US-KOREA 2011 YEARBOOK

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UNIVERSITY

SAIS | US-KOREA 2011 YEARBOOK

Published by the U.S.-Korea Institute at SAIS
www.uskoreainstitute.org

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The Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, Johns Hopkins University
Printed in the United States

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Allies at Odds: The North Korea Factor in China's Foreign Policy Strategy

By Matt Chitwood

I. INTRODUCTION

The "special relations" between China and North Korea are truly unique. The countries have a long-standing alliance and yet their goals seem obfuscated and incongruent. North Korea hails China as its most important ally, its biggest trading partner, and its main source of food, arms, and fuel. Indeed, 90 percent of North Korea's energy imports come from China. Even more astounding is that China is the world's third-largest food donor, half of which goes to North Korea. North Korea hails China as its most important ally for good reason.

Conversely, China characterizes North Korea as its most troublesome ally. Keeping North Korea from regime collapse is a significant economic burden. The two nations share an 850-mile border that has allowed between 30,000 and 100,000 North Korean refugees to penetrate China. North Korea is an unpredictable tinderbox that riles up conflict and either calls China to its aid or gives China cause for ire. China *does* value North Korea as a strategic buffer against foreign military forces as well as a bulwark against US military dominance in the region. China's peaceful development emphasizes regional stability, mutual noninterference, and soft power. China asserts that its growing economic and military prominence in the region will not threaten other nations but will instead benefit them as it bears increasing international responsibility. Juxtapose China's peaceful development strategy with North Korea's actions. Consider North Korea's nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009, the moribund Six-Party Talks, the sinking of the *Cheonan* in March 2010, and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November of the same year. These actions do not foster China's underlying development and foreign policy goals, yet China maintains its alliance with North Korea.

This essay explores how China is balancing its commitment to peaceful development and its role as a responsible international power vis-à-vis its foreign policy toward its ally North Korea. The sections that follow discuss the historical basis of this relationship, significant changes in China's policy toward North Korea over the course of that relationship, and projections for China's future policy.

II. THE EVOLUTION OF CHINA'S POLICY TOWARD NORTH KOREA

Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence

To understand the complexities of the current relationship between China and North Korea, one must understand the journey that brought these two countries where they are today. China and North Korea's alliance has long-standing roots in their shared Leninist-socialist ideology. During the Japanese invasion of Manchuria, for example, Chinese and Korean Communists joined forces against the invaders. Korean Communists also came to the aid of the Chinese Communist Party during its years of civil war with the Kuomintang on the mainland. So it was no surprise when, in 1950, Chinese forces entered the Korean peninsula to aid their comrades in North Korea in an ideology-driven civil war against South Korea and UN forces.

Chinese involvement in the war was significant. Over the course of the war, 114,000 Chinese died, including Mao Zedong's own son Mao Aiying. Moreover, the Korean War was the international embodiment of the ideological struggle that China had just dealt with domestically. The very cause of Communism was being fought out in its neighboring country, so the Chinese dutifully stepped up to support their comrades. This was the beginning of China's foreign policy toward what would become the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and was not the last time North Korea would draw China into conflict in the region.

Chinese aid did not stop with the end of the war. China played a key role in North Korean reconstruction efforts, forgiving debt and providing a four-year $350 million grant, which is even more financial support than given by the Soviet Union.

The frustrations of "divided nation ideologies" also bonded China and North Korea as they both emerged from civil war in the early years of their alliance. The Korean peninsula was divided into North and South, while China was split between the People's Republic of China (PRC) on the mainland and the island nation of Taiwan. This shared experience assured mutual understanding and support as both China and North Korea dealt with questions of unification in the years to come. Mao Zedong even said that the countries were "as close as lips and teeth." These common bonds of shared history and ideological struggle form the core of the Sino–North Korean alliance and are imperative to consider even though the alliance has changed shape over the years.

