

## *Tension on the Korean Peninsula and Chinese Policy*

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### **Abstract**

China is one of few countries that have friendly relations with both the DPRK and ROK. The historical interest of China in the geopolitical situation of Korea allows it to play a unique role in the relevant affairs of the peninsula. The North Korean nuclear and missile issue has become more complex in the context of a global financial crisis that has further complicated the bilateral relations among North Korea and countries like South Korea, Japan, and the United States. The role of China has become more prominent in such a background. The North Korean nuclear issue is a challenge to the international non-proliferation regime. China follows a policy of “persuading peace and promoting negotiation” and plays an active role in promoting communication and negotiation among all parties. This paper addresses the national interests of China on the peninsula, and makes some forward considerations about Chinese policy. China can adopt a policy of “participation, balance, and stability” in the affairs in the Korean peninsula. China will always play a constructive role in safeguarding peace and stability on the peninsula.

**Key Words:** Korean peninsula, Chinese policy, North Korean nuclear issues, Six-Party Talks, the principle of “participation, balance, and stability”

The second North Korean nuclear test and missile issue has become more complex within the context of the global financial crisis that has complicated the bilateral relations among North Korea and countries like South Korea, Japan, and the United States. China is one of the few countries that have friendly relations with both the DPRK and ROK. The historical interest of China in the geopolitical situation of Korea allows it to play a unique role in the relevant affairs of the peninsula. The role of China has become more prominent against such background. This paper addresses the national interests of China on the peninsula, and makes some forward considerations about Chinese policy.

### **The Changing Korean Peninsula**

The Korean peninsula is of special geopolitical significance. It is one of the strategic focuses of the U.S., Japan, Russia, and China, and is part of the extended arch from Central Asia through South Asia up to North Asia. The peninsula is a typical Rimland in which both land and sea powers would fight for, as described in N. J. Spykman's Rimland Theory.<sup>1</sup>

The security situation on the peninsula is active despite the current global financial crisis. The nuclear test and the missile launch have further obscured the prospect of the bilateral relations of North Korea with the U.S. and South Korea and the Six-Party Talks as well.

### ***The Standoff of the Six-Party Talks after the Satellite (Missile) Launch***

The media and officials of the DPRK said North Korea successfully launched the Kwangmyongsong-2 satellite into orbit.<sup>2</sup> The U.S., Japan,

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<sup>1</sup>-N. J. Spykman, *The Geography of the Peace* (Beijing: Commercial Press 1965), p. 76.

<sup>2</sup>-According to *Korean Central News Agency (KCNA)*, North Korea hailed the successful

and South Korea reacted strongly as they suspect North Korea is soon to test a Taepodong-2 missile with a range of about 2,500 to 2,800 miles (4,000 to 4,500km), which would put Hawaii within range.<sup>3</sup>

North Korea claims that it has the sovereign right under international law for the independent development and use of space. Judging by the current situation, North Korea will follow up with a policy of “two NOT and two RE-” (not to participate in the Six-Party Talks, not to observe concluded agreements, to RE-start Yongbyon, and to RE-build light-water nuclear reactors). All these reactions will seriously damage the peace and stability of the peninsula, and neutralize the efforts of the last few years.

### ***The Worsening of the Relations between the Two Koreas***

President Lee Myung-bak has redirected South Korean foreign policy since taking power: from “Sunshine Policy” to “No Nukes, Opening and 3000 Dollars,”<sup>4</sup> ending the North Korean “Strategy to Deal Directly with the U.S. and Freeze Out the South” moving instead to “Mutual Benefits and Common Prosperity” with North Korea, and changing from “the Diplomatic Relations with the Four Regional Powers” to a “New Asia Diplomacy Plan.”<sup>5</sup>

North Korea views these changes as threat to the survival of the regime and has adopted a hard-line approach.<sup>6</sup> North Korea declared on

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launch of a long-range rocket that put an experimental satellite “Kwangmyongsong-2” into orbit on April 5. However, the United States and South Korea said the launch was a failure with the second and third stages falling into the Pacific.

<sup>3</sup>- Bill Powell, “Korea after Kim,” *Time*, April 13, 2009, pp. 24-25.

<sup>4</sup>- Dong Yong Sueng, “The North Korea Policy of the Lee Administration and a Prognosis of Likely Development,” *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. XXXII, No. 2, Summer 2008, pp. 162-169.

<sup>5</sup>- “President Lee to Promote Pan-Asia Diplomacy,” *KBS World*, March 8, 2009, [http://world.kbs.co.kr/english/news/news\\_Po\\_detail.htm?No=61827](http://world.kbs.co.kr/english/news/news_Po_detail.htm?No=61827).

<sup>6</sup>- Yun Duk-min, “Pyongyang’s Brinkmanship No Longer Effective,” *Korea Focus*, Vol. 17, No. 1, Spring 2009, pp. 9-10.

