International Crisis Group
WORKING TO PREVENT CONFLICT WORLDWIDE

Fire on the City Gate: Why China Keeps North Korea Close

Asia Report N°254 | 9 December 2013

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Executive Summary

China tolerates the nuclear ambitions of North Korea (the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK) for now because its interests in the neighbourhood are much wider and more complex than this single issue. Beijing and the West often work toward their shared goal of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula with contradictory approaches that reflect their different priorities. The West uses diplomatic isolation, economic sanctions and extended deterrence to pressure Pyongyang to give up its nuclear program. Many Western policymakers believe the DPRK will denuclearise if sufficient costs are imposed and that Beijing holds the keys because the North is economically dependent on it. But China is reluctant to take any coercive action that might destabilise the regime and change a delicate geopolitical balance. It instead continues with diplomatic engagement and economic cooperation as the instruments it hopes will cause the leadership to denuclearise in the indeterminate future.

A decade has passed since the Six-Party Talks (China, Japan, the two Koreas, Russia and the U.S.) were convened to roll back the DPRK nuclear program; the last round was in December 2008. When the process began, many expected that the North's brinkmanship and transgressions would lead China to exert strong pressure on it to reverse course. In that decade, however, the DPRK has conducted three underground nuclear tests and four long-range missile flight tests, torpedoed a South Korean (Republic of Korea, ROK) naval patrol boat and shelled a South Korean island, while still receiving political and economic support.

Following the third nuclear test, in February 2013, Beijing responded briefly with sternness, but a significant and lasting policy shift has yet to take place and does not appear likely any time soon. China's fundamental geostrategic calculation remains in favour of sustaining the regime and keeping it close. Stability still trumps denuclearisation as a priority, and it does not perceive North Korea's nuclear weapons as a direct or pressing threat, unlike the U.S. and its allies. Rather, it considers denuclearisation a long-term goal and appears to have resigned itself to living with a nuclear DPRK for the time being.

North Korea's belligerent behaviour in March-April 2013 tested China's patience, jeopardising regional stability and undermining Beijing's interests in the midst of its once-a-decade leadership change. In response, Beijing supported and implemented additional UN sanctions, issued strong warnings and reportedly slowed joint economic development projects. President Xi Jinping's messages from summits with his U.S. and South Korean counterparts signalled rising discontent with the regime. However, these actions were designed to manage the North's behaviour and defuse mounting regional tensions, rather than to achieve denuclearisation. They were short-term, tactical and easily reversible, not indications of a strategic change in policy.

Beijing likely considers Washington a bigger threat to its geostrategic interests than Pyongyang and its North Korea policy contingent on Sino-U.S. relations. Though China's leadership intends to build what it calls a "new type of major power relationship" with the U.S., Washington's rebalancing toward Asia has deepened suspicion. A popular view in China is that the Obama administration has been taking advantage of tensions on the Korean peninsula (as well as in the East and South China Seas) to strengthen its strategic position in East Asia. Deep-seated mistrust of the U.S. impedes

cooperation on denuclearisation and enhances Pyongyang's value to Beijing, even though the North is no longer seen as the military bulwark it once was. China-ROK relations have warmed significantly but not sufficiently to alter either's strategic calculation on the Korean peninsula. Despite the shared denuclearisation objective with the South and the U.S., Beijing firmly opposes the regime collapse in the North that many in China suspect Washington seeks. Nor does China share Seoul's reunification goal.

Beijing sees denuclearisation as a long-term goal to be achieved by alleviating Pyongyang's insecurity, for which it considers Washington principally responsible. Many in China thus blame Washington as much as Pyongyang for the nuclear problem and resent the pressure the U.S. puts on China to control the North. China appears primarily concerned about managing Pyongyang's behaviour in order to prevent overreaction by Seoul or Washington that could expose it to risks of instability or conflict on the Korean peninsula. It prefers to be a mediator, ensuring itself interaction with and influence over all parties involved so as to prevent hostility from escalating into open conflict. For now, it will not risk the status quo.

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I. Introduction: Not Always a Smooth Relationship[1]

Their shared 1,416km-border is the keystone of the China-North Korea relationship that has been built by almost 80 years of close ties between the two communist parties. Forged during their wars against Japanese occupation and the Chinese nationalists in the 1930s and 1940s, the alliance has experienced ups and downs.[2] Relations became strained in the mid-1960s, during China's Cultural Revolution that saw Red Guards denounce the DPRK as a revisionist country. They began to recover in the late 1960s, when China faced a hostile Soviet Union and found good bilateral ties essential, but cooled again after Beijing established diplomatic relations with Seoul in 1992. There were no top-level exchanges for nearly seven years, until Kim Jong-il visited China in May 2000, one month before the first inter-Korean summit.[3]

With the collapse of the Agreed Framework between the DPRK and the U.S. in 2002, Pyongyang's nuclear breakout placed Beijing in a dilemma between fulfilling its international non-proliferation obligations and sheltering its ally. China became active in denuclearisation negotiations in 2003, hosting and chairing the Six-Party Talks that brought together the U.S., the two Koreas, Russia and Japan. Pyongyang agreed in September 2005 to abandon its pursuit of nuclear weapons, but it boycotted the forum the following year and conducted its first nuclear test on 9 October 2006. In response, the UN Security Council imposed sanctions by adopting Resolution 1718. China voted in favour, but only after negotiating away any threat of military action against the North and ensuring that inspections of DPRK cargo were not mandatory on member states.[4]

The last round of Six-Party Talks was held in December 2008, when the parties failed to agree on verification measures for the North's denuclearisation. In April 2009, Pyongyang flight tested a long-range missile configured as a space launch vehicle and declared its permanent withdrawal from the Six-Party process after the Security

[1] For previous Crisis Group reporting on China-DPRK relations, see Asia Reports N°200, *China and Inter-Korean Clashes in the Yellow Sea*, 27 January 2011; and N°179, *Shades of Red: China's Debate over North Korea*, 2 November 2009. For previous reporting on Chinese foreign policy, see Asia Reports N°245, *Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks*, 8 April 2013; N°223, *Stirring up the South China Sea (I)*, 23 April 2012; and N°229, *Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses*, 24 July 2012.

[2] Crisis Group Asia Report N°112, *China and North Korea: Comrades Forever?*, 1 February 2006; Chen Jian "Limits of the 'Lips and Teeth' Alliance: An Historical Review of Chinese-North Korean relations", Asia Program Special Report no. 115, Wilson Center, September 2003, p. 4.

[3] Chen Jian, op. cit., pp. 4, 9; Andrew Scobell, "China and North Korea: From Comrades-in-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length", Strategic Studies Institute, p. 4.

[4] Crisis Group Asia Report N°56, *North Korea's Nuclear Test: The Fallout*, 13 November 2006. "Haggling delays N Korea sanctions vote", *The Telegraph*, 15 October 2006. The resolution only "called upon" member states to take "cooperative action including through inspection of cargo to and from the DPRK, as necessary".

Council issued a presidential statement condemning the launch. On 25 May, the North conducted its second nuclear test, which led China to vote in favour of Resolution 1874, tightening sanctions, but only after again weakening its articles on cargo inspections.[5]

Despite strains in bilateral relations caused by Pyongyang's pursuit of nuclear weapons and Beijing's support of UN sanctions, high-level visits picked up in 2009, after Kim Jong-il recovered from his August 2008 stroke. Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao and an exceptionally large and senior delegation visited Pyongyang that October. Kim Jong-il made two trips to China the next year, reportedly to secure support for the eventual power handover to his son, Kim Jong-un. Also in 2010, Beijing refused to condemn Pyongyang following the sinking of the ROK naval vessel *Ch'ŏnan* and the artillery attack against Yŏnpy'ŏng Island.[6]

[5] Crisis Group Asia Briefing N°91, *North Korea's Missile Launch: The Risks of Overreaction*, 31 March 2009; and Asia Reports N°168, *North Korea Nuclear and Missile Programs*, 18 June 2009; and *Shades of Red*, op. cit., pp. 12-15. "DPRK Foreign Ministry Vehemently Refutes UNSC's 'Presidential Statement'", Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), 14 April 2009.

[6] Scott Snyder and See-won Byun, "China-Korea Relations: China's Nuclear North Korea Fever", Comparative Connections, vol. 11, no. 3, October 2009; Crisis Group interview, Chinese scholar, Beijing, June 2013; Choe Sang-hun, "Kim Jong-il Arrives in China", *The New York Times*, 3 May 2010; Barbara Demick, "China and North Korea deepen ties during Kim Jong Il Visit", *The Los Angeles Times*, 31 August 2010. Crisis Group Asia Reports, *North Korea: The Risks of War in the Yellow Sea*, 23 December 2010; *China and Inter-Korean Clashes*, op. cit.

II. Pyongyang Sets Beijing on Edge

Tensions on the Korean peninsula spiked in early 2013 as a result of DPRK acts. In December 2012, it launched a three-stage rocket that placed its first satellite into orbit. The Security Council condemned this as a violation of resolutions baring the North from any launches using ballistic missile technology and tightened sanctions on 22 January with Resolution 2087, which, inter alia, added four individuals and six entities to the list. Tensions escalated further after North Korea conducted its third nuclear test in defiance of UN resolutions, on 12 February, prompting adoption of Resolution 2094 on 7 March. It expanded the list of prohibited items for export to the DPRK and authorised states to seize cargoes brokered by the DPRK or its citizens even if not destined for the North.[7]

After Resolution 2087, senior DPRK officials are understood to have finalised a response that was rolled out in the following weeks and months. Chaired by Kim Jong-un on either 25 or 26 January, the meeting was attended by Ch'oe Ryong-hae, director of the Korean People's Army (KPA) General Political Bureau; Pak To-ch'un, Korean Workers Party (KWP) Central Committee secretary for machine-industry building (munitions); Hong Sung-mu, vice department director of the KWP machine-industry building (munitions) department; Kim Kye-gwan, first vice foreign minister; and Kim Yŏng-il, alternate member of the Politburo and secretary of the Central Committee's international department.[8]

Pak's and Hong's participation was noteworthy, as they are the senior officials in charge of the nuclear weapons and missile programs.[9] Kim Kye-gwan likely discussed the impact and management of reaction at the UN and in foreign capitals. Kim Yŏng-il presumably took part due to the importance of party-to-party relations with Beijing. The North conducted its third nuclear test and expanded work to restart the partially disabled 5MW(e) nuclear reactor in Yŏngbyŏn the next month. On 5 March, as the Security Council was nearing a vote on the resolution responding to the nuclear test, General Kim Yong-ch'ŏl, spokesman for the KPA Supreme Command, issued a defiant statement declaring the KPA would no longer be bound by the Korean War armistice. This initiated a turbulent spring, with threats of pre-emptive strikes and nuclear attacks "against aggressors".[10]

[7] "Report of the Panel of Experts established pursuant to resolution 1874 (2009)", Security Council, 11 June 2013; "UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea", Arms Control Association, March 2013.

[8] Also in attendance were Hyon Yŏng-ch'ŏl, chief of the KPA General Staff, and Kim Wŏn-hong, state security minister. "Kim Jong-un Guides Consultative Meeting of Officials in Fields of State Security and Foreign Affairs", KCNA, 26 January 2013.

