

Policy Implications of China-North Korea Relations

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Abstract

Fundamental changes in the nature of politics inside China's Communist Party are occurring at the same time the Kim-family regime is absorbed by succession politics. Specifically, we are seeing, in both states, not only transitions from one set of leaders to another but also transformations of the structures of both regimes, with the militaries of the two countries becoming more powerful. These momentous developments are happening while Beijing and Pyongyang are working out a new relationship. The result of all these realignments will, in all probability, be even greater uncertainty and much more turbulence on the Korean peninsula over the next several years. The implications will also be felt around the world as Pyongyang, with Beijing's assistance, challenges global nonproliferation norms.

Keywords: China, North Korea, South Korea, Iran, nuclear proliferation, military, economy

Today, fundamental changes to the nature of politics inside China's Communist Party are occurring at the same time the Kim-family regime is absorbed by succession politics. Specifically, we are seeing, in both states, not only transitions from one set of leaders to another but also transformations of the structures of both regimes, with the militaries of the two counties becoming more powerful. These developments are happening while Beijing and Pyongyang are working out a new relationship.

Beijing-Pyongyang relations, when they were anchored by two larger-than-life figures, were far more stable than they are today. Mao Zedong and Kim Il-sung had much in common: the charismatic communist comrades were Chinese-speaking, Confucian, and chubby. Consequently, diplomacy between the two countries was often conducted on a personal basis. Moreover, each owed the other a debt: Kim Il-sung sent Korean fighters to aid the Chinese revolution, and Mao returned the favor with his own "volunteers" during the "War to Resist US

Aggression and Aid Korea.” As a result of their dealings, Mao could talk about the two regimes being unshakable friends, “as close as lips and teeth” as he so memorably put it. Ties between the two capitals were never that close, of course, but old revolutionaries, who had fought as comrades on both Chinese and Korean soil, cemented the links between the two communist bloc members.

The change of generations inevitably eroded the lips-teeth ties. In Beijing, relations since the middle of the 1990s have been handled by people who know much less about the North than their predecessors,¹ and the 2003 retirement of Defense Minister Chi Haotian marked the formal passing of China’s generals who had fought in the Korean War. In Pyongyang, Kim Jong-il in the 1980s started purposively removing officials who had good links with China in a bid to shore up his position as his father’s successor. Kim, who reportedly disliked the Chinese and certainly distrusted them, then continued to purge those with ties to—and a good understanding of—Beijing even after he formally took power.

In this environment, it is not surprising that strained personal relations at the top of both the Chinese and North Korean governments were matched by communications problems at their lower levels. Neither capital retained strong institutional links with the other even though they remained each other’s only formal ally. Yet there were also structural reasons for the cooling of Beijing-Pyongyang ties. Mao consistently linked Chinese and Korean security concerns, almost from the founding of the People’s Republic,² but the end of the Cold War changed the calculus in the Chinese capital. The dissolution of the communist bloc gave China reasons to promote trade with other countries—particularly those in the West or allied to Western nations—thereby providing Beijing even more incentive to distance itself from its troublesome ally. And the Chinese wasted no time in building links with the nation Kim Il-sung always viewed as his mortal enemy. In what North Korea saw as an unforgivable betrayal, Beijing established formal relations with Seoul in 1992. China’s diplomatic ties with South Korea then led to trade, and increasing trade has gradually created a more comprehensive bond.

China’s quick outreach to former adversaries has resulted in the near universal perception that it is in the midst of a long process of moving away from Pyongyang. Michael Swaine of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, for example, voices the dominant view when he contends the Chinese are now engaged in a complex balancing act, trying

to deal with the North Koreans, on one side, and the Americans, on the other, while simultaneously working with regional players, especially the Japanese, South Koreans, and Russians.³ Swaine's general narrative in many ways influences and reflects the tone for reporting on relations between Beijing and Pyongyang. Almost all analysts now believe that Chinese policymakers are trying to strike an appropriate balance.

In September 2011, Zhu Feng of Peking University went one step further and asserted that the 1961 mutual assistance treaty between China and North Korea had become irrelevant—a dead letter—with the end of the Cold War because China had in fact switched sides and now preferred to South Korea.⁴ Professor Zhu's view buttresses the assessment of then-South Korean Vice-Foreign Minister Chun Yung-woo, who is reported to have told then-American Ambassador Kathleen Stephens in February 2010 that China “would be comfortable with a reunified Korea controlled by Seoul and anchored to the United States in a ‘benign alliance.’”⁵

Whether or not Chun accurately described Beijing attitudes, policymakers in the Chinese capital are clearly suffering from what is aptly called “Pyongyang fatigue.” As former Ambassador Stapleton Roy says, “No one has found a way to persuade North Korea to move in sensible directions,”⁶ and by now the Chinese seem as exasperated as the rest of the international community. Professor Zhu correctly suggests many in Beijing are embarrassed by their alliance with Pyongyang and know their support of the North is not in their country's long-term interests. Moreover, there is no doubt that there is profound unease in China about Kim-family rule, even though the two nations have maintained ties for decades.

These attitudes, although real, do not have much apparent impact on Chinese policy, however, as events in 2010 show. In 2010, the Kim regime was responsible for two horrific acts, the sinking of the *Cheonan*, a South Korean frigate, in March—46 dead—and the November shelling of Yeonpyeong—four killed, two of them civilians. North Korea's military “could neither bark nor bite” without China.⁷ Because it barked—and bit—twice in recent times, we need to question the view that Beijing is succeeding in backing away from its longstanding ally.

The two belligerent acts gave Chinese officials opportunities to break with their pro-Pyongyang policies, yet they stood fast with North Korea. As an initial matter, they did not stop the sinking of the *Cheonan* even though they had the opportunity to do so, at least according to the

intelligence service of a country in the region. This intelligence service has been privately saying the North Koreans informed China of their plans to torpedo a South Korean vessel. Whether or not Beijing knew beforehand, it diligently worked behind the scenes afterward, preventing the Security Council from condemning Pyongyang for the sinking and, more important, from imposing sanctions. The best Washington could do in the circumstances was to get Nigeria's U Joy Ogwu, president of the Council, to read out an even-handed statement in July of that year, calling for calm from all sides.

Yet Beijing not only protected its client state, it also helped create the conditions for the next incident, the November shelling. Washington and Seoul had been thinking of sending the *George Washington* strike group into the Yellow Sea soon after the March 26 sinking of the *Cheonan*. The presence of the carrier and its escorts was then conceived as a show of resolve. As Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in May of that year, the U.S. was going to send a "clear message" to Pyongyang.

China, which borders the Yellow Sea, vehemently objected to the presence of the *George Washington* so close to its shores. In the face of increasing threats from Beijing, the Pentagon did not send the carrier into that body of water but pledged in early September to do so sometime in the indefinite future. The idea was that the postponement would placate Chinese officials. The tactic, however, seems to have backfired because the North Koreans, seeing that China's intimidation had worked, evidently thought they had a green light for another provocation. Moreover, Beijing, according to one account, substantially increased its aid to the North after the sinking.⁸ Whatever lessons we may now draw from this sequence of events, we saw Chinese and North Korean policies in fact reinforce each other, evidence of coordination and maybe even conspiracy.

