PAPERS

BROADENING THE PICTURE: A REVIEW OF CHINESE AND ENGLISH-LANGUAGE MEDIA DISCOURSE ON THE DPRK[1]

James Pearson
University of Cambridge

Regardless of how much North Korea might frustrate China behind the scenes, the two states maintain the public impression of stable relations. Meanwhile, in the "Western" (Anglophone) community, North Korea is often portrayed in negative and potentially biased terms. If both houses of media cover North Korea using such one-dimensional viewpoints, what would happen if the two approaches were to be combined? This paper argues that using the Chinese media as a lens through which to view events on the Korean Peninsula broadens the picture of a complicated nation state. To do this, the paper is divided into two parts; Part One briefly outlines some of the academic and media discourse on North Korea and discusses the potential pitfalls of making normative statements in media coverage without reliable access to information. The author goes on to suggest that the predominantly unfavorable image of North Korea created by English-language media coverage threatens the ability of outside states and the DPRK to engage in constructive diplomacy. Part Two examines both Chinese and English media coverage of two significant events on the Korean Peninsula in order to show how viewing these incidents through a Chinese lens can, in fact, plug some of the gaps in English-language coverage. This paper thereby stimulates a discussion on the shortcomings of Western media representations of North Korea, plus offers insights on how paying careful attention to the Chinese media might broaden those same representations.

Introduction

Public opinion arguably has the potential to shape the foreign policy of the very states that, by diplomatically engaging in North Korea, could potentially

1 Online media citations in this paper include the dates they were accessed. Though accessed dates are not always necessary, the focus and content of this paper makes them necessary. – Editor

encourage them to embrace change. As ordinary citizens neither have the time nor the expertise to fully monitor the complex nature of international relations, decision makers often "simplify the world" and create "cognitive shortcuts" to sell their policies to the public, as expertly argued by Thomas Christensen in *Useful Adversaries*. This leads decision makers to "sell expensive policies by stating them in easily digestible ways, shunning complicated logic about abstract or long-term threats," Christensen posits.

Indeed, media representations of the DPRK are an important factor in creating the political environment within which that engagement can be instigated or "sold" to an easily influenced public. Although some policy makers or government institutions may have more access to information on the DPRK than media organizations do, the way North Korea is represented in the press has great potential to shape or even dictate the way North Korea is perceived. With little access to reliable information (thanks largely to the extraordinary lengths Pyongyang goes to in preventing outside information from reaching ordinary people) and little alternative to the more dominant perceived wisdom encouraging the view that the DPRK is an aggressive state and a threat to its neighbors, we run the risk of representing a very complex state of affairs as a one-dimensional problem.

Under the Kim Jong-il regime, much attention was given to colorful propaganda, goose-stepping soldiers and images of rockets or missiles relayed from within the bowels of KCTV archives. Recently, more formulaic reports might begin with Hilary Clinton or Barack Obama peering through a pair of binoculars at "freedom's frontier,"[2] then end with analysis that explains why the state presents an existential threat and why Kim Jong-un is too young to keep things under control. Indeed, with a state that is so opaque at the highest levels, journalists and some academics are understandably prone to making educated guesses, and then a priori statements on those guesses.[3]

Such characterizations, however, are by no means unfounded. Pyongyang's streets are peppered with Soviet-inspired, Cold War style socialist realist propaganda and the Korean People's Army (KPA) still dress in a uniform design that gives away the army's Soviet-sponsored roots. Newly-crowned "Marshall"

2 "Obama visits Koreas' Demilitarised Zone as tensions rise," *BBC News*, March 25, 2012, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-17502867 (accessed June 10, 2012).

3 Such an opaque society also gives way to rumors that quickly become fact. What can begin as a piece of leaked information from South Korean intelligence agencies to lawmakers can too often become front page news in some South Korean newspapers. This news then finds its way to the front pages of more influential papers in the West. The incident in July 2012 with the apparent attempted coup that the *p*incorrectly claimed broke out after Pyongyang removed Ri Yong-ho from his position is case in point.

Kim Jong-un is renowned for wearing the same Chairman Mao-style suits as his grandfather and the parallels between the impressive military parades in Pyongyang and Moscow's Red Square are ever-evident. But all we actually know about Kim Jong-un is that he is young, married to a woman we know nothing about, famously overweight, remarkably similar in appearance to his Grandfather, Kim Il-sung and, it turns out, he likes basketball. But how we use these facts to ascertain what policy decisions he may or may not be about to make remains unclear.

Yet North Korea still dominates headlines. Speculation of possible reform is ripe—but based on little evidence—and rarely does an article reach publication without being prefaced in some way by the keywords of starvation, famine, or nuclear threat, no doubt because some of these stories are dictated by the demand of a market set by media chiefs in Washington and London. Stories of famine and starvation are popular reading; stories that suggest the more "normal" aspects of lives in the North are not. In any case, where there is even the slightest incentive to sensationalize a story for the publishing market, a selective truth may emerge and the more mundane aspects of normality may become overlooked, or worse still, important details that reveal more telling insights might be missed.[4] This creates a journalistic free-for-all; no one can verify any facts and the "external" is free to portray the "internal" without the usual journalistic checks and balances that should hold authors accountable.

Recognizing the limitations of knowledge

A lot of the discourse on ordinary life for normal citizens in the DPRK, the majority of which is negative, is based on the accounts of defectors. Barbara Demick's *Nothing to Envy* promises to shed some light on "real lives in North Korea," yet it is entirely based on "seven years of conversations with North Koreans"—all of whom had defected and had lived very grim lives.[5] The book is a gripping read—a real page-turner, and it goes without saying that the stories of these people should not go untold. However, despite Demick's best attempts to bill the book as "primarily an oral history" and emphasize that most of it takes place during a catastrophic famine, the stories in *Nothing to Envy* are often used or quoted to suggest that this is what life for all North Koreans must be like. Such rhetoric therefore shapes our debate and affects our ability to engage with a reality that, in recent times, has become far more multi-dimensional and

4 James Pearson, "Real daily lives in North Korea," *NK News*, May 31, 2012, http://www.nknews.org/2012/05/real-daily-lives-in-north-korea/ (accessed July 28, 2012).

5 Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: Real Daily Lives in North Korea* (New York: Spiegel & Grau, 2010).

complicated following the advent of a rising middle class, the freer exchange of information and evidence of a slight economic liberalization. Written about the 1990s but released more than a decade later in 2010, we must be careful not to draw contemporary conclusions based on a previous era that is widely recognized, both within and outside North Korea, to be a dark and devastating period, plagued by starvation, and the death of millions.

As above, by no means does this go to suggest that the plight of defectors should be ignored. They provide those on the outside with a valuable insight into North Korean society and certainly help develop a significant understanding. However, painting a picture based solely on these accounts presents its problems. In 2010, Amnesty International produced a damning report[6] on the state of North Korea's healthcare system based entirely on defector accounts, some of whom, like in Nothing to Envy, had left almost a decade before the report was compiled. Yet, in the same year, the Director General of the World Health Organization (WHO) Margaret Chan said the country's healthcare system was "something which most other developing countries would envy."[7]

So whom do we believe? Both organizations ultimately have the interests of the North Korean people at the center of their aims, but both organizations draw dramatically different conclusions. The point is not to disagree with the notion that the North Korean government regularly fails to provide for its people—in the majority of cases it clearly has—it is that it should be fundamental procedure of any analysis to recognize the limits of knowledge available and critically assess the source of information. But, when it comes to North Korea, we seem to excuse ourselves from the standards to which we would otherwise hold ourselves accountable.[8] Ironically, those standards are the very standards North Korea is under so much pressure to embrace. Perhaps, therefore, our media (that is to say the Anglophone media of the "West") is fundamentally affected by a bias that is unwilling to accept a more complicated and multi-dimensional image of North Korea that could portray its actions as potentially rational and reasoned.

In order to address this issue, this study investigates whether or not this apparent gap in knowledge can be addressed by looking at North Korea through a Chinese "lens." It is a critical study of our own media representations of North

6 "The Crumbling State of Health Care in North Korea," Amnesty International, http://www.amnesty.org/en/library/asset/ASA24/001/2010/en/13a097fc-4bda-4119-aae5-73e0dd446193/asa240012010en.pdf, (accessed June 25, 2012).

7 "North Korea Has Plenty of Doctors: WHO," *Reuters*, April 30, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/04/30/us-korea-north-idUSTRE63T3TW20100430 (accessed July 23, 2012).

8 James Pearson, "How Failed is North Korea?," *The Diplomat*, January 31, 2012, http://thediplomat.com/flashpoints-blog/2012/01/31/how-failed-is-north-korea/ (accessed July 23rd, 2012).

Korea coupled with the added snapshot of Chinese reportage of the same events. China is widely believed to be North Korea's closest ally—but its media is also infamously censored. Nonetheless, this paper argues that, with more access to information and a closer relationship, news on North Korea from a Chinese perspective can significantly, and pragmatically, broaden the picture.

Chinese and Western coverage of events in North Korea

Although it is no secret that the Chinese government heavily censors and monitors its own media, this does not mean to say it is unreliable as a source. Provided that, as discussed above, the limitations of knowledge and access to information are recognized. That is to say, it is important to consider that: 1) information from North Korea is very difficult to verify; and 2) Chinese media comes with its own bias—one that is affected by its own government. Furthermore, some papers such as the *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend) have developed a reputation for often publishing a line quite distant from that of the Chinese government's more conservative or official stance echoed by more "mainstream" mainland newspapers such as the *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily). Thankfully, such once closed-off and hard-to-reach sources are now readily available online, providing Sinologists with a rich area of research.

John Gaddis argues that many social scientists suffer from what he dubbed physics envy, i.e., academics striving to adopt seemingly simple methodologies from "hard" science have detracted from their actual goal of explaining or forecasting social realities.[9] And Gaddis is right: trying to apply broad theories or models to entire populations of self-aware peoples is undoubtedly problematic. However, this does not mean to say that the creativity and inquisitive playfulness scientists apply to the experimentation process cannot be applied elsewhere. This thesis is therefore presented as an experiment—its findings are designed merely to present a snapshot of the Chinese media reaction to a select few events and see to what extent they differ from voices in the West. Rather than explain the complex nature of Sino-DPRK relations, the findings of this thesis should instead be seen as a useful tool that can challenge some of our perceived wisdom on North Korea, or more likely, address and highlight some of the more pressing issues outlined in Part One.