[9] "Report of the Panel of Experts", op. cit.

[10] "Spokesman for Supreme Command of KPA Clarifies Important Measures to Be Taken by It", KCNA, 5 March 2013. Kim is the director of the Reconnaissance General Bureau, responsible for special military operations against the ROK. He is widely suspected of intimate involvement with the torpedo attack that sunk the ROK naval ship *Ch'onan* in March 2010. Crisis Group Report, *North Korea: The Risks of War*, op. cit. On 7 March, hours before the Security Council adopted Resolution 2094 unanimously, the foreign ministry spokesman declared the U.S. was "kicking off the Key Resolve and Foal Eagle [combined military] exercises [with the ROK] to ignite a nuclear war against the DPRK", and "the war manoeuvres were timed to coincide with the moves to fabricate a new UN Security Council resolution against the DPRK and justify a war of aggression against the DPRK". He added: "The DPRK would exercise the right to a pre-emptive nuclear attack to destroy the strongholds of the aggressors", and warned "the farce for the adoption of a resolution on sanctions

After warning the U.S. and Security Council, Pyongyang did the same with Seoul. On 8 March, the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea (CPRK), a KWP organisation that deals with South Korean affairs, repeated much of the 5 March rhetoric, asserting that "the South Korean puppet forces are working with bloodshot eyes to invade the DPRK in collusion with the U.S." and declaring all inter-Korean agreements nullified, including those on non-aggression and denuclearisation. The CPRK also said the liaison office at Panmunjom would be closed, cutting off the North-South and Red Cross hotlines.[11]

As tensions mounted and Pyongyang issued increasingly shrill threats – even by its standards – eyes turned to the Kaesŏng Industrial Complex (KIC). On 27 March, the North cut the military communication lines used to control the transit of vehicles, people and supplies across the demilitarised zone (DMZ) to and from the KIC. A week later, it began to restrict access to the complex from the South. Then on 9 April, it withdrew all workers from KIC factories, condemning the U.S. and the South for raising military tensions and "impairing the dignity of the DPRK". The South's President Park told her top generals to "respond strongly … without any political consideration" upon first contact with any potential attack. The situation was the more uncertain and precarious because the motivation and leadership skills of the DPRK's youthful and relatively inexperienced leader, Kim Jong-un, in power only since December 2011, remained largely unknown.[12]

At the height of tensions, on 5 April, foreign ministry officials told diplomatic missions that the DPRK could no longer guarantee their safety, so they should have an evacuation plan ready by 10 April. A few days later, General Kim Yong-ch'ŏl briefed senior diplomats in Pyongyang in a different tone, however, as he seemed to signal retreat from the brink.[13] This was perhaps because the KPA's early spring military training was winding down, and military personnel were beginning mobilisation for spring planting. Furthermore, the 10 April "deadline for evacuation planning" coincided with the switchover to festivals and celebrations in honour of the 15 April birthday of Kim Il-sung, the state's founder.

A. *China Grows Impatient*

The North's actions galled Beijing in multiple ways. There was little advance notice before the December 2012 satellite launch or the third nuclear test, which took place against China's repeated advice. Pyongyang's defiance, seen as "one slap after another", was especially grating in Chinese eyes as President Xi Jinping's father belonged to

against the DPRK being backed by the U.S. at the UN Security Council would compel the DPRK to take at an earlier date more powerful second and third countermeasures". Clearly trying to influence the Security Council, he advised that "it has become difficult to avert a second Korean war", and "the DPRK strongly warns the UN Security Council not to make another big blunder like it did in 1950 by acting as a war servant for the U.S". "Second Korean War Is Unavoidable: DPRK FM Spokesman", KCNA, 7 March 2013.

[11] "Important Measures to Defend Nation's Sovereignty, Dignity and Country's Supreme Interests: CPRK", KCNA, 8 March 2013.

[12] "Important Steps Declared as Regards Kaesong Industrial Zone", KCNA, 8 April 2013. "In Focus: North Korea's Nuclear Threats", *The New York Times*, 16 April 2013. Crisis Group Asia Report N°230, *North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability*, 25 July 2012.

[13] "North Korea warns embassies over safety following missile threat", *The Guardian*, 5 April 2013". Crisis Group interviews, European diplomats, Beijing and Seoul, April, September 2013.

the same revolutionary generation as Kim Jong-un's grandfather, Kim Il-sung.[14] Many in Beijing perceived young Kim's behaviour as open disrespect for the elder Xi. The Pyongyang political elites were viewed in China as ingrates: "They just come to us and ask for stuff when they need us".[15]

The nuclear test interrupted the most important Chinese holiday, the spring festival (Lunar New Year), when most workers and government officials take a week's leave for family gatherings, and set off a minor public relations crisis that Beijing scrambled to manage. The Punggye-ri nuclear test site (Mt. Mant'ap) is only about 70km from the border, and a tremor was felt on the Chinese side during the test. Such proximity sparked concerns among nearby residents for radioactive fallout. Even the state-owned Xinhua News Agency noted: "In theory, radioactive material cannot easily escape to the Chinese side. Were there to be any error during the test process, however, underground water, nearby sea and even the atmosphere could face the threat of contamination".[16]

The environmental protection ministry issued a statement on 13 February to allay fears and assure the public it was ready to respond to any emergency, but Chinese netizens were not comforted.[17] In the days following the test, posts on Weibo, the Chinese equivalent of Twitter, questioned the ministry's credibility and mocked its record of protecting air, water and food safety. Many also commented that assisting and accommodating the North was a bad deal for China.[18]

Both Pyongyang's bellicose behaviour and the efforts of Washington and Seoul to bolster deterrence appeared to rattle Beijing and pressure the leadership to rein in the DPRK. Beijing viewed the turbulence as an extremely inopportune distraction. The satellite launch came on the heels of China's once-in-a-decade leadership transition. The nuclear test occurred when the new party leaders were forming a government. Beijing also faced deteriorating relations with Japan and on-going tensions in the South China Sea.[19] Pyongyang became "another headache" for the new leader, Xi,

[14] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, April and May 2013. "China Warns of North Korea nuclear test, urges restraint", *South China Morning Post*, 23 January 2013; "US: 'US, China oppose North Korea nuclear test'", Associated Press, 25 January 2013.

[15] Crisis Group interviews, including Chinese analyst, Beijing, June 2013.

[16] Such fears were amplified by the Fukushima nuclear disaster in Japan that began in March 2011 and whose effects are still felt. Crisis Group interviews, Changchun and Yanji, China, August 2013. "朝鲜核试验若出现纰漏将对中国造成污染威胁", 新华社 ["If North Korea's nuclear test went wrong, China would face a contamination threat"], Xinhua, 13 February 2013.

[17] The statement said, "North Korea's third nuclear test has not affected our environment or public health" and that the ministry had activated an emergency plan and dispatched multiple mobile units to monitor potential contamination at the border. "环保部有关负责人就朝鲜第三次核试验对我国的辐射环境影响答记者问" ["Environmental Protection Ministry official answers media questions on radioactive effect by North Korea's third nuclear test on China"], 13 February 2013.

[18] For example, commenting on the report that the nuclear test did not affect China's environment, a Weibo user wrote: "Whoa! That's high-tech. [the nuclear device] must have been produced at the world's first-class level. In comparison, even setting off a firecracker produces pollution. Learn from North Korea!" Post by @咖啡YF [coffeeYF], 8:23am, 17 February 2013. Another post said, "North Korea the dog has been raised to be an ingrate wolf. Such a strategic failure [for China]". Post by @智慧渝都 [zhihuiyudu], 7:30pm, 27 February 2013.

[19] A Chinese strategist remarked: "Xi Jinping as a new leader faces so many problems. The South China Sea and the East China Sea give him plenty headaches. Now North Korea's ... behaviour is giving him another headache". Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2013. On China's maritime disputes, see Crisis Group Reports *Dangerous Waters* and *Stirring up the South China Sea (I) and (II)*, all op. cit.

just as China was talking about forging "a new type of major power relationship" with the Americans.[20] Some Chinese analysts feared that "North Korea's behaviour could add friction between China and the U.S.".[21]

Reflecting growing frustration with its neighbour, China took a tougher line. Beginning in April and through early summer, it used stronger rhetoric, reportedly slowed bilateral economic projects and sent other signals of displeasure through diplomatic channels. Many in the West, which had long been frustrated by Beijing's reluctance to apply pressure on the North, thought its patience might finally be exhausted. However, hopes that China might become a more willing participant in the Western approach to denuclearise North Korea proved too optimistic.

B. *China's Stern Warnings*

The initial protests after the third nuclear test were largely routine. Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi summoned Ambassador Chi Jae-ryong – a step not taken after the first two – to say China was "strongly dissatisfied with" and "firmly opposed to" the test.[22] But the content of the verbal protest and the text of the ministry's official statement were nearly identical to what was said after the previous tests.[23] It took until early April, after the North's bellicose threats had been met with robust U.S. responses, for Chinese leaders to issue unusually stern warnings. President Xi Jinping said "no one should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gains", and his message was reinforced by other leaders. Many Western media assumed that Pyongyang, though not named, was the intended recipient of the warnings and speculated that Beijing was finally ready to change its DPRK policy.[24]

Domestic interpretation was more nuanced. Analysts said Xi's remark was also directed at the U.S. and South Korea. "China was unhappy with North Korea, but also unhappy with the U.S. and the ROK boosting military deployments and conducting

[20] Crisis Group interview, Chinese scholar, Beijing, June 2013.
[21] Ibid.
[22] "China 'firmly opposes' DPRK's nuclear test; Yang summons ambassador", Xinhua, 12 February 2012.
[23] The foreign ministry statement read: "On 12 February 2013, the … DPRK conducted another nuclear test in disregard of the common opposition of the international community. The Chinese government is firmly opposed to this act. To bring about denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, prevent nuclear proliferation and safeguard peace and stability in Northeast Asia is the firm stand of the Chinese side. We strongly urge the DPRK to honor its commitment to denuclearisation and refrain from any move that may further worsen the situation. To safeguard peace and stability on the peninsula and in Northeast Asia serves the common interests of all parties. The Chinese government calls on all parties to respond in a cool-headed manner and persist in resolving the issue of denuclearisation of the peninsula through dialogue and consultation within the context of the Six-Party Talks".
[24] "China Hints at Limits to North Korea Actions," *The New York Times*, 7 April 2013. The day before, Foreign Minister Wang Yi told UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon Beijing would "not tolerate trouble-making on China's doorstep". "China warns against 'troublemaking' on Korean peninsula", Reuters, 7 April 2013. Premier Li Keqiang said to U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry on 18 April that trouble-making on the Korean peninsula "is nothing different from lifting a rock only to drop it on one's own toes". "DPRK lays out conditions for negotiations amid tensions on Korean Peninsula", Xinhua, 18 April 2013. The BBC said Xi "delivered the rhetorical equivalent of a rap on the knuckles to Pyongyang". "Is China ready to abandon North Korea?", BBC, 12 April 2013. Reuters said Wang Yi's statement was "an apparent rebuke to North Korea". "China Issues Veiled Warning to North Korea", Reuters, 7 April 2013.

combined military exercises".[25] Such sentiments were echoed in state media. Just three days after Xi spoke, the *People's Daily*, the official publication of the Communist Party Central Committee, published an editorial warning the DPRK "not to misjudge the situation" but also admonishing the U.S. "not to add oil to the fire", the ROK "not to miss the focus" and Japan "not to loot a burning house".[26] This reflected mainstream belief that Pyongyang was not the only party responsible for tensions and that the U.S. and its allies were overreacting and taking advantage of the situation to advance their own agendas.

