

PRC-DPRK Relations and the Nuclear Issue

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Uncertainty once again prevails over Northeast Asia as the North-South Korean summit that was anticipated to sound the final note of the Cold-War era failed to take place following the sudden death of Kim Il Sung. It has come to be our burden that a fresh framework is now required in accordance with the development of a new power structure in North Korea.

Though the post-Cold War era is acknowledged as a global trend, Northeast Asia is still considered far from stable, and the role of China at this juncture has become even more significant.¹ Chinese leadership always insists that "China hopes for peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula." But how would China suggest that we break this impasse, especially regarding the North Korean nuclear issue?

There have been incessant predictions of an outbreak of war on the peninsula; the American media has reported so rashly the possibility that the ROK government complained to Washington. Former US President Carter's visit to Pyongyang,² however, led

1 Amos A. Jordan, "Coping with the North Korea Nuclear Weapons Problem," *Pacific Forum CSIS* (Honolulu, Hawaii), November 1993; Ralph A. Cossa, "China and Northeast Asia: What Lies Ahead?," *Pacific Forum CSIS* (Honolulu, Hawaii), February 1994.

2 Liaoning Ribao reported that Carter would be able to relay the following

to some rapid progress in negotiations regarding the inter-Korean summit. After Kim Il Sung's death, North Korea and the US now agree upon diplomatic representation in each other's capitals and reduction of barriers to trade and investment as moves toward full normalization of political and economic relations.³

In which context can such an unpredicted change be fit into the transforming order in Northeast Asia? As Professor Samuel Kim puts it, China cannot be ignored in the conflict-management process of the UN Security Council; China is part of both the "world-order problem" and the "world-order solution."⁴ Today, the United States enjoys sole superpower status, but no major issue in the Asia-Pacific region can be managed without at least tacit Chinese cooperation. Through a course of estrangement and reconciliation, China-US relations since their normalization in 1972 have been regarded as fragile.⁵ It has explicitly affected to the solution of North Korean issue.

To understand the Chinese perception on North Korea overall as well as pertaining to the nuclear issue, the actor's self-image and its view of the outside world must be known; without this, it is hard to analyze any nation's foreign policy.⁶

messages from North Korea: (1) The US should not press forward steadily and threaten to impose sanctions against the other side at every turn; (2) Although the DPRK threatens to withdraw from the IAEA, it has not done so. For the US to keep applying pressure will force it to withdraw from the nuclear nonproliferation treaty. Conversely, if the talks run smoothly, Pyongyang may cancel its withdrawal from the IAEA. 4 June 1994: "Commentary on North Korea's Withdrawal from IAEA" *FBIS-CHI-94-116*, 16 June 1994 p. 8; *Xinhua*, 17 June 1994: "Xinhua Reports on Carter's DPRK Trip" *FBIS-CHI-94-117*, 17 June 1994 p. 7.

3 *Korea Herald*, 14 August 1994.

4 Samuel S. Kim, "China and the World in Theory and Practice," *China and the World: Chinese Foreign Relations in the Post-Cold War Era* (Westview Press, 1994), pp. 3-41.

5 See Harry Harding, *A Fragile Relationship: The United States and China since 1972* (Washington: The Brookings Institution, 1992).

6 See application of perception theory to Chinese foreign policy, David Shambaugh, *Beautiful Imperialist: China Perceives America, 1972-1990* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991); Allan S. Whiting, *China Eyes Japan*

A change in belief and perception does not necessarily result in a change of foreign policy; rather, policy shifts often take place for pragmatic reasons without prior changes in perceptions or persuasion.⁷ Even though China did agree to a normalized relationship with South Korea for pragmatic Chinese national interest, China has tried to prevent visible discrepancies with North Korea, which could be a fatal loss towards the management of her periphery—especially Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.

This paper argues that the PRC-DPRK relationship and the North Korean nuclear issue cannot be understood simply within their mutual relationship but rather within the framework of Beijing-Washington-Pyongyang relations.

What is the basic Chinese perception, and its rationale, of North Korea's nuclear issue? Regarding the future of the North-east Asian order, what is the position of China as the sole nuclear-possessing country in the region? What are Pyongyang's views on Beijing's relationship with Washington and with Seoul? How could the PRC-DPRK relationship be explained in this context? The paper deals, in light of Beijing-Pyongyang relations, with some considerations we need to bear in mind to help resolve the North Korean nuclear problem.