China's so-called Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence were also formidable in

shaping its foreign policy. These principles were initially outlined in China's 1954 treaty with India concerning Tibet and are as follows:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Mutual nonaggression.
3. Mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs.
4. Equality and mutual benefit.
5. Peaceful coexistence.

These principles subsequently formed the foundation for China's foreign policy goals with other countries. They also explain China's principled solidarity with the North in the Korean War as well as China's expectations of other countries' policy toward North Korea.

China's alliance with North Korea also aligned with China's core interest of regional security. North Korea served as a strategic security buffer against possible attack from military forces stationed in South Korea. In the 1960s and 1970s, China viewed the roughly 60,000 US troops in South Korea as a threat to regional security. But North Korea's location between China and South Korea prevented those forces and missiles from being lined up directly on China's border. This has remained a core component of China's interest in North Korea as an ally. However, 1978 marked a change in the direction of China's economic policy, which had implications for its foreign policy. Deng Xiaoping had just taken the helm and he initiated China's opening up and reform. These reforms flew in the face of Communist ideology, but Deng's political acumen enabled him to deflect domestic criticism. Yet, his use of market mechanisms was antithetical to North Korean policies and was the start of a widening gap in the countries' mutual affinity. The schism between China and North Korea only grew, culminating with the Joint Communiqué of 1992 that established China's normalized relations with South Korea. This normalization did not happen overnight; rather, it took place over a decade and in several phases: from a one Korea policy, to a one Korea de jure and two Koreas de facto policy, to a two Koreas de jure and de facto policy. This allowed China time to adjust post-Mao foreign policy given the context of changing domestic, regional, and global sentiments.

China's New Security Concept

China's change in foreign policy to normalize relations with South Korea was significant. Normalization represented the official divorcing of China's foreign policy from its ideology and solidified a more pragmatic approach to its diplomacy

efforts. Jaewoo Choo, assistant professor of Chinese foreign policy at Kyung Hee University in South Korea, wrote in *Asian Survey* in 2008, "China now places more value on national interest, over alliances blinded by ideology." This reflects the realist school of thought concerning national interest theory. No longer were generational ties and shared sentiment the basis of China's foreign policy calculations. Rather, China turned to focus on economic development and finding its place in the changing global balance of power. China's national interest and indeed the very survival of the state were at stake. Maintaining a peaceful strategic environment conducive to economic development thus became the core of China's foreign policy.

Paramount to China's economic development was regional stability, particularly along China's own borders, as well as lessening the prospects for conflict with world powers like the United States. Wu Baiyi, deputy director of the Research Department at the China Foundation for International and Strategic Studies, wrote of this "new security concept" in 2001 in the *Journal of Contemporary China.* He described the three principles of this new Chinese foreign policy:

1. Sovereignty and the political, economic, and cultural pluralism of all nations must be respected.
2. National economic development requires mutual interest and common prosperity.
3. All parties must promote mutual trust and understanding while opposing any hegemonic behavior and avoiding the use of force in international affairs.

These principles have allowed China to engage both North Korea and the rest of the world in a flexible and interactive manner rather than being beholden to ideological constraints. However, normalized relations with South Korea yielded myriad implications for China's relationship with North Korea, not the least of which involved North Korea's own security concerns.

China and North Korea had signed the Sino–North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance in 1961, shortly after North Korea signed a similar agreement with the Soviet Union. Article II of this treaty stipulates that China and North Korea will use all necessary measures to oppose any country or coalition that attacks the other nation unprovoked. Yet, in 1992, China suddenly was engaging South Korea, much to the chagrin of the North. Moreover, the Soviet Union had collapsed just a few years prior, ending the Cold War. World powers were realigning and the resulting environment was not friendly toward

Communist regimes, rendering China's shift toward pragmatic diplomacy, which in turn made North Korea vulnerable.