C. *Chinese Implementation of DPRK Sanctions*

1. UN Resolution 2094

China apparently cooperated closely with Washington in drafting Security Council Resolution 2094.[27] After joining the unanimous vote in favour, it appears to be implementing sanctions against the DPRK more vigorously.[28] The authorities have reportedly stepped up border inspections of North Korea-bound cargo. The transportation ministry issued a directive in April ordering "relevant agencies to take measures to strictly enforce" sanctions on additional items, North Korean individuals and entities, as specified in the resolution. In September, several ministries and agencies published a long list of dual-use items and technology banned from export to the North because it could be used for nuclear, missile, chemical or biological weapons. Chinese diplomats privately confirmed that Beijing for the first time was strictly enforcing the sanctions.[29]

The export control list generated international media speculation of a significant policy shift, but publication on government websites more likely reflected greater awareness of need for robust export controls and wider dissemination following updating of the Nuclear Supplier Group's own list.[30] Establishing an effective export control

[25] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, April, August 2013.

[26] "半岛问题：给四国说四句话", *人民日报* ["On the Korean Peninsula Issue: Four Sentences to Four Countries"], *People's Daily*, 10 April, 2013.

[27] Upon tabling the draft resolution, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Susan Rice emphasised that it was "U.S.- China agreed". "Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, … at a Security Council Stakeout…" U.S. Mission to the UN, 5 March 2013. Likely because of what Rice called "very intensive and productive discussions in consultations, particularly with China", Resolution 2094 was the longest to draft of the sanctions series but the fastest adopted. Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "China and UN Security Council Resolution 2094: Is the Third Time the Charm?" Sino-NK website, http://sinonk.com, 11 March 2013.

[28] China joined the unanimous vote on Resolution 2094, the fifth directed at the DPRK since it flight-tested a long-range missile during a large July 2006 exercise. The binding resolution expanded the list of banned import items, sanctioned individuals and entities and extended the scope of financial sanctions and cargo inspections. Previously, China and Russia had opposed mandatory cargo interdiction and inspection. Victor Cha and Ellen Kim, "UN Security Council Passes New Resolution 2094 on North Korea", Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 7 March 2013. For a brief overview, see"UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea", op. cit.

[29] "China tightens border searches to punish North Korea as US asks for sterner measures", Associated Press, 23 March 2013. "关于执行联合国安理会第2094号决议的通知" ["Notice on implementing UN Resolution 2094"], transportation ministry, 25 April 2013. "商务部 工业和信息化部 海关总署 国家原子能机构公告2013年第59号 关于禁止向朝鲜出口的两用物项和技术清单公告 ["Announcement no. 59 of 2013 on list of dual-purpose goods and technologies banned from exporting to North Korea"], commerce ministry, 23 September 2013. Crisis Group interview, Beijing, August 2013.

[30] Roger Cavazos, Peter Hayes and David von Hippel, "Technical Bulletin #59 on Prohibition of Dual Use Exports to North Korea", NAPSNet Special Reports, 26 September 2013; Jane Perlez,

system is difficult, especially in a large, populous country with a complex economy. China's economy has grown greatly over two decades, and its firms have moved up the technology ladder. Even with strong political will, capacity and resource constraints make enforcement difficult. Though Beijing began to build the legal and institutional framework for export controls in the 1990s, the results have been mixed, with cases of sensitive exports to Iran, Pakistan and the DPRK. The government probably was influenced to publish its list also by discovery that the transporter-erector-launchers (TELs) for the DPRK mobile missile displayed in April 2012 were imported from a Chinese firm and that many components in the Ŭnha-3 space launch vehicle (SLV) were imported.[31]

Likely reflecting discomfort with the DPRK's increasing nuclear capability, Chinese cooperation on drafting and implementing Resolution 2094 probably was intended to signal disapproval of DPRK actions more than the concern for proliferation that some Chinese analysts describe as a top U.S. priority but less important for China.[32] Western analysts also pointed out that, despite improvement, enforcement remains deficient. For example, Beijing has yet to establish a list of prohibited luxury goods, despite agreeing to ban such exports.[33]

2. Closure of DPRK Foreign Trade Bank account

The Bank of China announced on 7 May 2013 it had closed the account of the North Korea Foreign Trade bank (FTB) and cut off all dealings. This incurred protest from Pyongyang and praise from Washington, but other state-owned financial institutions did not act similarly, nor was the closure ordered directly by the government. "The government informed them about the new sanctions and reminded them of the risk of doing business with North Korea entities. The Bank of China made the decision based on its own risk assessment".[34]

Beijing does not interpret the FTB as a target under Resolution 2094, but the U.S. Treasury formally sanctioned it in March via Executive Order 13382, which froze any assets in the U.S. and prohibited U.S.-based entities from doing transactions with it.[35]

"China Bans Items for Export to North Korea, Fearing Their Use in Weapons", *The New York Times*, 24 September 2013. Crisis Group interviews, Seoul, September 2013. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), formed after India's 1974 test, includes 48 supplier countries and provides guidelines to prevent illicit transfer of nuclear technologies, materials, and components.

[31] Evan S. Medeiros, "Chasing the Dragon: Assessing China's System of Export Controls for WMD-Related Goods and Technologies", Rand, 2005; Shirley A. Kan, "China and Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Missiles: Policy Issues", Congressional Research Service, 30 March 2012. South Korea recovered the first stage of the Ŭnha-3 from the Yellow Sea after the successful launch of the *Kwangmyŏngsŏng-3* satellite on 12 December 2012. 국방부, "북한 장거리 미사일 잔해 조사 결과" ["Ministry of National Defence, "Results of the investigation into North Korea's long-range missile debris"], 18 January 2013. Melissa Hanham, "North Korea's Procurement Network Strikes Again: Examining How Chinese Missile Hardware Ended Up in Pyongyang", Nuclear Threat Initiative, 31 July 2012.

[32] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, May, August 2013.

[33] Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga and Jenny Jun, "Getting China to Enforce Sanctions on North Korea", Sino-NK website, http://sinonk.com, 21 July 2013.

[34] A Chinese analyst said, "North Korea was very angry and protested to the Chinese government". Crisis Group interview, Beijing, September 2013. "China publicly cuts off North Korean bank", *The Wall Street Journal*, 8 May 2013.

[35] The new resolution requires member states to "freeze or block" any financial transactions or monetary transfers deemed to help DPRK nuclear and ballistic missile programs and prohibits financial support for trade that could assist its illicit programs. Victor Cha and Ellen Kim, op.

The Bank of China operates in the U.S. and could have been vulnerable had it continued dealings with the FTB. Although state-owned, its decision appears motivated by self-preservation, not a broader push by the Chinese government to cut off financial transactions with the DPRK.

3. Economic Cooperation

In the weeks following the third nuclear test, officials in China's Jilin province, one of two bordering the DPRK, reported a slight decline in North Korea-bound goods and investment. Officials explained this as a sign firms were adjusting their operations because of perceived political and security risks. Chinese businessmen said they noticed no changes in central or local government policies but cited uncertainty regarding Pyongyang policies and politics, as well as their concerns for possible instability on the Korean peninsula, as reasons for limiting the expansion of their business activities.[36]

Jilin provincial officials and analysts also reported a slowing of China-funded infrastructure upgrades for the Rasŏn Special Economic Zone, in the DPRK's far north east. A project that connects Rasŏn to the Chinese power grid, scheduled for completion in June, was delayed, reportedly because Beijing wished to send a signal to Pyongyang. Chinese analysts explained, however, that the commitment to make Rasŏn a demonstration project for bilateral economic cooperation is unchanged. The institutional structure for joint management and coordination there was implemented in November 2012, when a committee opened for operations in a Rasŏn office building constructed by China.[37]

China's participation in the Rasŏn SEZ has been aimed at drawing the DPRK closer into its economic orbit, seemingly to expose it to economic reforms in the hope that Pyongyang would change its thinking and policy orientation. Such intentions almost certainly would endure, even if the DPRK holds another nuclear test, though China likely would slow economic cooperation projects in the case of a serious transgression. It might seek to calibrate the pace of such cooperation so as to persuade Pyongyang to return to the Six-Party process, or to "blunt the momentum of the DPRK's growing nuclear capability", Chinese analysts said.[38]

cit. "Treasury Sanctions Bank and Official Linked to North Korea Weapons of Mass Destruction Programs", U.S. Department of the Treasury, 11 March 2013.

[36] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, March 2013; Changchun, Yanji and Hunchun, August 2013; Shenyang, November 2013. Several Chinese businessmen in Changchun called Pyongyang's decision to close the KIC the ultimate display of the North's disregard for contractual commitments and further placed in doubt the regime's desire for economic development.

[37] Crisis Group interviews, Changchun, Yanji and Hunchun, August 2013. The committee has four Chinese and three North Korean members and six bureaus, each led by a Chinese, but ethnic Korean Chinese cannot hold these positions. Each bureau also has a North Korean director. The committee is the bottom rung of a four-level institutional structure for joint management and coordination of Rasŏn. The top three are: 1. central leadership coordination; 2. the Joint Steering Committee for Developing Two China-DPRK Economic Zones, led by Chinese Commerce Minister Chen Deming and DPRK National Defence Commission Vice-Chairman Chang Sŏng-t'aek; and 3. the China and North Korea Rasŏn Economic and Trade Zone Administrative Committee, led by the standing committee of the provincial party committee and secretary of the Yanbian Prefecture party committee, Zhang Anshun, and Chairman of the Rasŏn City People's Committee Cho Chŏng-ho. Crisis Group interviews, Yanji and Hunchun, August 2013.

[38] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, Changchun, Yanji, August-September 2013.