China's Perspective

The North Korean nuclear issue should be interpreted in the framework of PRC-US relations, which in turn will help us understand the Chinese perspective. What is China's *rationale* in resolving the nuclear problem? How does China define its relationship with North Korea, on its *periphery*? How should we

(Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989); and Gilbert Rozman, *The Chinese Debate About Soviet Socialism, 1978–1985* (Princeton University Press, 1987).

7 See Ernst Haas, "Collective Learning: Some Theoretical Speculations," in George W. Breslauer and Philip E. Tetlock, eds., *Learning in U.S. and Soviet Foreign Policy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 62–99.

understand *Chinese ambition* in the struggle to maintain regional hegemony against the new US-led order in East Asia?

Rationale

Stability and peace in the region are China's two major targets to enable it to carry out its four modernization program; Chinese leadership insists upon "sincerity and unswerving effort toward this dual objective."⁸ It is in the Chinese national interest to favor peaceful means of resolving the nuclear problem and to oppose any forceful measures. The Chinese perspective on the North Korean nuclear issue abides within a behavior-centered framework,⁹ as an aggregate of purposeful external actions or the behavior of other international actors in the pursuit of certain interests. China thus sees the issues on the peninsula as being resolved not only between the two Koreas but also between China and the United States.¹⁰ The Chinese argue it is not good to compel a country to submit by applying strong pressure: "The crucial issues are US policy and Clinton's attitude."¹¹

In general, China doubts the nuclear development capability of the DPRK, and considers the issue as Pyongyang's playing card to boost its own international status¹² and to break out of its isolation.¹³ China understands the North Korean objective as

8 "Xinhua Reports on Carter's DPRK Trip," *FBIS-CHI-94-117*, 17 June 1994, p. 8.

9 Samuel S. Kim, *China and the World*, pp. 16-21.

10 Jong Chong-mun, *Dong-A Ilbo*, 6 July 1994.

11 "Commentary on North Korea's Withdrawal from IAEA," *FBIS-CHI-94-116*, 16 June 1994 p. 7.

12 Ibid.

13 "Daily Reports PRC to Send 85,000 Troops If War breaks Out," *FBIS-CHI-94-070*, 12 April 1994 p. 4.

an effort to improve its relationship with the United States and Japan¹⁴ because its national power is "too poor."¹⁵

Periphery

China regards US pressure on North Korea over the nuclear issue as a challenge to its periphery as well as to its alliance. Also, the Chinese insist that after the Cold War and Soviet dissolution, nuclear proliferation has now become inevitable, "a hidden peril facing world peace."¹⁶ And, undoubtedly, China has requested that North Korea abide by IAEA regulations and continue talks with Seoul for denuclearization of the Korean peninsula.

China, however, argues that sanctions will have no effect on Pyongyang. First, its self-reliant economy is not dependent upon foreign markets; North Korea has been under economic sanction from the West since 1953 yet its economy has remained intact.

Second, sanctions against North Korea would have a negative effect on the open-minded among North Korean leaders. It would weaken their positions and the consequence would be contrary to the original objective of inducing reform and opening.¹⁷

Third, of the US\$890 million worth of PRC-DPRK trade volume approximately US\$700 million takes place with the three northern provinces of Jilin, Liaoning and Heilongjiang, and the Chinese central government lacks control over these local areas.

14 Liaoning Ribao reported on 4 June 1994 that North Korea wants to raise funds from the United States and Japan even when buying a light water reactor. "The DPRK is Incapable of Producing Bombs," *FBIS-CHI-94-116*, 16 June 1994, p. 7.

15 "Daily Reports PRC to Send 85,000 Troops If War Breaks Out," *FBIS-CHI-94-070*, 12 April 1994, p. 4. "Spokesman Voices Opposition to Sanctions against DPRK," *FBIS-CHI-94-112*, 10 June 1994, p. 1.

16 Takung Pao, "The World Faces a Crisis of Nuclear Proliferation," *FBIS-CHI-94-118*, 20 June 1994.

17 Yinhay Ahn, "Elite Politics and Policy Making in North Korea: A Policy Tendency Analysis," *The Korean Journal of National Unification*, RINU, Vol. 2, 1993. pp. 63-84.

Moreover it would be impossible to impose sanctions upon the China–North Korea boundary trade that takes place in the area of the Aproc and Tumen Rivers.

Therefore China maintains that neither threats nor pressure will work, that a constructive attitude and comprehensively expounded position should be adopted to continue the dialogue and seek an appropriate solution; the four parties, the US, IAEA, DPRK and ROK, should iron out their differences and resolve problems through talks within a tripartite framework.¹⁸ China justifies its position by saying that its relationship with Pyongyang is still intimate, but that North Korea has implemented equidistance diplomacy toward China, sticks to its Juche self-reliance, and will not submit to foreign pressure—including Chinese.