For example, if China has indeed grown as distant from North Korea as some suggest, to what extent is a similar image being portrayed in Chinese media? They key questions are: by including Chinese sources in our media analy-

9 John Lewis Gaddis, "History, Science, and the Study of International Relations," in *Explaining International Relations Since 1945*, ed. Ngaire Woods (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1996), 32-48.

sis of key North Korean events, are we able to achieve a better understanding of a fundamentally misunderstood country? Or, does Chinese reportage on the subject merely reflect what is said in Western journalism? Furthermore, as alluded to in the introduction, the Western academic debate is full of important discoveries that could help us understand how North Korea functions. A lot of it is conflicting, but is nevertheless largely based on extensive research that, despite the lack of information, can offer a reasonably comprehensive view of the North Korean state. But, to what extent does media reportage reflect this, and through which "lens" does China view North Korea and therefore report it?

Methodology

In honor of the "physics envy" of Gaddis and to try to address these questions and test such theories, we need a test tube of sorts—a petri dish of information from within which some tentative conclusions can be drawn, or useful ideas can be suggested. Luckily, for the seasoned Pyongyangologist (as they do not like to be known), no other country seems to generate disproportionately more headlines and column inches than North Korea. From Kim Jong-un's "mystery woman" to the sinking of the Cheonan battleship and the success of North Korean Olympic athletes in 2012, stories on the DPRK set the media's gear to hyperdrive. Therefore, for the purpose of this study, two major events that have succeeded in capturing the world's attention will form that test tube:

- The bombardment of Yeonpyong Island that saw what appeared to be an unexpected and "unprovoked" attack from a North Korean artillery battery on the South Korean-controlled island of Yeonpyong in the seas to the immediate West of the 38th parallel.

- The death of Kim Jong-il which, despite long-standing rumors of ill-health, still came as a shock and accelerated the transition to Kim Jong-un.

Each of these two events, or "catalysts," were covered very closely by world media, generating thousands of lines of analysis and are therefore rich veins of research. Each incident triggered a similarly large tide of headlines but there is an important distinction in the nature of each event in that: 1) each was completely unexpected and happened "externally;" and 2) each was expected in all but the timing and happened "internally." Theoretically at least, this might imply the particular style of media reaction might vary for each incident. To study

media reaction to each of these two catalysts in both China and the English-speaking "West,"[10] in this case the UK and US, six sources from a measured but representative background are drawn upon throughout the study. In English, these are:

- The *Guardian*, a British newspaper that, although lacking the wide circulation of the center-right Times and Telegraph, has a wide readership in the United States thanks to a flourishing online edition. The *Guardian* also publishes a weekly edition, the *Guardian* Weekly, which has an international and trans-Atlantic appeal, making it an important addition to this study.

- The *New York Times*, like the *Guardian*, has a lower circulation than its larger US competitors, in this case the *Wall Street Journal* and *USA Today*. However, its online edition generates over 30 million page views per month, making it the most-viewed news resource in the US.[11]

- The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), a household name known well beyond its home soil that, although funded by the British government, is genuinely believed to be objective and impartial: an editorial line it generally maintains throughout its rich and diverse reportage.

In comparison, three Chinese sources were picked to mirror their English-language counterparts as much as is realistically feasible—even if differences in political systems and culture naturally make a complete match impossible. Taking into account distribution and reach, the Chinese sources cited are:

- The *Renmin Ribao* (People's Daily), one of the largest of China's newspapers and widely seen as the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) mouthpiece thanks to its direct control by the party. Although, like the DPRK, central Chinese leadership is almost completely opaque to outside interpretation, the editorial line of the *Renmin*

10 The "West" here refers to the dominant states of Western, Central and Eastern Europe, North America, Australia and New Zealand. Although the term is unfavorable, its use is reluctant in place of a more suitable alternative that does not require long and explanatory footnotes.

11 Russell Adams, "*New York Times* Readies Pay Wall," *Wall Street Journal*, January 24, 2011, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704213404576100033883758352.html (accessed June 27, 2012).

Ribao is largely in tune with the policy that the Chinese government projects to the rest of the world.

- *Xinhua Tongxunshe* (Xinhua News Agency), China's official news agency, which, as a wire service, feeds the majority of Chinese newspapers, including the *Renmin Ribao* with stories from its many mainland and overseas correspondents. Like the *Renmin Ribao,* its editorial line tends to reflect government policy and rhetoric.

- *Nanfang Zhoumo* (Southern Weekend), a popular weekly newspaper that somewhat breaks the mold. Its editors are said to gain control of the paper via "a revolving door" to jail,[12] thanks to its more investigative, liberal and open approach that often counters the government line. The *Nanfang Zhoumo* is included based on the educated guess that it is less likely to reflect CCP rhetoric and, as a weekly publication, is also more likely to offer analysis on events, rather than simply report them in real-time and give way to speculation.

Case 1: The Bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island

On November 23, 2010, Korean People's Army (KPA) artillery guns opened fire on a military base on the South Korean island of Yeonpyeong, resulting in the deaths of two civilian construction workers, two South Korean marines and the injury of sixteen other soldiers. North Korea does not claim ownership over Yeonpyeong, which lies just 12.5km from its nearest coast, but the area around it is subject to dispute. The Northern Limit Line (NLL), an inter-Korean maritime border that extends from the Military Demarcation Line (MDL)—the land border between North and South—West into the Yellow sea, was never fully agreed upon following the end of the Korean War in 1953.

Although the Armistice stipulated that Yeonpyeong Island and neighboring Paengnyeong Island were to be administered by the South, the maritime border was not included in the agreement, and as the laws on the extension of land borders into maritime territory changed over the years, Pyongyang began to take issue with the border: rather than simply continuing from the MDL in

12 "China Media Guide: Southern Weekly," *Danwei*, August 9, 2008, http://www.danwei.org/media_guide/newspapers/southern_weekly.php (accessed June 27, 2012).

the same direction, the border curves upwards towards the North Korean coast. Yeonpyeong Island is particularly sensitive: South Korea has built up a military presence there over time, including an artillery battery, well within range of Northern targets. North Korea had made its position on the NLL and the sensitive nature of the surrounding islands clear on several occasions, declaring that Yeonpyeong lies within what they claimed to be North Korean territorial waters and that the "safe passage of warships" within the area "cannot be guaranteed."[13] While this does not imply North Korea henceforth has free reign to indiscriminately open fire upon whomever it pleases, it should, at the very least, indicate that the territorial dispute surrounding the NLL is highly sensitive and caution—not the military—should therefore be exercised in that area. Nevertheless, when the guns eventually fell silent, South Korean media described the attack as being "completely out of the blue"[14] and, in response to the attack, opened fire on North Korean artillery positions and deployed fighter jets in local airspace.

From a North Korean perspective, the argument would be that the DPRK opened fire in response to what was viewed as aggressive South Korean military exercises in nearby (and disputed) waters. Pyongyang requested days in advance that the South cancel its plans to carry out the exercises. The South refused and, despite further warnings on the day and a telephone message that morning, the exercises went ahead and the North opened fire, true to their conditional threat. Following what could be considered an overreaction from the North Korean side, the majority of foreign leaders across the world were quick to condemn Pyongyang for its actions: Secretary-General of the United Nations Ban Ki-moon characterized the attack as "one of the gravest incidents since the end of the Korean War"—a fairly bold statement considering the various other more damaging events that have occurred since fighting stopped in the 1950s.

Western media reaction was quick to begin live coverage of the events as they unfolded. The *Guardian* began with a regularly updated stream of South Korean reactions and the usual social media coverage before eventually filing a story on the attack later in the day.[15] Two articles by the *Guardian*'s Beijing cor-

13 "KPA Panmunjom Mission Clarifies Revolutionary Armed Forces' Principled Stand," *KCNA,* May 27, 2009, http://kcna.co.jp/calendar/2009/05/05-27/2009-0527-011.html (accessed July 25, 2012).

14 "The best weapons are useless if strategy is inept," *Chosun Ilbo*, December 1, 2010, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/12/01/2010120101069.html (accessed July 25, 2012).

15 This particular feature was largely based on minute-by-minute reactions and included very little analysis. It is therefore not considered stable enough a source for the purpose of this study, despite being the first piece to be posted on the *Guardian* website immediately after the barrage began.

respondent[16] were published in the next day's print edition. The first described how events unfolded but moved on quickly to highlight that the attack happened within the context of "growing international concern over reports that North Korea has a new uranium enrichment facility,"[17] a concern echoed in a *New York Times* leading article that referred to an American scientist who had "been shown a secret and modern nuclear enrichment facility"[18] on a recent visit to the North. *BBC News* also stated that the North had recently "shown off"[19] a similar apparatus. The *Guardian* quoted an "unofficial spokesman" for North Korea, Kim Myong-chol,[20] who "warned that nuclear war could follow 'at any point' unless the exercises stop."[21]

Despite a quote from a Chinese academic which stated that it was "too early to be sure what had happened," the *Guardian*'s coverage speculated, based on his analysis, that the attack may have been meant to "send a message to a domestic audience" or designed to "get attention from the international community." The *New York Times* echoed the same line by speculating that the shelling may have been a "deliberate North Korean provocation"[22] to try and gain food aid, and the *BBC News* noted that "Kim Jong-il is thought to be ill and trying to ensure the succession of his youngest son."[23] This was also a point that the *New York Times* had alluded to, but did not directly link to the attack. However, an article in the same edition entitled, "A pattern of aggression" speculated that the attack was most likely designed for Kim Jong-un to establish "leadership credentials within the military."[24]

All three sources, the *Guardian*, *New York Times* and *BBC News* made it clear that the Northern Limit Line (NLL) was either "disputed" or had been the

16 The *Guardian* covers the Korean Peninsula from Tokyo (South) and Beijing (North) and has no local bureau. However, recent events in Korea have convinced its London chiefs to relocate their non-salaried stringer from Tokyo to Seoul.