Beijing's failure to break with Pyongyang in 2010 calls into question optimistic pronouncements that China is on the verge of abandoning—or has already abandoned—its alliance with the Kim family. In fact, Beijing's continuing support reveals, if anything, the durable nature of ties between the people's republics in China and Korea.

Beijing's Ties with Pyongyang

Kim Jong-il's apparent confidence in Chinese support for his seemingly never-ending provocations meant that, in general, his ties with Beijing were stronger than most outside observers believed. It is often

said that China and North Korea have the world's oddest bilateral relationship, and, if the dominant narrative on this topic were correct, the Chinese would have walked away from their troublesome allies long ago.

Yet Beijing officials realize they cannot do that because there are elements that keep the two nations tied to each other. For one thing, they remain locked in a permanent embrace of location. The boundary line that separates them is arbitrary, drawn after conquest, and has Koreans living on both sides. It has proved almost impossible to control without extraordinary effort. Even with recent fortifications on the Chinese side⁹ and increased surveillance on the North Korean one,¹⁰ the boundary, almost entirely defined by two rivers, remains porous. In winter one can walk across the ice to China and in the summer wade. At one point—at Yibukua, which means “one step across”—the portion of the Yalu River forming the border is just about as narrow as the name implies.

This border, although artificial in some ways, nonetheless divides two very different peoples and mentalities. The Chinese, for hundreds of years, have viewed the Koreans as inferiors, vassals to their grander kingdom and followers of their more magnificent culture. Beijing leaders, whether they articulate this or not, see the Korean peninsula as a part of their natural sphere of influence, more than just a buffer as it is so often characterized. On the south side of that same boundary line, the North Koreans bitterly resent their condescending Chinese overlords. They—and especially their leaders—are contemptuous of the Chinese, upset at perceived slights, and deeply suspicious. The Koreans, although envious of China's new-found prosperity, do not necessarily admire China.

As a result, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea regularly bites the hand that feeds it. The Chinese provide the DPRK with 90 percent of its energy, 80 percent of its consumer goods, and 45 percent of its food,¹¹ much of it on concessionary terms. Aid from China may be the only reason that a third member of the Kim family, the newly installed Kim Jong-un, is ruling today. Although the regime is particularly opaque, common sense, if nothing else, tells us that the coldly rational North Koreans know they cannot risk the loss of China's support. And yet they believe, at least most of the time, that they do not have to show gratitude to Beijing.

Kim Jong-un's immediate predecessor, his father, shrewdly reasoned that the Chinese provided all the support for their own benefit and had little choice but to keep his regime in business. China, after all, has

never been a charity. That, in a nutshell, is why the now deceased Kim could afford to annoy his benefactor most of the time.

The Chinese, to prevent Washington from applying pressure on them, understated their influence on North Korea, but if Kim Jong-il didn't listen to Beijing's officials at any particular moment, it was largely because they did not expect his obedience all the time. China supported his state, whether or not he was cooperative, because the Chinese believed in the longer run he would realize his debt. They knew they had influence and could use it when needed, notes China watcher Chung Jae Ho of Seoul National University, but they preferred not to do so all the time.¹² It was good enough for them that Kim knew his obligations and would pay them back when they demanded.

The Chinese could be confident because they knew, year-by-year, that they were gaining influence in the DPRK. For one thing, they were tying the North Korean economy closer to theirs. Trade between the two nations, a vital barometer, increased from \$370 million in 1999 to \$3.47 billion in 2010.¹³ In that year, 57.1 percent of the North's international commerce was with China, up from about 25 percent in 1999.¹⁴ Chinese aid almost quadrupled from \$400 million in 2004 to \$1.5 billion in 2009,¹⁵ and, from what we can tell, has continued the upward trend since then. Beijing took up the slack when Seoul cut off food assistance, and it has continued to increase assistance even after the *Cheonan* sinking. Now, more than half of China's foreign aid goes to Kimist Korea.¹⁶

Chinese investment into the North has followed a similar trajectory. The amount China invested in 2003 was a minuscule \$1.1 million, according to statistics from Beijing's Ministry of Commerce. In 2008, that figure jumped to \$41.2 million.¹⁷ Chinese investment fell precipitously in 2009, but it has since returned to high levels from all indications. Premier Wen Jiabao's October 2009 trip to Pyongyang, ostensibly to celebrate sixty years of diplomatic ties between China and North Korea, marked the beginning of a new phase in Beijing's support of the Kim government. During the visit, Wen signed commercial pacts, promised additional aid, and announced the building of a new highway bridge over the Yalu.

Since that highly publicized visit, China has accelerated its plans to penetrate the North Korean economy with a series of high-profile investments. In December 2010, for instance, a private Chinese enterprise signed a \$2 billion investment pact to build, in its first phase, three additional piers as well as a highway and railroad from neighboring

Jilin province in China to the Rajin-Sonbong economic zone in Rason.¹⁸ The news caps a series of disclosures about increasing Chinese investment in the strategic port, where a Chinese enterprise has already built a pier and is about to begin work on another.¹⁹ China also leased another port facility in that city for 10 years.²⁰

Beijing's apparent long-term plan is first to develop and then to control Rason in order to give its three northeastern provinces—Jilin, Heilongjiang, and Liaoning—easy access to the sea. By a quirk of history, it is Russia—not China—that has sovereignty over the northern bank of the Tumen River as it empties into the East Sea or the Sea of Japan. Beijing, therefore, is accelerating its plans to control the south bank, the part held by North Korea. And Beijing is well on the way to doing so. China used that port for the first time in December 2010, when one of its enterprises transported 20,000 tons of coal from a mine in Jilin to Shanghai.²¹

Furthermore, at the western end of the 885-mile border, Chinese enterprises are eyeing the investment of more than \$800 million to build special investment zones on two islands—Wihwa and Hwanggumpyong—in the Yalu near the Chinese border city of Dandong, the heart of one of the fastest growing areas in China. The Communist Party chief for Dandong is surely exaggerating when he says his city and Hwanggumpyong will be “the hot ground for investors worldwide”²² and reports of the project seem fanciful at this stage, but there will eventually be Chinese money flowing into North Korea near the mouth of the Yalu. Although Beijing is not as interested in these projects as it is with Rason,²³ they nonetheless show the scope of its ambitions.

With all these plans in various stages of implementation, it appears, as the South Koreans fear, that Chinese leaders want to make North Korea their “fourth northeast province,”²⁴ which would mean the end of the dream of a united Korean nation. And that also means the North is on the road to becoming a de facto Chinese colony. As Jeremy Paltiel of Carleton University observes, the increasing interaction between China and the North is falling into “a pattern not seen since the 1950s.”²⁵

The death of Kim Jong-il seems likely to accelerate this trend, as Georgetown's Victor Cha implied when he wrote, immediately after the event, that “North Korea as we know it is over.”²⁶ In all probability, he is correct as China is in position to increase its already considerable influence in Pyongyang, especially in the short-term, as Kim Jong-un and his circle seek Beijing's assistance to stabilize their destitute state. In the

longer term, it is possible the North Koreans could reverse course and reach out to South Korea, yet no democratic government—not even the one in Seoul—can engage the Kim regime while it remains unstable. And by the time that Pyongyang is able to achieve stability, it may be too late. Then, as Cha suggests, Beijing may have already absorbed “its little Communist brother.”