Should sanctions be imposed on North Korea, China worries about a brink of confrontation.¹⁹ It would only increase the ambiguity of North Korea's nuclear development project and make transparency all but impossible to guarantee. The DPRK would confront foreign pressure even more strongly and tension on the peninsula would intensify beyond limit.

In the context of the national minority problem in China and the PRC's relationship with the nations on its periphery, such perception is easy to understand. The collapse of North Korea would directly and intolerably affect China's periphery area—Tibet, Xinjiang and Inner Mongolia.

Ambition

China and the United States have complementary economies, possess a common desire for stability and peace in Asia and share the same interests for the global environment. The relationship

18 *Renmin Ribao*, 15 June 94; "Commentary Urges Dialogue in DPRK Nuclear Crisis," *FBIS-CHI-94-117*, 17 June 1994, p. 8.

19 *Zhongguo Xinwen She*, *FBIS-CHI-94-112*, 10 June 1994, p. 1.

between the two countries, however, which at the same time have different ideologies, political and economic systems, levels of development, and geopolitical positions, contains elements of both cooperation and competition in almost every dimension.²⁰

China opposes the restructuring of the Northeast Asian order under the initiative of the United States, such that the Party leadership wants to revise its policy toward the United States. Hu Jintao insists that the US at present considers the PRC its main rival, that it is interfering with and subverting the Chinese government and strangling economic development. He says, "While facing hegemonism, power politics, and the aggressive anti-China strategy pursued by the United States, we have no room for any choices. We must sternly and explicitly tell the United States, and declare to the world also, that the normalization and development of relations between China and the United States can only be made on the basis of the two joint communiqués signed by the two governments."²¹ This position was revealed in the negative Chinese attitude at the US-hosted APEC meeting in November 1993.²² Moreover, comparing ROK President Kim Young Sam's and Jiang Jemin's schedules after the Seattle meeting we can explicitly see China's consideration of the socialist countries; President Kim Young Sam held a summit with President Clinton in Washington while Jiang Jemin met with

20 Harry Harding, pp. 358-61.

21 Cheng Ming published an article in June 1993 saying that one hundred generals had submitted a petition to Deng Xiaoping. *FBIS-CHI-94-087*, 5 May 1994; *Xinhua*, 10 June: "Qian Qichen Views International Situation, Foreign Policy," *FBIS-CHI-94-112*, 18 June 1994; *Ta Kung Pao*, 7 June 1994: "Cooperation with China in World Trend," *FBIS-CHI-94-110*, 8 June 1994, p. 4; *Renmin Ribao*, 16 May: "Interviews with Hou Zhitong and Lou Zhitong," *FBIS-CHI-94-098*, 20 May 1994; *Fazhi Ribao*, 22 June: Li Zerui, "Can New Concept of Sovereignty Legalize Interference in Internal Affairs?" *FBIS-CHI-93-126*, 2 July 1993.

22 China was reported to have taken an active role at the meeting but sympathized more with the ASEAN. Considering the uncomfortable relationship with the United States, it may be accurate to view Jiang Jemin's participation more as an opportunity for a summit with Clinton than as active participation in APEC.

Fidel Castro in Cuba—the first Chinese head of state to visit Cuba since Castro seized power in 1959. This could only be a signal that China will no means abandon too easily its socialist alliance with Pyongyang.

China demonstrates deep apprehension over the possibility that the DPRK will arm itself with nuclear weapons. China, the sole nuclear-armed country in Northeast Asia, realizes that North Korean nuclear development would proliferate to South Korea and Japan, and that China would lose its status. Beijing has also argued that nuclear armament on the part of either Korea would hinder the process of unification.

The Chinese keep in mind that Russian acceptance of the South Korean policy towards North Korea is the reason for its loss of influence over Pyongyang. This explicitly implies that China will take North Korea's demands into consideration in order to maintain an equidistant diplomacy with Pyongyang and Seoul. Even after the death of Kim Il Sung,²³ China now promises a favorable stance toward Pyongyang by rendering immediate and firm support for Kim Jong-il. In order to exert influence over Northeast Asia China would not allow a solely American-led order in the region.