China's cooperation with South Korea was also part of the former's emerging strategic ambiguity policy. Jaewoo Choo asserted in *Asian Survey* in 2008 that China believes itself to have the right to interpret the principle of intervention laid out in its 1961 treaty with North Korea. That is, China can decide when it wants to come to North Korea's defense. Experts say that this deters others from responding to the North's military aggression, although they also question if this deters North Korea from military aggression. Ultimately, China's change to a more pragmatic approach toward foreign policy was in its own national interest, but it made maintaining simultaneous good relations with both sides of the 38th parallel a formidable challenge.

Despite improved relations with South Korea, China was painstakingly scrupulous in maintaining what Council on Foreign Relations' Korea expert Scott Snyder described in January 2012 as a "formal equidistance between the two Koreas." Chinese state media was charged with evenhanded reporting on Chinese "special relations" with North Korea and its "normal state relations" with South Korea. High-level exchanges in Seoul were balanced with equivalent gestures in Pyongyang.

In 1993, the year following China's diplomatic normalization with South Korea, North Korea instigated the first North Korean nuclear crisis. Following its noninterventionist policy, China avoided taking an official role in the talks; however, because of its relationship with both North Korea and the United States, it engaged in shuttle diplomacy as liaison between the two countries. Through this experience, China gained stature as an international mediator and was described by one anonymous US government official that year in the *New York Times* as "the key to solving the North Korea crisis." China also began to realize the fundamental correlation between regional stability and denuclearization. A nuclear-capable neighbor would undermine China's efforts at peaceful development, and so denuclearization of the Korean peninsula became one of China's strategic goals. This is reflected in the Crawford Consensus of 2002 between US President George W. Bush and Chinese President Jiang Zemin, which articulated US-Sino collaboration to peacefully achieve North Korea's denuclearization. The Crawford Consensus also illustrates the inherent tension between China's goals; on the one hand, of regional stability and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and, on the other, China's long-standing principle of nonintervention in other countries' domestic affairs. This became even more clear during the nuclear crisis of 2003–2005 and through the Six-Party Talks that began in 2003.

Six-Party Talks and China's Foreign Policy

In 1985, North Korea ratified the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), which committed signatories to (1) non-proliferation, (2) disarmament, and (3) the right to peacefully use nuclear technology. However, in early 2003 the United States alleged that North Korea had a uranium enrichment program, leading North Korea to withdraw from the treaty. This ultimately led to the Six-Party Talks, a multilateral effort to end North Korea's nuclear program. China, the United States, South Korea, Japan, Russia, and North Korea all took part in six rounds of talks that were held between 2003 and 2007. Unfortunately, the talks were discontinued in 2009 after North Korea's failed satellite launch and UN Security Council sanctions, with ultimately little progress having been made.

China was strategically involved in the talks to further its interests of stability and denuclearization of the Korean peninsula. Recognized as the party with the best relations with North Korea, in February 2004 China used its influence on the leadership in Pyongyang and pledged $50 million in aid and energy assistance to bring North Korea to the negotiating table. China hosted the talks and hoped to gain international prestige as the potential broker of peace and stability in East Asia. However, the talks reached one stalemate after another as North Korea and the United States struggled to overcome their deep mutual mistrust. North Korea repeatedly called for bilateral negotiations, while the United States insisted upon multilateral talks, neither party showing flexibility. In these deadlocks, China's brokering efforts proved ineffective. The only results from the first three rounds of talks were "chairman's statements" that simply reiterated participants' commitment to peaceful dialogue.

At some point, China realized the talks might fail to denuclearize the peninsula. Fearing blame and negative public perception, China started urging the United States and North Korea to resort to bilateral discussions, thereby allowing the Six-Party Talks to focus on broader regional stability issues. This revealed that China's interest in the Six-Party Talks was for its own benefit rather than for the collective goal of denuclearization. This self-interest extended to other parties as well. In the words of Scott Snyder, "Participating states placed their own immediate priorities and concerns above the collective need to halt North Korea's nuclear program."

Regardless of China's urgings, the Bush administration remained impervious to suggestions of bilateral talks with North Korea, as it sought for resolutions framed in multilateral terms. Meanwhile, China continued its shuttle diplomacy, perceiving no benefit to siding with either the United States or North Korea.