Another telling sign of Beijing's intention was that it did not reduce the supply of fuel, mainly through a pipeline across the Yalu River, after the third nuclear test and throughout the DPRK's provocative behaviour in March-April 2013. Fuel is Beijing's most potent leverage: the DPRK imports nearly 90 per cent of its energy from China.[39] While some Chinese analysts assess that the North would have collapsed in weeks if the flow had been cut, they stress that such a drastic measure would be unlikely, even with further nuclear tests, unless the North turned openly hostile to China.[40] Nevertheless, Pyongyang appears to be seeking to reduce its dependence slightly by signing a deal for a Mongolian firm to invest in a 20 per cent share of a North Korean oil refinery.[41]

Beijing has calibrated its economic sanctions to "punish but not to strangle" Pyongyang and underline its influence.[42] Chinese officials repeatedly emphasised that sanctions must be proportionate, moderate and aimed only at bringing the North back to talks, not at weakening the regime. There is no intention to use economic leverage to achieve denuclearisation. "We can't cut off connections with the DPRK because of its nuclear program. We have to stay with them, even if they conduct a fourth or fifth nuclear test", a Chinese analyst said.[43]

D. *Diplomatic Signalling*

A flurry of presidential-level diplomacy at mid-year surrounding the nuclear issue showed China balancing its relationship with the DPRK on the one hand and the U.S. and the ROK on the other. Xi Jinping met with Barack Obama in California in early June and received President Park Geun-hye for her first state visit to China later that month. Official statements after the summits stressed the leaders' common ground and projected an image of convergence on denuclearising North Korea as a top objective.[44]

[39] Western media, citing customs data that showed Chinese oil export to the DPRK was zero that month, initially reported that China cut its oil supply in February, but such data for many years has shown zero oil export in February but double the monthly average in March, likely a reflection of accounting and reporting delays due to the Chinese New Year, which often takes place in February. Chinese sources confirmed that fuel was not reduced. Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, Changchun and Yanji, August-September 2013. Alex Melton, "Testing China's Patience? The Oil Non-Story", Peterson Institute for International Economics, 9 April 2013. Jayshree Bajoria and Beina Xu, "The China-North Korea Relationship", Council on Foreign Relations, 21 February 2013.

[40] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts, Beijing, May, August, September 2013; Changchun and Yanji, August 2013.

[41] Michael Kohn and Yuriy Humber, "Mongolia taps North Korea oil potential to ease Russian grip", Bloomberg, 18 June 2013. This was followed by bilateral cooperation agreements during Mongolian President Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj's visit in October. "Agreements on Cooperation between Governments of DPRK, Mongolia Signed", KCNA, 28 October 2013; Sam Kim, "North Korea-Mongolia Sign Deals before Leaders Meet in Pyongyang", Bloomberg, 29 October 2013.

[42] Crisis Group interviews, Shenyang, Beijing, Changchun, July-August 2013. A Chinese analyst said, "the entire rest of the world thinks China can influence North Korea; the only one that doesn't think so is North Korea, so it should be made to feel so". But she added that punitive measures from China were designed to make the North "feel the pain but not to kill it".

[43] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts, Beijing, May, September 2013.

[44] Chinese State Councillor Yang Jiechi told a press conference Xi had told Obama that China and the U.S. were "the same in their positions and objectives" on the nuclear issue. "Xi-Obama summit: US and China agree North Korea must give up nuclear weapons", *The Telegraph*, 9 June 2013. According to then-U.S. National Security Advisor Tom Donilon, Obama and Xi agreed "North Korea has to denuclearise; that neither country will accept North Korea as a nuclear-armed state; and that we would work together to deepen U.S.-China cooperation and dialogue to achieve denuclearisation".

The picture of Xi and Obama strolling and chatting during the sun-drenched retreat and the enthusiastic reception Park received in Beijing may have sent powerful signals of Beijing's displeasure to Pyongyang.

Before each summit, Beijing received a high-level North Korean envoy. Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission Ch'oe Ryong-hae met with Xi in late May and delivered a personal letter from Kim Jong-un. First Vice Foreign Minister Kim Kye-gwan visited on 19 June.[45] Beijing then rolled out a concerted campaign, apparently to convince especially Washington and Seoul that the latest Korean crisis was ending. The foreign ministry said tensions on the peninsula were "showing positive momentum of easing" and urged that "all sides cherish and seize the opportunity" to return to dialogue and engagement. On the same day, an analyst from its affiliated think-tank wrote that the situation had "turned a corner to the bright side".[46]

Beijing then continued its diplomatic balancing act. In late July, Vice President Li Yuanchao visited Pyongyang for the 60th anniversary of the Korean War armistice, a carefully choreographed move designed to accommodate each side. Because Li ranks among the top government officials, Pyongyang could claim robust bilateral ties, but his party rank is second-tier, satisfying Seoul's request that no top-level party official or any leader Park had met be sent.[47] Beijing also emphasised to Washington and Seoul that Li visited as a government, not party representative and at the invitation of the Supreme People's Assembly, not the KWP, thus symbolising the effort to transition from "blood alliance" to normal state-to-state relations. However, the nuances seem to have been missed in Washington, which protested Li's presence in Pyongyang on the basis that it allowed the Kim regime to claim a diplomatic success and boost its legitimacy.[48]

Beijing by then was already returning to its accustomed neutral mediator posture meant to ensure minimum cost to relations with any of the players. Chinese diplomats were again consistently touting to U.S. and ROK counterparts their country's central role in restoring calm and securing Pyongyang's expressed willingness to talk. They also have been repeatedly, albeit unsuccessfully, trying to convince Washington to relax its conditions for the resumption of dialogue with the DPRK.[49]

White House press briefing, 8 June 2013. Park stated at a joint conference with Xi: "Both sides shared the view that North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons is unacceptable under any circumstance and agreed that we will continue to strategically cooperate to realise North Korea's denuclearisation". "Park, Xi vow closer cooperation on N. Korea", *The Korea Herald*, 27 June 2013.

[45] "习近平见朝方特使重申中方立场 崔龙海转交金正恩书信",新华社 ["In meeting with North Korean envoy, Xi Jinping reaffirms China's stance; Ch'oe Ryong-hae delivers letter from Kim Jong-un"], Xinhua, 25 May 2013. "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference", Chinese foreign ministry, 21 June 2013.

[46] Foreign ministry spokesperson, 21 June 2013, op. cit. "专家：朝鲜半岛事态"峰回路转柳暗花明", 新华社 ["Expert: Situation on Korean Peninsula 'turned a corner to the bright side'"], Xinhua, 21 June 2013.

[47] Crisis Group interview, Beijing, August 2013. Li belongs to the 25-member Politburo but not its Standing Committee, China's seven-member supreme decision-making body. The official Xinhua report did not mention his Politburo membership. "金正恩会见李源潮", 新华社 ["Kim Jong-un meets with Li Yuanchao"], 27 July 2013. DPRK media downplayed the visit. "Chinese delegation lays wreath before Friendship Tower", KCNA, 26 July 2013. Born in 1950, the year China intervened to help North Korea in the Korean War, Li, like many contemporaries, had the given name "Yuanchao" [援朝], ie, "assist [North] Korea". He later changed this to 源潮, pronounced the same but literally meaning "origin of the tide".

[48] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, August 2013.

[49] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, June and August 2013.

E. *Growing Domestic Consensus*

The display of sternness toward Pyongyang was underlined by a convergence of opinion in China's foreign policy circles that some policy adjustment on the North was desirable. Such open debate is no longer unusual; every time in recent years the DPRK has done something wrong it has sparked an internal debate. However, the early 2013 variant was more serious, a Chinese scholar said, as "more and more people think North Korea does not consider China's interests".[50]

Another novelty was emergence of the "centrists". Past debates featured "strategists", who argued for outright abandonment of Pyongyang, against "traditionalists", who advocated keeping the special bond between communist countries.[51] The latter, disillusioned by repeated DPRK disregard for China's interests, and the former, willing to settle for gradual change, converged in the centre, concluding that "a middle road (中庸之道)" had to be found. "Abandoning North Korea is not a realistic choice for China, but we don't need to cover up our displeasure like we did in the past". The middle road also is an effort to balance relations with all parties. "If North Korea undermines North-East Asian stability and hurts Chinese interests, we have to respond [with punishment]. But this does not mean China is siding with the U.S. and Japan against North Korea".[52]

The emerging domestic consensus on the necessity for adjustment reflects the prevailing view that the previous, Hu Jintao, administration had been too tolerant, resulting in the DPRK undermining China's interests.[53] The Xi administration is attempting to lay down boundaries so that the Kim regime will seriously consider those interests before acting. Beijing is unlikely to continue unconditional support for the North, but it is unclear precisely what adjustments are probable. The most often heard view is that China would "mete out rewards and punishment accordingly (奖惩分明)". This seeming ambiguity and flexibility means there is room for cooperation with the West but also that Chinese measures will be reactive to Pyongyang's behaviour. In addition, Beijing will respond to Washington's DPRK policy. According to a Chinese analyst, "if the U.S., like it was under the Bush administration, wants regime change [in the DPRK], of course we have to side with North Korea".[54]

Beijing's actions and the trajectory of domestic debate have made it clear that China under Xi Jinping will be much less tolerant of errant North Korean behaviour than previously, but this is far from a wholesale policy change. Chinese actions will likely continue to be tactical, designed to manage and control Pyongyang's behaviour but not have a denuclearised North as their goal. The adjustments are "tactical but not strategic" and "changes in attitude and implementation but not policy". They enable cooperation with Washington and Seoul, but "the expectations should not be too high", a Chinese scholar said.[55] Beijing's calculation will be guided by its own interests, which both overlap with those of others and diverge from them in some fundamental ways.

[50] Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2013.
[51] Crisis Group Report, *Shades of* Red, op. cit., pp. 5-7.
[52] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Shenyang, July 2013.
[53] A Chinese analyst said many foreign policy experts criticised the government for not condemning Pyongyang after it shelled Yŏnp'yŏng Island and killed four South Koreans in 2010. Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2013. For the incident, see Crisis Group Reports, *North Korea: The Risks of War* and *China and Inter-Korean Clashes*, both op. cit.
[54] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, June 2013.
[55] Crisis Group interview, Chinese scholar, Beijing, July 2013.

III. China's Geopolitical Calculation

A. *Washington: The Dominant Factor*

The role Beijing chooses to play on the nuclear issue reflects its geopolitical positioning and perception of strategic advantages and constraints. The U.S. relationship dominates calculations: "China's North Korea policy eventually will be decided by Sino-U.S. relations. If the U.S. tries to contain or encircle China, then more people will think we should help North Korea. If … relations get better, there will be more cooperation [on North Korea]".[56] The ambiguous role Beijing plays is defined by the hedging strategy toward Washington: "Externally, we say we want to establish a new type of major power relationship with the U.S. and that we want it to be win-win. Internally, we say the U.S. wants to contain China and wants to subvert the Chinese government".[57]

Establishing "a new type of major power relationship" with the U.S. is a signature Xi Jinping foreign policy initiative. At his June meeting with Obama, he said it ought to be characterised by "no conflict; no confrontation; mutual respect; and win-win cooperation". The U.S. has not fully adopted the concept but endorsed building "a new model of relations between an existing power and an emerging one".[58] The summit led to mutual expression of desire to cooperate on the nuclear issue. That offers promise to expand common ground but does not bridge the gap in positions. China falls far short of U.S. expectations that it put more pressure on the North; it wants the U.S. to return to the Six-Party Talks, but Washington is reluctant without a clear DPRK commitment to previous agreements. This difference resulted in diverging scripts on the nature of cooperation. The U.S. reported that the leaders "stressed the importance of continuing to apply pressure … to halt North Korea's ability to proliferate". China reiterated "solving the North Korea nuclear issue … through dialogue and negotiation".[59]

Sino-U.S. cooperation on the nuclear issue is likely to remain superficial due to non-alignment of priorities. High-level visiting U.S. officials consistently send the message that such cooperation "could be a test" for the new type of relationship China wants to forge.[60] To Beijing, the cooperation is contingent on Washington's attitude and actions, as well as its own other geopolitical concerns. "If we have the U.S. selling weapons to Taiwan, if we have issues with the U.S. interfering in the East China Sea and the South China Sea, then there will not be smooth cooperation on the North Korea issue", a Chinese analyst said.[61]

[56] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, June 2013.
[57] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analyst, scholar, Beijing, June, September 2013 respectively.
[58] Xi first raised the concept in Washington as vice president. "Speech … at Welcoming Luncheon Hosted by Friendly Organizations in the United States", China-US Focus, 15 February 2012. "习近平概括中美新型大国关系：不冲突、不对抗，相互尊重，合作共赢", 新华社["Xi Jinping summarises China-U.S. new type of major power relationship: no conflict, no confrontation, mutual respect, and win-win cooperation"], Xinhua, 10 June 2013. Tom Donilon, "The United States and the Asia-Pacific in 2013", remarks at the Asia Society, 11 March 2013. Obama used the phrase "new model of relations between the United States and China". "Remarks by President Obama and President Xi Jinping … after Bilateral Meeting", White House, 8 June 2013.
[59] Donilon press briefing, op. cit. "Yang Jiechi's Remarks on the Results of the Presidential Meeting … at the Annenberg Estate", foreign ministry, 9 June 2013.
[60] Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Beijing, June 2013.
[61] Crisis Group interview, Beijing, August 2013.