The Changing Regimes in Beijing and Pyongyang

The worrisome trend in relations between the two states, each other's only formal military ally, is now being driven by several factors, but the one of most concern is the hardening of politics and policy in both capitals. The militaries are gaining influence inside their respective political systems and their emergence means that the very natures of the two regimes are changing. Thus, the rise of the Chinese military has special implications for the Korean peninsula because China's generals have traditionally endorsed pro-Pyongyang policies.

In China, we are witnessing what looks like the remilitarization of politics and policy. At one time, the Chinese military was organically linked to the Communist Party of China. It was the People's Liberation Army that installed the Communists in Beijing, and the first two leaders of the new communist state, Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, were military officers. Then, the army was powerful, making or breaking China's rulers. It was the military that restored order during the decade-long Cultural Revolution, got rid of the ultra-leftist Gang of Four in October 1976, ensured the elevation of Deng to power in 1978, and restored Deng's rule by slaughtering residents, workers, and students in Beijing in June of 1989. These incidents reinforced the perception in society that the PLA was the final arbiter in China's rough game of politics.

Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, successors to Mao and Deng, are civilians, and this has led to what Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip Saunders have termed the “bifurcation of civil and military elites.”²⁷ Jiang's elevation to the top post marked the beginning of a period of rapid decline of military influence. His tenure witnessed progressively fewer generals and admirals holding posts in top Communist Party organs. For instance, no military officer has served on the Politburo Standing Committee, the apex of political power in China, since 1997.

This decline is now being reversed as the PLA has been gaining influence during the tenure of Hu Jintao, the current leader. There have

been various reasons for the marked upswing in the fortunes of China's military. First, civilian leaders are relying on the troops of the People's Liberation Army and the semi-military People's Armed Police to keep order—and to keep themselves in power—in the face of a rising tide of discontent, not only in minority areas but across the 31 provinces, provincial-level cities, and autonomous regions of the People's Republic. Moreover, civilian leaders are turning to nationalism to bolster eroding political legitimacy, and it is the military that carries the flag of the People's Republic beyond China's territories and into space.

Yet the most important reason for the reemergence of the PLA is that its top officers have emerged as power brokers inside the Communist Party. From about the middle of 2003, Hu courted flag officers for their support in his struggle with his predecessor, Jiang Zemin, who was trying to linger in the limelight. Hu's tactics largely paid off, but the military exacted a price, once again emerging as a power center inside the Party. Generals and admirals won ever-larger increases in defense expenditures; there have been promotions for hawkish officers, especially General Chen Bingde, who became chief of general staff; and Beijing has adopted a markedly more assertive posture toward other nations in line with the military's views.

Some analysts deny there has been a shift of power in favor of flag officers, arguing either that their outspokenness reflects more openness in society or that timid civilian leaders are using generals and admirals to speak for the nation, as cat paws. Although there may be some truth to these assertions, it is nonetheless evident that senior military officers are gaining power in the Chinese capital. Senior officers, as a result of their new-found clout, appear to be acting independently of civilian officials, openly criticizing them and making pronouncements on areas once considered the exclusive province of diplomats. Moreover, there are too many public reminders to the military that “the Party controls the gun” to think this has not become an issue.²⁸ Finally, although Hu Jintao has said that increases in military spending should be commensurate with the growth of the economy,²⁹ it appears the hikes in the PLA's budgets have outpaced economic growth in recent years.

Now, as Karl Marx famously said, history is repeating itself. Splits in the run up to the 18th Party Congress, to be held in late 2012, appear to be once again giving leverage to the military as they did last decade. As Hu and his rivals struggle over various matters—especially the slate of candidates to take over the country in 2012—the military is bound to

consolidate its recent gains and seek even more control over the country's finances and external policies. This appears to be the case largely because the PLA, in recent years, has been better able to maintain its cohesiveness than other power blocs in the increasingly faction-ridden Communist Party.

In January 2011, then-Defense Secretary Robert Gates spoke of the “disconnect” between China's civilian and military leaders. We are beginning to see, as he suggested, a divided regime with constituent elements often carrying out their own policies with little evident coordination. As the center continues to fracture during this time of political transition—something especially evident during Gates's troubled last visit to Beijing—the one-party system is inevitably splintering, something that has not happened to this degree since the Beijing Spring of 1989 or maybe even since Mao's death in 1976. As Arthur Waldron of the University of Pennsylvania points out, Chinese history is marked by periods where civilian and military leaders drift apart,³⁰ and now China is entering one of those eras.

While China's generals and admirals are accumulating power, their counterparts in the DPRK are doing the same thing, also during a period of stressful leadership transition. By the time that Kim Jong-il unexpectedly died in December 2011, Kim Jong-un did not have the opportunity to cement his position at the top of the leadership. He did not, since being designated successor in 2009, place a sufficient number of supporters in key positions in the regime or gain the experience of balancing, in addition to Kim family members, its three other factions—the military, the security services, and the party. Of those three factions, the military is by far the most influential, the only institution able to keep the country together. Kim Jong-il, throughout his rule, promoted *songun*—military first—politics, and to help Jong-un he arranged for him to be made a full general in September 2010, a public recognition of the predominance of the military in both society and the regime.

Yet the award of four stars was just for show as the real generals and admirals, at Jong-un's expense, are accumulating even more power as they fill the vacuum caused by his father's death. The military's enhanced role was already evident by its prominence in the funeral rituals. Flag officers took positions of honor, and, even more striking, the powerful Jang Sung-thaek, Kim Jong-il's civilian brother-in-law and presumed regent for Jong-un, donned the uniform of a general, the first time he did so in a public ceremony. There are a multitude of insider

reports that the young Kim will share power with flag officers, and one former American diplomat even said the regime is becoming “a sort of military junta.”³¹

Because flag officers have already gained influence, there is not only a change in leaders but also a fundamental transformation in the structure of the North Korean regime itself, a transition from one-man rule, generally the least stable form of government, to a military-dominated collective leadership. This transformation looks like it is already mimicking the change that occurred after Kim Jong-il suffered his debilitating August 2008 stroke. Then, senior officials quickly established a collective to manage the country during the dictator’s disability.³²

Flag officers gained influence during this period of collective rule³³ not only because Kim Jong-il needed their support for the hastily-arranged transfer of power to his son but also because he looked to them to execute the belligerent plans—the sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong—he engineered to confer legitimacy on Jong-un. The ascendancy of the military was also apparent in light of the dismissal in March 2011 of Ju Sang-song, the North Korean security chief and a rival of the top brass.³⁴ Moreover, the unusual deaths of senior civilian officials in Pyongyang, starting in the spring of 2010—especially that of Ri Je-gang, reportedly a primary backer of Jong-un³⁵—is another sign that military officers have gained ground against others in the vicious politics of the regime.

