders, with huge political, economic, and social consequences for Chinese domestic politics. Beijing's realpolitik logic here

seems clear enough: to abandon or rebuke Pyongyang publicly, especially during a crisis situation, would be to follow the Soviet fallacy of premature allied abandonment, losing whatever leverage it may still have in the politics of divided Korea.

Moreover, Beijing believes, as do many North Korea experts, that Pyongyang's HEU program may have started as a hedge or a strategic "ace in the hole" but was accelerated in response to the perceived ratcheting-up of hostile attitude by the Bush administration. The logic of Beijing's proactive preventive diplomacy is to avert the crystallization of conditions under which Pyongyang could calculate that lashing out—to preempt America's preventive strike, as it were—is a rational course of action, even if victory were impossible.

China's preferred solution is now advanced in the form of a comprehensive package deal stressing several key elements: (1) restarting diplomatic dialogue and negotiations in an bi-multilateral framework (trilateral talks with bilateral talks on the sidelines); (2) avoiding any hostile or provocative rhetoric and actions; and (3) specifying security assurances and economic aid in exchange for dismantling the nuclear program, thus reviving and revising the 1994 Agreed Framework.

Yet such a comprehensive but flexible proposal is easier proposed than accepted. Certainly, Beijing is better situated than any other regional power to help both Pyongyang and Washington think outside the box of their mutual making. Nonetheless, there are at least three major constraints on China's leverage in the resolution of the U.S.-DPRK nuclear confrontation.

First, China does not have as much influence over North Korea's security behavior as Washington believes. China's primary leverage is food and oil aid, but this is a double-edge sword, so Beijing is cautious to a fault for fear of provoking and/or causing collapse in the North, with all the social, economic, and political destabilizing consequences. Paradoxically, China's leverage is also its vulnerability. Strategically located at the vortex of Northeast Asian security—indeed, the most important strategic nexus of the Asia-Pacific region—Pyongyang could potentially entrap China and/or all other regional powers in a spiral of conflict escalation.

Second, China's leverage in reshaping the Bush administration's rogue-state strategy ranges from

very modest to virtually nil. With China generating a trade surplus of over \$103 billion in 2002 (by U.S. calculations), the United States is the one country that can help or hinder China's march to great powerdom. However, the Bush administration's relentless pressure on China to exercise its leverage, mainly through economic sanctions, may well exceed the price that Beijing is willing or able to pay in pushing Pyongyang in potentially dangerous directions.

Third is the often-overlooked question of nuclear fairness and justice. If nuclear weapons are necessary for China's security, or if Israel, India, and Pakistan can get away with building a weapons program by dint of not signing the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, why is the same not true for North Korea? Pyongyang asserted as much in its repeated statements that if missile development is permissible for the United States, China, Russia, and Japan, then it is surely permissible for the DPRK. In short, as the world's third largest nuclear power, Beijing cannot capture the high moral ground in pushing too vigorously for unilateral nuclear disarmament of an insecure hermit kingdom in its strategic buffer zone.

CONCLUSION

The interplay of a rising China and a declining North Korea in the post-Cold War world is complex and often confusing, with paradoxical expectations and consequences. On the one hand, contrary to conventional realist wisdom, China usually behaves as a largely conservative status quo power, more satisfied with its born-again national status and security than at any time since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949. On the other hand, North Korea at first glance seems like a textbook case of how most Chinese dynasties collapsed under the twin blows of *neiluan* and *waihuan* (internal disorder and external calamity). Yet the DPRK has defied all collapse scenarios and predictions, as well as the classical realist axiom that the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept. For its own geopolitical interests and domestic and regional stability, Beijing has played a generally positive role in Korean affairs, not only providing necessary economic support to the DPRK, but also making it clear to Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo that it is now in the common interest of all to promote the peaceful coexis-



tence of the two Korean states on the peninsula rather than having to cope with the turmoil, chaos, and probable massive exodus of refugees that would follow in the wake of system collapse in the North.