North Korea's Perspective

What are the North Korean *rationale* of its nuclear weapon development project? How can we understand the *ambivalence* of the North Korean nuclear card in maximizing nuclear ambiguity by showing its will to develop nuclear weapons for security and enhancement of economic cooperation? An attempt is made to shed light on the North Korean perspective by examining the perception on the part of North Korean leadership on opening policy as a *survival strategy*.

23 China had advised that, given his charismatic influence over the North Korean residents, it would have been easier and more desirable for the two Koreas to unite while Kim Il Sung was still alive.

Rationale

North Korea's ultimate goal is to consolidate the Kim Jong-il system and at the same time overcome its economic crisis. Among possible alternatives for North Korea to maintain its regime in the face of the collapse of the socialist countries and severe economic difficulties, the most efficient method turned out to be the nuclear choice. Under the growing economic gap, it is fully aware how frivolous would be continued competition with the ROK over conventional weapons. Military support from Russia and China is no longer guaranteed. The objectives of Kim Il Sung's nuclear development strategy have been to conduct direct talks with the US and to gain support for conversion to light-water reactors, economic cooperation and normalization. North Korea may well take advantage of the tensions resulting from the nuclear issue to consolidate its system through internal coercive apparatus. With the advent of the Kim Jong-il regime, however, the North Korean leadership has changed its perception from the previous "stability over improved relations" to "improved relations over stability."

Ambivalence

In the process of nuclear negotiations between the DPRK and the US, it is clear that Pyongyang's intention is to exclude Seoul. And by stepping up the ambiguity Pyongyang has played its nuclear card quite effectively in dealing with Washington.²⁴

How does North Korea see the American intentions towards this nuclear development project, invoking such ambivalence?

24 See, Alexander Y. Mansourov, "North Korean Decision Making Processes Regarding the Nuclear Issue," prepared for the Northeast Asia Peace and Security Network managed by Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainable Development, Berkeley, California, May 1994.

First, Pyongyang insists that in the post-Cold War era the United States needed an excuse to maintain hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region.²⁵

Second, the domestic political factors of the United States could be grouped into the Cold-War and the post-Cold War eras. The Department of Defense had more influence on international affairs during the Cold War than did the Department of State. Now, however, the situation is reversed, so the Defense Department cooked up a military issue to secure its status and its budget. North Korea's rebuke is that this was reflected in the Gulf war in the Middle East and the nuclear issue in Northeast Asia.

As conflict was prolonged between the two departments, the State Department under the support of Arnold Kanter began to promote an improvement of the inter-Korean relationship in order to maintain the initiative in the restructuring of the world order. From November 1991, however, the inter-Korean talks deteriorated and the relationship degenerated sharply when the American commander stationed in South Korea ordered the reopening of the Team Spirit military exercise on 31 May 1992.²⁶

Under such circumstances and in tandem with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the Eastern European socialist regimes, North Korea considered the PRC-ROK normalization in August 1992 a severe threat to the stability of its regime. It stimulated keenly the North Korean motive to accelerate the development of nuclear weapons. Pyongyang has been planning nuclear projects since 1963 when its ties soured with the Soviet Union. North Korea insists that the hawkishness of the Defense Department to maintain hegemony over the dovish State Department pushed North Korea to go for nuclear power.

25 Hu Jintao, *FBIS-CHI-94-087*, 5 May 1994.

26 *Hankook Ilbo*, 1 June 1992.

As a setback in March 1993 the DPRK declared it would withdraw from the NPT.²⁷ The North Koreans claim that the testimony of IAEA Director General Hans Blix in front of a US Congress subcommittee and the announcement to reopen the Team Spirit exercise were measures taken by the Defense Department. The sequence of US initiatives made North Korea feel the nuclear inspections were unfair, which supplied an excuse to withdraw.

At the US-ROK summit held on 23 November 1993 Kim Young Sam and Bill Clinton agreed that South Korea should take the initiative in the resolution of the nuclear issue, the exchange of special envoys, and the right to decide whether and when to hold Team Spirit military exercises. That, however, was quite contrary to the North Korean intentions to raise its own international status through direct US-DPRK talks. The agreement reached during the US-ROK summit together with irreconcilable differences of interest between the two Koreas created negative vibrations towards resolution of the nuclear problem, as well as the inter-Korean relationship.

These events deepened North Korean distrust of the US and South Korea and heightened Pyongyang's ambivalent sentiment. Pyongyang adheres to direct talks with Washington to achieve its dual goals of maintaining the regime and overcoming economic crisis by playing with nuclear card. Such strategy on the part of North Korean leadership was also to satisfy the ambivalent stance of having to negotiate with the antagonistic US imperialists in order to sustain its regime.