17 Tania Branigan, "South Korea warns North of 'enormous retaliation' after attack," *Guardian*, November 24, 2010.

18 Mark McDonald, "'Crisis Status' in South Korea After North Shells Island," *New York Times*, November 23, 2010.

19 "North Korean artillery hits South Korean island," *BBC News*, November 23, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11818005 (accessed June 25, 2012).

20 Kim Myong-chol is the director of The Centre for Korean-American Peace. A Japanese-Korean, Kim is infamously pro-North Korean, and is a self-declared "unofficial" spokesperson for the regime. Nevertheless, media outlets regularly turn to him for comment and, despite underlining his unofficial status, often publish headlines based on his claims. His actual authority or influence with the DPRK is unknown beyond the same "unofficial" roles many pro-North Korean groups overseas perform.

21 Tania Branigan, "South Korea warns North of 'enormous retaliation' after attack," *Guardian*.

22 McDonald, "Crisis Status," *New York Times*.

23 "North Korean artillery hits South Korean island," *BBC News*.

24 Martin Fackler, "A Pattern of Aggression," *New York Times*, November 23, 2010.

scene of earlier incidents, but no source elaborated on the nature of that dispute. Instead, the *Guardian* linked the event to the sinking of the Cheonan[25] warship in nearby waters, as did the leading articles in the *New York Times*[26] and *BBC News*.[27] A more lengthy report in the same edition of the *Guardian* quoted Peter Beck, a research fellow with the Council of Foreign Relations, as claiming the event "brings us one step closer to the brink of war,"[28] a common phrase, and by no means unique to Beck, that became a feature of many of the early morning editions of the next day's British newspapers.[29]

Concomitantly, in China the Remin Ribao carried a simple statement in the next day's edition from the *Xinhua* news agency that read:

> Foreign ministry spokesman Hong Lei said on the 23rd that the Chinese government was "paying attention to reports of a shelling incident on the Korean Peninsula." During a routine press conference, a journalist asked: "On the 23rd, North Korea launched an artillery attack on South Korea, and South Korea fired back. What is the Chinese government's position on this?" Mr. Hong indicated that the Chinese government had noted the reports and is paying attention to the situation. Specific details of the situation are as yet unconfirmed and that China hopes all concerned parties can remain calm, restrained and work together to maintain peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.[30]

While most front pages of major Western news sources were dominated by photographs of smoke towering over Yeonpyeong, the *Renmin Ribao* carried no images or stories about the attack, and the above statement was more or less buried on page four of that morning's edition.[31] The *Renmin Ribao* article was

25 On March 26, 2010, the South Korean Naval Corvette Cheonan split in half and sank in waters near Paengnyeong Island, one of the three islands that nestle the disputed maritime border. An international investigation concluded that the ship had sunk after being hit by a North Korean torpedo. The North Korean offer of assisting the investigation was rejected and the outcome was disputed by Chinese and North Korean officials alike. In an interview with the author, all North Koreans doubted that a North Korean submarine sunk the Cheonan. However, most agreed that Pyongyang was well within its right to launch the artillery attack on Yeonpyeong.

26 McDonald, "'Crisis Status' in South Korea After North Shells Island."

27 "North Korean artillery hits South Korean island," *BBC News*.

28 Tania Branigan, "North Korea: a deadly attack, a counter-attack—now Koreans hold their breath," *Guardian*, November 24, 2010.

29 "Newspaper review: Papers voice fears over Korea tension," *BBC News*, November 24, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-11826395 (accessed June 25, 2012).

30 "Zhongfang guanzhu Chaoxian bandao paoji shijian (China is paying attention to the bombardment incident on the Korean Peninsula)," *Renmin Ribao,* November 23, 2010.

31 It should be noted, however, that the online edition of the *Renmin Ribao* and many other Chinese websites had special online features, including maps and locations of the artillery batteries. Print response,

in fact taken from a *Xinhua* wire release on the same day that elaborated more broadly on the attack, its precise location, and the conflicting statements from Seoul and Pyongyang. The article went into far more detail than anything in the *Renmin Ribao* and, in contrast to coverage in English sources, went into slightly more depth regarding the exact nature of the South Korean military exercises that were arguably at the center of the conflict:

> According to reports, South Korea held its "Hoguk [National Defense] Exercise" with US forces and almost 70,000 officers and men of the Republic of Korea Army, Navy, Air Force and Marines taking part. The KCNA commented, saying the recent strengthening of the military alliance between South Korea and the US threatened to agitate the already tense situation on the Korean Peninsula.

Furthermore, although the *Guardian*, BBC and *New York Times* all indicated the Northern Limit Line (NLL) was disputed, only *Xinhua* elaborated on the nature of the dispute in its initial report that described why the NLL was sensitive:

> North and South Korea have always differed as to where the dividing line through maritime waters on the Western side of the Korean Peninsula exists. South Korea unilaterally established the "Northern Limit Line" but North Korea has never recognized it: the North Korean maritime border they defined in 1999 runs further South than the South Korean "Northern Limit Line."[32]

Xinhua also conducted an interview with their bureau chiefs in Seoul and Pyongyang, which they published in full. Ji Xinlong, of the Seoul bureau,

echoed the more nuanced line in the main *Xinhua* piece and simply reported the reaction of people in Seoul:[33]

---

however, was more muted.

32 Gao Haorong and Zhao Zhan, "Chaoxian junfang shuo Chaoxian caiqu junshi cuoshi fanji Hanguo de tiaoxin (North Korean military says military measures were adopted to counter-attack South Korean provocation)," *Xinhua Wang*, November 23, 2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-11/23/c_13619125.htm, (accessed June 25, 2010).

33 Lei Dongrui and Liu Xiaojun, "Lianxian Xinhuawang zhu Shouer shouxi jizhe Ji Xinlong (Interview with *Xinhua*'s Seoul Bureau chief Ji Xinlong)," *Xinhua Wang*, November 23, 2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-11/23/c_12807594.htm (accessed June 25, 2012).

> *Xinhua*: Are the people of Seoul showing any reaction?
>
> Ji Xinlong: People in the city are paying more attention to what kind of situation it is and whether or not it will get worse. The South Korean military are saying they fired back over twenty shells and the presidential palace has stated that they believe the incident might be related to yesterday's war games. North Korea sent a telephone message to South Korea this morning expressing their protest, stating that undertaking [military] exercises in disputed waters is akin to a provocation.

And although *Xinhua* was able to communicate directly with its office in Pyongyang, the response was less than useful, but nevertheless included in the transcript:

> *Xinhua*: Mr. Gao…can you tell us if the North Korean media has reported anything about the incident? Is the North Korean government communicating its position?
>
> Gao Haorong: At present, North Korea hasn't reported anything, nor has it released any information.

The lack of information from the Pyongyang bureau is interesting. Where one might assume China's position on the ground in North Korea might offer it access to more information where it counts, such an empty response suggests that even North Korea's closest ally has difficulty obtaining useful local information or, at least in this case, recognizes the extent to which its knowledge is limited. Even if the Pyongyang chief was unable to report what North Korean state media was saying, the news that they had not said anything at all was nevertheless useful.

Nanfang Zhoumo, its weekly publication slot neatly landing just a few days after the attack, produced two front-page articles on the incident. The first was on the hardware capabilities of both North and South Korean artillery—a fairly long, military related piece of analysis that offered little relevant insight beyond comparing the circumferences of artillery barrels and their range.[34] The other, with the headline "When both sides get bombing, it's game over for the Six-party Talks," was an equally lengthy piece including analysis from interviews with both Chinese and South Korean academics that suggested the incident could

34 Qing Yan, "Chaoxian dapao fa wei, Hanguo dapao fa dia (North Korean guns play it tough, South Korean guns play it coy)," *Nanfang Zhoumo,* November 25, 2010.

threaten the fragile future of the Six-Party Talks.[35] The article likened the situation on the Korean Peninsula to a tentatively balanced row of dominoes, with each new incident threatening to cause another.

Furthermore, like Western sources, *Nanfang Zhoumo* also linked the earlier sinking of the Cheonan to the leadership succession and the bombardment—although that was a conclusion based on the analysis of a South Korean academic. However, turning to a local Koreanist from Beijing's Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao (Central Party School), *Nanfang Zhoumo,* like *Xinhua*, suggested that South Korea's role in carrying out military exercises should not be discounted:

> South Korea's own military exercises have the potential to exacerbate the North-South issue as both states are equally hard-line in their approach. In the midst of military exercises, it's hard for both sides to avoid accidentally firing their guns in the midst of polishing them.

Such analysis is interesting. China wants to resume the Six-party talks so normally remains critical of any pressure on North Korea. Yet here, the *Nanfang Zhoumo* was lightly criticizing both sides for potentially jeopardizing such a resumption, although that criticism appears slightly more directed towards the South. Like a *BBC News* report, "North Korea firing: Why now?"[36] and a "A Pattern of Aggression" in the *New York Times*, the *Nanfang Zhoumo* also mused over possible causes for the incident. As in the BBC article, the Nanfang piece agreed that military exercises, the leadership transition and North Korea's possible desire to re-enter negotiations with the South could have triggered the attack. However, the paper also argued that South Korean president Lee Myung-bak had, earlier that year in May, promised to make North Korea "pay" for the Cheonan incident and, at exactly the same time, the Pentagon had declared it would hold joint military exercises with the South. From that announcement onwards, the *Nanfang Zhoumo* argues, "South Korean warships almost never disappeared from inter-Korean disputed and sensitive territorial waters."[37]

Understanding this point is essential, the Lee Myung-bak administration had taken a consistently tough stance on North Korea in both its rhetoric and buildup of such "National Defense" exercises. "Defense" here is the operable

35 Qin Xuan, "Liang fang paoji zheng han, Liufang Huitan xie cai (When both sides get bombing, it's game over for the Six-Party Talks)," *Nanfang Zhoumo,* November 26, 2010.

36 "North Korea firing: Why now?," *BBC News*, November 23, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world/asia/pacific/11818729 (accessed June 26, 2012).