April 3, 2008 the end of inter-Korean dialogue channels, forbid South Korean officials from crossing the border, killed a South Korean tourist at Mt. Keumkang on July 11, 2008,<sup>7</sup> closed the land passage of the military demarcation line on December 1, 2008, and abolished the agreements regarding the suspension of political and military confrontation between the two Koreas on January 30, 2009.<sup>8</sup> In addition, North Korea unilaterally cut the hotline with South Korea, expelled South Korean staff at the Kaesong Industrial Complex, and even adopted measures that might threaten the security of South Korean civilian airliners. The three main inter-Korean economic cooperative programs (the Mt. Keumkang tourism, the Kaesong Industrial Park, and linkage of inter-Korean railways) are now suspended.<sup>9</sup>

Military tensions also went high; Inter-Korean relations seem to have entered into the stage of “all around confrontation.”<sup>10</sup> North Korea abolished all inter-Korean agreements regarding the suspension of political and military confrontations, agreements regarding inter-Korean reconciliation, cooperation, communication, and mutual non-intervention, and agreements on military demarcation lines on the relevant seas. Now the U.S. and South Korea have launched the Key Resolve joint military exercise on March 9, 2009.<sup>11</sup> In response, North Korea said it would take “every necessary measure” to defend itself.<sup>12</sup> On

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<sup>7</sup>-Zhang Lian'gui, “It Is Not a Mistake of Abandoning the Sunshine Policy,” *Oriental Morning Post*, January 1, 2009, p. A18.

<sup>8</sup>-Zhou Zhiran, “South Korea Expressed Regret for North Korea Insisted on the Nullification of the Military Agreement Signed between the Two Koreas,” *People's Daily*, January 31, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup>-Yang Moo Jin, “North Korea Policy in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,” *Korea and World Affairs*, Vol. XXXII, No. 1, Spring 2008, pp. 51-60.

<sup>10</sup>-“South Korea's Troubled Government Up in Flames,” *The Economist*, January 24, 2009, p. 29.

<sup>11</sup>- See more details at [http://world.kbs.co.kr/english/news/news\\_zoom\\_detail.htm?No=4031](http://world.kbs.co.kr/english/news/news_zoom_detail.htm?No=4031).

<sup>12</sup>-“North Korea Sound and Fury,” *The Economist*, March 14, 2009, pp. 30-31.

May 26, South Korea, “angered by North Korea’s second nuclear test, announced that it will fully participate in” the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI).<sup>13</sup> North Korea replied on May 27, “It will no longer abide by the Korean War armistice and may retaliate militarily in response.”<sup>14</sup> Finally the Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea stated, “The state of military confrontation is growing acute and there is constant danger of military conflict itself means igniting a war.”<sup>15</sup>

### ***The Policy of the Obama Administration towards North Korea Is Not Clear Yet***

The change of the U.S. administration will have direct and critical impact on the prospect of North Korea-U.S. relations, the North Korean nuclear issue, and the security situation on the peninsula. It is believed that policy of the Obama administration will be substantially different from the Bush administration and there is a view that Obama will adopt an ABB (Anything But Bush) policy.<sup>16</sup>

The changes could include: (1) Among the priorities of Obama, the North Korean nuclear issue will be dealt with after domestic economic problems, the withdrawal of troops from Iraq, counter-terrorism in Afghanistan, and Pakistan issues<sup>17</sup>; (2) Obama trying to “negotiate with

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<sup>13</sup>- Lee Ki-dong, “S. Korea Joins PSI after N. Korea’s Nuke Test,” *Yonhap News Agency*, Seoul, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2009/05/26/0200000000AEN20090526002700315.HTML>.

<sup>14</sup>- Kim Hyun and Tony Chang, “N. Korea threatens military response after S. Korea joins PSI,” *Yonhap News Agency*, Seoul, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2009/05/27/0401000000AEN20090527011500320.HTML>.

<sup>15</sup>- The Committee for the Peaceful Reunification of Korea issued a statement, “The DPRK Regards S. Korea’s Full Participation in PSI as Declaration of War against the DPRK,” May 27, Pyongyang, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2009/200905/news27/20090527-17ee.html>.

<sup>16</sup>- Tao Wenzhao, “Get Rid of the Bush’ Policy: An Analysis of Obama’s Foreign Policy Directions,” *Collected Papers of Leadership Skills*, January 1, 2009, pp. 21-27.

<sup>17</sup>- Fareed Zakaria, “Wanted: A New Grand Strategy,” *Newsweek*, December 8, 2008, p. 36.

enemy” believes that “negotiation is more important than military action” and has already appointed special envoy dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue that will talk directly with North Korea on normalizing relations; and (3) The Obama administration attaches more importance to human rights and democracy issues, and would not tolerate North Korean dishonesty.<sup>18</sup>

There might be no change in the following areas: (1) the U.S. administration will not back away from the position of the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, which is directly concerned with national security, and will continue to follow the principle of complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization (CVID) in regards to verification<sup>19</sup>; (2) mutual mistrust of North Korea by the U.S. will exist as the U.S. still regards North Korea as an “Axis of Evil” and a “rogue state” where North Korea still believes the U.S. intends to overthrow the regime due to the nuclear issue; and (3) the basic U.S. position must be “no rewards for wrong actions,” where the influence of neo-conservatives will not allow the compromise and appeasement to a member of the “Axis of Evil.”<sup>20</sup>

### ***North Korea Conducts a Second Nuclear Test***

The North Korean policy of the Obama administration is not yet clear and there is concern that North Korea might take further action if feelings are neglected or no timely economic assistance is offered within the context of the global financial crisis.