Many in China consider the U.S. and its allies pose a larger challenge to China's regional strategic interests than North Korea. They see Korean peninsula issues through the lens of Sino-U.S. rivalry. "The U.S. is concerned about the Chinese dragon behind North Korea. We are concerned about the U.S. eagle behind South Korea".[62] Washington's rebalancing to Asia reinforced suspicion, called by hardliners an attempt to contain China and by moderates a hedge against its rise.[63] Many suspect the U.S. uses the DPRK nuclear program as an excuse to strengthen regional alliances and advance its overall Asia-Pacific strategy.[64] Officials repeatedly stress to U.S. counterparts that "Beijing was not convinced that the deployment of U.S. missile defence assets are only in response to North Korea and [considers that they] are not in China's strategic interest".[65]

Beijing's deep mistrust presents a dilemma for cooperation on denuclearisation. Robust responses to Pyongyang by the U.S. and its allies, including combined military exercises, missile defence system upgrades and military deployments, can have the consequence of convincing Beijing more than the North's belligerence – that its strategic interests are in jeopardy. They motivate Beijing to try to defuse tensions on the peninsula but also deepen its suspicion and undercut its willingness for meaningful cooperation. Chinese analysts point out that the UN Command (UNC) was formed "against China and the DPRK" during the Korean War. "With such large-scale military exercises in the Yellow Sea, how do you think we Chinese feel? It's hard for us even to convince ourselves that such actions were not carried out partially with China in mind".[66]

As a result, Beijing can be expected to do the necessary to manage Pyongyang's behaviour, so as to tamp down tensions and prevent what it considers overreaction from Washington. Though denuclearisation is stated as a long-term Chinese goal, it appears subordinate to countering U.S. influence and hedging against U.S. advances in the region. China is unlikely to sacrifice North Korea to serve the interests of what it perceives to be a rival and potential foe.

B. *Pyongyang: Strategic Asset or Liability?*

Each time a crisis flares on the Korean peninsula, it sparks debates in China on the costs and benefits of sheltering the North, whose strategic value to China continues to evolve. The cost of sustaining the Kim regime may have increased, and the benefits may have declined, but the calculation remains that the potential consequences of cutting Pyongyang loose are unacceptable.

China has traditionally considered North Korea a military buffer for its north east, countering U.S. troops stationed in South Korea and Japan. The geography of the Korean peninsula provides few barriers to rapid military manoeuvres from south to north or vice versa. It could also facilitate an invasion of China by Japan or vice versa,

[62] Crisis Group interview, Chinese scholar, Shenyang, July 2013.
[63] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts and scholars, August 2012-March 2013.
[64] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts and scholars, June-August 2013; Shenyang, July 2013; Changchun, August 2013.
[65] Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Beijing, June 2013.
[66] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts, Beijing, May, September 2013. The Security Council authorised the establishment of UNC on 7 July 1950 in Resolution 84. Other than U.S. and ROK troops, the first foreign troops arrived from the UK on 29 August, about two months before Chinese "volunteers".

as has happened several times in history.[67] Mao Zedong described the China-North Korea relationship as that of "the lips and teeth (唇齿相依)", a phrase derived from the Chinese idiom that "if the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold (唇亡齿寒)".[68] The military buffer value of the DPRK has lessened in the age of long-range missiles and cyber warfare and in the face of continued U.S. naval dominance in the region. According to a Chinese analyst, the People's Liberation Army (PLA) has a keen understanding of such shifts: "Military conflicts have changed so much. There are no longer any land wars".[69]

Nevertheless, North Korea is likely to remain a valuable geopolitical buffer for the foreseeable future. A shift away from China's sphere of influence would threaten one of two unpalatable outcomes for Beijing: a spurned Pyongyang turning to Washington; or a unified Korea strategically aligned with the U.S. Instead, as Asian coastal states, rattled by China's assertiveness in maritime disputes, welcome a growing U.S. presence, and Myanmar, which not long ago counted China as one of its only friends, moves toward Western political values, the loss of a nuclear but allied North Korea becomes more unthinkable.[70] Beijing's fears make it hesitant to use its leverage over the DPRK; Pyongyang understands this and exploits it. Chinese analysts commonly believe that "when China uses its leverage, the leverage disappears".[71]

The complexity of the DPRK-China security relationship has increased its ambiguity. The bilateral Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance stipulates that if one party is attacked, the other is to provide military help, but China has repeatedly avoided clarification on implementation.[72] "The alliance relationship … is kept ambiguous in the interest of both [signatories]".[73] The treaty helps China maintain influence on the North, manage potential instability and discourage the U.S. and South Korea from military action against the DPRK. Beijing is aware, however, that the obligation stated in it could produce entanglement in an unwanted war triggered by the North. Pyongyang nominally relies on the treaty to counter the direct threat of

[67] Roger Baker, "China and North Korea, A Tangled Partnership", Stratfor Global Intelligence, 16 April 2013.

[68] 毛泽东，"关于志愿军撤出朝鲜问题给金日成的电报" [Mao Zedong, "Telegram to Kim Il-sung on Volunteers Withdrawing from the DPRK"], 24 January 1958, at http://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64184/64185/189967/11568180.html.

[69] Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2013.

[70] On Myanmar, see Crisis Group Asia Briefings N°127, *Myanmar: Major Reform Underway*, 22 September 2011; and N°136, *Reform in Myanmar: One Year On*, 11 April 2012; and Asia Report N°231, *Myanmar: The Politics of Economic Reform*, 27 July 2012.

[71] Crisis Group interview, Beijing, April 2013.

[72] "In the event of one of the parties being subjected to the armed attack by any state or several states together and thus being involved in a state of war, the other party shall immediately render military and other assistance by all means at its disposal" (Article two). In June 2009, when asked after Pyongyang conducted its first nuclear test whether the treaty remained valid and China would participate in a war caused by the test, the foreign ministry avoided a direct answer, instead reciting its standard statement on the North Korea nuclear issue. "外交部9日例行记者会：秦刚就朝鲜半岛局势等答问" ["Foreign Ministry's Regular Press Conference on 9 June: Qin Gang answers questions on Korean Peninsula Situation"]. In July 2011, on treaty's the 50th anniversary, the foreign ministry was asked whether China would renew it in 2021, when it expires. The spokesman merely repeated the standard script on denuclearising the Korean peninsula. "2011年7月14日外交部发言人洪磊举行例行记者会" ["Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hong Lei Hosts Regular Press Conference on 14 July"].

[73] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, June 2013.

the ROK-U.S. alliance but is suspicious of Chinese influence.[74] In reality, its leadership, inspired by *sŏn'gun* ideology ("military first", 先軍思想), considers no outside security guarantee credible. State ideology proclaims that security can only be assured by self-help and that military power, including nuclear weapons, is the best guarantee.

The political relationship has also gone through transition, and the ideological bond has been frayed. "North Korea … does not recognise China as a socialist country". Once China began economic reform and opened up in the 1980s, North Koreans "grew suspicious, because they thought China has gone capitalist".[75] They also resent their dependence, due to national pride and the influence of Kim Il-sung's *chuch'e* ideology [主體思想], which emphasises self-reliance, ethnic nationalism and resistance to external influence. China considers the DPRK "a family dynasty".[76] Many Chinese, especially the younger generations to whom "blood alliance" is an abstract, anachronistic concept, view it with pity and contempt. Satirical jokes about Kim Jong-un populate the internet.[77]

In recent years, China has been de-emphasising ideological affinity with the DPRK, instead stressing that the ties are "normal state-to-state relations". The exact date when the shift began is hard to pinpoint, but Chinese scholars place it in the 1990s, when Deng Xiaoping started to balance relations with the two Koreas.[78] There is no official explanation of what "normal" ties entail, compared to the old blood alliance, but Chinese analysts say China should fit its DPRK policy to national interests, not ideological and historical bonds. "We should make it clear to the DPRK that we can work together when our interests are aligned, but when we differ, the DPRK has to take China's interests into consideration".[79]

The "state-to-state" phrase also provides a cover for deflecting calls to do more to rein in Pyongyang. After each satellite launch or nuclear test since March 2009, the foreign ministry has repeated that "China and North Korea have normal state-to-state ties", no more special than with other nations. Commenting on limited responsibility after the third nuclear test, Ai Ping, vice minister of the party's international liaison department (ILD), said China "can't wag its finger and impose its will …."[80]

Despite the "normal relations" refrain, special political ties still at times define the relationship. Kim Jong-il in May 2010 was received by all nine members of the Politburo Standing Committee. "That's abnormal, as no other country gets such a

[74] For more analysis on the treaty, see Lee Sang-sook, "North Korea-China Treaty of Friendship: New Implications and Current Bilateral Relations", Korea Focus, 11 November 2011.
[75] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese scholars, Yanji, August 2013; Beijing, June 2013.
[76] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese scholars and officials, Beijing, June 2013; Changchun and Yanji, August 2013.
[77] The Chinese video-sharing website youku（优酷）has abundant user-made jokes about "Kim the Third Fatty". http://v.youku.com/v_show/id_XNjA0MTA5Nzc2.html. A mobile game, "Stop Kim!", is translated as "Stop it, Kim the Third Fatty (别闹！金三胖！)". http://android.d.cn/game/28364.html.
[78] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, May and June 2013.
[79] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, May 2013.
[80] "2009年3月17日外交部发言人秦刚举行例行记者会" ["Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Qingang hosts regular press briefing on 17 March 2009"]; "2009年6月2日外交部发言人秦刚举行例行记者会" ["Foreign Ministry Spokesman Qingang hosts regular press briefing on 2 June 2009"]; "2013年3月8日外交部发言人 华春莹主持例行记者会" ["Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Hua Chunying hosts regular press briefing on 8 March 2013"]. "中联部副部长谈朝鲜核试验：再好的邻居也是主权国家", *观察者* ["ILD Vice Minister on North Korea's Nuclear Test: No matter how friendly the neighbour is, it is a sovereign country"], *The Observer*, 14 March 2013.

reception", a Chinese analyst said.[81] Kim Jong-un's envoy, Ch'oe Ryong-hae, in May 2013 was first received by ILD Minister Wang Jiarui. "That means our relations are led by party-to-party political ties".[82] Compared with the ILD, "the foreign ministry doesn't play much of a role" in shaping and implementing DPRK policy, a Chinese scholar said.[83] The ambassador to North Korea, Liu Hongcai, is an ex-ILD vice minister in charge of North Korea affairs.[84]

The recent crisis on the Korean peninsula appeared to prompt Beijing to take institutional steps toward normal bilateral ties. In June 2013, it hosted the first strategic dialogue between the foreign ministries. Sending Li Yuanchao, the vice premier, rather than a Politburo Standing Committee member to Pyongyang for the Korean War armistice ceremony was also a "high-profile display that China and North Korea have normal state-to-state relations rather than a 'blood alliance'", according to a PLA scholar.[85]

The thinning ideological kinship does not suggest reluctance to sustain the Kim regime. Chinese often refer to North Korea, with a mixture of condescension, exasperation and affinity, as their errant little brother. The hidden message is that Beijing still sees Pyongyang as a member of the communist family and will continue to succor it, though it may at times enforce discipline. Meanwhile, the leadership under Xi Jinping, having concluded that a main cause of the Soviet Union's collapse was that "their ideals and beliefs had been shaken", has launched a Maoist-style campaign to forge ideological purity in the party, rebuild its legitimacy and tighten ideological control domestically.[86] The failure of a China-friendly communist regime next door would run counter to these efforts.