37 Qin,"Liang fang paoji zheng han," *Nanfang Zhoumo*.

word—a widely used term by militaries everywhere which is both euphemistic in its use and Orwellian in its nature. Large-scale joint operations with the US a few nautical miles offshore of the North Korean coast are certainly not viewed as defensive by Pyongyang for the same reason that a Sino-DPRK naval exercise within range of the South Korean coastline would probably be condemned as an aggressive action internationally—particularly if South Korea and the US had demanded the exercises immediately cease. Was the attack therefore unprovoked? Military exercises, using live ammunition, were taking place in a very sensitive area near a highly disputed border. As the *Xinhua* articles illustrate, North Korea gave timely warning that it would take action if the exercises went ahead, and as Asia specialist Tim Beal argues:

> The South had been building up military capacity on the islands in recent years, and the plans for the live-fire exercise were well known. The North warned against them over a couple of months, and there was even a telephone call to the South on the morning of the incident. So there was nothing accidental about it. How we interpret it is, of course, another matter.[38]

Only the *New York Times* seemed to offer more nuance in its interpretation, albeit in the next day's edition, after initial stories had already been published. Quoting John Delury of Seoul's Yonsei University, the article "Korea Analysts Puzzle Over Cause of Artillery Exchange" suggested that military exercises contributed to the "atmosphere of tension and conflict," especially the immediate announcement of additional military exercises later in the month led by a US aircraft carrier, a move which the article argued would "bolster the hardliners inside North Korea." The article headline perhaps failed to do justice to the more actively nuanced line the article sought to represent. On Kim Jong-il's role in ordering the attack, the author quoted Michael Breen, a Kim Jong-il biographer as saying:

> "He's not a foolish man at all," Mr. Breen said. "He's not crazy, not at all. He's not nuts. That's very shallow analysis. If he was here on a conference call with us, he'd say, 'Look, if there's a war, my country will be finished within a week.' I know that. I'm not trying to start a war, I just don't like enemy states holding live-fire exercises within stone-throwing distance of my coast."[39]

38 Tim Beal, an author, researcher and North Korea specialist, in discussion with the author in July 2012.
39 Mark McDonald, "Analysts Puzzle Over Cause of Flare-up," *New York Times*, November 24, 2010.

Breen's analysis was contrasted with a previous quote from the South Korean Ministry of Defense—a quote that had relayed a line from President Lee Myung-bak saying the bombardment was "a premeditated provocation and an indiscriminate attack against civilians,"[40] which was the more common perception in South Korea.Such welcomed nuanced analysis on the bombardment, however, was quickly shelved as media attention began to turn to China. The *Guardian* published two articles in the main paper, one entitled "US to press China to rein in North Korea after attack"[41] and another under "North Korean attack on South Korea pushes China's patience."[42] The *New York Times* also published two articles on a similar theme: "China Addresses Rising Korean Tensions"[43] and two days later, "White House Seeks Chinese Help With N. Korea."[44] The BBC also turned to China with a multitude of articles, the first of which argued that "while Western leaders and editorials have condemned North Korea's artillery barrage of its southern neighbor on Tuesday, in China the response has been more muted."[45]

The article argued that "Beijing almost never criticizes its neighbor, no matter how troublesome it proves [and] the state media has followed suit." The author was presumably referring to the line given by the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, mentioned above,[46] that was relayed in the *Renmin Ribao* and *Xinhua*. However, whereas the BBC saw flaws in the lack of criticism for the North in Chinese media coverage, its own coverage seemed to lack more impartial criticism of South Korean military exercises that in themselves could have presented a more nuanced analysis contradicting the more widely-held belief that the attacks were indiscriminate and "out of the blue."[47]

China, in this case, did indeed remain "muted" as English-language sources suggested. But it also remained more balanced in its presentation of the facts. Although none of the Chinese sources produced articles that indicated China

40 The two "civilians" who died in the attack were construction workers contracted by the military and were killed by a shell that hit the marine base on which they were working.

41 Tania Branigan, "US to press China to rein in North Korea after attack," *Guardian*, November 25, 2010.

42 Tania Branigan, "North Korean attack on South Korea pushes China's patience," *Guardian*, November 25, 2010.

43 Ian Johnson and Martin Fackler, "China Addresses Rising Korean Tensions," *New York Times*, November 26, 2010.

44 Helene Cooper and Martin Fackler, "White House Seeks Chinese Help With N. Korea," *New York Times*, November 24, 2010.

45 Martin Patience, "China's muted response to North Korea attack," *BBC News*, November 24, 2010, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-pacific-11828846 (accessed July 25, 2012).

46 "Zhongfang guanzhu Chaoxian bandao paoji shijian (China is paying attention to the bombardment incident on the Korean Peninsula)," *Renmin Ribao,* November 23, 2010.

47 "The best weapons are useless if strategy is inept," *Chosun Ilbo*, December 1, 2010.

should be under some sort of pressure to influence Pyongyang, they did however release regular summaries of the overseas coverage of China's role in the incident.[48] The shelling of Yeonpyeong is interestingly placed as it happened just days before the Wikileaks papers were released, fueling the growing suspicion that the Sino-DPRK relationship might be under considerable stress. Following the publication of the information, the *Guardian* released a front page article, "Wikileaks cables reveal China 'ready to abandon North Korea'" that suggested Chun Yung-woo, a vice-foreign minister at the time, had told a US ambassador that "the younger generation of Chinese Communist Party leaders no longer regarded North Korea as a useful or reliable ally."[49]

Thus, without dwelling too much on North Korea and Wikileaks, what they can usefully indicate regarding the nature of Chinese and North Korean diplomatic relations is limited by the very nature of the informal and highly subjective nature of the cables. The potential pitfalls are plentiful, Beal argues:

> 1) Chun Yung-woo may have misinterpreted what the Chinese said; 2) Chun Yung-woo may have spoken to Chinese officials who were not in a position of sufficient authority to make such assurances; 3) the Chinese officials may have deliberately misled Chun Yung-woo for domestic political reasons; 4) Chun Yung-woo may have deliberately misled [US] Ambassador Stephens to garner US support for a takeover of the North; 5) [US] Ambassador Stephens may have misinterpreted what Minister Chun said.[50]

Nevertheless, such questions are rarely asked and the revelations of the Wikileaks cables still support the general assumption that the relationship is strained. But until this position is somehow reflected in Chinese policy, we will never know—and therefore caution must be exercised when using Wikileaks to tackle this issue. The language used in Chinese media coverage does not seem to suggest any evidence of this strain, given that they remained so apparently "muted." In reality, while the rhetoric may fluctuate, North Korea has a very real and useful economic function as far as Beijing is concerned.

---

48 "Waimei: Chao-han paoji Mei-ri-han yupo Zhongguo dui Chaoxian shiya (Foreign Media: The US, Japan and South Korea force China to put pressure on North Korea for the North-South artillery bombardment), *Xinhua*, December 25, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2010-11/25/c_12813910.htm (accessed July 20, 2012).

49 Simon Tisdall, "Wikileaks cables reveal China 'ready to abandon North Korea,'" *Guardian*, November 29, 2012.

50 Tim Beal, Crisis in Korea: America, China and the Risk of War (London: Pluto Press, 2011), 2.

Case 2: The Death of Kim Jong-il

On December 17, 2012, Kim Jong-il died. Much debate surrounding the deterioration of Kim's health had been in full swing since a French doctor, who had been to Pyongyang to treat Kim, confirmed rumors that the aging dictator had suffered a stroke in 2008, leading to much speculation at the time that Kim Jong-il may have already died.[51] However, in December 2011, despite the DPRK's best efforts to suggest in their propaganda that Kim would "live on well into the 21st century," he did not. News of Kim's death did not become knowledge outside of his closest circles until the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) declared in a "special announcement" at noon on December 19 that Kim Jong-il had "passed away from a sudden illness" en-route to give on-the-spot guidance. Dressed in black, North Korean newsreader Ri Chun-hee, famous among Chinese netizens for her overly-dramatic delivery of the news,[52] read the following official announcement, a copy of which was carried by all North Korean media outlets:

> The Central Committee and the Central Military Commission of the Workers' Party of Korea, the National Defense Commission of the DPRK, the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly and the Cabinet of the DPRK notify with bitterest grief to all the party members, servicepersons and people of the DPRK that Kim Jong-il, general secretary of the Workers' Party of Korea, chairman of the National Defense Commission of the DPRK and supreme commander of the Korean People's Army, passed away of a sudden illness at 0830 on December 17, Juche 100 (2011) on his way to give field guidance.[53]

Like the Yeonpyeong incident, English-language coverage began online before the transition to print media was made. But unlike Yeonpyeong, an "external" incident that generated a lot of information, news was slow to come out of North Korea and most media outlets quickly filed stories breaking the news. The *Guardian*, *New York Times* and BBC all reported that, in accordance to the KCNA announcement above, Kim had died en route to give field guidance. Ri,

51 Steven Erlanger, "Doctor Confirms Kim Jong-il Stroke," *New York Times*, December 11, 2008.

52 "North Korean Anchorwoman Ri Chun Hee Becomes Famous," *chinaSMACK*, November 28, 2010, http://www.chinasmack.com/2010/stories/north-korean-anchorwoman-ri-chun-hee-becomes-famous.html (accessed July 28, 2012).

53 "Kim Jong-il Tongji-kkeseo seogeohasiyotda (Comrade Kim Jong-il dies)," *KCNA,* December 19, 2011, http://kcna.co.jp/calendar/2011/12/12-19/2011-1219-030.html (accessed July 27, 2012).

the "tearful anchorwoman clad in black Korean traditional dress"[54] who delivered the television announcement, was also mentioned by most initial English-language articles.