In the early 1950s it was common to hear the rallying cry that China needed to start a tidal wave of learning from the Soviet Union so as to make today's Soviet Union tomorrow's China. Half a century later, perhaps the greatest challenge to China's leadership in the uncertain years ahead is how to prevent tomorrow's China from becoming yesterday's Soviet Union. Many Chinese leaders and scholars have come to recognize the ineluctable Toynbeeian truth that the degeneration of a large country or empire—such as the former Soviet Union and many Chinese dynasties—starts from the internal roots of ethnonational separatism, economic stagnation, or political and social chaos, and they see the need to respond to the challenge of establishing a stable, orderly, and

healthy society as the top priority. There is every indication that Chinese leaders are determined not to repeat the Soviet strategic blunder of placing an unbearable defense burden on its economy by spending too much on its military forces.

China is arguably a more influential player in the reshaping of the future of the Korean peninsula than at any time since the Korean War and than any other peripheral power. And yet its capacity to initiate or implement consistent policies toward the two Koreas is increasingly constrained by the norms and practices of important domestic groups, and northeast Asian regional and global regimes, as well as the United States. When all is said and done, the future of North Korea is not for China to make. China can help or hinder North Korea in taking one system-rescuing approach instead of another, but in the end no external power can determine North Korea's future.

Asymmetric Nuisance Value: The Border in China-DPRK Relations

HAZEL SMITH

Chinese-Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, more commonly known as North Korea) international relations are conventionally understood as if both countries were monolithic actors, controlling and directing all inter-country activities through the medium of a small number of elite government and military officials. This picture provides only a partial representation of the truth. North Koreans and Chinese engage in substantial interaction along the China-DPRK border—to varying degrees of intensity and with the involvement of diverse actors. Border interactions have not provided a major source of conflict although some official and non-official DPRK activities have provided asymmetric nuisance value for China. The border for the DPRK is a source of access to food, goods and income. China remains willing to permit North Koreans to engage in cross-border activities but has reacted forcefully to secure its own interests when these were threatened by DPRK border activity.

The interaction of North Korean and Chinese elites is limited geographically and functionally. North Korean and Chinese elites normally only visit each other's capitals whilst interaction is formal and restricted to matters of high politics. While Chinese officials and senior academics have privileged access to Pyongyang they are not permitted to move around the country or engage in independent activities. Apart from official elites, however, other North Korean and Chinese actors engage in regular interaction of varying degrees of intensity. These include Chinese and North Korean businesses, local governments on both sides of the border, humanitarian organisations and churches (in China), academics and Chinese and North Korean individuals who are engaged in regular border crossings, of both a legal and illegal nature. If Chinese-DPRK interaction is only understood as what happens between elites, the extent of Chinese interaction with the DPRK state and society and, conversely, DPRK interaction with Chinese state and society, is underestimated and therefore poorly understood.



The complexity of Chinese-DPRK relations is perhaps best illustrated through a study of political, economic and social dynamics along the long, open, geographically and demographically diverse land border between the two countries. Given that even the most informed audience with empirical data has paid scarce attention to the border, the first purpose of this essay is to demonstrate the diversity of background conditions along the border that serve to enable or constrain cooperation and conflict. The second purpose of the essay is to inform policy debates of all those involved in seeking stability and peace on the Korean peninsula such as to provide ideas for improved and more nuanced policy interventions, both on border issues and in the context of broader China-DPRK relations. Certainly, China-DPRK border relations are not as politically important or as sensitive as the major security dynamics with which China is currently involved as intermediary between the DPRK and the United States. However, a study of border relations allows some insight into the various dynamics of the DPRK's international relations with its contiguous neighbour such as to indicate that the DPRK state and society is neither monolithic nor homogeneous and

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can be understood using conventional tools of social science analysis.

This essay uses DPRK provincial boundaries, providing geographical and administrative differentiation, to supply the analytical focus for comparing sources and dynamics of conflict and cooperation. Given this essay is concerned with border relations, the focus is on the four northern border provinces of the DPRK. The far western province is North Pyongan, to its east is Chagang, east of which is Ryanggang and the most northeasterly North Korean province is North Hamgyong.