C. *Seoul: A Budding Romance*

Mid-2013 brought China and South Korea dramatically closer. Under the slogan "a trip of heart and trust", President Park visited in late June and was received warmly. Her personal charm, proficiency in Mandarin and professed love for Chinese culture and history delighted her hosts. Domestic commentators proclaimed that the visit ushered in "an era of high-speed development" or "a new starting point" for relations.[87]

[81] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, May 2013.
[82] "朝鲜劳动党总书记金正日对我国进行非正式访问", 新华社 ["General Secretary of North Korean Workers' Party Kim Jong Il in China for informal visit"], Xinhua, 7 May 2010. "王家瑞会见金正恩特使崔龙海", 新华社 ["Wang Jiarui meets Kim Jong Un's envoy Choe Ryong Hae"], Xinhua, 23 May 2013. Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, May 2013.
[83] Crisis Group interview, Beijing, June 2013.
[84] "刘洪才大使简历 [Biography of Ambassador Liu Hongcai] ", Chinese embassy, Pyongyang. For Chinese entities that shape the country's DPRK policy, see Appendix B below.
[85] 纪明葵"李源潮访朝为恢复朝核六方谈判创造条件", 中国网 [Ji Mingkui, "Li Yuanchao visits North Korea to create conditions to resume the Six-Party talks"], China.com.cn，26 July 2013.
[86] The other lesson Xi drew from the Soviet collapse was that "the military was depoliticised, separated from the Party and nationalised". 高瑜, "男儿习近平," [Gao Yu, "The Man Xi Jinping"], Deutsche Welle, 25 January 2013. Xi launched a campaign to strengthen the party's ties with the people and "maintain the Party's progressiveness and purity". "党的群众路线教育实践活动工作会议召开 习近平发表重要讲话", 新华社 ["The Party holds mass-line education and practice working meeting, Xi Jinping gives important speech"], Xinhua, 18 June 2013. In August, Xi emphasised in a speech that "ideological work is an extremely important task for the Party", Xinhua, 20 August 2013.
[87] "Park Geun-hye fever sweeps China", China.org.cn, 1 July 2013. 谭亚，"朴槿惠访华：中韩关系进入高速发展期"，*人民网* [Tan Ya, "Park Geun-hye visits China: China-ROK relationship enters era of high-speed development"], *People's Daily* (online), 28 June 2013. 王木克，"韩国总统朴槿惠成功

Beijing likely sensed geopolitical profit. Understanding that the U.S. alliance remains the bedrock of South Korea's security policy, strategists nevertheless saw potential in bringing Seoul closer. Nudging its neighbour toward a midpoint between the U.S. and China "will have a completely different geopolitical effect than leaving it entirely in the arms of the U.S", a newspaper editorialised, and the deterioration in Sino-Japanese relations has also enhanced the value of Seoul's friendship.[88] Chinese media played up that Park departed from tradition, visiting Beijing before Tokyo.[89] Headlines portrayed a Japan "nervous" at a China-ROK "honeymoon". In a not-so-subtle reference to the enmity China and South Korea share toward Japan due to World War II and modern nationalism, the joint statement signed during Park's visit expressed "special concerns" toward regional instability caused by historical issues.[90]

The appearance of rapport raised mutual hopes for more cooperation over North Korea. Park's "trust-building process" for managing inter-Korean relations won support, as it is considered a more flexible alternative to Washington's policy.[91] Chinese analysts "perceive nuanced differences" between Seoul and Washington and say "Park's approach toward the DPRK emphasises a correlation between security and the economy" that China sees as closer to its approach of engagement and dialogue. Seoul is also believed to place a higher premium on peace on the Korean peninsula compared to Washington's denuclearisation and non-proliferation priority. Many in China are convinced the Park administration is shifting away from the U.S. alliance-based framework for managing the North Korea issue in favour of U.S-China-ROK trilateral coordination.[92]

Seoul equally has raised its expectations regarding China's cooperation on the DPRK problem, and some South Koreans also seem convinced of a gradual convergence in views. "China is seeing the uncertainty with Kim Jong-un as well. China is reassessing the implications of a nuclear North Korea". Heartened by subtle changes in China's attitude – "at least debates are taking place on whether North Korea is a liability or asset" – Seoul intends to encourage such a shift.[93] The aspiration for closer cooperation and coordination is tempered in both countries, however, by realistic understanding of divergent interests and objectives. "For Washington, the end goal for North Korea is denuclearisation and regime change. For the ROK, it's reunification.

访华 中韩关系站上新起点", *瞭望* [Wang Muke, "South Korean President Park Geun-hye successfully visits China. China-ROK relationship steps onto new starting point"], *Outlook*, 1 July 2013.

[88] "环球社评：中韩关系是战略的，也是婆婆妈妈的", *环球时报* ["China-ROK relationship is strategic but also womanishly fussy"], *Global Times* editorial, 28 June 2013. It added that, compared to problems with Japan, China-ROK relations appear "clean" as the two are not in strategic competition and do not have unsolvable disputes.

[89] "Such a carefully designed foreign policy itinerary sends the policy signal to the outside world that the South Korean government places great importance on its relations with China". 王木克 [Wang Muke], op. cit.

[90] "朴槿惠优先访华 中韩进入蜜月期让日本坐不住", *环球时报* ["Park Geun Hye prioritises visit to China China-ROK honeymoon unsettles Japan", *Global Times*], 28 June 2013. "朴槿惠访华让日本'吃醋' 中韩'联手'让日本紧张，新华社" ["Park Geun-hye's visit to China makes Japan 'jealous' China-ROK 'joining hands' makes Japan nervous"], Xinhua, 28 June 2013. "中韩面向未来联合声明" ["China-ROK Joint Statement for the Future"], foreign ministry, 27 June 2013.

[91] "Park's visit aids 'trust-building process'", *China Daily*, 28 June 2013. Park Geun-hye, "A New Kind of Korea: Building Trust between Seoul and Pyongyang", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2011. Crisis Group interviews, Shenyang, Beijing, Changchun, July-August 2013.

[92] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts, Beijing, Changchun, July-August 2013.

[93] Crisis Group interviews, South Korean scholar; Beijing, July 2013; South Korean official, Seoul, June 2013; and South Korean scholars, Beijing, July-August 2013.

China's end goal is denuclearisation and peace. You can't expect China to follow Washington and Seoul", said a Chinese analyst. South Koreans acknowledge that their U.S. alliance and China-DPRK affinity remain hurdles to tightening ties with Beijing.[94]

Even during Park's visit, differences emerged. Although she claimed she and President Xi "shared a common understanding that Pyongyang's possession of nuclear weapons is unacceptable under any circumstances", the joint statement attributed this position to the ROK alone.[95] When describing a shared position, the statement spoke of "relevant nuclear weapons development" and "denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula", without naming the North. Beijing's choice of words was a tacit nod to Pyongyang's insistence that denuclearisation must apply to the entire peninsula, including Washington's nuclear umbrella.

Walking a delicate balance between the two Koreas has been Beijing's policy since it established diplomatic ties with the ROK in 1992. Those ties have not led to growing distance from the North. "We want to do business with both", said a Chinese analyst. This policy is seen as advancing China's primary goal of maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula, as it provides leverage over both. "If we stood on only one side, the situation would have been more tense than today", a retired general said.[96]

[94] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, August 2013; South Korean scholar, Beijing, July 2013.
[95] "President Park's State Visit to China A Trip of Heart and Trust", South Korean foreign ministry, 2 July 2013. "China-ROK Joint Statement for the Future", op. cit.
[96] Crisis Group interview, Beijing, August 2013. Comment at conference, Beijing, May 2013.

IV. Chinese Views on Denuclearisation

Despite the appearance of convergence with the West on the denuclearisation goal, Beijing's approach and timeline remain fundamentally different.

A. *Denuclearisation vs. Stability*

Following Pyongyang's third nuclear test, statements by Chinese leaders sparked speculation that Beijing had reordered its objectives and that denuclearisation has risen to the top of its priorities. When meeting North Korean Vice Marshal Ch'oe Ryong-hae in May, Xi Jinping stated China's position as "insisting on the objective of denuclearising the peninsula, insisting on maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula and insisting on solving relevant issues through dialogues and consultation".[97] These "three insists" were repeated by Xi and other leaders and appeared to alter the traditional order of priorities: "no war, no instability, no nukes" (不战、不乱、无核), in descending order.[98] But analysts explained that the "three insists" only clarify long-existing policy and do not mean denuclearisation now outranks stability. China's "basic approach" remains "stabilising the region first – then, in a stable region, try to denuclearise".[99]

China's overall priorities remain economic development and domestic stability. Instability in North Korea would be disruptive. Though some Chinese analysts acknowledge that DPRK nuclear ambition is a major destabilising element, Beijing appears more concerned that Western style denuclearisation would lead to regime collapse or war, undermining Chinese national interests. It believes denuclearisation can only be achieved in the long-term, while "peace and stability of the peninsula have to be guaranteed first".[100] Within this framework, most in China seem resigned that no credible pressure or deterrence could dissuade Pyongyang from its nuclear capability. Though Beijing has sent "lots of démarches, diplomatically and politically it's impossible for China to take actions to prevent a fourth nuclear test". Nor would that test impel China to increase pressure on Pyongyang, beyond expressing "more frankly and toughly our dissatisfaction".[101] Beijing does not see it as possible in the near term to stop the North from further tests and satellite launches without jeopardising its own basic interests.