After exhausting what little information had been released by Pyongyang, all three English-language sources began talking about the imminent leadership transition presenting an immediate threat to the Korean Peninsula and its neighbors. The *Guardian* said, "there will be widespread anxiety about potential instability and the implications of the change in leadership."[55] The *New York Times* warned of an "unpredictable outcome of an abrupt leadership change in one of the most opaque and repressive countries"[56] and the BBC stated "with the process of transition from father to son incomplete, Mr Kim's death could herald 'very unstable times' in North Korea."[57] But just why Kim's death would therefore lead to instability is unclear. Despite what North Korean propaganda may suggest, Kim Jong-il was not the sole figure behind Pyongyang's power. Furthermore, the feasibility of North Korea launching an attack or destabilizing the entire region because of an internal event remains to be seen. Although, as discussed above, some analysts also interpreted Yeonpyeong as being linked to the succession, there is little reason to suggest that North Korea would try and "flex muscle" in the event of a destabilizing event, particularly when North Korea finds itself at the more unfavorable end of a significant military imbalance.

The North Korean military is regularly said to be one of the largest in the world, with roughly one in twenty five people enlisted in the armed forces. What is less promulgated is that this "standing army" is also one of the largest construction companies in the world—many of North Korea's roads, buildings and structures are built by soldiers from a military that is as much about easily mobilizing and organizing a national workforce as it is about creating a readied fighting machine.[58] Under such a structure, new recruits probably have more experience of spades and pitchforks than they do of guns and grenades. One only need watch one of the KCNA's many propaganda videos on construction work in Pyongyang to notice that the men in hard hats doing the manual labor are mainly soldiers and their foremen are mainly officers.[59]

54 Tania Branigan, "Kim Jong-il, North Korean Leader, dies," *Guardian*, December 19, 2011.

55 Ibid.

56 Choe Sang-hun and David E. Sanger, "Kim Jong-il, North Korean Dictator, Dies," *New York Times*, December 19, 2011.

57 "North Korean leader Kim Jong-il dies of 'heart attack,'" *BBC News*, December 19, 2011.

58 James Pearson, "A change in North Korean leadership," *CESRAN*, December 21, 2011, http://bit.ly/OWygrz (accessed July 25, 2012).

59 Driving between North Korean towns and even in more rural areas in the northeast, soldiers are frequently spotted organized into work units that are plowing fields, transplanting rice, building tunnels or

Nevertheless, the implication in immediate coverage of Kim Jong-il's death suggested that a leadership struggle would ensue and spill over North Korea's borders. The BBC ran a front page article the next day, "North Korea: Neighbors on alert" that suggested "regional powers have voiced fears over the nuclear country's future course."[60] Apart from briefly mentioning the fact that Kim Jong-il had "carried out his father's policy of 'military first' building the world's fifth largest military force," the article made no relation to the fact that Kim Jong-il had died, nor did it implicitly argue that his death meant North Korea was a threat. However, although it was most likely an attempt to highlight just why its neighbors might perceive the DPRK as a threat, the BBC included three infographics about the North's military capabilities in the article: 1) an azimuthal map indicating the maximum range of North Korean missiles, including the Taepodong-2 that, although never successfully tested, is alleged to have a range of 6,000 kilometers; 2) a political map indicating all major military bases on the Korean Peninsula as well as nuclear and missile test sites in the North; and 3) a table charting the "regional military balance" based on expenditure, equipment procured and personnel.

The "regional military balance" table implied North Korea had a standing army of 1,106,000 compared to the South's 687,000—i.e., almost twice as many troops. Using a ten year old estimate from 2002,[61] the chart cited the North Korean military budget as roughly $5 billion compared to the South's $24.5 billion. Although military spending rarely works on these terms, the amount of spending per soldier in North Korea would be approximately $4,500 a year according to these figures. Based on the same data, Southern spending would be around $37,000 per soldier—over 700 percent of what is spent in the North. According to the information, both North and South have an equal amount of the population functioning as reservists that can be called upon to fight. But a quick glance at the figures should indicate the North lacks the equipment, funding, and by implication, training and capability of the South. War is doubtlessly still a numbers game—but the numbers that are important in today's world are financially quantitative and have far less to do with overall manpower.

---

laying roads.

60 "North Korea: Neighbors on alert," *BBC News*, December 20, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16267467 (accessed July 28, 2012).

61 The budget estimate cited by the BBC is naturally problematic: not only is it ten years old, it was based on an estimate where little hard evidence of military spending other than satellite images and propaganda footage is available. Even when the DPRK does release economic figures, the data is often based on a percentage increase of the previous year, which in turn was also a percentage increase of the year before that, and so on.

Again, the article was not overtly stating that North Korea presented the only immediate military threat. It went to great lengths to indicate that the US "has its own military presence in South Korea" that "adds to the capabilities of other key countries in the region" and had "promised to defend regional allies." However, the graphics seemingly suggested that it was the existence of North Korean missile technology and its allegedly oversized army that threatened to destabilize the region after Kim Jong-il's death.

Furthermore, the context within which the data was produced supported analysis elsewhere on the BBC that was trying to predict what ramifications Kim's death might present. One article, that focused on the US call for the DPRK to adopt the "path of peace," reminded readers that North Korea has a "one million-strong army thought to be [the] world's fifth largest"[62] and another that looked to past experience surrounding the death of Kim Il-sung for insight:

> While Kim Il Sung held absolute sway over his country, under Kim Jong Il it slid deeper into poverty and further towards military confrontation. In 2006 and 2009, it carried out nuclear tests. In March 2010, it sank a South Korean patrol boat. And in November 2010 it shelled an island near the disputed border.[63]

Here, the author moves seamlessly from nuclear tests to the disputed sinking of the Cheonan to the bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island, suggesting all events were just another incident in a long line of North Korean provocations. As discussed earlier, the sinking of the Cheonan is fiercely denied by North Korea—and South Koreans remain skeptical with as many as three in ten people not trusting the results of the international inquiry into the incident.[64] The Yeonpyeong incident, however, is seen as justified action in North Korea. The bombardment is openly admitted by diplomats and officials as being "deliberate," and more recently, appears to have been attributed to the KPA under Kim Jong-il himself as part of the KCNA's "Kim Jong-il Patriotism" propaganda campaign.[65] For North Korea, therefore, the only thing that connects the two

62 "Kim Jong Il's death: US urges 'path of peace,'" *BBC News*, December 20, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16259786 (accessed July 28, 2011).

63 Humphrey Hawksley, "Lessons from the death of North Korea's first leader," *BBC News*, December 19, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-16252540 (accessed July 28, 2012).

64 "Most S. Koreans Skeptical About Cheonan Findings, Survey Shows," *Chosun Ilbo*, September 8, 2010, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2010/09/08/2010090800979.html (accessed July 28, 2012).

65 "KCNA Report on Kim Jong-il's Journeys for Patriotic Devotion (3)," *KCNA,* August 9, 2012, http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2012/201208/news09/20120809-10ee.html (accessed August 10, 2012).

events is the sensitive nature of the disputed area they took place—something which was rarely discussed when the event originally occurred.

Regardless, whether or not the two events are connected remains unclear. But the suggestion that the incidents were related to an internal struggle of some kind seems to be based on little thoughtful analysis or fact. Furthermore, the notion that the death of Kim Jong-il would pave the way for a similar incident seems even more improbable. While English-language media focused on the dangers, Chinese coverage initially mirrored the line of the KCNA report in both its content and tone. The front page of the *Renmin Ribao* carried two articles: 1) an official message of condolence from the CCP that reminded readers "Comrade Kim Jong-il was an intimate friend of the Chinese people" and will "never be forgotten,"[66] along with 2) an exact translation of the announcement from Pyongyang.[67] *Xinhua* carried almost identical versions of the article and, again, echoed North Korean official messages that were urging the North Korean people to "show loyalty to Kim Jong-un."[68]

Unlike Western coverage, Chinese reports were either dominated by party rhetoric (of both the CCP and KWP) or were from a more human perspective. Page three of the next day's edition of the *Renmin Ribao* carried a more detailed report of the scene in North Korea from their Pyongyang correspondent that suggested things were fairly ordinary, off-camera:

> The images broadcast by Korean Central Television (KCTV) show Pyongyang residents choked up with tears in interviews, unable to believe the news. But some everyday things carry on as normal: on a construction site in the central district of Mansutae, work is underway and road sweepers are out, sweeping the streets. The mood in Pyongyang is one of sadness, calm, and orderliness.[69]

The *Nanfang Zhoumo,* its weekly edition falling three days after the event, also ran a story about the North Korean people's reaction—the only story to discuss the death of Kim Jong-il in that issue. The piece was a lengthy news feature

66 "Zhonggongzhongyang dianyan Jin Zhengri shishi (Official message of condolence from the CCP regarding the death of Kim Jong-il)," *Renmin Ribao,* December 19, 2011.

67 "Chaoxian zuigao lingdaoren Jin Zhengri shishi (North Korea's leader, Kim Jong-il, passes away)," *Renmin Ribao,* December 19, 2011.

68 Zhang Li and Zhao Zhan, "Jin Zhengri shishi Chaoxian yaoqiu renmin zhongyu Jin Zhengen (Kim Jong-il passes away, North Korea demands the people be loyal to Kim Jong-un), *Xinhua*, December 19, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/video/2011-12/19/c_122446199.htm (accessed July 28, 2012).

69 Zhou Zhiran, "Chaoxian renmin chentong aidao Jin Zhengri shishi ([North] Koreans mourn the passing away of Kim Jong-il)," *Renmin Ribao,* December 20, 2011.

about North Korea's "Sea of Blood Opera Company," a group of opera singers from Pyongyang, who were touring China at the time the news broke:

> Upon hearing this news from the North Korean consulate, Ju Yong Il [the head of the opera company] fell to the ground, and the actors held their heads, crying. They changed into dark clothing, went to the first floor of the hotel, arranged themselves neatly in a line, and bowed their heads in silence, some of them covering their faces to mask the crying.[70]

English sources also covered the reaction from North Koreans based on footage broadcast by KCTV and what little information the *Associated Press* (AP) was able to gather from its bureau in Pyongyang. The BBC spoke to psychiatrists to try and ascertain if the mass hysteria and crying was authentic in a *BBC News* Magazine article, "How genuine are the tears in North Korea?"[71] The article made the useful comparison of the British reaction to the death of Princess Diana in 1997 and the similar hysteria that gripped the public at the time. But, quoting Demick's *Nothing to Envy*, the article also indicated that not crying in certain circumstances in North Korea could lead to imprisonment or death.[72] Ultimately however, English language sources had nothing but the footage relayed by the KCTV to go by[73] and the occasional interview with an AP journalist at the scene in Pyongyang.