DIVERSE DYNAMICS ON A LONG AND POROUS BORDER

The thousand mile long border between North Korea and China is mountainous, forested and sparsely populated. It is enormously long when considered against the entire length of the Korean peninsula (North and South combined) at 621 miles and compared to the widest point of the peninsula at 150 miles.¹ The border follows the length of the Yalu and Tumen rivers—separating the two countries by a continuous stretch of water but allowing for relatively easy interaction, especially in winter when sub-Siberian temperatures cause the rivers to freeze over and North Koreans and Chinese can simply walk across the narrower river channels. The China-DPRK border is largely devoid of an overt security presence with few guard posts or man-made barriers like fences, barbed wire emplacements or surveillance position, that might inhibit transborder activities. The most visible security is at the major border crossing between Sinuiju (DPRK) and Dandong (China) but other crossings at Hyesan (Ryanggang province, DPRK), Tumen and Namyang (North Hamgyong province, DPRK) possess only a desultory military presence. The absence of electricity on the North Korean side of the border also makes transborder activities difficult to police. On the other hand, inadequate road networks (improving on the China side, disastrous and decrepit on the North Korean side), an abundance of tough mountain ranges on both sides of the border, and severe winter temperatures provide a prohibition of their own to easy physical human and economic interchange.

Geographical, topographical and climactic conditions, combined with economic parameters, help to shape the social limits of transborder contacts. Populations of the southern part of the DPRK are not drawn to the northern border areas. The climate is too extreme, the mountainous and forested terrain for the most part precludes extensive agricultural development—compared to the southern region's relatively better agricultural capacity, and the journey to the north, especially the northeast, is too physically difficult to attract 'southern' migration. Likewise, non-northeastern Chinese citizens find little to take them to the China/DPRK border area—especially in the further eastern stretches. Chinese citizens are attracted to the economically developing cities of Beijing and Shanghai—not to the poor farming and mining areas and severe winter climates of the remote northeastern provinces of Jilin and Heilongang. The major exception along the China/DPRK border is Liaoning, the Chinese border province with northwest DPRK, which contains the economically important port city of Dalian, and provides a pole of substantial economic attraction for non-northeast China citizens. On the whole, however, border interaction between China and North Korean citizens takes place between Chinese and Koreans border peoples (broadly defined), most of whom will have had long-lasting historical ties to the region.

There are historical ties binding Chinese and North Korean border inhabitants. North Koreans fighting the Japanese in the first half of the twentieth century based themselves in Manchuria in China as well as in the Russian border provinces. North Koreans fought in Mao's armies—resulting in victory against the nationalists in 1949, while the Chinese contribution to the Korean War of 1950–53 is well known. United States forces bombed Chinese border towns during the Korean War—local Chinese populations are still highly skeptical of U.S. forces claims that these were accidental bombings. General MacArthur's stated intention to drop an atomic bomb on the Yalu, which would have killed and maimed Koreans and Chinese citizens alike, eventually vetoed by the Joint Chiefs of Staff, may not have been fully communicated to Chinese citizens, but the legacy of U.S. bombing, still visible in burned out border bridges also leaves a heritage of sympathy

for the DPRK in its conflict with the United States.²

Culturally, there are variegated relationships across the border. To the west, the DPRK borders Chinese-speaking communities, while to the east the DPRK shares its border with the Korean-speaking part of China, Yanbian, and at the outermost eastern part, the DPRK joins together with both Russia and China. The closest transborder cultural links are, naturally enough, with Korean speaking communities in the Korean Autonomous Prefecture of Yanbian, in Jilin province and the neighbouring DPRK provinces of Ryanggang and North Hamgyong. Yanbian is the only Korean autonomous region in China, although its population is tiny—at an estimated 2.2 million in 2003. Of this total population, less than half—fewer than 900,000—are Korean-Chinese. The largest concentration of ethnic Koreans of Chinese citizenship is in Yanji City, the capital of Yanbian and the largest human settlement in the prefecture. But even here the ethnic Korean population stands only at around 210,000, compared to a population of 350,000 for the entire city. The Korean dialect in Yanji City, the capital of Yanbian, is close to the North Korean dialect, containing vocabulary and verbal usages common to both sides of the border, and uncommon in South Korea. The continuation of cultural linkages is assisted by the range of opportunities provided for licit and illicit border crossings in this area—where the river narrows in a number of places.