On May 25, North Korea staged a “successful” underground nuclear test, prompting international condemnation. The state says it

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<sup>18</sup>-Yang Qingchuan, “The Things before President Obama,” *Xinhua News Agency*, January 25, 2009, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup>-The principle of CVID is “complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization.”

<sup>20</sup>-Graham Allison, “The Only Thing that Can Keep Nuclear Bombs out of the Hands of Terrorists is a Brand-new Science of Nuclear Forensics,” *Newsweek*, March 23, 2009, pp. 31-32.

was more powerful than the previous one in October 2006.<sup>21</sup> An official communiqué from the North Korean state radio said the test was, “part of measures to enhance the Republic’s self-defensive nuclear deterrent in all directions” and that the test would “contribute to safeguard the sovereignty of the country and the nation and socialism.”<sup>22</sup> The international community responded immediately in strong terms after the KCNA declared that the DPRK successfully conducted another underground nuclear test on May 25.

### Chinese National Interests on the Korean Peninsula

China has long been an active advocate for peace, development, and cooperation. By following the road of peaceful development, it tries to develop international standing by furthering world peace. The “Good-Neighborliness-and Friendly-Cooperation” foreign policy helps create a favorable environment for Chinese reform and modernization, but it is also vital to a harmonious neighborhood of lasting peace and common prosperity. China plays an important part in molding a security environment of the region that is beneficial to the peace and prosperity of the whole region.<sup>23</sup>

According to the *Report on the Work of the Government 2009*, “We will ... make new contributions to the proper resolution of hotspot issues and global problems.... share development opportunities, and build a harmonious world of durable peace and common prosperity.”<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>-“North Korea conducts nuclear test,” *BBC*, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/8066615.stm>.

<sup>22</sup>-“KCNA Report on One More Successful Underground Nuclear Test,” *Korean Central News Agency*, Pyongyang, May 25, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm>.

<sup>23</sup>- Xu Jian, “The International Situation and China’s Diplomacy,” *International Studies*, No. 2, 2007, p. 15.

<sup>24</sup>- *Report on the Work of the Government 2009*, Premier Wen Jiabao delivered at the second session of the 11<sup>th</sup> National People’s Congress on March 5, 2009.

The North Korean nuclear issue is one of the “hotspot issues.” China has a special interest in the Korean peninsula and plays a special role in the affairs relevant to the peninsula. The national interests of China in the Korean peninsula include:

### ***Peace and Stability of the Region***

The objective of Chinese foreign policy is to promote “a harmonious Asia” and “a harmonious world,” which is an extension of the Chinese “harmonious society” principle and marks a new phase in Chinese diplomacy. A harmonious foreign policy (derived from Chinese culture, confidence, power, and ambition) is comprised of a brand-new global value, indicating that China expects to carry a heavier duty to maintain world peace and promote common development. This policy suggests that China acknowledges and takes an active part in the current international system, and that it is willing to realize local interests and seek common interests within the existing international order. It advocates a new style of behavior that is conducive to the friendly coexistence and common benefit of all countries.<sup>25</sup>

A harmonious neighborhood is the primary goal of constructing a harmonious world and the foundation of a domestic harmonious society. The Chinese friendly-neighborhood policy helps implement a strategic goal on the regional level.<sup>26</sup>

The geopolitical position of Korea, the history, and status are related to the political, military, and economic security of China. Should the nuclear crisis cause large-scale riots or war, the international environment that China faces would deteriorate and the social stability

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<sup>25</sup>- Yu Zhengliang and Que Tianshu, “China’s New Diplomatic: Concept and Practice,” *Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theory*, No. 5, 2007, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup>- Shen Guofang, “China’s New Diplomatic: Concept and Practice,” *World Knowledge*, No. 13, 2007, p. 44.



and economic development in Northeast China would be greatly impaired. It is of vital importance to the strategic interests of China to lower the possibility of the crisis escalating into war, to help pull the peninsula out of the Cold War status, and to prevent (or at least postpone) the occurrence of acute conflicts on the peninsula.

To maintain peace and stability on the peninsula, however, does not mean the maintenance of a separated situation. China plays an active role in breaking the impasse between the United States and North Korea, helping in the rebuilding of the North Korean economy, and promoting the peaceful reunification of the peninsula (that are all in the interests of China) but will also satisfy the common interest of all parties to the greatest extent.