Perhaps the most important reason to believe that the military increased—and will continue to increase—its role is that the generals have traditionally maintained the best links to China due to mil-to-mil ties. Because Pyongyang relies more on Beijing these days, the North’s flag officers would appear to have naturally boosted their influence. This is most evident in North Korea’s exports to China. About 63 percent of the North’s total exports are minerals sold to China, and the minerals sector is increasingly controlled by Pyongyang’s military.³⁶ From 2000 to 2009, the North’s mineral exports to China increased by a stunning annual average of 53 percent.³⁷ That upward trend accelerated during the first nine months of 2011, when mineral exports more than tripled over the same period in 2010.³⁸ Today, China is establishing new mining ventures in the North, especially near Musan, where the Chinese will develop a rare-earth deposit and receive half its output for free.³⁹

The rise of the Chinese and North Korean militaries changes the equations of powers in their respective states and creates uncertainty as to how they will behave in coming years. When Aidan Foster-Carter says that “if China takes North Korea in hand, the risk factor will diminish,”⁴⁰ the famous Korea watcher is making a critical assumption—that Beijing wants to restrain Pyongyang. That is probably wrong. The rise of hawkish elements in both countries explains, if not why the North attacked the South twice in 2010, then at least why Beijing staunchly supported Pyongyang after the incidents. Analysts have extensively investigated events occurring that March and November and have identified reasons the North engaged in these attacks, but there are always “provocations” by Seoul as far as the Kim regime is concerned. Kim Jong-il would never have authorized the sinking of the *Cheonan* or the shelling of Yeonpyeong unless he knew he could count on Beijing’s backing for these acts, and he undoubtedly realized that the resurgence of the People’s Liberation Army meant he was assured of the support of hardliners in the Chinese capital.

Yet the hardliners do not necessarily have the Kim family’s best interests in mind, even if they support its actions, because they have more than economic domination of North Korea on their minds. Nothing says “colony” more than the presence of foreign forces. South Korea’s main papers have been carrying stories that Beijing has been negotiating the entry of Chinese troops into the North. In a sensational article, the *Chosun Ilbo* reported in mid-January 2011 that sources said Chinese forces were already on North Korean territory. In the east, some 50 armored vehicles and tanks had crossed the Tumen River at night about 30 miles from Rason in the middle of December. In the west, jeeps of the People’s Liberation Army were seen in Dandong, heading to the North Korean city of Sinuiju, just south of the Yalu River, at about the same moment.⁴¹ If these reports were accurate, China’s troops were back in the North for the first time since withdrawing from the Demilitarized Zone in 1994.

Beijing immediately issued denials. “China will not send a single soldier to other countries without the approval of the UN,” the Defense Ministry said to the *Global Times*, a Communist Party–run paper.⁴² Furthermore, in October 2010 Beijing, through the *Global Times*, denied another South Korean article stating that up to 3,000 Chinese troops would help modernize Pyongyang’s forces.⁴³ Some speculated that China’s soldiers were supposed to seize defectors and “suppress public

disturbances.” An unnamed South Korean official, quoted in *Chosun Ilbo*, said that “they’re apparently there to protect either facilities or Chinese residents rather than for political or military reasons.”⁴⁴ These rumors of Chinese troops surfaced again immediately after the death of Kim Jong-il.⁴⁵

So far, no one has confirmed the presence of PLA elements in North Korea, an indication that the newspaper reports are probably untrue. But even though Chinese security analysts professed surprise at the articles in the Seoul papers, it is common knowledge in Beijing that China’s officials have had discussions with their North Korean counterparts about such action for some time. As one source told the *Chosun Ilbo*, “The North has apparently concluded that it is unavoidable to accept the Chinese military presence on its land to woo Chinese investment, even if it’s not happy about it.”⁴⁶

The willingness even to talk about allowing foreign troops on Korean soil is an indication of just how bad things have become in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea. After all, the Kims based the legitimacy of their rule on *Juche*, an ideology Kim Il-sung introduced within two years of the end of the Korean War. “*Juche*” literally means “master of one’s self” or self-reliance. Nations without *Juche* were said to be colonies, so South Korea, for instance, was branded a puppet of the United States.

By developing his own ideology, Kim Sr., in both appearance and reality, staked out an independent path avoiding the close embrace of either of his big-power sponsors, Beijing or Moscow. He may have made his state reliant on aid, which he did immediately after the Korean War, but his country was never dependent on any single donor. When either communist giant temporarily spurned Kim—often, as he was exceedingly difficult to control—he simply took handouts from the other.

Kim Jong-un’s problem at this moment is that, like his father but unlike his grandfather, he has only one sponsor. Moscow, eager to enhance ties with an economically-vibrant South Korea, shifted sides in the zero-sum contest between Seoul and Pyongyang by ending aid to North Korea in early 1991. Kim Jong-il was able to replace the Soviet Union with South Korea as first Kim Dae Jung, with his Sunshine Policy, and Roh Moo-hyun, with his Peace and Prosperity Policy, competed with China for the affections of the North Korean regime. Yet South Korea’s current leader, President Lee Myung-bak, ended Seoul’s aid soon after taking office in early 2008. That left the North with only one backer,

China.

Kim Jong-il's August 2011 trip to the Russian Far East to meet President Dmitry Medvedev is best seen in the context of Kim's trying to find a supporter to play off against China. Yet until Kim Jong-un can get the Russians fully on board, Beijing will continue to have extraordinary leverage on Pyongyang. Some argue that leverage may not signify much. "Yes, China is taking over the North Korean economy, but that does not mean they are going to take over politics," argues the widely followed Andrei Lankov. "The reason is the North Korean elite do not take care of the well-being of the people, so economic growth is not as important as in other countries."⁴⁷

Lankov's statement has the ring of truth,⁴⁸ but Beijing's grip over the North's economy is now so pervasive that the Chinese probably can still get what they want in Pyongyang. As it is, the DPRK is struggling to avoid becoming, in the words of noted Korea watcher Bruce Bechtol, "a complete Chinese satellite."⁴⁹ The North Koreans, unfortunately, know they're fighting a losing battle with their gigantic neighbor.

The Implications of Pyongyang's Policies for South Korea

As noted, strained relations between Beijing and Pyongyang dominates recent analyses. This narrative was evident, for instance, in the reporting of Kim Jong-il's week-long excursion to China in May 2011, a visit Korea watchers termed "disastrous." During the trip—the third to China in 13 months for the North Korean leader—he and his Chinese hosts rarely found themselves on the same page. Chairman Kim, for instance, wanted to talk aid while Chinese leaders spoke of economic development. And when both sides discussed economic development, China's officials took positions that displeased the easily irritated North Korean. Premier Wen Jiabao, for instance, rejected the notion that the Chinese government would come to his assistance by getting directly involved in development projects in the North. "China hopes that economic cooperation is achieved through normal business processes and we believe provinces and businesses need to become more proactive," he said.⁵⁰

Kim was so upset after talking with Wen that he reportedly ordered his economic advisors to boycott his subsequent meeting with Chinese leader Hu Jintao. As a result, the Chinese delegation at the meeting was three times larger than the North Korean one although protocol required them to be of equal size. And then three days after leaving China—

where he pledged to work for peace—Kim threatened “physical action”—Pyongyang’s code for war—against South Korea.⁵¹ The highly provocative comments at the end of May were interpreted as a sign of Kim’s defiance of Beijing. This is the view that Beijing, through its corps of spokesman-like academics and analysts, often promotes.