China particularly feared that harsh terms against North Korea would threaten regional stability. In a 2005 article in Singaporean newspaper the *Straits Times*, a Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences researcher, Zhang Zuqian, stressed the trade-off between North Korea's stability and denuclearization. He argued that the political, military, and economic risks attached to instability in North Korea were short-term compared to the benefits that would accrue from finally resolving the issue in a clear-cut way.

The fourth round of talks finally brought headway, and the parties issued a joint statement on September 19, 2005. North Korea asserted that it was "committed to abandoning all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs," it would rejoin the NPT, and it would permit the return of International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) monitors. In return, other talk participants offered food and energy aid to North Korea, and the stage was set for further normalization of relations and peace agreements. Unfortunately, this victory was short-lived. Accusations of North Korean money laundering in Macau instigated further provocative behavior on the part of North Korea. The country then proceeded with missile tests in July 2006 and conducted a nuclear test in October of the same year.

III. THE EFFECTS OF NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR TESTS ON CHINESE POLICY

The First Nuclear Test and China's Foreign Policy

The nuclear test of October 2006 was a game changer for China. Prior to the test, China exerted much of its political capital exhorting North Korea not to test a nuclear weapon. It did so through public and private channels and relied on its supposed long-standing ties to carry the weight of its words. China was in a better position than all other players to sway the actions of North Korea. And to its credit, China had done much to support the country as its largest aid donor and champion of its regional security concerns vis-à-vis other international powers. Yet, despite Beijing's admonitions, Pyongyang conducted the nuclear test, which was a dramatic loss of face for China. To the international community, the nuclear test was seen as Kim Jong-il essentially fooling China and inciting international mockery. North Korea's actions also called into question China's efficacy in solving the DPRK nuclear crisis.

China has also struggled to see the benefits of economic reform in North Korea. It has closely cooperated with officials to develop trade and reform that will enable market mechanisms to operate within North Korea. However, two problems remain.

The first is that the government in Pyongyang lacks the authentic commitment to see economic reforms through to fruition. All policies fall secondary to *military-first politics*, which poses a substantial obstacle to economic progress. The second problem is the inherent tension between economic reform and regime survival. If the regime does not open up, financial collapse seems imminent, particularly when international aid is absent. Paradoxically, if it does open up, North Korea fears vulnerability to foreign powers and fatal political risks.

Prior to the October 2006 nuclear test, China's primary strategic interest was regional stability, particularly on its periphery. Denuclearization was not seen as a top priority, short of its contribution to the larger regional stability goal. However, North Korea's nuclear test raised the specter of rapid regional nuclear proliferation. China dreaded the thought of Japan, South Korea, or Taiwan citing this nuclear test as justification to develop their own nuclear programs. As a result, China began to question whether North Korea was a strategic asset or a strategic liability. Granted, China had been the lynchpin in bringing the country to the Six-Party Talks in the first place; however, despite the close ties between Beijing and Pyongyang, it seemed that China ultimately exerted little leverage over North Korea. The former presidential candidate of the United New Democratic Party, Chung Dong-young, concurred in a 2011 interview: "In actuality, Beijing has little control over North Korea." Daniel Sneider, of Stanford's Asia-Pacific Research Center, followed up in a 2006 *New York Times* article, asking, "Can China actually try to exercise that influence without destabilizing the regime? Probably not."

The more aid China offers North Korea, the more leverage North Korea seems to have over China. North Korea's utter dependence on China's economic aid could become a liability for the donor. This is particularly possible given that China's aid in part serves its interest in preventing regime collapse. North Korea's increased dependency means that there would be strong negative consequences should China reduce or withdraw aid. Gordon Flake, executive director of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, said in 2011 that this makes China "hostage to" and "an enabler" of North Korean provocations.