### ***Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula***

The nuclear issue of the Korean peninsula is a heritage of the Cold War era, which should be resolved as the peninsula steps out of the Cold War status. The tension and the Cold War status on the peninsula will not be eliminated until the North Korean nuclear program is ended. Paradoxically, as long as North Korea still faces heavy pressure on the strategic environment or feels threatened by the United States and other countries, it will stick to the goal of developing nuclear weapons, regardless of the objective of “denuclearization” announced in the Joint Statement of September 19. The nuclear issue has always been used by North Korea as leverage against the United States. Once North Korean security is guaranteed by a non-invasion promise by the United States and the beginning of the normalization process, it can be predicted that North Korea will end the nuclear issue and begin to re-engage the international community. Boosting denuclearization without first ensuring the peace and stability of the peninsula (or insisting in reaching the goal by force) will prove detrimental to the final resolution.

### ***Easing Tension on the Korean Peninsula***

“Détente, peace, and reunification” has become a common hope for both North and South Korea. The leaders of both countries are adjusting policies according to the changing situation, trying to enhance peace and stability on the peninsula. However, due to the lasting mutual distrust and differences between the two in the social systems, ideologies, economic systems, and values, a breakthrough in the political relationship is not imminent. A resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue and the following establishment of a peace mechanism will enable the end of the precarious situation of “no war, no peace, and no negotiation” by gradually increasing mutual understanding and trust.

China has supported the reunification of the Korean peninsula. China does not only expect to maintain a friendship with North Korea, but is looking forward to developing a cooperative relationship with South Korea on the political, economic, and diplomatic level. China does not seek a leading position, scope of influence, or self-interest on the peninsula. The Chinese government and the leadership repeatedly declared that China supports the two sides on the peninsula advancing towards détente and a peaceful reunification on the condition that no foreign forces are involved.<sup>27</sup>

### ***The Development of Mutual Trust and Benefit and the Bilateral Relations with the United States***

U.S.-China relations are among the most important and complicated bilateral relations in the world today. After 9/11, anti-terrorism and the prevention of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction became two major strategic goals of the United States. The active cooperation by

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<sup>27</sup>- Li Dunqiu, “The Development of Relations between China and the ROK in Northeast Asia after the Cold War,” *Contemporary ROK*, Summer 2007, p. 7.

China with the United States in these fields moves the development of the bilateral relations forward as well as the cooperation on global and regional issues, now that they have common interests in maintaining national security and the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

The North Korean nuclear issue is an opportunity for China and the United States to improve mutual acknowledgment and trust, as well as to promote the overall development of bilateral relations, despite the fact that they have common interests and significant dissension. From the perspective of the general environment for Chinese diplomacy (especially for the long-term dynamics between China and the United States), the Korean peninsula might well serve as an effective platform for China to balance the influence of the United States while strengthening cooperation on the global level. Taking an active role in diffusing the nuclear crisis on the Korean peninsula, China is not only able to contain U.S. expansionism more effectively, but it can also help maintain and develop the U.S.-China strategic relationship.

### ***A Mutual Trust Mechanism for Regional Development***

The lack of mutual trust is a major cause for the security dilemma in Northeast Asia. Meanwhile, there exists a great potential for the establishment of a mutual trust mechanism in the region, as all countries share the same security interests and the need for economic development. In the past, the different characteristics of national interests of individual countries were a topic of concern in analyzing the causes for the lack of mutual trust, yet in this era of globalization the common features of different national interests have become increasingly conspicuous. To maximize national interests is the guiding principle in formulating national foreign policy. The international community and all countries in Northeast Asia can work together to establish a mutual trust mechanism by expanding and developing common interests, on which

basis separate national interests can be best achieved.<sup>28</sup>

### **The Chinese Role in the Six-Party Talks**

During a press conference Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao stated, “The countries involved in the talks to increase consensus and properly handle differences and refrain from doing anything that might escalate the situation. The Chinese government will consult with all parties and push the Six-Party Talks to proceed on the sound track. It is time for all parties to work harder to advance Six-Party Talks.”<sup>29</sup>

In terms of the North Korean nuclear issue, the Chinese viewpoint has always been clear and consistent, “To maintain the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and to preserve the peace and stability of the peninsula through the dialogue mechanism.” “To maintain the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula” is the objective of Chinese policy on the North Korean nuclear issue; “the dialogue mechanism” is the best way to the objective; and “to preserve peace and stability of the peninsula” is a natural result after the objective is achieved. These statements have a clear logic and profound significance.<sup>30</sup>

China has played a constructive and positive role in resolving the nuclear issue, lifting the three-party mechanism to the Six-Party Talks, bridging dialogue while the two were in confrontation, and reaching statements and signing a common agreement. The indispensable role of China has been widely recognized and appreciated.

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<sup>28</sup>-Li Shuyun and CK Lau, “Trust: The Key Factor of the Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia,” *Diplomatic Comment*, February 2007, p. 82.

<sup>29</sup>-Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao answers questions during a press conference after the closing meeting of the second session of the 11<sup>th</sup> National People’s Congress (NPC) in Beijing, March 13, 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/13/content\\_11002970.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/13/content_11002970.htm).

<sup>30</sup>-Zhang Liangui, “The Situation after North Korea’s Nuclear Test and China’s Choice,” *New Vision*, No. 2, 2007, p. 26.