Survival

After the sudden death of his father, Kim Jong-il faces having to reinforce political and ideological propaganda, and social control, in order to prevent identity crisis and social disintegration.

27 *New York Times*, 13 March 1993.

It must also solve its economic crisis to preclude agitation among the people and compensate for the problem of father-to-son power succession and Kim Jong-il's lack of charisma. Since 1973 Kim Il Sung had taken significant measures in domestic as well as international affairs to solidify Kim Jong-il's power succession. The rehabilitation of Kim Young-joo to a government position at the sixth session of the Ninth Supreme People's Assembly held from 9–11 December 1993 provided Kim Jong-il a firm stance with the patron group consisting of relatives as a bulwark. In the twenty-first plenum of the Sixth Party Central Committee meeting held in December 1993 as well as in the New Year Address for 1994, Kim Il Sung set the priority on agriculture, light industry and trade. On 18 June 1994 in conference with Jimmy Carter, Kim Il Sung also opened a road to solve the nuclear issue through dialogue by proposing continuation of the third round of the US-DPRK high-level talks and an inter-Korean summit.

Under the Kim Jong-il system, pro-opening groups of technobureaucrats will rise in power in the Party, government and the military, and this is expected to facilitate North Korea's open door policy. They will seek limited economic opening policy of development by adopting an active model for the Rajin and Sunbong areas as free economic and trade zones, and establishing the Shineuijoo and Nampo areas as special economic zones.²⁸ North Korea, however, can well be trusted to try to evade the burden of any threats to the regime that might accompany a fullscope economic reform policy.

For system survival favorable relationships with China, the US, Japan, and Russia will also be required. Pyongyang keeps firm ties with Beijing in order to rearrange domestic policy to stabilize the Kim Jong-il regime and to seek moderation of the international pressure and gain recognition from international

28 *Korea Herald*, 24 July 1994.

society. Kim Jong-il could thus extend trade relations and bolster a secure fuel and food supply from China,

To avert international pressure on its nuclear development project and to foster external conditions favorable to implementation of an economic open-door policy, it is critical that North Korea speed up the improvement of its relationship with the United States. Such urgency after the death of Kim Il Sung made possible the rapid progress of the third round of DPRK-US high-level talks. For North Korea, renouncement of the nuclear development project is a risky option for the maintenance of the regime, but it will not be easy to find an alternative.

As there is progress in the resolution of the nuclear issue, North Korea will seek negotiations for normalization with Japan, which has been put on hold since their eighth working level conference in November 1992. North Korea will attempt to achieve tangible results in economic development by introducing Japanese capital and technology. If the reparation issue can be resolved fairly, it will certainly be conducive to overcoming the economic crisis.

North Korea will also promote its relationship with Russia to facilitate economic ties, asking for transfer of Russian technology; relations between the two countries are expanding for mutual benefit. Russia has recently suggested that a Russian-type nuclear reactor be installed in North Korea with South Korean and Japanese funding.²⁹

The newly launched Kim Jong-il regime is seeking adjustments in domestic and foreign policy. If the North Korean intention to wield leverage against the world with its nuclear card game emerges successful in terms both of justification and of utility for the very survival of the regime, then Kim Jong-il will be able to maintain system stability.

29 *Korea Herald*, 29 August 1994.

China and North Korean Relations

Despite their relations of *estrangement* after the PRC-ROK normalization, what is the underlying motive for the *reconciliation* of PRC-DPRK relations? What is the reason for China and North Korea to pursue *strategic ties* to uphold the socialist system? These questions are analyzed with special focus on the nuclear issue.

Estrangement

After normalization between Beijing and Seoul on 24 August 1992, Pyongyang-Beijing relations deteriorated visibly—especially North Korean sentiment against China.³⁰ Upon President Roh Tae-woo's visit to China on 27 September 1992 North Korea denounced China as "the apostate and the traitor who succumbed before the imperialists. Reinforcing the anti-imperialist struggle is the fundamental requirement to accomplish the fulfillment of socialism."³¹ As Russia declared it would cease offering military support, China reduced its military assistance to North Korea and revised the Immediate Military Intervention phrase in its Military Alliance Treaty with North Korea.³² China said it would not comply with any North Korean demand for military support except for defensive purposes.³³

30 In an address given on 25 August, the day after, Kim Il Sung said that "we cannot trust the Russians, and the Chinese are beginning to be untrustworthy. Therefore, the people should have trust in me, and to do so, they should rely on Kim Il Sung's Juche Thought, the spiritual nuclear bomb, and on the material nuclear bomb" (the nuclear bomb-in-development and the Rodong-3 missile). It is reported that Kim Il Sung commented on the address that "it is best to be silent in the PRC-DPRK relationship." *Shin Bao*, 7 May 1993, quoted from the *Segye Times*, 8 May 1993).