Yet, there is an alternative explanation for Kim’s belligerent words. For example, the increasing Chinese presence in his country gave the North Korean leader more room to do what he wanted. Why? Because Beijing had too much invested in the North to walk away and let the country—or the Kim family—fail. And Kim undoubtedly perceived that the rise of the military and other hardliners in Beijing meant he had, as a practical matter, even more latitude for his schemes, violent and otherwise. So when he threatened action against South Korea, his words had special significance.

Beijing, whether evil puppet master or unwilling co-conspirator, will continually be drawn into disputes involving the two Koreas, as it was in 2010. This means, at a minimum, that the warming ties between Beijing and Seoul will be tested. China and the South in 2008 declared themselves to be in a “strategic co-operative partnership,” and they held their first-ever strategic defense talks in July 2011. Nonetheless, the overriding reality is that North Korea sees the South as its mortal enemy, so Pyongyang will continually attack it, as evident from the two provocations in 2010 and a low-level campaign of violence the following year.⁵² All these developments provided evidence that Beijing’s relations with Seoul are fundamentally unstable and will remain that way until the Chinese finally turn their backs on the Kim-family regime and embrace a more constructive approach to the world. This is true even though trade between China and South Korea is growing. China is South Korea’s largest trading partner. In 2010, China accounted for 24.5 percent of South Korea’s trade volume. China’s share was more than double that of the country in second place, Japan. Japan’s share was 11.5 percent. The U.S., by the way, was in third at 10.8 percent.⁵³ The volume of China-South Korea trade in the first six months of 2011 was \$107.5 billion, or 20.2 percent of the South’s overall trade.⁵⁴ In 2000, the volume was \$14.8 billion, just 9.2 percent of South Korea’s trade total.

Yet the trade links between the two countries, as strong as they were, did not result in Beijing’s siding with Seoul in 2010, when it had so many chances to do so. There are three points to make in this regard.

First, South Korea accounted for 7.0 percent of China's trade in 2010⁵⁵ while China accounts for more 20 percent of South Korea's. This means China is less dependent on South Korea than South Korea is on China. Although analysts approvingly note South Korea's engagement with China, there are risks for Seoul as it is becoming dependent on its enemy's best friend. Second, the Chinese military, which could be driving Beijing's Korean policy, is probably not particularly impressed by the growing economic ties between their country and South Korea. In fact, China's flag officers probably see these links as a tool to exploit. After all, they talk about Beijing's using its economic relations with the United States as leverage, so why should they treat the South Koreans differently? Third, many in Beijing undoubtedly want to switch partners in the Korean peninsula, given the economic ties with Seoul, but there is no consensus on changing Chinese policy—and in Beijing's system, there must be general agreement to execute a reversal of the country's policy direction. Where it counts—not at the lowly Foreign Ministry but at the top, the Politburo Standing Committee of the Communist Party—there appears to be solid support for Pyongyang, especially because Hu Jintao is thought to be an admirer of the Kim political system.⁵⁶ In September 2004, he reportedly said “politically, North Korea has been consistently correct.” In sum, growing trade links in North Asia are not necessarily promoting stability there. China's economic integration with the Korean peninsula is making both Koreas more dependent on Beijing at a time Beijing is becoming assertive in ways that cause concern in the region.

The Implications for the International Community

The increasing Chinese influence in North Korea has implications that go far beyond the Korean peninsula, of course. For instance, Beijing's clout affects the way global leaders have structured their efforts to “denuclearize” the Kim regime. So far, Beijing has received praise for its role in this regard. Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi was not far off in his characterization of international perceptions in September 2011 when he said that “China does not have its own selfish interests in the issues on the peninsula, and has received widespread acclaim and high marks from the international community for its constructive role in protecting regional peace and stability.”⁵⁷

Those who believe the Chinese are trying to play a constructive role always point to Beijing's displeasure with the North's October 2006

detonation of a small atomic device, its first known test of a nuclear weapon. They invariably note that Beijing voted for U.N. Security Council sanctions on the North that October and again in June 2009.

Events following the detonation, however, suggest a different interpretation. The Kim regime, to weather global condemnation of its 2006 nuclear test, launched a charm offensive to obtain aid from the United States, South Korea, Japan, and the rest of the international community. Pyongyang abruptly ended that campaign three years later in late 2009 after the passage of additional sanctions imposed by Security Council Resolution 1874.

Why was Pyongyang no longer concerned by sanctions after the enactment of a *second* set of them? The answer: the North Koreans knew that the Chinese had their back. As noted, Premier Wen Jiabao in October 2009 went to Pyongyang to announce his country's increased support for the North Korean economy. As a Chinese netizen wrote soon after the crucial announcements, "It must be a huge encouragement for North Korea that, when the whole world is isolating them, our premier is there to give them hope."⁵⁸ And the extensive investments also sent a message to the international community that Beijing was willing to undercut U.N. sanctions through its economic relations with Pyongyang.

Security Council Resolution 1874 prohibits most commercial contacts with the North. Paragraph 19 of the Resolution calls on U.N. member states "not to enter into new commitments for grants, financial assistance, or concessional loans to the DPRK, except for humanitarian and developmental purposes directly addressing the needs of the civilian population, or the promotion of denuclearization." Paragraph 20 calls on members "not to provide public financial support for trade with the DPRK . . . where such financial support could contribute to the DPRK's nuclear-related or ballistic missile-related or other WMD-related programs or activities." The deals announced by Wen in October 2009 were so significant they undoubtedly violated Resolution 1874, and Chinese investment into the North, especially in Rason, has grown since then from all indications.

China's willingness to openly flout U.N. sanctions reveals problems with the narrative that relations between Beijing and Pyongyang are fundamentally strained, and its defiance also exposes the faulty assumptions of American policymakers who are attempting to disarm the North. Since the early years of the George W. Bush administration, the American solution to Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal has run through

Beijing. President Bush's premise was that the Chinese, who helped arm Kim Il-sung with nukes, would strip away those weapons from his son and that they would repudiate their decades-old pro-proliferation policies that had resulted in the spread of nuclear weapons technology, first to Pakistan and then to other nations.

Apparently Washington thought that China was in the beginning of a once-in-a-lifetime realignment of its foreign policy with its leadership completing a long process of generational transition. That meant Chinese policy toward North Korea would undoubtedly change as younger Chinese policymakers began to accept nonproliferation norms and believed that their country no longer benefited from spreading dangerous technologies. There were American policymakers who challenged the conventional wisdom that China would not allow the North to completely fail, and there was even evidence pointing to this conclusion. For instance, Shi Yinhong, an oft-quoted Beijing international relations expert, argued that North Korea's collapse would be good for China because a newly unified Korea would gravitate toward the Chinese state, once again becoming its satellite. Moreover, Korea would naturally distance itself from Japan and have no need for American troops.⁵⁹

Some analysts went so far as to suggest that, despite treaty obligations, the People's Liberation Army would not come to Pyongyang's aid in the event of an American military attack. The late James Lilley, the former American ambassador to Beijing and Seoul, even believed Kim Jong-il knew the Chinese were "getting ready to sell him out as a loser."⁶⁰ In any event, Washington believed Kim was fast losing support in the Chinese capital.