The Chinese contributions to the talks are shown through the following four aspects:

### *Facilitating the Talks*

China has made enduring efforts during the talks and has proven to be a good host and successful moderator. “At the critical moment, the talks lasted from the previous morning till early next day. China not only created a platform for negotiation, but it also served as an active mediator among related parties. When it looked ‘hopeless,’ China could still find a breakthrough to improve the atmosphere and reach an agreement. As the host country for the talks, China is one of the keys to the final issuance of the joint documents. In this sense, we can say that the Chinese diplomacy scored quite some points.”<sup>31</sup>

The Joint Statement and the following joint documents were reached based on Chinese proposals, because they were flexible and designed to balance the interests of all parties. In view of the intricacy and sensitiveness of the nuclear issue, China has been trying to create a friendly atmosphere for negotiations among all parties that enhance trust in each other. “Although China’s national power is increasing, it has never before played such a leading role as a moderator in multilateral diplomacy.”<sup>32</sup> The efforts are instrumental to the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, but also prove that China has become the most important country in promoting the establishment and development of the peace mechanism on the Korean peninsula.

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<sup>31</sup>- “Joint Document Adopted in Six-Party Talks,” *Xinhua News Agency*, February 14, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup>- “The Fourth-Round Six-Party Talks Ended on September 19 with the Adopting of the First Joint Statement,” *Xinhua News Agency*, September 19, 2005, p. 3.

### ***Coordinating among All Parties as a Patient Moderator***

China is the initiator and promoter of the Six-Party Talks. “With an objective, overall and balanced attitude, China endeavors to take the interests of all parties into consideration. As China is always open to communication and negotiation with the other five parties, its travail is surely helpful to the goal of denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and to peace and stability of Northeast Asia.”<sup>33</sup> “The peaceful means through negotiation and dialogue will prove to be the best way to more consensuses and the final solution.”<sup>34</sup>

From shuttle diplomacy to mutual visits of the leadership, from sending special envoys to meetings between heads of delegations, China has played the role of a patient moderator among all parties, encouraging each of them to reach the goal of incremental denuclearization and by peaceful means. China has paid due concern to North Korean political and economic requests, and advocated the joint engagement of the other five parties in compensating North Korea.

### ***Mediating between the U.S. and North Korea as a Skillful Balancer***

In the view of Japan, South Korea, and the United States, China maintains a special relationship with North Korea from the “brotherly friendship” in the past to Kim Jong-il’s many informal visits to China in recent years. When China stopped oil deliveries (such as in 2003) Pyongyang quickly returned to the bargaining table.<sup>35</sup>

This year will mark the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of China-DPRK diplomatic relations. The friendship and cooperation has been tested and improved

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<sup>33</sup>- “Six Parties Stress ‘Action-to-Action’ in Resolving Nuclear Issue,” *China Daily*, December 17, 2006, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup>- Yu Zhengliang and Que Tianshu, “China’s New Diplomatic: Concept and Practice,” *Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theory*, No. 5, 2007, p. 15.

<sup>35</sup>- Marcus Noland, “Take Away Their Mercedes,” *Newsweek*, February 25, 2009, p. 28.

despite various historic changes due to the efforts on both sides. Bilateral exchanges between the two at all levels have become more frequent, and cooperation on international and regional issues has grown. It shows that the development of China-North Korea friendship and cooperation will not only serve the fundamental interests and common wishes of the two, but also contribute to the peace and stability of the region.

Kim Jong-il received Wang Jiarui, the head of the Chinese International Department of the Communist Party Central Committee, on January 23, 2009.<sup>36</sup> The two sides have fully exchanged views on further development of friendship and cooperation and regional and international affairs of mutual concerns during DPRK Premier Kim Yong Il's visit to China in March of 2009.<sup>37</sup>

After the North Korean nuclear test, the grave statement of the Chinese government and the following action (overall suspension of investment into North Korea) were key to reopening the Six-Party Talks, "because North Korea takes China's stand seriously." The U.S. has to cooperate with China in moving North Korea away from the nuclear issue. The Chinese influence over North Korea is irreplaceable.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, "China enjoys the greatest leverage to move North Korea, that is, China provides the most support to the country, and is its largest trading partner as well. Yet China does not boast the leverage, but use it tactfully in pressuring upon North Korea when necessary."<sup>39</sup>

China firmly disapproves of North Korea conducting the nuclear

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<sup>36</sup>- Zhang Binyang, "Kim Jong-il met with Wang Jiarui," January 24, 2009, *Xinhua News Agency*, p. 3. It is reported that "Wang Jiarui," who is the only foreign leader Kim met (in public) from last Summer to this Spring.

<sup>37</sup>- "Wen Jiabao Attends the Opening Ceremony of China-DPRK Friendship Year," *People's Daily*, March 18, 2009, p. 1.

<sup>38</sup>- "International Community Strongly Reacts to DPRK's Nuclear Test," *Xinhua News Agency*, October 12, 2006, p. 3.