Recognizing the special nature of transborder ties

The Chinese and DPRK governments recognise the special nature of transborder social ties, particularly between the DPRK and Yanbian. A Chinese consulate is located in Chongjin, a major port city in North Hamgyong, the most northeasterly province of the DPRK, to service the Chinese traders, business representatives and family members that visit the northeast of the country by way of the northern border. Special visa arrangements are also in place between the DPRK and China whereby nationals of Yanbian, and nationals of DPRK counties bordering Yanbian may relatively easily visit each other—although these visas do not qualify either nationals to visit other parts of the respective countries. A Chinese businessperson from Yanbian, for

instance, may visit Musan (a border mining county in North Hamgyong) but may not travel to Pyongyang on that special visa. There are also restrictions in that a Chinese person living in North Hamgyong, married to a North Korean, may relatively easily obtain a visa and DPRK permission to visit China, but it is much more difficult to gain DPRK authorization to visit China accompanied by their spouse.

GEOGRAPHICAL DIFFERENTIATION AS A LOCUS OF CONFLICT/COOPERATION ANALYSIS

Common to all four DPRK border provinces is the pull of an economically prosperous China with food, goods, sometimes jobs and relative freedom. Common to all four also is the push factor—an economically devastated and food insecure country, lacking basic goods even had the population the wherewithal to purchase, a decimated public infrastructure, with freedoms circumscribed or denied. Not all these conditions hold to the same extent for every member of the population. In some areas, food is more readily available than in others; in some areas the diminution of state security capacity in the wake of the deterioration of the economy means there is increased freedom of movement and decision-making capacity for some. In any case, these common factors might indicate a common border problem in terms of the potential for North Korean illegal emigration to China. Illegal emigration is not, in fact, an issue in cross-border relations for the entire border region and therefore does not constitute a general factor of conflict (or cooperation) between the two states. Instead, each of the four North Korean border provinces has distinctive economic and demographic dynamics, such that there are consequential differences in respect to conflict/cooperation relations depending on geographic location.

North Pyongan—China's dominance

North Pyongan contains the important border town of Sinuiju and forms the northern most point of the Nampo/Pyongyang/Sinuiju (NPS) economic corridor and, comparatively speaking, the economically dynamic part of the DPRK. North Pyongan, South Pyongan, and Pyongyang—the three provinces that enclose the NPS economic corridor, each contain



12 to 13 percent of the country's population—between two and three million people in each province.³ The only province with a larger population is South Hamgyong, situated on the country's east coast. North Pyongan is heavily populated with 2.6 million people, according to 2001 figures. North Pyongan contains a mix of economic sectors but it was, in 2001, a food surplus province in that it could just about feed all its people with a reported food availability per capita of 234 kg (for comparison, the Food and Agriculture Organisation set 167 kg per capita as the average minimum food requirement). Food deficits did not therefore provide as much of an impetus for emigration to China as in food deficit provinces.

The wide river mouth maintains a physical distance between local North Korean and Chinese populations but the simple sight of abundant electricity at night in China compared to the darkness of the North Korean side gives enough evidence to both populations of the economic disparities between the two countries. The relatively heavily policed Sinuiju area—compared to other border crossings—may be testimony to a DPRK fear of North Korean emigration to China and Chinese apprehension of such a development. An inhibitory factor on North Korean emigration efforts, however, is the language barrier. Dandong is a Chinese speaking area and poor North Koreans, unable to speak Chinese and unfamiliar with the territory and customs, would not fare well without legal documentation and financial support. Mass North Korean emigration is feared by both DPRK and Chinese authorities and, given the absence of an empathetic Korean-Chinese community in Dandong and surrounding areas compared to the existence of such a community further East along the border, there remains shared interests between both local and central governments to preventing such a development.