The more human-centered reportage by the Chinese media in this case is a good example of where China's apparent access to stories from within North Korea can be a useful mine of information when it comes to gauging the situa-

70 Li Yilan, "Jiangjun de yizuo: Jin Zhengri yu Chaoxian Xuehai Geju Tuan Zhongguo xunyan (The General's legacy: Kim Jong-il and [North] Korea's Sea of Blood Opera Company tour China)," *Nanfang Zhoumo,* December 23, 2011.

71 Tom Geoghegan, "How genuine are the tears in North Korea?," *BBC News*, December 20, 2011, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-16262027 (accessed July 25, 2012).

72 Witnessing Kim Jong-un's first ever public speech, broadcast via a large TV screen in the main square of Rajin in April 2012, I found myself surrounded by weeping North Koreans from all walks of life reacting very emotionally to his "no more tightening of the belts speech." The reason for crying will have been subjective from person-to-person, but there is no doubt that it was spontaneous or genuine, and given that I was one of only six Westerners in the entire region at the time, there is little reason to believe it was fabricated for an external audience.

73 All KCNA or KCTV footage is highly orchestrated, regardless of how mundane or serious the news. "Vox pop" interviews with ordinary citizens on the streets are often scripted: follow the eyes of the interviewee closely and it's clear someone is holding up a script behind the camera. This probably has just as much to do with saving "face," by getting the footage perfect, as it does with making sure nobody speaks out of fashion. However, viewed from the outside, such methods make the validity of such footage appear highly suspicious or unreliable.

tion on the ground. For people within the NGO community, such stories matter, and provide a form of human "intelligence" that is not marred by political or strategic implications. In one interview, an NGO worker based in China said:

> As someone "on the ground," it's the micro issues that I'm most interested in. Pundits, both Western and Chinese, are mainly just full of rhetoric. Human interest stories in Western media are either extremely naive in the eyes of people who do work in the DPRK or, more often, are only focused on defectors.[74]

Furthermore, at times when North Korea is suddenly plunged into difficulties the first step ought to be an empathetic one if the goal is to engage with the regime and encourage it to adopt a softer approach itself. However, in the eyes of many North Koreans, the death of Kim Jong-il will have presented them with an equally pressing crisis. Ignoring this fact and instead adopting a defensive posture creates counter-productive distance between North Korea and the "outside." Writing in the *Independent* at the time, former British charge d'affaires in Pyongyang Jim Hoare argued:

> World leaders have said Kim's death provides an opportunity for change, but they have hardly got off on the right track. Few have offered condolences. Others have concentrated on the problems and the dangers.[75]

Australian Foreign Affairs Minister Kevin Rudd was right at the time when he said, "It is at times like this that we cannot afford to have any wrong or ambiguous signaling,"[76] yet in the same statement, he called for North Korea to engage fully with the international community while talking of the need to "deal with the outstanding problem of North Korea's nuclear weapons program." No word of condolence or sympathy for the fact that, for a lot of North Koreans at the time, they had lost someone whom they believed was their sole hope for success and "prosperity" in the future.

74 NGO worker in China in discussion with the author, April 2012. The interviewee wishes to remain anonymous.

75 Jim Hoare, "Reform would open the son to the charge of betrayal," *Independent*, December 20, 2011.

76 "Kevin Rudd: new opportunities as North Korea mourns," *ABC News*, December 19, 2011, http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2011/s3394257.htm (accessed July 26, 2012).

Offering condolences to one of the world's most infamous dictatorships does not automatically mean you are aligning yourself to that country, its leadership or its policies. The international community was most likely right when world leaders indicated that the death of Kim Jong-il presented a good opportunity for engagement. But that engagement has to be two-way engagement to be effective; ordinary North Koreans were presented with a time of political uncertainty and vulnerability, and the opportunity to reach out and engage needed to come from the outside, not the inside.

Among Western states, the UK has so far led the way in demonstrating this pragmatic policy of "critical engagement"[77] since the establishment of an embassy in Pyongyang in 2001 with the DPRK following suit in London shortly afterwards. This seems to have led to more exchange, both politically and academically, thereby allowing London to view the regime from the inside and propagate certain clever engagement initiatives such as allowing North Korean scholars to study at prestigious British educational institutions such as the University of Cambridge—an approach that has arguably led to closer diplomatic ties and forced both parties to be more measured in their approach.[78]

Conclusion

From the cases above, it is possible to draw some tentative conclusions that Chinese media coverage on North Korea can, on occasion, be clearer, more factual and more nuanced in its analysis than some of its Western counterparts, and therefore, when combined with the picture painted in Western reportage, might possibly broaden our understanding of North Korea. The quotes highlighted are representative to an extent, but should not be used to assume a similar pattern might emerge in the future. As alluded to in Part Two, this thesis was an experiment and is therefore reluctant to draw more solid conclusions beyond the findings of the above two critical case studies. Evidently, more sources are needed—not to mention events.

77 "Working with DPRK," *UK in DPRK*, http://ukindprk.fco.gov.uk/en/about-us/working-with-dprk/ (accessed July 26, 2012).

78 According to some North Koreans, references to "British and American imperialism" rarely include "British" anymore and following the death of Kim Jong-il, Foreign Secretary William Hague's statement was one of the only ones to recognize that, for the people of North Korea "we understand this is a difficult time for them." By no means explicit condolences, but nonetheless signaling that at least some members of the international community can recognize that there are still people behind the unpopular face of the regime, a factor that this paper seeks to encourage.

Nevertheless, in looking at some cases such as the Yeonpyeong bombardment, *Xinhua* and especially the *Nanfang Zhoumo* go to great lengths to contextualize the attacks within the background of South Korean military exercises near the heavily disputed NLL. Although these points are touched upon in English-language sources, focus is largely on North Korea and its actions are reported within the context of a discussion on Pyongyang's apparent history of aggression. Meanwhile, South Korean policy towards North Korea and its role in staging military exercises is largely ignored.

While it is undeniable that the Chinese media engaged in the same kind of speculation that English sources did, coverage was on the whole less inclined to suggest war or conflict might be imminent. To an extent, this is reflected by the *Renmin Ribao*'s fairly active down-playing of the incident, choosing only to relay the official line of the party on page four of the next day's edition, rather than feature the story on the front page. This was most likely in part to protect Sino-DPRK diplomatic interests, yet in the process created an incidentally far more nuanced presentation of the situation. This nuance, however, is broadly non-existent in the reporting of Kim Jong-il's death, a much more sensitive subject that seems to become hijacked by the rhetoric of the party—a very separate body. However, scratching beneath the surface, stories that promote a more human perspective are published alongside these easily-dismissed political articles and potentially offer a useful insight that Western coverage lacks.

In the Chinese articles studied, it could be posited that there is more emphasis on the facts, rather than analysis; an approach that, although unsatisfactory for those pursuing answers, nevertheless minimizes the opportunity to speculate on or inflame the situation unnecessarily. Following the political formalities on the death of Kim Jong-il, for example, articles in China seemed mainly to be focused on the North Korean people themselves, rather than the geopolitical dangers many in the West focused on.

As some allude to, these micro stories help people trying to work with North Korea to develop a better understanding and possibly help break through the more established presumptions discussed in part one that ordinarily paint the state in such unfavorable terms. However, the suggestion is not that that Chinese sources should become a replacement for English sources, nor is to suggest using a Chinese lens solves the issues discussed at the beginning of this paper. One must certainly be able to read between the lines of Chinese media coverage and be prepared to look beyond the more overtly political nature of some coverage. Nevertheless, by including such coverage in our existing understanding of North Korea, this study argues that, taking into account the limitations of using only two cases, Chinese media reportage may well be able to broaden our pre-

existing picture of events in North Korea and, better still, equip us with a tool with which our own media coverage can be checked and balanced—something that, if events surrounding the Korean "crisis" in March 2013 is anything to go by, is very much required. **Y**

GETTING CHINA TO ENFORCE SANCTIONS ON NORTH KOREA

Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga
London School of Economics and Political Science

Jenny Jun
Georgetown University

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 2087 and 2094 again raises the question on whether China's enforcement will provide the resolutions the teeth they need to bite. After analyzing China's reactions to North Korea's three nuclear tests and subsequent policy decisions, we argue that while Chinese incentives for implementing sanctions on North Korea have increased, many traditional roadblocks still persist as salient variables. This is likely to result in more lukewarm sanctions enforcement than what is expected from current media hype. We then identify three ways that the Chinese government's level of sanctions enforcement could be improved: viewing sanctions as raising barriers of entry rather than compelling policy change, the United States striking a balance between cooperative and coercive measures to diffuse Chinese fears of instability, and creating expectations of additional unilateral sanctions that threaten Chinese interests.

Introduction

Giving teeth to sanctions on North Korea has been traditionally difficult due to a mismatch in incentives between the legislator and the enforcer. The United States and South Korea, perceiving North Korea's missile launches and nuclear test as a dire threat to security and nonproliferation, are more motivated to impose harsh sanctions to curve North Korea's nuclear program. China has not entirely empathized with such security concerns, and holds a lukewarm attitude toward the utility of sanctions, stemming from its historical distaste for interference in foreign governments, fear of regime collapse in North Korea, and com-

plicated bureaucratic politics. Yet, due to its geographic proximity and sheer volume of transactions with North Korea, China has become a more pivotal actor in the enforcement of sanctions than the United States and South Korea, chief drivers in the drafting of such resolutions. As a result, the successful adoption of a sanctions resolution on North Korea needs to be viewed separately from the successful enforcement of its provisions.