B. *Cause of the North Korea Nuclear Problem*

It is a mainstream view in China that the nuclear issue's root cause is the regime's concern for survival. Analysts see this concern as understandable, even if it is unjus-

[97] "习近平见朝特使重申中方立场 崔龙海转交金正恩书信", 新华社["Xi Jinping reaffirms China's stance in meeting with North Korean envoy, Ch'oe Ryong-hae delivered letter from Kim Jong Un"], Xinhua, 25 May 2013.

[98] Prior to North Korea's third nuclear test, China's standard position was, "It is to the interests of all parties concerned to solve the problem through dialogues and consultation, safeguard peace and stability on the Peninsula, and achieve denuclearisation of the peninsula and its lasting peace and stability". "2011年7月14日外交部发言人洪磊举行例行记者会" ["Foreign Ministry spokesperson Hong Lei's regular press conference on 14 July 2011"].

[99] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, Changchun, August 2013; Chinese analyst, Beijing, September 2013.

[100] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analyst, Beijing, August 2013.

[101] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, September 2013.

tifiable for Pyongyang to seek security via nuclear weapons. Western countries believe developing nuclear weapons for security is illegitimate, and other paths to national security are available. The widely held view in China is that Pyongyang's insecurity results from Washington's refusal to give a credible security guarantee. Some suggest a U.S.-DPRK peace treaty as denuclearisation's starting point.[102]

Many Chinese also believe Washington has exacerbated the problem by "ignoring" it when things are calm and "overreacting" when tensions rise.[103] The U.S. view is that the DPRK repeatedly reneged on denuclearisation, so it will not negotiate further unless Pyongyang takes concrete steps to dismantle its program.[104] Chinese analysts blame the U.S. for "lost opportunities to reach a peaceful solution" by ignoring Pyongyang's desire for direct talks.[105] One of them said, "the Obama administration's strategic patience is seen by analysts here as strategic ignorance. It allowed North Korea to develop nuclear weapons".[106] Sanctions are said to have inflicted pain on people, while "they sped up the nuclear programs".[107] Chinese tend to believe deterrence and military exercises and deployments by the U.S. and allies have deepened DPRK insecurity. "The U.S. made such big moves at North Korea's doorstep. It's terrifying to North Korea".[108] Beijing thus believes it is on Washington to address the root cause and repair the damage of its policy.[109]

C. *Perception of Threat*

While the U.S. and its allies see themselves as potential targets of Pyongyang's nuclear weapons, Beijing does not believe its dependent neighbour would turn on it.[110] China and the West also differ on their assessments of the DPRK's capabilities. The North's three tests indicate it has nuclear devices, but its ability to miniaturise a weapon to fit inside a ballistic missile warhead is unknown. It has deployed mobile short-range missiles capable of reaching targets throughout the ROK and mobile medium-range missiles capable of striking Japan. It also is developing mobile intermediate-range

[102] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing, April and August 2013; Changchun, August 2013.
[103] Crisis Group interviews, Beijing and Changchun, August 2013.
[104] Crisis Group interview, diplomat, Beijing, September 2013. Under the 1994 U.S.-DPRK Agreed Framework, the North committed to freezing its plutonium weapons program in exchange for aid and negative security assurances. The agreement broke down in 2002, after Pyongyang was found to have a clandestine uranium-enrichment program, and it expelled International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) inspectors. In 2003, the DPRK withdrew from the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and resumed operations at the Yŏngbyŏn nuclear complex. In September 2005, it agreed to abandon its nuclear program, return to the NPT and restore IAEA safeguards in exchange for economic aid and security guarantees. The next year, it test-fired seven ballistic missiles and conducted its first nuclear test. In February 2012, in the "Leap-day Agreement" with the U.S., Pyongyang agreed to freeze the nuclear and ballistic missile programs in exchange for food aid. The agreement ended following the December 2012 satellite launch and 2013 nuclear test. "Chronology of U.S.-North Korean Nuclear and Missile Diplomacy", Arms Control Association, April 2013.
[105] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts, Beijing, April 2013; Changchun, August 2013.
[106] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, August 2013.
[107] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, April 2013; remarks, retired PLA general, conference, Beijing, May 2013.
[108] Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, August 2013.
[109] "解铃还需系铃人" ["The one who ties the knot is responsible for untying it"]. Crisis Group interview, Chinese analyst, Beijing, April 2013.
[110] Only a handful of scholars who advocate the outright abandonment of Pyongyang warn that the North Korean regime's use of nuclear weapons against China cannot be ruled out.

and mobile long-range missiles that could potentially strike the East Asian region and the U.S.[111] In Washington's assessment, North Korea is thus "a direct threat" to its allies and "is becoming more and more an issue of a direct threat to the homeland". China has not made its assessment public, but some Western diplomats have the impression "China loves to look at North Korea condescendingly and sees North Koreans as a bunch of bumbling idiots, and does not take North Korea's nuclear capability seriously".[112]

The threat of proliferation by the North, one of Washington's "gravest concerns", is seen as distant in China, whose primary concerns are the side effects of the nuclear program. Its "ultimate nightmare scenario", a Chinese scholar said, is the domino effect of the ROK and/or Japan developing nuclear weapons in response to Pyongyang's threat. A close second is the North's growing nuclear capability triggering military strikes by Washington, destabilising China's periphery, sending millions of DPRK refugees across the border into China, toppling the Kim regime or, worse still, forcing China into a war. China fears that "a fire on the city gate could bring disaster to the fish in the moat" (城门失火殃及池鱼).[113]

Pyongyang's threat to the international non-proliferation regime is at times cited as a Chinese concern. "As a member …, China has its own interest in safeguarding the NPT (Non-proliferation Treaty), especially if China wants to be a great power".[114] But such protection of the "global commons" is secondary to other national interests. Instead, Chinese analysts see non-proliferation as much more a U.S. priority and argue that the burden is on Washington to win China's cooperation for it: "If China feels comfortable and confident with the U.S., it will behave as a responsible big power, safeguarding the non-proliferation regime".[115]

D. *Timeline and Approach for Denuclearisation*

Despite pledging denuclearisation as a shared goal, China and the West are far apart in timelines and approaches, leading to countervailing effects. China downplays the DPRK nuclear threat, both capability and intent. It does not believe that threat is credible, so considers denuclearisation less urgent than managing the North's behaviour and preventing overreaction by Seoul or Washington. Because it does not see itself directly threatened by the nuclear program but is concerned for collateral damage from a military conflict on the Korean peninsula, it appears to prefer the role of a mediator, preventing hostility from escalating to conflict.

[111] "Military and Security Developments Involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea", U.S. Defense Department, 2 May 2013, p. 9. In April 2013, a U.S. Congressman cited a Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) report stating it had "moderate confidence" that North Korea had mastered the ability to mount a nuclear warhead on a ballistic missile, although warning that weapon "reliability will be low." Director of National Intelligence James Clapper issued a same-day statement saying that was not a U.S. intelligence community consensus. The Pentagon's same-day statement also qualified the DIA assessment. The South Korean defence ministry the next day said it had "doubt that North Korea has reached the stage of miniaturisation". "Pentagon finds nuclear strides by North Korea", *The New York Times*, 11 April 2013.

[112] Crisis Group interviews, diplomat, June, September 2013.

[113] "Military and Security Developments", op. cit., p. 16. Crisis Group interviews, Chinese scholar, Beijing, August 2013; Chinese analyst, Shenyang, July 2013.

[114] Crisis Group interview, Chinese scholar, Beijing, June 2013.

[115] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analysts, Beijing, June, August 2013.

Whereas the West views pressure as necessary to compel the North to give up its nuclear ambition, the prevailing opinion in China favours relaxing pressure in order to alleviate Pyongyang's existential concerns. While the West insists on diplomatic isolation and economic sanctions to alter Pyongyang's cost-benefit calculation, China nurtures diplomatic ties and economic engagement in the hope of influencing the regime's thinking and eventually inducing it to embark on economic development and give up the nuclear program. Washington holds out a peace treaty as the ultimate reward for denuclearisation; China urges it to give the DPRK a security guarantee to create the environment for denuclearisation.

Chinese policymakers are convinced their approach is superior because they are uniquely able to interpret the North's mindset. Many tend to see in it their own recent past: "It's like China in the 1970s, when Mao criticised 'American imperialists' but secretly wished to establish contact with the U.S. The U.S. can't interpret North Korea's statements literally".[116] The logic follows that with proper incentives, the DPRK can be coaxed onto the path China charts: economic reform, opening, eventual international integration, then possibly denuclearisation.

In Beijing's view, the Western approach – pressure and suspected efforts to topple the regime – results from "ignorance of East Asian existential logic" and underestimation of the regime's resilience. "The more pressure you apply, the higher it [the regime] bounces back".[117] Because the West's approach might also produce consequences unacceptable to it, such as regime collapse, a refugee flood or a unified Korea as a U.S. ally, China prefers the status quo, at least for now, to minimise risks and buy time, so that its strategy might succeed in the long run.

[116] Crisis Group interviews, Changchun, November 2013; Chinese analyst, Beijing, April 2013.
[117] Crisis Group interviews, Chinese analyst, Beijing, April 2013; Chinese scholars, Beijing, April 2013, Yanji, August 2013.

V. Conclusion

Beijing's DPRK policy is primarily guided by geostrategic calculations, but traditional friendship still wields considerable, albeit declining, influence. The Chinese see the nuclear problem primarily as a U.S. responsibility and many express the view that treatment of the North is contingent upon Sino-U.S. relations. While outwardly expressing the desire to forge a new type of major power relationship with Washington, strategic mistrust has been deepened by Washington's pivot toward Asia. Beijing suspects the U.S. is using the North as an excuse to gain strategic advantage in the region, with China as a potential target.

Seen through the lens of rivalry with the U.S., North Korea's value to Beijing increases, even though its utility as a military buffer is becoming less relevant. Nuclear tests and repeated provocations have damaged Chinese national interests, but Beijing believes the benefit of sustaining the Kim regime outweighs the risk of cutting it loose. China-ROK relations have improved, but verbal expressions of cooperation and coordination on North Korea have done little to counter fundamental differences in strategic interests and goals.

Despite reaffirming its commitment to denuclearising the Korean peninsula, Beijing still prizes stability more and sees the two objectives as mutually exclusive at the current stage. Many in China are convinced Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program is motivated by concern for regime survival and confess sympathy. They blame Washington for Pyongyang's insecurity and believe it is up to the U.S. to change its policy. Beijing does not yet perceive the North's nuclear capability as a direct or credible menace, but rather sees U.S. and allied responses to the program as potentially more threatening to its interests. The integrity of the international non-proliferation regime, though important, is a secondary priority.

China's less urgent assessment of the need to denuclearise North Korea contrasts greatly with that of Washington and its allies. A sense of resignation prevails in Beijing that the North cannot be stopped from developing its nuclear capability in the short-term unless extraordinary and politically unacceptable measures are taken. Chinese analysts thus advocate denuclearisation as a long-term goal that, they say, requires the U.S. first to alleviate DPRK anxieties.