31 *Chung-ang Media*, Pyongyang, 27 September 1992.

32 *Jing Bao*, June 1993.

33 *International Herald Tribune*, 13 April 1993.

In 1993 the Chinese sent delegates to neither Kim Jong-il's nor Kim Il Sung's birthdays, and not even to the North Korean Military Foundation Day.³⁴ On the event of the North Korea declaration of withdrawal from the NPT in March 1993, the PRC-DPRK relationship again became touchy over resolution of the nuclear issue.

Reconciliation

China had learned already the lesson that disintegrating relations with North Korea would not benefit Chinese national interests for economic modernization.³⁵ In April 1993 Russia declared it would maintain relations with North Korea, pursuing a balanced diplomacy between North and South Korea. Accordingly, a high Russian official who visited Seoul implicitly expressed Moscow's attempts to influence Pyongyang by relaying Russia's decision to curtail the oil and weapon supply to Pyongyang.³⁶

For the memorial day of the Korean War the Chinese People's Liberation Army headquarters explained why China had been involved in the Korean War: not because North Korea was part of the socialist alliance, but it is "on the Chinese periphery."³⁷

34 Although large-scale Chinese delegations led by Yang San-kyun visited Pyongyang on the occasion of Kim Il Sung's eightieth birthday (15 April 1992), no such visit was made at his eighty-first. In contrast, Qian Qi Chen, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs made the first official visit to South Korea (26–28 May 1993), and negotiations went on for a summit between the two countries.

35 This is clearly spoken in the administrative report made by Prime Minister Li Peng at the first plenum of the People's Congress held on 15 March 1993 right after Deng Xiaoping's Nansun Jianghua (18 January to 21 February 1992). See Yinhay Ahn, "Power Elites and Policy Competition in China," *Korean Political Science Review*, Vol. 26, No. 2, 1992, pp. 325–44.

36 Russian Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kolkomov announced on 29 April 1993 that a normal relationship would be maintained with North Korea, but no further ideological considerations would be given to Pyongyang.

37 In a meeting with Kou Mei Tou Chairman Ishida in Japan, Jiang Jimin, the Party General Secretary, said that despite friendly PRC-DPRK relationship as war

This served as a pointed reminder to Washington and Seoul that now after the Cold War even if it does not maintain a socialist military alliance China will not dismantle Beijing-Pyongyang relations. Here was affirmation that China could be expected to continue its periphery diplomacy regarding North Korea.

China sent Hu Jin Tao, a member of the politburo and leader of the next generation, and in the same age bracket as Kim Jong-il, together with Minister of Defense Chi Hao Tian, to North Korea. (27 July 1993)³⁸ This would help North Korea solidify close relations with China after the Kim Il Sung era. Indirectly it also signaled the Chinese will to guarantee Kim Jong-il's system after his father's death. Prime Minister Li Peng publicly declared support for the Kim Il Sung-Kim Jong-il succession, and Chi Hao Tian announced that fears of North Korean nuclear weapons development were exaggerated. (9 September 1993) China insisted that if economic sanctions against North Korea were attempted in the UN Security Council, China would not support the decision.

In 1994 the relationship between China and North Korea has reconciled so closely that it has expanded to military support. China promised to send a ground army of 85,000 troops to North Korea if war were to break out on the Korean peninsula, and to provide credit assistance for such as food and energy if UN economic sanctions are effected.³⁹ Such an agreement between China and North Korea was discussed between the key leaders of the North Korean Party and government who visited China in early June and the relevant high-level officials of the Chinese

comrades in the June 25 Korean war, it was not of alliance relations. *Trend of North Korea*, National Unification Board, October 1991, p. 147.

38 Hu Jin Tao said that "the Chinese party, government, and people support all the efforts made by the Korean party. The traditional Sino-Korean friendship will, under the kind attention of the leaders of both countries, surely be continuously consolidated and developed in the new period." *FBIS-CHI-93-114*, 29 July 1993.

39 Western diplomatic sources in Hong Kong said on 11 June 1994. *Chosun Ilbo*, 12 June 1994, in *FBIS-CHI-94-113*, 13 June 1994, p. 4.