Another Test, Another Round of Sanctions

The sanctions arrived in response to North Korea's third nuclear test on February 12, 2013, which Pyongyang claimed was a miniaturized nuclear device.[1] Coupled with the North's largely successful December 2012 so-called "satellite launch," suspected of covertly testing ballistic missile technology, these two events suggest progress on developing the capabilities necessary to attack the United States with a nuclear-tipped missile, as well as increased risk of nuclear and ballistic missile technology and material transfers.[2] This growing threat to US security interests, emphasized by North Korea's explicit threat to conduct a "preemptive nuclear strike" on the United States, further motivated the US government to push through a new round of targeted sanctions against the Kim Jong-un regime.[3]

The North Korean regime's third nuclear test followed the established pattern of increasingly bombastic rhetoric and a missile test, culminating in a nuclear test followed by sanctions, repeating events in 2006 and 2009. The most important development from this nuclear test is growing suspicion that North Korea tested a uranium-based bomb, which would indicate the North has another avenue towards proliferation that is easier to conceal and easier to mobilize. Moreover, it adds to the suspicion that the North has access to more uranium, unlike its fixed supply of plutonium, enabling them to make more nuclear warheads.[4] However, attempts to collect an air sample soon after the test reportedly

1 David E. Sanger and Choe Sang-hun, "North Korea Confirms It Conducted 3rd Nuclear Test," *New York Times*, February 11, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test.html?_r=0.

2 Choe Sang-hun and David E. Sanger, "North Koreans Launch Rocket in Defiant Act," *New York Times*, December 11, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/12/world/asia/north-korea-launches-rocket-defying-likely-sanctions.html?pagewanted=all.

3 Rick Gladstone and David E. Sanger, "New Sanctions on North Korea Pass in Unified U.N. Vote," *New York Times*, March 7, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/08/world/asia/north-korea-warns-of-preemptive-nuclear-attack.html?pagewanted=all.

4 Max Fisher, "Why uranium would make a North Korean nuclear test especially scary," *Washington Post*, February 8, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2013/02/08/why-uranium-would-make-a-north-korean-nuclear-test-especially-scary/.

failed, as they did in 2009, leaving policy makers and scholars without definitive evidence that this test was uranium-based.[5]

According to US Ambassador to the United Nations Susan Rice, these sanctions are "some of the toughest sanctions imposed by the United Nations."[6] Indeed, the sanctions include a provision requiring states to inspect any North Korean cargo suspected of transporting items prohibited by all four rounds of sanctions against the North, a marked shift from Beijing's previous opposition to mandatory inspections.[7] They also further inhibit North Korea's access to cash, blacklist several North Korean diplomats and officials with connections to the North's nuclear and missile programs or money laundering activities, as well as explicitly ban several luxury items.

China and UNSCR 2094: Third Time's a Charm?

China's support for sanctions against North Korea on paper have yet to be matched by substantial actions on enforcement, but there is growing hope that China's support for UNSCR 2094 is a breakthrough for China's support of the sanctions regime. In 2006, despite strongly opposing the North's nuclear test and President Hu Jintao's personal involvement in declaring it "flagrant" (*hanran*), a term usually reserved for China's enemies, China rejected the first US draft of sanctions against the North, forcing a bargaining process that spanned five days until China approved UNSCR 1718.[8] In 2009, China again "diluted" the sanctions by crafting "loopholes," such as allowing Chinese companies to continue selling small arms to North Korea.[9] The new round of sanctions in

5 Joby Warrick, "North Korean secrecy on bomb test fuels speculation on nuclear advances," *Washington Post*, April 1, 2013, http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/north-korean-secrecy-on-bomb-test-fuels-speculation-on-nuclear-advances/2013/03/31/f46bda44-98ae-11e2-b68f-dc5c4b47e519_story.html.

6 US Mission to the United Nations, Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, New York: US Department of State, March 5, 2013.

7 Beijing did allow optional inspections under UNSCR 1874. See: United Nations Security Council, *Security Council Condemns Nuclear Test By Democratic People's Republic Of Korea, Unanimously Adopting Resolution 1718 (2006)*, New York: United Nations, October 14, 2006; US Mission to the United Nation, *FACT SHEET: UN Security Council Resolution 2094 on North Korea,* New York: US Department of State, March 7, 2013; and Bureau of Public Affairs, *North Korea Sanctions: Resolution 1718 Versus Resolution 1874*, Washington, DC: US Department of State, June 12, 2009.

8 For a discussion of Hu Jintao's personal involvement in writing the statement, see: Linda Jakobson and Dean Knox, *New Actors in Chinese Foreign Policy*, report for the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2010, 5; and "UN slaps sanctions on North Korea," *BBC*, October 14, 2006, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/asia-pacific/6051704.stm.

9 Neil MacFarquhar, "U.N. Security Council Pushes North Korea by Passing Sanctions," *New York Times*, June 12, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/13/world/asia/13nations.html.

2013 saw China's greatest cooperation yet with the United States on drafting sanctions.

Compared with past sanctions, this round took the longest to draft, but patience and horse-trading during the drafting process appears to have paid off, since the draft resolution was adopted the quickest.[10] Moreover, the United States went to great lengths to emphasize its cooperation with China on drafting the sanctions, even introducing the draft resolution as "US-China agreed," which is in stark contrast with conflict over drafting between China and the United States in 2006.[11] Given questions surrounding Xi Jinping and his reshuffled foreign policy team's willingness to compromise with the United States on any front, US-China explicit cooperation on the North Korean sanctions front needs to be noted and commended as a welcome change from even late last year.[12]

China's support of the new sanctions was accompanied by the fiercest Chinese academic commentary yet against North Korea. Most notably, Fudan University professor Shen Dingli wrote in *Foreign Policy* that "China has reached a point where it needs to cut its losses and cut North Korea loose," and Deng Yuwen of the Central Party School wrote in *Financial Times* that "China should consider abandoning North Korea [and] take the initiative to facilitate North Korea's unification with South Korea."[13] Xie Tao of the Beijing Foreign Studies University asserted that China's policy was an "utter failure" that went "against the tide of history" and concluded that "it is time for China to let go of North Korea."[14] Surveying such commentary, Peking University professor Jia Qingguo noted "the debate in China has changed from one about whether China

10 Sanctions were drafted and introduced 21 days from the day of the test in 2013, compared with 16 days in 2009 and the same day in 2006, but passed one day after being introduced in 2013 compared with two days in 2009 and five days in 2006.

11 US Mission to the United Nations. Remarks by Ambassador Susan E. Rice, Permanent Representative of the United States to the United Nations, At a Security Council Stakeout, March 5, 2013. New York: US Department of State, March 5, 2013. See also: "UN slaps sanctions on North Korea."

12 There also seems to be some implicit agreement between the United States, China, Russia and South Korea to avoid unnecessary tensions on the Korean Peninsula. UNSCR 2094 was only approved after Russia took over the rotating chair from South Korea, as allowing sanctions to be passed while Seoul chaired the Security Council was much more likely to draw a strong reaction from Pyongyang. Colum Lynch, "Rice's new Chinese sparring partner," *Foreign Policy*, December 12, 2012, http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/12/rice_s_new_chinese_sparring_partner.

13 Shen Dingli, "Lips and Teeth," *Foreign Policy*, February 13, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/02/13/lips_and_teeth_china_north_korea. See also: Deng Yuwen, "China should abandon North Korea," *Financial Times*, February 27, 2013, http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9e2f68b2-7c5c-11e2-99f0-00144feabdc0.html.

14 Xie Tao, "What's Wrong with China's North Korea Policy?," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 26, 2013, http://carnegieendowment.org/2013/03/26/what-s-wrong-with-china-s-north-korea-policy/ftjw.

should work with other countries to impose sanctions against North Korea to one about the kind of sanctions China should endorse."[15] Although these arguments are part of a wider academic debate that likely reveals varying schools of thought within the Chinese government, Chinese scholars are likely voicing their own opinions and not the opinions of specific policy makers, limiting the value of monitoring the debate for signs of future shifts in policy.

While Western observers are obviously drawn to the bold assertions by Shen, Deng and Xie, the reality is that the Chinese state-run media is likely to reflect the views of China's decision-makers more accurately than outspoken critics of North Korea publishing in the Western media. The state-run media has also been unusually critical of North Korea following the test, but reflects the underlying sentiment of the Chinese government with its refusal to endorse abandoning North Korea. The *Global Times* repeated its January 25 pre-test call for China to reduce aid to North Korea, writing, "since Pyongyang's nuclear test has damaged China's interests, it's necessary for China to give Pyongyang a certain 'punishment.'"[16] Nevertheless, the *Global Times* still carried skeptical undertones of US intentions, as the newspaper claimed that the United States, South Korea and Japan's underlying motive is to turn Beijing into "North Korea's top enemy" and recommended a proportional response that does not ultimately undermine the relationship or China's strategy and interests in the region.

The Chinese government's response to the 2013 nuclear test was restrained in comparison to the academic response. While the wording coming from Beijing was strong, the Chinese government again did not use "flagrant" to describe the latest test, establishing that its response to the 2006 test was a special case. The Chinese government's strongest criticism of North Korea's ongoing provocations were issued by none other than President Xi Jinping, who said that "No one should be allowed to throw a region and even the whole world into chaos for selfish gain," and the general assumption was that his comments were directed at Pyongyang, although some believe they were also directed at Washington.[17] Nevertheless, Xi's statement and other similar admonitions of North

15 Jia Qingguo, "Shifting emphasis: Beijing's reactions to North Korea nuclear test," *East Asia Forum*, March 3, 2013, http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2013/03/03/shifting-emphasis-beijings-reactions-to-north-korea-nuclear-test/.

16 "Not all Peninsula issues China's problem," *Global Times*, January 25, 2013, http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/758130.shtml. See also: "China needs to find right way to punish NK," *Global Times*, February 17, 2013, http://www.globaltimes.cn/NEWS/tabid/99/ID/762090/China-needs-to-find-right-way-to-punish-NK.aspx.

17 Jane Perlez and Choe Sang-hun, "China Hints at Limits to North Korea Actions," *New York Times*, April 7, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/08/world/asia/from-china-a-call-to-avoid-chaos-for-

Korea have yet to be matched by successful Chinese action to end the warlike stance in North Korea, especially since there have been no high level meetings since last November when Politburo member Li Jianguo traveled to Pyongyang in a failed attempt to dissuade the North from its December missile test.