<sup>39</sup>- "China Joins Call for 'Punitive Actions' against North Korea," *Chosun Ilbo*, October 12, 2006.

tests while remaining cautious in levying sanctions against it; China is trying to convince the United States not to worsen the conflicts and crisis. This dual-purpose strategy serves as a guarantee for the peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue, and renders China great influence over the issue as well as receiving wider acknowledgement from the world.

### ***Promoting the Talks as a Wise and Flexible Participant***

Many details demonstrate the wisdom and flexibility of China during the Six-Party Talks. For example, to enhance contact and communication between delegates from North Korea and the United States, China arranged the seats by the order of the full names of the respective countries, so that heads of both delegations could be seated next to each other.<sup>40</sup> The interpretation system was made to synchronize with the flashing of five bulbs, which would be lit once simultaneous interpretation began, and would be turned off when interpreters finished in all five languages. Officials of the Chinese Foreign Ministry often responded to questions with vivid similes, such as “wishing the talks as sweet as Coca-Cola,” “we have mounted many peaks, and caught many big fish,”<sup>41</sup> and “all the six parties are on the same boat that has departed from the port; now that no one can get off, all we can do is to unite together and sail forward.”<sup>42</sup> These humorous but sincere remarks represent a new image of Chinese diplomats and helped ease the tension among all parties at the beginning of the talks.

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<sup>40</sup>- This means North Korea is DPRK (D), Japan is Japan (J), China is P.R. China (P), South Korea is ROK (Ro), Russia is Russia (Ru), the United States is the U.S.A. (U), so the United States and North Korea can sit near each other.

<sup>41</sup>- “Six-Party Talks Open, Focusing on Denuclearization Road Map,” *China News Service*, September 29, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>42</sup>- “China Says Solution to DPRK Funds Issue Should Consider All Parties’ Concerns,” *China News Service*, March 22, 2007, p. 3.



The Six-Party Talks and the bilateral negotiation between North Korea and the United States were often held at the same time. The Chinese position was that “results are more important than means,” as it is certain that the bilateral talks between the United States and North Korea (whether in New York or in Berlin) have to be finalized with a statement or other documents within the framework of the Six-Party Talks in Beijing. The U.S.-North Korea meeting in Berlin is still “an integral part of the Six-Party Talks, a kind of bilateral contact during the interim.”<sup>43</sup>

Patience is especially needed for a better atmosphere for the bilateral negotiation between the United States and North Korea within the framework of the Six-Party Talks. All related parties should make full use of inherent advantages, influence, and act wisely, to prevent the crisis from escalating into a whole-scale war on the peninsula. In the process, China, South Korea, and the United States are to cooperate and coordinate separate interests and policies. Despite the limited influence over North Korea, China should actively work with other parties to implement UN resolutions and pressure both North Korea and the United States in order to push forward the Six-Party Talks with political and economic power as well as impartiality.<sup>44</sup>

Action is the key to the final resolution of the issue. It will remain a massive “systematic project” to implement the Joint Statement, energy aid such as heavy oil, “fully reporting the North Korean nuclear issue,” “de-functionalizing all its nuclear facilities,” and the future impact of the five working groups.<sup>45</sup> There is still a long way to go before the final goal

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<sup>43</sup>- “U.S., DPRK to Discuss Financial Issues on January 30,” *People’s Daily*, February 9, 2007, p. 3.

<sup>44</sup>- Liu Ming, “The North Korean Nuclear Test and the Six-Party Talks: Assessment and Prospects,” *International Observer*, No. 3, 2007, p. 72.

<sup>45</sup>- Gao Haikuan, “Where Will the North Korean Nuclear Issue Go?” *World Knowledge*, No. 14, 2007, p. 2.

is reached. However, the strenuous efforts of China will help generate further progress towards the resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue.

## **Forward Thinking on Chinese Policy**

### ***The Chinese Responses about the Second North Korean Nuclear Test***

The role of China has become the central topic of discussions. Some hypothesize that “China is shocked by its neighbor’s defiance”<sup>46</sup>; some holds that “the Six-Party Talks are dead”<sup>47</sup>; and some others argue that the nuclear test “puts China in a tight spot.”<sup>48</sup>

The response of China was rapid. The Chinese Foreign Ministry said that, “The DPRK ignored universal opposition of the international community and once more conducted the nuclear test. The Chinese government is resolutely opposed to it.”<sup>49</sup>

The positions of China are consistent. “Realizing denuclearization on the Korean peninsula, opposing nuclear proliferation and safeguarding peace and stability in Northeast Asia is the persistent stand of the Chinese government, which also serves the common interests of all parties.”<sup>50</sup>

Towards the ongoing situation on the peninsula, the Chinese responses and positions showed that:

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<sup>46</sup>- Ariana Eunjung Cha and Glenn Kessler, “Anger May Help Bring New UN Sanctions,” *The Washington Post*, May 27, 2009, <http://mobile.washingtonpost.com/news.jsp?key=392218&rc=to>.