As a result, President Bush made the Chinese the focal point of denuclearization efforts by getting them to host the so-called six-party talks, which started in Beijing with global fanfare—and great optimism—in August 2003. To this day, China's diplomats are promoting the negotiations. In September 2011, for instance, the Foreign Ministry was the force behind a forum, formally sponsored by the China Institute of International Studies in Beijing, celebrating the sixth anniversary of a joint declaration of the six parties promising a denuclearization of the North.⁶¹

The short September 2005 statement of principles—a series of vague promises called a major achievement by the participants at the time—is now a dead letter, and there would have been no need to hold a forum if

the six-party talks had not hit a dead end. The six countries participating in the negotiations—the two Koreas, Japan, Russia, and the United States and China—have not formally met for more than three years, not since 2009 when North Korea announced its abandonment of the discussions. Now, Beijing is actively working to restart the talks by promoting a series of bilateral sessions involving Pyongyang.

So, China's policy today seems an echo of its old one. Today, as before, it wants to see these multilateral negotiations continue. Its current view is that both sides—it continues to see itself as mediator and honest broker—should make concessions to get the six-party discussions back on track, but it blames Washington and Seoul far more than the real culprit, the Kim regime.⁶²

If China really wanted the talks to remain on track, they would still not be stalled. In the past, Chinese officials have been able to use their economic leverage to get the North Koreans to fall in line. In June 1994, for instance, China forced Pyongyang to comply with its wishes. *Ta Kung Pao*, a Hong Kong newspaper that has often served as Beijing's mouthpiece, ran an editorial suggesting China might adhere to any embargo imposed on North Korea and cut off food and oil. Pyongyang immediately softened its position on starting talks over its production of plutonium. In February 2003, Beijing, eager to start nuclear negotiations, cut off oil for three days as a warning. As a result, the North agreed to participate in the six-party talks shortly thereafter.

Some—like author William Triplett⁶³—have argued that all this back-and-forth maneuvering is kabuki, but it is clear, whether we are witnessing staged events or not, that China can force Pyongyang to act when it sees the need, as Chung Jae Ho, the China watcher, suggests. And this is especially true today, when China is obviously stronger and North Korea undoubtedly weaker than at anytime during the last two decades. So if the North is not cooperative at this time, it is because China either does not want it to be or does not care if it is.

In the past, Beijing itself was cooperative because it believed it needed the support of the United States and the international community. Chinese officials, therefore, worked with their American counterparts to restrain North Korea. Now, however, there is a sense among members of the Beijing elite that the United States is in swift decline and that China will dominate this century—as well as succeeding ones—if it does not do so already. Consequently, Chinese officials have indulged their sense of power as they think they no longer have to conceal long-held objectives.

Beijing's more complete backing for the Kim family, evident since 2009, is just another manifestation of its new confidence. This confidence has in turn led to assertiveness.

So what can we expect from a more assertive Beijing? First, the Chinese military will certainly continue its pro-proliferation activities by providing assistance to North Korea's nuclear technicians. Beijing covertly transferred uranium enrichment technology to Pakistan beginning in 1974 in a now well-documented cooperation. Dr. A. Q. Khan, the "father of Pakistan's bomb," then merchandised that technology to the Kim family sometime in the early 1990s. Islamabad and Pyongyang, for instance, had entered into a nukes-for-missiles deal with "Pakistani"—really Chinese—enrichment technology heading to North Korea, and North Korean missiles going to Pakistan. Pakistani air force planes involved in transferring items covered by this arrangement, including centrifuges, refueled at a military base in Lanzhou—in central China—on their way to and from North Korea in 2002—and perhaps in other years as well. Since 2002, the United States has sanctioned Chinese companies for transferring to the North items useful in a uranium-weapons program.

Second, we can expect Beijing to continue its obstructionist role at the United Nations. China, for instance, blocked the Security Council from adopting a report on North Korea's uranium program in February 2011.⁶⁴

Now that the Korea has unveiled its state-of-the-art cascades of centrifuges in Yongbyon—it proudly showed them off to American scientists in November 2010—the North Koreans probably do not require that much more outside assistance to make crude gravity-delivered nuclear bombs. Yet the Korean People's Army needs help in difficult-to-master areas. It is, for instance, struggling to develop reliable long-range missiles. Today, the North's longest-range deployed missile, the one-stage Musudan, can fly 4,000 kilometers and reach the American island of Guam.⁶⁵

Yet the North Korean military has grander ambitions than attacking islands in the Pacific. In August 1998, they tested a three-stage Taepodong, which arced over Japan's main island of Honshu before heading out over the Pacific Ocean. The third stage either misfired or failed to ignite, but some believe debris landed on Alaskan snow.⁶⁶ Since then, the North has conducted two spectacularly unsuccessful tests—in July 2006 and April 2009—leading some to downplay the

threat posed by the North's missiles. Yet that would be a mistake because countries learn as much or more from missile failures as from successes. Some, including Vice Admiral Lowell Jacoby when he was director of the Defense Intelligence Agency a half decade ago, think the North Koreans can already land a payload in the West Coast with a missile. Others disagree. Robert Gates, when he was in Beijing in January 2011, expressed the consensus estimate when he talked about North Korean missiles as not "an immediate threat" but not "a five-year threat" either.

So far, we don't know what the North Koreans can actually do, but, as U.S. Air Force General Paul Hester remarked before he retired, the DPRK is capable of "remarkable breakthroughs" in missile technology at any time. And because the North Koreans have surprised American analysts in the recent past, it is just a matter a time before Pyongyang's technicians can master the necessary technology tasks to deliver a warhead to any place on earth. "Technology and time means [sic] regimes like North Korea will increasingly have the ability to strike at the United States," said Ari Fleischer in 2003, when he was President George W. Bush's spokesman.

Because time is a critical factor, Beijing's promotion of dialogue without solutions can be seen in a sinister light. China, by dragging out the six-party talks, gave Kim Jong-il the one thing he needed most to weaponize the atom and increase the range of his missiles: time. And China is now using its new-found clout to give the North Koreans even more of it.

In early 2004, Chinese government spokesman Liu Jianchao said, "It's China's hope that the process of the six-party talks can go on and on." Beijing was, in fact, successful in dragging out negotiations "on and on," and, as a result, the North detonated a small nuclear device two years later. At the moment, Beijing is trying to restart the fruitless talks—presumably to get other countries to relieve China's burden of supporting the North—yet few think the Kim regime will give up its nuclear arsenal under any conceivable conditions, especially after its comments in March 2011 that Moammar Gadhafi would not have been attacked by the United States had he not surrendered his nuclear program in 2003.⁶⁷

We may not know the pace of progress of the various weapons programs of the North Koreans, but they will, as they have done in the past, make substantial progress with Beijing's insistence that the

international community continue dialogue without the possibility of solutions.