Sources of transborder cooperation existed by way of the possibilities for dynamic economic interchange between the two border towns. Dandong, the China border town, stands in a similar relationship to Sinuiju as San Diego does to Tijuana, Mexico, benefiting from its position as the most important Chinese border crossing for trade with the DPRK. Major humanitarian agencies, in support of the largest food aid operation in the world,

brought in all goods that did not arrive by sea, primarily through Dandong. Chinese trading firms, based in Dandong, acted as intermediaries for international organizations, based in the DPRK, and also traded directly with the North Korean government. Transborder economic activity brought jobs, goods, income and hard currency to the Sinuiju area—not enough to obviate widespread grinding poverty but enough to provide more economic opportunities for local populations than in many other parts of the DPRK. Local governments on both sides of the border had every incentive to maintain economic intercourse.

Sources of potential and actual conflict also existed. DPRK central government relations with Chinese central government were strained by Pyongyang's unilateral attempt in September 2002 to install a free trade zone in Sinuiju, headed up by a Dutch-Chinese citizen, Yang Bin. The Sinuiju free trade zone would have been absent all DPRK domestic economic regulation—giving potentially free rein to a transborder overspill to the 'grey' market activities that are already developing in the DPRK—ranging from customs evasion on petty trade to corruption and alleged narcotics trafficking. The absence of a settled rule of law in the DPRK to oversee an economy that has been transformed from a state run command operation to one that, since 1995 at least was marketised but not liberalised, meant that even without malice aforethought, Sinuiju could have become a magnet for east Asian transnational organised crime including the proximate Chinese snakeheads (people smugglers), Russian criminals based in Vladivostok and Japanese *yakuzas* (gangsters)—not to mention homegrown North (and South) Korean criminal elements.⁴ This was especially so given that Sinuiju borders Liaoning, an economically dynamic Chinese province—whose major port of Dalian is home to a Versace outlet and five star hotels. China had already shown its anxiety to clean up the local economy in a recent crackdown on corrupt government officials in Liaoning, in an attempt to make the province more attractive for foreign investment.

China's response to the announcement of the free trade zone in Sinuiju was swift and publicly humiliating for the DPRK. The Chinese authorities arrested Yang Bin on charges of bribery, forging documents, illegal use of land and fraudulent con-

tracts, with the Liaoning People's court sentencing him to 18 years imprisonment in July 2003.⁵ This was more than a broad hint to Pyongyang that China would not tolerate potentially harmful developments on its border as a result of DPRK actions. China also demonstrated that it would not always be careful to save its neighbour's face if it felt its interests were directly threatened.

Chagang—An absence of information

Chagang has a population of 1.2 million and although the province is geographically large, the land is 98 percent mountainous and therefore contains many very sparsely populated counties. Consequently, about 75 percent of the population is located in urban areas.⁶ Food production is well below that required to feed the population at the most basic level—at 113 kg per capita per annum in 2001.⁷ Of all the provinces, Chagang is least known to the outside world because only seven of its eighteen counties are open to humanitarian organisations. The DPRK cites reasons of national security for its closure of these counties to the aid agencies and points to the fact that Kanggye, the province capital, is an important center for the country's munitions industries.⁸ Given the priority of the 'army first' policy of Kim Jong Il, it is very likely that bilateral food assistance, from China for instance, is directed towards this province such as to feed the military. This may also be a reason why few North Koreans interviewed in China by foreign organizations emanate from Chagang. Either food is adequate or the crossing to China is too arduous—because of the difficult topography, absence of usable roads especially in winter and lack of transport or because local communities are more tightly policed than in other parts of the DPRK's northern provinces. Neither emigration nor other factors, therefore, have caused either conflict in the transborder relationship along this part of the border.