<sup>47</sup>- Andre de Nesnera, “Analysts Worry Threatening N. Korea with Sanctions Could Create Escalation,” *The VOA News*, Washington, DC, May 26, 2009, <http://www.voanews.com/english/2009-05-26-voa51.cfm>.

<sup>48</sup>- Tania Branigan, “North Korea’s nuclear test puts China in a tight spot,” *Guardian*, May 29, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/may/29/china-beijing-north-korea-nuclear-test>.

<sup>49</sup>- “Chinese government ‘resolutely opposes’ DPRK’s nuclear test,” *China View*, May 25, 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/25/content\\_11433096.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-05/25/content_11433096.htm).

<sup>50</sup>- Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Ma Zhaoxu’s Regular Press Conference on May 26, 2009, <http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/ce/cgmb/eng/fyrth/t564893.htm>.

First, because of the nuclear test China resolutely opposes the nuclear test by the DPRK. Unlike the U.S., ROK, and Japan, China has to face the direct security challenges of post-test nuclear pollution and refugees. The possible chain reactions such as a competition in nuclear weapons research will hurt peace and stability in Northeast Asia and the whole Asia-Pacific area that undermine peripheral environment necessary for Chinese peaceful development.

Second, China regards peace and stability as the priority before denuclearization, that is, to put forward denuclearization with the premise of peace and stability. Stress on denuclearization without the consideration of peace and stability is to disregard the reasonable security concerns of the DPRK, which will only result in the increasing insistence on the DPRK nuclear weapons program through self-help behavior.

Third, the role of China is not as strong as imagined, and has not declined because of the nuclear test. China has been in contact with the relevant parties (including the DPRK) and adhered to resolving the problem through consultation and dialogue. Dialogue works better than confrontation. Chinese dialogue with the DPRK will play a crucial role while other countries are in confrontation with it. In the meantime, China has followed an independent peaceful foreign policy, develops friendly relations with all countries based on the five principles of peaceful coexistence, and will not 'coerce' compliance by the DPRK's as some other countries require.

Fourth, China strongly opposes "the argument that the six-party has met its death." The Six-Party Talks as an ideal platform for dialogue, communication, and consultation among relevant parties are of particular significance in dealing with a "nuclearized DPRK" though the two nuclear tests have neutralized previous efforts. The Six-Party Talks also shoulder the responsibilities of managing the nuclear crisis and conflicts among relevant parties apart from the function in resolving the nuclear dispute.

Fifth, the Six-Party Talks are also the demonstration of the Chinese “new diplomatic thinking,” as Chinese shuttle diplomacy and mediating have indicated. As a responsible regional power and influential global power, China will not give up after the frustration of the new situation.

### ***China’s New Diplomacy***

Chinese efforts in solving the nuclear crisis demonstrated the role of China in maintaining peace and stability on the peninsula and the new thinking of China as well.

(1) China correctly understands its own position in international history and international configuration. China neither overestimates nor underestimates its own capability.

(2) China rightly defines its role. China defines itself as responsible regional power and influential global power. As one of the developing countries, China helps to protect the interests of developing countries; as a major power, China shoulders the role coordinating the relations among small, medium, and large nations.

(3) China keeps to the principle of national interests. China regards the national interest as the start point of diplomacy, has completely abandoned a previous ideological diplomacy, and attaches importance to economic and cultural diplomacy.

(4) China adheres to the peaceful development road, independent and peaceful foreign policy, and mutual-benefiting open strategy. China, as “a member of the big Asian family,” “hopes to see political stability, economic development, and improved livelihood of our surrounding countries.”<sup>51</sup>

China has seemingly changed from “hide our capacities and bide

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<sup>51</sup> - Chinese Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi speaks to the press at the second session of the 11<sup>th</sup> National People’s Congress (NPC) at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing, March 7, 2009, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/07/content\\_10960851.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/07/content_10960851.htm).

our time” to “accomplishing something to our extent.”<sup>52</sup> China strives for peaceful international environment to develop while promoting peace through internal development.

### ***The Principle of “Participation, Balance, and Stability”***

Based on this new thinking, China will keep to the principle of “participation, balance, and stability” regarding the issues on the peninsula.

#### **Firstly, Participation**

Regarding the nuclear issue, China emphasizes the importance of patience and resolves to achieve an earlier solution of the disputes within a multilateral framework. The Chinese policy serves to promote the interests of all parties through compromise, monitor the denuclearization of North Korea, safeguard regional stability, and promote development. For China, either a full or a partial solution of the disputes within the multilateral framework could be the ideal outcome. However, a solution within bilateral framework will not reward China, and will even harm the role of China on the peninsula and in the nuclear issue. The Six-Party Talks have provided a stage for interaction among various parties, and, if made a long-term mechanism or institutionalized, will facilitate security dialogue and cooperation in the region.

As a major power with traditional and actual influence on the peninsula, China has actively participated in all negotiations, consultations, and communications relevant with the construction of institutions and mechanisms about the peninsula affairs.<sup>53</sup> China is a party of the Armistice Agreements and directly engaged in the transformation of the

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<sup>52</sup>- Wang Yizhou, *The New Heights of China's Diplomacy* (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2008), pp. 30-31.