In light of North Korea's nuclear tests and China's realization of its waning influence over North Korea, China conceded to UN Security Council Resolution 1718 on October 14, 2006. This resolution established sanctions against North Korea, including a mandate to cease its nuclear program and limitations on trade in military and luxury goods. By reaching a unanimous and consolidated agreement through the United Nations, China eased its influence over North Korea and granted the United States more influence in shaping China's foreign policy. Even

so, China feared that increased cooperation with the United States might bring regional political and economic strife, once again conflicting with China's primary interest of stability. China also continued to fear a US military response to North Korean provocations, which it also deemed unfavorable for the region. China's hope was and is a Korean peninsula that is peaceful, neutral, friendly, and open to China—and free from US military forces.

Gordon Flake describes the Chinese approach to foreign policy as the three no's: no nukes, no war, and no collapse. China's decision to endorse (and not just abstain from) the UN Security Council resolution heavily shifted China's policy priority toward *no nukes* while also moving the country into a more responsible international role. While China's voice of influence was decreasing and being joined by others in the region, China still had tools to help achieve its strategic ambitions: trade, aid, and economic ties; high-level exchanges; and diplomacy in the Six-Party Talks. However, the next major turn of events led to a further decrease in the effectiveness of these tools.

The Second Nuclear Test and China's Foreign Policy

In another provocative move, North Korea tried launching what was an alleged satellite on April 13, 2009. The launch failed and the international community asserted that the "satellite" was actually the test of a ballistic missile as a nuclear device. A UN Security Council Presidential Statement quickly condemned the act and sanctions were tightened. In a heated response, North Korea withdrew from the Six-Party Talks and declared that it would resume its uranium enrichment program. It also immediately expelled all IAEA monitors. And just one month later, North Korea conducted a second nuclear test.

Alan Romberg, a former US State Department official now with the Stimson Center, described this second nuclear test in *Time* as a "spit in the People's Republic of China's eye." The test not only revealed the waning influence of China over North Korea, but also showed that despite close ties with China, Kim Jong-il was deciding for himself how to run his country. China also demonstrated increased solidarity with the international community in its approval of UN sanctions. Once again, *no nukes* seemed to top China's policy priority list. However, China's enforcement of these sanctions has been less straightforward and the country is much criticized for its opaque trade and aid practices with North Korea. Trade of luxury goods has continued to increase despite sanctions, averaging $11 million per month in 2009. Exact quantities and mechanisms of food aid have remained a mystery as well.

IV. US-CHINA JOINT STATEMENTS AND INTERNATIONAL CRISES

An analysis of the US-China Joint Statement issued by President Hu Jintao and President Barack Obama on November 17, 2009, helps to gauge China's foreign policy recalibration. Four paragraphs in the statement are devoted explicitly to nuclear nonproliferation, and the language regarding North Korea is clear: continue Six-Party Talks and implement the talks' September 19, 2005 joint statement, including denuclearization of the Korean peninsula, normalization of relations, and establishment of a permanent peace regime in Northeast Asia.

With China's new minimal leverage over North Korea and its fear of further nuclear proliferation in the region, stability and denuclearization have become its two-pronged strategy to reach its policy goals in Northeast Asia. However, these tactics ebb and flow in terms of priority. Kim Jong-il's health was also a complicating factor. He suffered a stroke in 2008, and Beijing was increasingly concerned about domestic stability and the succession of power to his son Kim Jong-un, then only in his late twenties. Some scholars suggest that China once again recalibrated its policy priorities to emphasize *no collapse* rather than *no nukes*. China's lack of enforcement of UN sanctions supports that view.

The 2009 US-China Joint Statement also said the following: "The Chinese side welcomed the start of high-level contacts between the United States and the DPRK." China was pushing for normalization of US trade with North Korea, perhaps a more central strategy for state-to-state relations, and for further regime stability. This strategy seemed to hold steady through the turmoil of 2010, including the sinking of the *Cheonan*, the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, and discovery of evidence of a uranium enrichment program. The *Cheonan* incident occurred in March 2010, killing forty-six South Korean sailors. Contrary to international expectations, however, China remained silent on the event and never assigned blame to North Korea. On the contrary, Beijing actually welcomed Kim Jong-il twice in the following months. China's approach was proactive engagement and this seemed to be helping to stabilize the region.