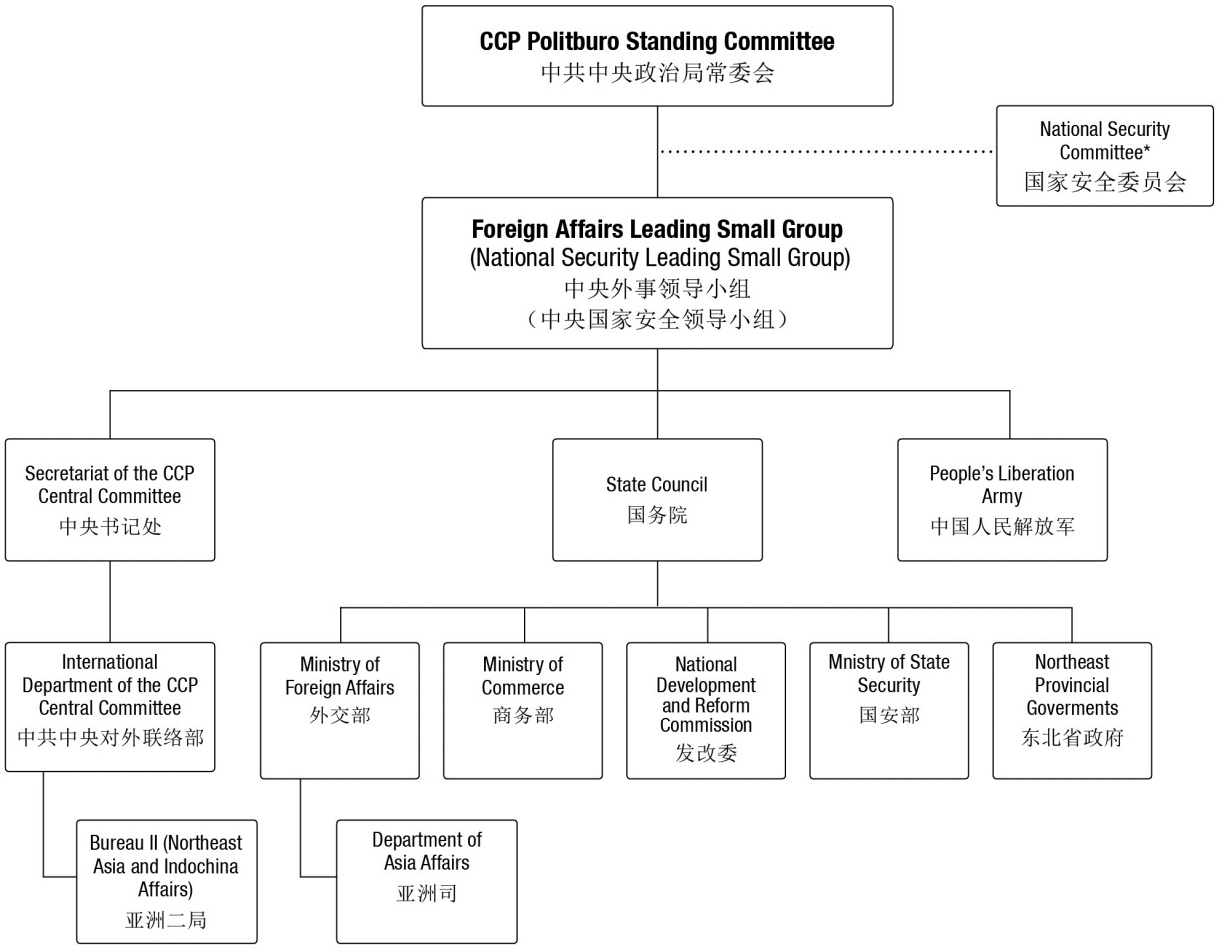
Though a domestic consensus is forming around the desirability of adjustments to DPRK policy, it appears Beijing will make only tactical changes for the foreseeable future to better maintain and manage the status quo. That includes controlling Pyongyang's behaviour and managing Western responses, while staying committed to diplomatic and economic engagement with the North.

Beijing/Seoul/Brussels, 9 December 2013

Appendix A: Map of China

Appendix B: Map of North Korea

Appendix C: Key Chinese Actors on DPRK Policy



Appendix D: About the International Crisis Group

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Crisis Group's approach is grounded in field research. Teams of political analysts are located within or close by countries at risk of outbreak, escalation or recurrence of violent conflict. Based on information and assessments from the field, it produces analytical reports containing practical recommendations targeted at key international decision-takers. Crisis Group also publishes *CrisisWatch*, a twelve-page monthly bulletin, providing a succinct regular update on the state of play in all the most significant situations of conflict or potential conflict around the world.

Crisis Group's reports and briefing papers are distributed widely by email and made available simultaneously on the website, www.crisisgroup.org. Crisis Group works closely with governments and those who influence them, including the media, to highlight its crisis analyses and to generate support for its policy prescriptions.

The Crisis Group Board – which includes prominent figures from the fields of politics, diplomacy, business and the media – is directly involved in helping to bring the reports and recommendations to the attention of senior policy-makers around the world. Crisis Group is chaired by former U.S. Undersecretary of State and Ambassador Thomas Pickering. Its President and Chief Executive since July 2009 has been Louise Arbour, former UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and Chief Prosecutor for the International Criminal Tribunals for the former Yugoslavia and for Rwanda.

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December 2013

Appendix E: Reports and Briefings on Asia since 2010

As of 1 October 2013, Central Asia publications are listed under the Europe and Central Asia program.

North East Asia

The Iran Nuclear Issue: The View from Beijing, Asia Briefing N°100, 17 February 2010 (also available in Chinese).

North Korea under Tightening Sanctions, Asia Briefing N°101, 15 March 2010.

China's Myanmar Strategy: Elections, Ethnic Politics and Economics, Asia Briefing N°112, 21 September 2010 (also available in Chinese).

North Korea: The Risks of War in the Yellow Sea, Asia Report N°198, 23 December 2010.

China and Inter-Korean Clashes in the Yellow Sea, Asia Report N°200, 27 January 2011 (also available in Chinese).

Strangers at Home: North Koreans in the South, Asia Report N°208, 14 July 2011 (also available in Korean).

South Korea: The Shifting Sands of Security Policy, Asia Briefing N°130, 1 December 2011.

Stirring up the South China Sea (I), Asia Report N°223, 23 April 2012 (also available in Chinese).

Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses, Asia Report N°229, 24 July 2012 (also available in Chinese).

North Korean Succession and the Risks of Instability, Asia Report N°230, 25 July 2012 (also available in Chinese and Korean).

China's Central Asia Problem, Asia Report N°244, 27 February 2013 (also available in Chinese).

Dangerous Waters: China-Japan Relations on the Rocks, Asia Report N°245, 8 April 2013 (also available in Chinese).

South Asia

Sri Lanka: A Bitter Peace, Asia Briefing N°99, 11 January 2010.

Nepal: Peace and Justice, Asia Report N°184, 14 January 2010.

Reforming Pakistan's Civil Service, Asia Report N°185, 16 February 2010.

The Sri Lankan Tamil Diaspora after the LTTE, Asia Report N°186, 23 February 2010.

The Threat from Jamaat-ul Mujahideen Bangladesh, Asia Report N°187, 1 March 2010.

A Force in Fragments: Reconstituting the Afghan National Army, Asia Report N°190, 12 May 2010.

War Crimes in Sri Lanka, Asia Report N°191, 17 May 2010.

Steps Towards Peace: Putting Kashmiris First, Asia Briefing N°106, 3 June 2010.

Pakistan: The Worsening IDP Crisis, Asia Briefing N°111, 16 September 2010.

Nepal's Political Rites of Passage, Asia Report N°194, 29 September 2010 (also available in Nepali).

Reforming Afghanistan's Broken Judiciary, Asia Report N°195, 17 November 2010.

Afghanistan: Exit vs Engagement, Asia Briefing N°115, 28 November 2010.

Reforming Pakistan's Criminal Justice System, Asia Report N°196, 6 December 2010.

Nepal: Identity Politics and Federalism, Asia Report N°199, 13 January 2011 (also available in Nepali).

Afghanistan's Elections Stalemate, Asia Briefing N°117, 23 February 2011.

Reforming Pakistan's Electoral System, Asia Report N°203, 30 March 2011.

Nepal's Fitful Peace Process, Asia Briefing N°120, 7 April 2011 (also available in Nepali).

India and Sri Lanka after the LTTE, Asia Report N°206, 23 June 2011.

The Insurgency in Afghanistan's Heartland, Asia Report N°207, 27 June 2011.

Reconciliation in Sri Lanka: Harder Than Ever, Asia Report N°209, 18 July 2011.

Aid and Conflict in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°210, 4 August 2011.

Nepal: From Two Armies to One, Asia Report N°211, 18 August 2011 (also available in Nepali).

Reforming Pakistan's Prison System, Asia Report N°212, 12 October 2011.

Islamic Parties in Pakistan, Asia Report N°216, 12 December 2011.

Nepal's Peace Process: The Endgame Nears, Asia Briefing N°131, 13 December 2011 (also available in Nepali).

Sri Lanka: Women's Insecurity in the North and East, Asia Report N°217, 20 December 2011.

Sri Lanka's North (I): The Denial of Minority Rights, Asia Report N°219, 16 March 2012.

Sri Lanka's North (II): Rebuilding under the Military, Asia Report N°220, 16 March 2012.

Talking About Talks: Toward a Political Settlement in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°221, 26 March 2012.

Pakistan's Relations with India: Beyond Kashmir?, Asia Report N°224, 3 May 2012.

Bangladesh: Back to the Future, Asia Report N°226, 13 June 2012.

Aid and Conflict in Pakistan, Asia Report N°227, 27 June 2012.

Election Reform in Pakistan, Asia Briefing N°137, 16 August 2012.

Nepal's Constitution (I): Evolution Not Revolution, Asia Report N°233, 27 August 2012 (also available in Nepali).

Nepal's Constitution (II): The Expanding Political Matrix, Asia Report N°234, 27 August 2012 (also available in Nepali).

Afghanistan: The Long, Hard Road to the 2014 Transition, Asia Report N°236, 8 October 2012.

Pakistan: No End To Humanitarian Crises, Asia Report N°237, 9 October 2012.

Sri Lanka: Tamil Politics and the Quest for a Political Solution, Asia Report N°239, 20 November 2012.

Pakistan: Countering Militancy in PATA, Asia Report N°242, 15 January 2013.

Sri Lanka's Authoritarian Turn: The Need for International Action, Asia Report N°243, 20 February 2013.

Drones: Myths and Reality in Pakistan, Asia Report N°247, 21 May 2013.

Afghanistan's Parties in Transition, Asia Briefing N°141, 26 June 2013.

Parliament's Role in Pakistan's Democratic Transition, Asia Report N°249, 18 September 2013.

Women and Conflict in Afghanistan, Asia Report N°252, 14 October 2013.

Sri Lanka's Potemkin Peace: Democracy under Fire, Asia Report N°253, 13 November 2013

South East Asia

Radicalisation and Dialogue in Papua, Asia Report N°188, 11 March 2010 (also available in Indonesian).

Indonesia: Jihadi Surprise in Aceh, Asia Report N°189, 20 April 2010.

Philippines: Pre-election Tensions in Central Mindanao, Asia Briefing N°103, 4 May 2010.

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