<sup>53</sup>- Cui Liru, “The Korean Peninsula Security Issues: The Role of China,” *Contemporary International Relations*, No. 9, 2006, pp. 42-47.

armistice mechanism to the peace mechanism, and should play an equally important role in the construction of peacekeeping mechanisms on the peninsula.<sup>54</sup> It is in the interests of the people on the peninsula, and serves to promote peace, stability, and development in the region to build on the peace mechanism. China supports the construction of a peace mechanism. China will play an active role in the process as a contracting party of the armistice mechanism.<sup>55</sup>

It is in the Chinese interests to maintain and increase strategic influence on the peninsula; and China will work for a unified peninsula friendly to China. Independent and peaceful unification is in the interests of China, and China is reasonable to support such a process; a unified Korean peninsula friendly to China is also in the interests of people on it. A unified Korean peninsula friendly to China is the common objective of China and the two Koreas as well.

### **Second, Balance**

China maintains a balanced policy towards the two Koreas. China needs to keep discreetly balance relations with the two Koreas so as not to hurt relations with the other side while developing relations with one of them.

China will maintain traditional relations with the DPRK. The CPC and the Labor Party of the DPRK have historic relations, and the two countries fought together during the Korean War. China will not only

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<sup>54</sup>- Shi Yuanhua, "China's Basic Position on Korean Peninsula's Peace Mechanism," *Tongji University Journal Social Science Section*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2006, pp. 21-29.

<sup>55</sup>- Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Jianchao said at a routine press conference, noting that China appreciates the efforts generated by the involved parties to promote the talks' process. He said the work on the next phase of the six-party talks "will be decided through consultation among the involved parties," noting that the involved parties already demonstrated their sense of responsibility, flexibility, and sincerity based on which China hopes to continue to promote the talks as well as the denuclearization process on the Korean peninsula. *China View*, October 9, 2007, p. 3.

consider the interests and security concerns of the DPRK on various international occasions, but also maintain political influence on the DPRK by means of high-level dialogue and engagement, leading it to solve international disputes by means of negotiation and integration into the international system that might serve to dissuade it from taking radical actions. On the principles of “carrying forward traditions, aiming at the future, being good-neighborly and friendly, and strengthening cooperation,” China will assist the DPRK solving the economic problems while actively helping to promote the transformation of the economic system and enhancing economic cooperation and communication.

The ROK, as both a state of the same nation with the DPRK and an ally of the U.S., is closely relevant with the security and stability on the peninsula. China should properly increase coordination and communication with the ROK, and encourage the ROK to play the role of a bridge among parties and to adopt active measures including raising proposals and providing energy.

China needs to maintain a balanced policy towards the United States. China has always stressed that denuclearization of the peninsula and the maintenance of the peace and stability of the peninsula and Northeast Asia serve the interests of all relevant parties. China hopes that various parties should keep calm, engage with each other through positive interaction, and jointly push forward the Six-Party Talks. The Obama administration appreciates the important role of China, and is willing to continue the Six-Party Talks together with other relevant parties to achieve the final goal of the verifiable denuclearization of the peninsula.

China and the U.S. (the largest developing and developed countries) have a common responsibility in maintaining peace and stability in the Asia-Pacific region. China should take active measures to reduce the distance from the U.S. conservatives so that they will consider more of

Beijing's interests while making China policy. Crisis means both danger and opportunity, and the nuclear crisis is important in maintaining the general stability of China-U.S. strategic relations. In this way, the DPRK is the strategic asset of China rather than a burden.

### **Third, Stability**

It is an important part of the efforts of China to grasp the strategic opportunity to defuse the nuclear crisis. China has consistently considered peace and stability of the peninsula as a strategic interest.

The Chinese central government has invested tremendous finances and materials, issued a series of favorable policies, and constructed infrastructure to revive the old industrial base. It is necessary for the implementation of the grand strategy of reviving China's northeast region to maintain peace and security of the northeastern border. Without a stable periphery, there would be no foreign investment or the revival and development of the northeast.

China should not overemphasize the importance of the denuclearization of the peninsula while neglecting peace and stability. China should resolutely oppose to denuclearization through military means. China should put peace and stability ahead of denuclearization as internal priorities. Denuclearization without peace and stability is equal to disregarding the reasonable security concerns of the DPRK, which is unfair for the DPRK and would make the DPRK more resolute on weaponizing a nuclear capability.

To maintain long peace and stability in the peninsula is not only the shared aspiration of the people on the peninsula and its peripheral countries but also the necessity of Northeast Asian security cooperation. It is unfortunate that the ending of the Cold War has not brought real peace for the peninsula but made it "the last living fossil of the Cold War." The prospect of the security situation on the peninsula is subtle.



The special geographical location, history, and reality of the peninsula closely affect Chinese political, military, and economic security. China will continue to play a constructive role in the issues of the peninsula and the maintenance of national interests as well.

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