Party and army. The final agreement was reached during the visit by Choe Kwang, chief of the General Staff of the DPRK army, to China on 7 June 1994. In return for Chinese support, North Korea has proposed that it will grant China the right to use its East Sea ports, and that it will provide materials such as nonferrous metals and cement. Again China emphasized opposition against sanctions to North Korea.⁴⁰ It implies that even though China and North Korea may not continue their socialist alliance, China will support the North Korean system.⁴¹ In this way China was saying that they have done as much as possible for their comrades in Pyongyang for reconciliation.

Strategic Ties

For the complimentary relationship between North Korea (for system security) and China (for its Four Modernizations) stability and peace in Northeast Asia is of utmost importance. China as one of the permanent members of the UN Security Council has helped North Korea to avoid UN sanctions and open direct talks with the United States. By consistently arguing for the principle that the nuclear issue must be resolved through dialogue, China has built up Pyongyang's dependency upon Beijing.

Such development of the PRC-DPRK relationship coincides with the Chinese perspective of the ideal Northeast Asian order. Perhaps the most significant of remarks from Chinese leadership has been that in the process of resolving issues related to China, Chinese sovereignty and the national pride of the Chinese people

40 "Qian Qichen Views International Situation, Foreign Policy," *FBIS-CHI-94-112*, 10 June 1994, p. 1; "China's Opposition to Sanctions against North Korea," *FBIS-CHI-94-117*, 17 June 1994, p. 8.

41 Although publicly China always defers the problem on the principle of "Koreanization of the Korean Issue," Jiang Jiming did remark recently to Japanese Premier Hosokawa at the November 1993 APEC meeting that China does, indeed, have influence in Pyongyang, and promised to use such influence in a positive direction.

should never be compromised.⁴² China wants to protect North Korea as its peripheral state, and to exclude excessive US influence in the region. This mood is well reflected in the Sino-American relationship. For example, in June 1993 China severely denounced as an act of internal intervention the US intention to link renewal of the most-favored-nation status with Chinese human rights issues.

Although it may be difficult to return to strategic relations of the past against the former Soviet Union, the Sino-American relationship under the Clinton Administration is now to develop into a new phase of reconciliation based on the realistic interests of the two countries under the new international order. The human rights issue⁴³ and trade imbalance⁴⁴ that have been having negative influence on the relationship are gradually calming down. By extending MFN status to China for one more year Washington showed some flexibility in light of Chinese endeavors for reform and opening and their socialist- to market-economy transformation.⁴⁵ Even so, China refused to succumb

42 For an example, Jiang Jemin, in his address on the "Centennial Celebration of the Birth of Mao Zedung," delivered on 26 December 1993, reiterated his emphasis that "From the Opium war to the present, the objective of the Chinese people has been to realize national independence, unification, democracy and national prosperity. We therefore strongly oppose the politics of hegemony and naked force." Jiang Jemin, "Ideological Reinforcement of in the Centennial Celebration of the Birth of Mao Zedung," *Renmin Ribao*, 27 December 1993.

43 Just before the renewal of MFN in May 1994, China had taken partial measures corresponding to the US demands such as the release of some leading dissidents arrested in the Tianamen Incident in June 1989.

44 Since 1990 China has been active in its attempts to resolve trade frictions by dispatching large-scale inspection delegates to gain US support towards extending the MFN status, as well as in affiliating with the GATT. For the Chinese policy guideline toward the United States, see Wei Zhengyan, "China's Diplomacy in 1993," *Beijing Review*, 17-24 January 1994, pp. 10-15; David Bachman, "China in 1993: Dissolution, Frenzy, and/or Breakthrough?" *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIV, No. 1, January 1994, pp. 37-40.

45 Barbara Rudolf, "Status Seeking," *Time International*, 31 May 1993, pp. 14-16; Susumu Awanohara, "Breathing Space: Clinton Delays on Conditions to China's MFN Renewal" *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 10 June 1993, p. 13.

to US demands for marked improvement in human rights, ethnic problems in Tibet, and the trade imbalance—arguing that such demands represent “internal intervention” and “infringement upon sovereignty.”⁴⁶ As the Clinton Administration decided to withdraw its linkage policy, China welcomed the conciliatory action in terms of strengthening Sino-American economic ties.⁴⁷ However, strong criticism emerged that the US should have not renounced the linkage between the extension of MFN status, that it should have been linked to the North Korean nuclear issue.⁴⁸ As the past clandestine Beijing-Washington relationship cannot be restored, their future relationship ought to be based on the realistic interests of both countries.⁴⁹