Implications for Iran

Washington's inability to persuade China to withdraw its support for the North Korean nuclear weapons program destabilizes more than just East Asia. The implications are global, reaching, for instance, all the way to Iran. As proliferation analyst Henry Sokolski noted in 2003, Tehran had instructed its diplomats to find out what Washington would do about events in Northeast Asia. The first and only question they asked him was what Washington planned to do about North Korea.⁶⁸

So North Korea is not just about Korea. North Korea is also about Iran, Syria, Algeria, and every other state that wants an atomic arsenal. Never being signatories of the global Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, India, Pakistan, and Israel became nuclear powers outside the world's nonproliferation regime, but the DPRK is the first country to nuclearize inside it. In many ways, the precedent could not have been worse. "What is the problem with withdrawing from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty?" asked Ayatollah Ahmad Jannati, the leader of Iran's powerful Guardian Council, in 2003. "North Korea withdrew from the treaty."⁶⁹

Kim Jong-il not only withdrew from the global pact in 2003 but also flouted nonproliferation rules.⁷⁰ By doing so, he showed that the United States and the United Nations were helpless when it came to dealing with what must certainly constitute the greatest threat to global stability. An international system that cannot protect its most fundamental interest against one of its weakest members cannot, in all probability, last. Beijing's support for the North's weaponization efforts could lead to the end of the global nonproliferation regime with unimaginable consequences thereafter as nations—and nonstate actors—get their hands on fissile material and "the bomb."

Analysts tend to discuss North Korea as if this isolated nation were an isolated problem. It's not. Unfortunately, North Korea is where the world's nonproliferation regime could finally collapse. "The 'domino theory' of the 21st century may well be nuclear," said George Tenet when he headed the CIA. "We have entered a new world of proliferation."⁷¹

In that world, China's military has been in the forefront of spreading destructive technologies to some of the world's least responsible actors. Mao Zedong initially believed that socialist nations should have the

bomb, and he maintained, at least rhetorically, general pro-proliferation policies. After China detonated its first device in 1964, his China adopted a policy of “managed proliferation,” in other words, selective transfers to friendly nations. During this period, Beijing helped Pakistan and North Korea nuclearize. Beijing formally got out of the bomb business in 1992 when it acceded to the global nonproliferation treaty, but it has covertly continued its efforts to help its allies enrich uranium and build arsenals of atomic bombs.

For instance, China and North Korea, working both together and separately, have helped Iran’s nuclear weapons program. And North Korea, both on its own and with Beijing’s assistance, has transferred missile technology to the “atomic ayatollahs.” China, for its part, spread centrifuge technology to Iran through both the A. Q. Khan network and direct transfers. Some observers contend that Beijing’s technical assistance to Iran’s nuclear program ended sometime after 1997, when President Bill Clinton reportedly got his Chinese counterpart, Jiang Zemin, to agree to halt China’s assistance to the Islamic Republic. But Beijing did not in fact stop proliferation then. In November 2003, for example, the Associated Press reported that the staff of the International Atomic Energy Agency had identified China as one of the probable sources of equipment used in Tehran’s suspected nuclear weapons program. And in July 2007, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the State Department had lodged formal protests with Beijing about Chinese companies, in violation of Security Council resolutions, exporting to Iran items that could help it build nuclear weapons.

The direct transfers seem to have continued into 2011. In March of that year, for instance, Malaysian police in Port Klang seized two containers from a ship en route to Iran from China. Authorities believe that items labeled “goods used for liquid mixing or storage for pharmaceutical or chemical or food industry” were actually parts for nuclear warheads. And in September of that same year, *Sankei Shimbun*, the conservative-leaning Japanese newspaper, reported that North Korea was planning to use five Chinese businessmen to smuggle equipment to Iran for use in its nuclear and missile programs. Pyongyang and Tehran had been planning to employ the intermediaries—located in Hunchun, near the North Korean border, and Beijing—to minimize travel between them as a means of avoiding detection by international weapons inspectors and Western intelligence agencies.⁷² Although the report did not directly implicate the Chinese central government, it is unlikely that

Chinese officials would not have known about the plot, given the sensitivity of the matter, the transfer of Chinese-origin items, Beijing's close dealings with the North Korean and Iranian authorities, and the extensive nature of the operation.

As plot after plot has been revealed over the years, the facts suggest that China's military, despite passionate and repeated denials, has not stopped helping Iran. Nor have China's generals stopped playing "the proliferation card," their most powerful tool for accomplishing their most important strategic objectives. As much as we would like to think otherwise, the Chinese are willing to risk nuclear winter to get their way in the world. From Mao's days to the present, they have been less worried about the danger of nuclear weapons than others, they have been more confident about controlling the consequences of proliferation, and they have been utterly ruthless. Pakistan and North Korea are their two "success" stories, and Iran is about to become the third.

As Chinese flag officers gain power inside Beijing and as their North Korean counterparts are doing the same in Pyongyang, it seems like there is little that will stop their plans to proliferate nuclear weapons technology, thereby complementing and supporting similar policies of the Kim family. This is perhaps the most destructive legacy of decades of cooperation between China and North Korea.

Conclusion

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea is one of the weakest states on earth—always destitute, usually looking for handouts. Yet it is also one of the most effective nations, often able to accomplish its objectives. How can both statements be true at the same time? The answer lies in the fact that the Kim-family regime on its own is weak, but it also has a supporter and together they are strong. North Korea has the support, encouragement, and backing of its neighbor to the north, the mighty People's Republic of China. So North Korea is not just North Korea. It's also part of a powerful combination with the Chinese state.

The two hardline regimes are working out a new relationship. They may not always appear to be on the same page, and they often express real frustration with the other, yet they are coordinating policies and working toward mutual objectives. "There's no denying these two regimes are closer together than they were two years ago," says Bechtol, the Korea analyst. "Everyone else needs to watch out."⁷³

As China gains influence in Pyongyang, we see no improvement in

North Korea's external behavior, as we would expect to happen if Beijing were truly upset with its troublesome ally. The reason is that, at this moment, a newly assertive China is backing an increasingly aggressive—and substantially more unstable—North Korea. A dangerous dynamic now exists in North Asia.

Notes:

¹ Tai Ming Cheung, interview by author, Washington, D.C., November 20, 2003.

² See Henry Kissinger, *On China* (New York: Penguin Press, 2011), p. 205.

³ See Michael D. Swaine, "China's North Korea Dilemma," *China Leadership Monitor*, November 19, 2009, <http://media.hoover.org/sites/default/files/documents/CLM30MS.pdf>.

⁴ See Kim Kwang-tae, "Professor: N. Korea-China Pact on Intervention Is a Dead Letter," *Yonhap News Agency*, September 1, 2011, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/09/01/94/0401000000AEN20110901003851315F.HTML>.

⁵ See "US Embassy Cables: China 'Would Accept' Korean Reunification," *Guardian* (London), December 1, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/249870>.

⁶ Stapleton Roy, interview by author, New York City, February 25, 2004.

⁷ James Yang, "China Must Dump North Korea," *Asian Wall Street Journal* (Hong Kong), April 9, 2003, p. A9.

⁸ See William Choong, "Mr Kim's Extraordinary Tactics," *Straits Times* (Singapore), August 26, 2011, <http://www.asianewsnet.net/home/news.php?id=21111>.

⁹ See Peter Foster and Agencies, "China Builds Higher Fences Over Fears of Instability in North Korea," *Telegraph* (London), March 30, 2011, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/8415490/China-builds-higher-fences-over-fears-of-instability-in-North-Korea.html>.