Regional stability took a dramatic turn in November, however, in response to two key events. First, North Korea shelled Yeonpyeong Island in South Korea. Second, North Korea revealed to a visiting American delegation that it possessed a uranium enrichment program. Suddenly, China's foreign policy strategies appeared to be misguided and failing, and received strong international criticism. Instead of merely ignoring North Korea's misdeeds, US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton accused China of facilitating North Korea's actions by shielding it from

consequences. Reason suggests that China should strongly reconsider its foreign policy approach. The US-China Joint Statement of January 19, 2011, also suggests another recalibration of policy. This most recent statement emphasizes peace and stability as of the utmost importance, and says that the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula is tantamount to preserving that peace and stability. Perhaps more telling, however, are the three separate references to the 2005 Six-Party Talks Joint Statement in one paragraph dedicated to the Korean peninsula. According to Gordon Flake of the Mansfield Foundation, this is quite odd, given that the Six-Party Talks Joint Statement was never fully implemented and the talks themselves are all but dead. However, his point is this: North Korea has asserted itself as a nuclear power since 2006 and claims that the Six-Party Talks are about peace and security, not about denuclearization. Yet, Hu and Obama's references to the Six-Party Talks Joint Statement make it clear that North Korea's declaration of its uranium enrichment program violated that joint statement and that progress in the Six-Party Talks would only come in the context of that joint statement. Progress means both peace and denuclearization.

What the 2011 US-China Joint Statement does not say is also interesting, since what it fails to say exposes the limitations on US-China cooperation in dealing with North Korea. First, it fails to mention the specific UN Security Council resolutions (1718 and 1874) that China is particularly key, yet lax, in implementing. Second, the joint statement ignores and does not assign responsibility for the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. The 2011 US-China Joint Statement also omits two key pieces of information. First, there is no agreement on the United Nations' role in addressing further conflicts on the Korean peninsula. An agreed-upon resolution process, and an expression of joint commitment to respect that process, would help provide accountability in the event of future disagreements. Second, the US-China Joint Statement calls for "concrete and effective steps to achieve the goal of denuclearization" and the other commitments in the Six-Party Talks Joint Statement, yet it does not clearly define what those steps are.

V. CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY MOVING FORWARD

China has myriad competing interests to consider when defining its foreign policy toward North Korea. Even its own strategic interests are further confused in the context of considering other powers' strategic interests and compromise. It is in China's interest to maintain North Korea as a strategic buffer against military aggression, but it is also damaging to China's other international relationships to align itself with the "neighborhood bully." China wants to prevent collapse of

North Korea, but it also realizes that propping up the regime is costly. China wants to provide technical assistance and investment to North Korea while it is clear that there are no guarantees of financial security. Despite these competing and often shifting interests, there are three foreign policy objectives that stand out as constants: maintaining regional stability, protecting China's security interests, and increasing China's regional influence.

Maintaining Regional Stability

Maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula and in East Asia as a whole is paramount for China. With recent events such as the *Cheonan* sinking and the Yeonpyeong Island shelling, this seems a formidable task. However, these events themselves demonstrate the political, economic, and security costs of *not* maintaining stability. China already has significant investment in both North and South Korea, so its economic incentives are substantial.

China must also avoid North Korean regime collapse at all costs. In the event of the regime's collapse, an influx of refugees across the 850-mile China–North Korea border would place a tremendous economic, political, and social burden on China that it is not prepared to deal with. This could also potentially draw international attention to China's human rights record in dealing with refugees, which China prefers to avoid. China's construction-in-progress of a fence stretching along the most accessible part of this border reveals the importance of this potential refugee issue for China.