In this context China maintains strategic ties with North Korea. The DPRK dependency on China will definitely increase as it becomes more and more isolated from the international community.⁵⁰ It is inevitable for Kim Jong-il to rely upon China for practical aid, and Pyongyang and Beijing share a mutual understanding on this matter.⁵¹ Pyongyang must achieve economic development: economic growth went down five percent and shortages of electric power, fuel and food were very serious

46 *Renmin Ribao*, 17 March and 29 May 1994; Lincoln Kaye, “No Stop to Uncle Sam: Beijing Gives a Frosty Reception to Christopher,” *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 24 March 1994, pp. 18–20; “China 1, America 0,” *The Economist*, 19 March 1994, pp. 33–32; Marguerite Johnson, “Good Cop, Bad Cop: A Crackdown on Dissidents Creates a Human Rights Uproar on the Eve of Christopher’s Visit,” *Time International*, 14 March 1994.

47 *Renmin Ribao*, 28 May 1994.

48 Qimao Chen, “New Approaches in China’s Foreign Policy: The Post–Cold War Era,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. XXXIII, No. 3 (March 1993), pp. 248–51.

49 Harry Harding, 1992, pp. 358–61.

50 On the day when Kim Il Sung died, North Korea informed and consulted with China before any other country.

51 “North Korea’s Future in the Post–Kim Il Sung Era,” *Nejabishimaya Gajeta*, Russia, 3 August 1994, quoted from *Kookmin Ilbo*, 4 August 1994.

by 1993.⁵² Moreover, as it is forced to respond to the human rights issues raised by international organizations,⁵³ more and more will North Korea seek strong ties with China, which would never want the collapse of the North Korean system.

Such PRC-DPRK relations are based on the strategic ties sharing mutual interest towards that intervening factor, the United States. China's perspective on the North Korean nuclear issue, in particular, cannot be separated from its relationships with the US. Such a framework will be conducive in prospecting factors of estrangement and reconciliation in the PRC-DPRK relationship.

China understands Russia's loss of influence on North Korea as Moscow's accordance with Seoul policy toward Pyongyang. This implies that Beijing will maintain an equidistance diplomacy toward both North and South Korea.

Conclusion

The coincidence of strategic interests for North Korea who needs China's support for survival in the face of the Soviet and East-bloc collapse, and for China trying to prevent the predomination of US initiatives in the Northeast Asian region, creates harmony through estrangement and conciliation.

First, based on its position as the major nuclear-possessing country and economic power it achieved over the past fifteen years, China is seeking extended influence in the Northeast Asian region. While competing with the United States, the sole superpower, China perceives that maintaining influence upon North Korea, its periphery state, will definitely be conducive to

52 Accordingly, North Korea is continuing a ration system and it is reported that a laborer is supplied with 600 grams of rice daily per person, and even rice is limited to thirty percent of daily supply. Ibid.

53 The UN Human rights committee published its report on the human rights in Korea, and President Kim Young Sam is putting efforts to realize the return of kidnapped South Koreans through Amnesty International. August 1994.

the stability and peace in the region that is crucial to China's ambitious economic development.

Second, while North Korea has been playing the nuclear game to maintain the Kim Jong-il regime and overcome economic crisis, inevitably it will depend for economic support upon China, adjacent to DPRK territory and a member of the UN Security Council. North Korea will stand ambivalent with its counterparts in a package-deal solution that demands US support for a light-water-reactor project and full normalization of relations. Pyongyang perceives that maintaining a reconciliatory mood with the Western countries and Japan, with Chinese support even after the death of Kim Il Sung, will be vital to the survival of the Kim Jong-il regime.

Third, the PRC-DPRK relationship that had deteriorated since the PRC-ROK normalization has now promoted strategic ties. Chinese leaders are reinforcing relations with Kim Jong-il and rendering full support to the North Korean regime. The package deal for the nuclear issue negotiation proceeding in the third round of US-DPRK talks will not be resolved completely until all North Korean justification and utility have been fulfilled by means of the nuclear card. The relationship between China and North Korea should progress in terms of improving bilateral economic cooperation, reducing tensions on the Korean peninsula, bolstering security, and respecting the NPT.

China seems to be satisfied that the North Korean nuclear issue is being resolved through the DPRK-US agreement (13 August 1994), in a way that Beijing has consistently urged. China, however, should not indulge in its own interest of expanding influence in the Northeast Asian region. China should rather look forward to the twenty-first century, in which it must seek prosperity of the region as a whole, as well as stability and peace through Korean unification.