¹⁰ See Kim Kwang-tae, "N. Korea Installs CCTV Cameras Near Border With China to Thwart Defections," *Yonhap News Agency*, August 16, 2011, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/08/16/99/0401000000AEN20110816002300315F.HTML>.

¹¹ See Jayshree Bajoria, "The China-North Korea Relationship," Council on Foreign Relations, October 7, 2010, <http://www.cfr.org/china/china-north-korea-relationship/p11097>.

¹² Chung Jae Ho, interview by author, Seoul, May 4, 2004.

¹³ See "N. Korea Deepens Trade Dependence on China," Yonhap News Agency, September 25, 2011, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/09/25/73/0401000000AEN20110925002100315F.HTML>.

¹⁴ Pyongyang's dependence on China increased dramatically in 2010, in part because inter-Korean trade fell as Seoul retaliated for the sinking of the *Cheonan*. See Cho Jong Ik, "NK Economy Stays in the Mire," Daily NK, July 7, 2011, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk00100&num=7923>.

¹⁵ See Donald Kirk, "North Korea Has Ransom On Its Mind," Asia Times Online, April 25, 2009, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/KD25Dg01.html>.

¹⁶ See Andrei Lankov, "The Yeonpyeong Island Incident: Why It Happened, Why Nothing Can Be Done, and What to Expect: Some Thoughts," North Korean Economy Watch, November 29, 2010, <http://www.nkeconwatch.com/nk-uploads/Lankov-about-the-crisis.pdf>.

¹⁷ See People's Republic of China, Ministry of Commerce, *2009 Statistical Bulletin of China's Outward Foreign Direct Investment*, <http://hzs.mofcom.gov.cn/accessory/201009/1284339524515.pdf>.

¹⁸ See Jay Solomon and Jeremy Page, "Chinese Firm to Invest in North Korea," *Wall Street Journal*, January 19, 2011, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704678004576090270026745368.html>. "Chinese Troops Stationed in N.Korean Special Zone," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), January 17, 2011; http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/01/17/2011011700465.html.

¹⁹ See Tania Branigan, "China Launches Major Push to Invest in North Korea," *Guardian* (London), September 26, 2010, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/sep/26/china-push-invest-in-north-korea>.

²⁰ See Mandy Zuo and Kristine Kwok, "China Gets Sea of Japan Foothold in N Korea," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), March 9, 2010, <http://www.scmp.com/>.

²¹ See "Chinese Shipping Through N.Korean Port in Full Swing," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), January 4, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/01/04/2011010400436.html.

²² Bao Chang, Zhu Chengpei, and Ding Qingfen, "Trade Zone to Boost DPRK Economy," *China Daily* (Beijing), June 25, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/china/2011-06/25/content_12774092.htm.

²³ See "Chinese Magazine Dismisses N.Korean Development Dreams," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), August 31, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/08/31/2011083100355.html.

²⁴ Peter M. Beck, "Can North Korea Change?" *Foreign Policy*, December 30, 2010, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2010/12/30/can_north_korea_change?page=full.

²⁵ Jeremy Paltiel, "What Is Going On Between China and North Korea?" CanKor, October 27, 2010, <http://cankor.sitebyjames.com/what-is-going-on-between-china-and-north-korea.php>.

²⁶ Victor Cha, "China's Newest Province?" *New York Times*, December 19, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/2011/12/20/opinion/will-north-korea-become-chinas-newest-province.html?_r=1&ref=opinion.

²⁷ Michael Kiselycznyk and Phillip C. Saunders, "Civil-Military Relations in China: Assessing the PLA's Role in Elite Politics," Institute for National Strategic Studies China Strategic Perspectives, No. 2, August 2010, <http://www.ndu.edu/press/lib/pdf/china-perspectives/ChinaPerspectives-2.pdf>.

²⁸ See, e.g., "No Nationalization of Military in China: Senior PLA Officer," Xinhua News Agency, June 20, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/English/2010/china/2011-06/20/c_13940229.htm.

²⁹ See "PLA Budget to Rise with the Economy: President Hu," *People's Daily* (Beijing), August 2, 2007, <http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90001/90776/90786/6230046.html>.

³⁰ Arthur Waldron, telephone interview by author, September 27, 2011.

³¹ CNN Wire Staff, "S. Korea Expresses Sympathy to N. Korean People," CNN, December 20, 2011 (comments of Christopher Hill), http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/20/world/asia/north-korea-leader/index.html?hpt=hp_c1.

³² See Larry A. Niksch, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Development and Diplomacy," Congressional Research Service, January 5, 2010, <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/RL33590.pdf>.

³³ Among those who also gained power during Kim's incapacity were Jang Song Thaek and his wife, Kim Kyong Hui. Ms. Kim, Kim Jong Il's sister, was, at least for ceremonial purposes, made a four-star general in September 2010.

³⁴ See “N.Korean Security Chief Sacked,” *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), March 17, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/03/17/2011031701073.html.

³⁵ See, e.g., “N.Korean Eminence Grise Dead in Mysterious Circumstances,” *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), June 4, 2010, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/06/04/2010060400549.html.

³⁶ See Blaine Harden, “North Korea Military Asserts Command Over Nation’s Economy,” *Washington Post*, November 3, 2009, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/11/02/AR2009110203603.html>.

³⁷ See Nathaniel Aden, “North Korean Trade with China as Reported in Chinese Customs Statistics: 1995-2009 Energy and Minerals Trends and Implications,” Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, June 7, 2011, http://nautilus.org/publications/essays/napsnet/reports/DPRK_PRC_Trade_Aden

³⁸ See “N. Korea’s Mineral Exports to China Tripled from Last Year: Study,” Yonhap News Agency, November 6, 2011, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2011/11/06/39/0401000000AEN20111106000300315F.HTML>.

³⁹ See Chang Se-jeong, “North Got Fertilizer on Kim’s Trip to China,” *Korea JoongAng Daily* (Seoul), August 19, 2011, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joinsmsn.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2940431>.

⁴⁰ Andrew Salmon, “A State of Total Dependence,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), December 12, 2010, <http://www.scmp.com/>.

⁴¹ See “Chinese Troops Stationed in N.Korean Special Zone.”

⁴² Jia Cheng, “Beijing Denies Sending Troops to Pyongyang,” *Global Times* (Beijing), January 17, 2011, <http://china.globaltimes.cn/diplomacy/2011-01/613194.html>.

⁴³ See Guo Qiang, “‘No Troops Going to North Korea,’ ” *Global Times* (Beijing), October 21, 2010, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/china/diplomacy/2010-10/584179.html>.

⁴⁴ “Chinese Troops Stationed in N.Korean Special Zone.”

⁴⁵ “Reports About Chinese Army in DPRK ‘Totally Groundless’: Defense Ministry Spokesman,” Xinhua News Agency, December 28, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2011-12/28/c_131331823.htm.

⁴⁶ “Chinese Troops Stationed in N.Korean Special Zone.”

⁴⁷ “A State of Total Dependence,”

⁴⁸ Despite Lankov’s assessment, prosperity is important to the regime in 2012, the year in which it will mark the 100th anniversary of Kim Il Sung’s birth.

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