Ryanggang—Sparsely populated, but targeted for agricultural investment

At just under 700,000 people, Ryanggang contains only 3 percent of the country's population, who are spread out over twelve rural, mountainous, remote counties.⁹ Even when food is available—during the October to May winter which is severe to the

extent of regularly reaching below minus 20 centigrade—roads are often impassible and there are enormous logistical difficulties in transporting basic supplies to the population. The government has, however, poured enormous investment into agriculture in Ryanggang, helped by the Swiss government, and focused on expanding potato production. The county of Taehongdan, with its flat uplands, has been the recipient of most of this investment. As a result, in 2000 Taehongdan boasted the second highest figure of grain production per capita in the entire country. Families from other parts of the country were resettled in Ryanggang to take advantage of these investments in agriculture and demobilized military personnel have also been encouraged to migrate to the province to contribute to the drive to increase potato production. The grain production figures per capita in 2001 showed that the province could just about feed the population at 215 kg basic grain per capita. But the figures belied the real food insecurity of the population as the extreme weather allowed for little additional production of food other than potatoes—to the extent that three-quarters of basic grain consumption was provided by this crop. The average diet lacked basic nutrients, including vitamins, minerals and protein.

The provincial capital, Hyesan, is just across a bridge from China where regular cross-border economic and social interaction takes place. The Chinese-Korean prefecture of Yanbian lies to the North of Hyesan, making Ryanggang's communication with Yanbian's Korean speaking inhabitants relatively straightforward. Similarly to Chagang, interviews with Koreans that have moved to China do not show an exodus from Ryanggang. Ryanggang-China relations focus on trade, with lumber from Ryanggang forests sold legally and illegally in Chinese markets. Potato starch is also sold in China, providing a source of cash income to the state farm in Taehongdan. Unlike the cooperative farms that are the dominant form of rural land ownership in the DPRK in which cash income is the property of the cooperative, the cash income of the state farm belongs directly to the government. Given the large investments in the Taehongdan state farm, however, it is unlikely that this cash income generates much of an overall profit for the government.

The government's focus on investment in this province, its resettlement of military families pre-



sumably loyal to the regime and the ability of most of Ryanggang isolated population to separate themselves from state surveillance, along with coping solutions provided by access to petty trade along the unguarded border, provide coping mechanisms and opportunities for the northern Ryanggang population. The chance to engage in trade with China is much less possible for the population of the southern part of the province, for whom the journey into China is almost physically impossible, and who are likely facing higher rates of malnutrition than the northern Ryanggang population.¹⁰

In terms of overall border relations, Ryanggang's relations with China are of normal economic interaction. It is likely that customs evasion takes pace on both sides of the border, particularly in the buying and selling of lumber, but the scale of economic activity is so low that it has not yet caused either irritation or conflict in DPRK-China relations.

North Hamgyong—Migration a source of irritation but not conflict

North Hamgyong is the fifth largest province in the country with a population of 2.2 million—10 percent of the DPRK's population.¹¹ Like Chagang to the east, most of the population, about 80 percent, is located in the large urban and industrial conurbations, which housed the country's chemicals, fertilizer and steel industries before these were decimated after the economic breakdown of the 1990s. Mining is another local industry. Unlike heavy industry, the mines continue to operate albeit with few health or safety facilities, making the work highly dangerous; payment is generally only in food or the almost worthless *won*. The province has little arable land and its own production is nowhere near sufficient to feed its population—making available just 111kg per person in 2001. The pressures to emigrate to China, either legally or illegally, are thus considerable. Access is straightforward—over the river. Yanbian, across the other side of the river, is Korean speaking and its residents have generally been sympathetic to the poverty and hunger of their Korean neighbours.

North Hamgyong's influence in the structures and decision-making of the National Korean Workers' Party had historically been disproportionate—partly because of the heritage of the North Hamgyong party leadership in the anti-Japanese struggle and partly because of the importance of the

North Hamgyong industrial infrastructure in the party's development model.

The majority of residents in North Hamgyong lived in dense urban neighbourhoods, which had facilitated the effective implementation of surveillance of the population through the neighbourhood reporting system. The roots of this nationally-organised system of community-based social control lay in colonial methods instituted by Japan during their occupation of Korea in the first half of the twentieth century that were adapted by the DPRK for use from everything from preventative health care to local policing. Given the urban nature of the North Hamgyong population—compared to, for instance, their neighbours in Ryanggang—it was much more likely that the residents would have regular contact with the repressive arm of the state and, therefore, much more reason for discontent.