Stability in North Korea also ensures a strategic buffer between China and military forces in South Korea, preventing the unwelcome prospect of a democratic, nuclear-armed United States perched on China's border. A 2010 Congressional Research Service report on China-North Korea Relations describes China's steady flow of economic assistance *not* as an effort to sustain North Korea's human rights abuses or to prop up a nuclear threat; rather, it is a regular insurance payment that China remits to avoid having to pay the higher costs of North Korean collapse or a second Korean War.

Of note, the Chinese Communist Party's International Affairs Department is responsible for Sino–North Korean relations—not the Chinese Foreign Ministry. This party-to-party relationship aligns foreign policy incentives with pursuing a stability strategy, and these Chinese party members are among those least likely to pursue destabilizing policies toward North Korea.

Protecting China's Security Interests

China's sovereignty and territorial integrity are top priorities. Having nearby nuclear threats would therefore be contrary to China's security interests. A nuclear-capable North Korea might lead to nuclear proliferation for other regional powers, including South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan. A denuclearized North Korea, on the other hand, fits into China's long-term strategy for regional stability. This would dissuade other regional powers from taking steps toward nuclear proliferation and would reduce the saber rattling and brinkmanship that have repeatedly pushed the region toward armed conflict. Politically maneuvering to prevent a nuclear-capable North Korea, however, is difficult. Thus far, the nuclear aims of North Korea have not led to nuclear armament of the region. Moreover, China has managed its regional relationships well so as to avoid sparking such conflict. Leaders in Beijing recognize China's inability to control North Korea, and so China has been increasingly leveraging its international role in the Six-Party Talks to achieve these ends multilaterally.

Increasing China's Regional Influence

Were the North Korean regime to collapse or the two Koreas to unify, China would aim to be on the best possible terms with both countries in order to reap the maximum benefits. China has realized economic opportunity through normalizing relations with South Korea and trade continues to increase. China even signed the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement with Taiwan for economic and political gains. Food and energy aids to the DPRK also give China leverage in aligning North Korean interests with its own, exerting economic influence while also encouraging reform. These opportunities come only through exerting influence and establishing mutually beneficial arrangements.

China's desire to host the Six-Party Talks exemplifies this approach. By mediating between the involved parties, China has gained valuable experience in international negotiation and has been able to regularly engage with foreign countries like Japan to help resolve long-standing differences. China also values its own bilateral discussions and senior-level meetings with US policymakers. South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade asserts that North Korea is sending positive signals about moving forward with the Six-Party Talks early in 2013, so perhaps China will make further progress toward these goals in the near future.

VI. CONCLUSION

Being a rising power and an ally of North Korea requires tremendous responsibility. China has found it difficult to balance its commitment to peaceful development as an international power with its foreign policy toward North Korea. Ultimately, China's strategic interests can be summed up in the following three policies: maintaining regional stability, protecting China's security interests, and increasing China's regional influence. Over the course of its alliance with North Korea, China has encountered many conflicting interests, both internally and with the international community, and has attempted to resolve these in accordance with its underlying interests. At other times China has had to embrace the tension of conflicting interests and competing foreign powers.

Moving forward, there will be continued tensions and recalibrations of foreign policy priorities. In the immediate future, China will likely continue to focus on regional stability as it handles the aftermath of succession of leadership in North Korea. China is uniquely poised to take advantage of whatever opportunities result, thanks to its positive regional influence. Denuclearization will remain a priority for China only to the extent that it does not threaten Chinese security interests and increasing Chinese regional influence.

These policy predictions assume that the China–North Korea alliance will continue unabated. However, J. R. Kim of South Korea's Ministry of Unification pointed out in a 2011 interview that, in the summer of 2010, Chinese leadership held official discussions on whether or not to continue support of North Korea. Obviously, China decided to continue support; however, that Beijing leadership even raised this question is significant, which perhaps implies the alliance will not last forever. In the meantime, so continues one of the world's longest-standing—and most conflicted—alliances.

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