Given also the spread of hunger and famine in the 1990s, combined with the punitive mentality of security forces, it would not be surprising if there were more incentive to emigrate to China from this province than from others. At the same time those same factors—the extent of the security apparatus combined with the extent of hunger, which particularly affected the urban populations—meant that many members of both the security apparatus and the party also suffered. In this context, it was also not surprising that those willing to take the risk could bribe their way into China or benefit from a breakdown of the law and order apparatus that had functioned so effectively when the state had been in a position to reward its functionaries.

The poor mining counties of Musan and Undok, classed as two of the most vulnerable counties in the country by the UN World Food Programme, provide a major source of unauthorized migration to China. The most serious research carried out on North Korean migration, by researchers associated with Johns Hopkins, indicated that 'migrations into China can be characterized typically as short-term movements by a single member of a household whose other members remained in North Korea'.¹² A more recent, albeit non-random or scientific survey, undertaken by the nongovernmental organization (NGO), Refugees International, in 2003, came to similar conclusions: 'Many North Koreans who make the perilous border crossing, however, have no intention of staying in China. Their hope is to

receive immediate financial or humanitarian assistance from relatives or local support networks and then return.¹³

North Korean migration into China did not provide a major source of conflict with central state authorities because both governments agreed on the same objective—return North Koreans to the DPRK.¹⁴ Local authorities in Yanbian and local NGOs have been less sanguine about this policy, often assisting North Koreans to stay in China. The Chinese government had only intermittently enforced its agreement to return North Koreans to the DPRK and had tolerated local authority assistance to destitute North Koreans until the high profile foreigner organised invasions of embassies started to take place in 2002. In the wake of these activities, the Chinese government employed the national security apparatus, as opposed to leaving law enforcement to local police forces. It continued in a vigorous campaign of enforcement—its activities leading to North Koreans being sent back to the DPRK or being forced into ever more precarious living arrangements in China—also acting as a deterrent factor to those North Koreans considering crossing the border for short or long term residence

MORE COOPERATION THAN CONFLICT

Chinese authorities have, on the whole, found North Korean border dynamics non-threatening to their interests. The major exception was the DPRK government's attempt to establish an unregulated zone of capitalism in Sinuiju, bordering the Chinese province of Liaoning, a region of strategic importance to the Chinese government. The Chinese government, to be sure, has been irritated by the DPRK's refusal to embrace change, and local government authorities in particular have understood and been sympathetic to the political and economic reasons for North Korean emigration to China. Conversely, North Koreans have felt secure enough in their political relationship with China not to view Korean migration to China as a threat to Chinese-Korean relations. Nor were they willing to jeopardise Chinese political and economic support by protesting at the arrest and imprisonment of Yang Bin, the putative governor of the Sinuiju free trade zone. In the end, therefore, this long but remote border area, although providing the only space for

any dynamic foreigner interchange with the DPRK apart from the tiny length of frontier with Russia, is of marginal political significance compared to the broader international relations of both the DPRK and China.

An investigation of border dynamics does, however, indicate that some nuanced investigations can be made in respect to DPRK society and DPRK relations with its neighbour such as help inform external policy analysis. Policy interventions designed to support humanitarian assistance, human rights advocacy and political change need to take into account the facts on the ground rather than assume an undifferentiated social and economic landscape within the DPRK. For instance, foreign investment in North Hamgyong's mining counties in Musan and Undok, channeled through an Asian Development Bank or World Bank loan, provided the investment was organised in a transparent and publicly accountable manner and insisted on good labour practices, would not only bring economic assistance by providing jobs and income but would also help bring more openness to the society and therefore help bring about the possibility of improved human rights and political reform. Rather than the moralistic posturing that sometimes substitutes for serious foreign policy, such concrete steps, as part of a political strategy designed to bring change through dialogue and diplomacy, can provide instruments to help bring about much-needed political and economic improvements in the lives of North Koreans.

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