The chasm between the academic debate and government rhetoric carries over into sanctions policy. The *Global Times*' original denunciation of North Korea's test threats reflects China's conflicting views on the role sanctions should play in resolving the North Korean nuclear issue. The *Global Times*' January 25th editorial warned that "if the US, Japan and South Korea promote extreme UN sanctions on North Korea, China will resolutely stop them and force them to amend these draft resolutions," adding that China should "just let the US, Japan and South Korea grumble about China. We have no obligation to soothe their feelings."[18] Despite calls, both inside and outside of China, for greater sanctions, China remains reticent to endorse strong sanctions or fully enforce existing sanctions.

Implications of UNSCR 2094: Increasing Incentives for Enforcement?

China's support for UNSCR 2094 raises hopes of an evolution in Beijing's North Korea policy following the Kim regime's third nuclear test and the recent leadership transition from Hu Jintao to Xi Jinping. Christopher Hill, US envoy to the Six Party Talks under President Bush, claimed that China's support "suggests that after many years, the screws are beginning to turn," echoing similar statements by Jon Huntsman, Kurt Campbell and even President Obama.[19] Yet, the question remains that if indeed the screws are finally turning, who is doing the turning, how tight will they go and how will the outside world know the screws have been tightened?

Since the first Korean nuclear crisis in 1994, China has had two discernible shifts in policy. Following the North's second withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003 and increased international pressure on Pyongyang, China took its first truly active role in the diplomatic arena by hosting the six-party talks aimed at denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula.[20] This also followed closely after Hu Jintao's ascension to Chairman of the CCP, replacing Jiang

selfish-gain.html?pagewanted=all. See also: Paul Eckert, "Analysis: In bitter irony for China, North Korea furthers US strategic goals," *Reuters*, April 10, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/10/us-korea-usa-china-idUSBRE93903U20130410.

18 "Not all Peninsula issues China's problem."

19 Gladstone and Sanger, "New Sanctions on North Korea Pass in Unified U.N. Vote."

20 Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs*, November/December 2003: 22.

Zemin, who had largely ignored North Korea since establishing diplomatic relations with South Korea in 1992. This shift towards a policy more favorable to the United States lasted through the DPRK's first nuclear test in 2006, marked by Hu Jintao's strong condemnation, but faded when the risky and untraditional policy failed to pay a dividend of a denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

China's second policy shift was in 2009, driven by the failure of China's more aggressive approach to the North Korea nuclear issue, revelations of Kim Jong-il's failing health and the imminent hereditary succession as well as the US "Pivot to Asia," which increased North Korea's strategic value to Beijing. As the Global Financial Crisis emboldened China to capitalize on the perceived weakness of the US-led Western order and shift towards a more aggressive foreign policy in Asia, North Korea was facing a rushed transition to a young and untested Western-educated heir with a frail tyrant seeking to steer his country through failed currency reform and dire economic conditions. The Chinese leadership under Hu Jintao responded to the 2009 test with a thorough review of its policy and even an informal vote in the Politburo Standing Committee, the highest arbiter of foreign policy.[21] The vote was 5-4 in favor of continuing to support the North, and Premier Wen Jiabao was dispatched to Pyongyang in October 2009, the first visit by a Chinese premier in nearly 20 years in a sign of goodwill to get the China-DPRK relationship back on track.

Now in 2013, there are expectations that Beijing may be re-examining this relationship under the new leadership of Xi Jinping. The active academic debate within China appears the most animated since 2009, but is unlikely to lead to a wholesale reappraisal of Chinese policy towards its neighbor. Despite the *Global Times*' nationalistic slant in its editorials and oft-forward leaning criticism of North Korea, the fact that Shen, Deng and Xie published outside China in a foreign language, combined with Zhu Feng's censorship, demonstrates the unwillingness of the Chinese government to engage in real conversations about policy change.[22] This unwillingness was highlighted by revelations that Deng Yuwen was suspended from his post at the Central Party School explicitly because of his *Financial Times* article.[23] The chasm between Chinese policy mak-

21 Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "The 18th Party Congress Crosses the Yalu: Implications for China's North Korea Policy," *38North*, November 27, 2012, http://38north.org/2012/11/nbmustafaga112712/.

22 Zhu Feng's critical article was originally published in Singapore's Lianhe Zaobao but republished in the *Global Times* with substantial and obvious censorship. For a translation and comparison of the two versions, see Adam Cathcart, "Incinerated Fantasy: Kim Jong-un, Zhu Feng, and a Censored Article in Beijing," *Sino-NK*, February 9, 2013, http://sinonk.com/2013/02/09/incinerated-fantasy-kim-jong-un-zhu-feng-and-a-censored-article-in-beijing/.

23 Jane Perlez, "Chinese Editor Suspended for Article on North Korea," *New York Times*, April 1, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/02/world/asia/chinese-suspend-editor-who-questioned-north-korea-

ers and popular academic sentiment is evident in the lack of tangible action on Beijing's part.[24] Despite the *Global Times*' published survey of 20 Chinese experts following the DPRK's 2009 test that split evenly between support for harsher sanctions and lesser sanctions than UNSCR 1718, there has been little forward progress on improved sanctions or enforcement so far.

Despite the increasingly open debate within China that may suggest China's rethinking of North Korea policy, China's fundamental interests have not changed as a result of the test. China's policy is driven by a combination of political, economic and most importantly strategic factors, yet the impact of the test on China's policy drivers has been insufficient to force a fundamental change in policy. The impact to China's external environment has not differed dramatically from that of the 2006 and 2009 tests, despite worries of nuclear proliferation in Asia and increased US military presence; and Chinese businesses are still able to invest and trade with the North, despite new UN sanctions, leaving political factors as the only reason China would change its policy. Although political motivations do exist, such as Xi's push for better relations with the United States as he starts his term, the relative benefit is unlikely to alter China's strategic calculus in the near future.[25]

This lack of fundamental movement does not preclude Beijing adopting a tougher stance on North Korea's illegal activities, as suggested by its support for Resolution 2094. Among the many possible indicators of a changing stance in Beijing, one easy item to watch is if China finally creates a luxury items list for its customs enforcement. Resolution 1718 banned countries from exporting luxury goods to North Korea but left it up to individual countries to determine what are considered luxury goods, and so far China has yet to release a list of banned luxury items. While Resolution 2094 does explicitly ban some goods as luxury items—notably yachts, racing cars, and jewelry with pearls and precious metals—it still does not present a comprehensive list for countries, again leaving most of the responsibility up to individual countries.

China's lack of a luxury goods list led the Congressional Research Service to conclude: "clearly, China has not been enforcing the sanctions on luxury goods," as China exported over $50 million of banned goods in one month

---

alliance.html.

24 A. Greer Meisels, "Is Enough Finally Enough for China and North Korea?," *China Brief* 13, no. 6, March 15, 2013.

25 Adam Cathcart, Roger Cavazos and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "The View From Beijing: North Korea as a Path for US-China Cooperation," *Sino-NK*, January 27, 2013, http://sinonk.com/2013/01/27/the-view-from-beijing-north-korea-as-a-path-for-u-s-china-cooperation/. See also: Jane Perlez, "North Korea Draws New China Scrutiny," *New York Times*, February 11, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/12/world/asia/north-korea-draws-new-china-scrutiny.html?_r=0.

alone, December 2008.[26] China could easily make a high-profile arrest of Chinese businessmen involved in the luxury goods trade with North Korea as an example of stepped-up enforcement while leaving the larger trade network unaffected. Other possible signals that China is enforcing sanction may be the seizure of a North Korean vessel, China simply announcing increased surveillance of Air Koryo flights from the Beijing airport, arresting people for smuggling goods to Iran or even making suspicious North Korean aircraft fly around Chinese airspace when flying to Iran.

China's support for UNSCR 2094 provides potential insights into Beijing's views of the stability of the North Korean regime and the succession process to Kim Jong-un. Beijing's support for incrementally harsher sanctions suggests Beijing believes the transition to Kim Jong-un is progressing well and the Kim regime can now handle external pressure from the international community and China. While the Chinese media has been quick to note that sanctions should not lead to regime change or damage Chinese interests, implicitly linking those concepts together, the Chinese government appears to believe Kim Jong-un has successfully consolidated enough power at the top of the North Korean system to absorb the impact of greater sanctions and some subsequent level of enforcement, as well as greater use of Chinese leverage. Coupled with the shift in the language of the official response to the February test, Beijing may be considering a more proactive enforcement policy.

UNSCR 2094 may also suggest Xi's administration sees North Korea as a possible avenue toward increased cooperation with the United States moving forward. Some Chinese scholars view North Korea as the most feasible stepping stone for better US-China relations and believe this round of sanctions represents a "strong signal of bilateral cooperation" between the two countries."[27] Echoing this Chinese view, one prominent US scholar asserted that "this may represent a bold new step forward by Party General Secretary Xi Jinping and China's new leadership in signaling the US that China is now interested in finding new areas of convergence."[28] However, China's traditional view of North

26 Dick K. Nanto and Mark E. Manyin, *China-North Korea Relations*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, December 28, 2010, 20.

27 Sun Ru, "A Strong Signal of China-US Cooperation on North Korea," *China-US Focus*, March 12, 2013, http://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/a-strong-signal-of-china-us-cooperation-on-north-korean/. See also: Adam Cathcart, Roger Cavazos and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "The View From Beijing: North Korea as a Path for US-China Cooperation," *Sino-NK*, January 27, 2013 http://sinonk.com/2013/01/27/the-view-from-beijing-north-korea-as-a-path-for-u-s-china-cooperation/.

28 "Can the North Korea Challenge Bring China and the US Together?," *The Atlantic*, March 7, 2013, http://www.theatlantic.com/china/archive/2013/03/can-the-north-korea-challenge-bring-china-and-the-us-together/273777/.

Korea as a counterweight to US influence in the region challenges this newfound optimism.

Roadblocks to Full Enforcement

China's resistance to fully enforce sanctions against North Korea, despite its international legal obligation, is due to a combination of principled opposition, fear of North Korea's collapse linked to its strategic value in US-China relations and Chinese bureaucratic politics. Despite China's nominal support for sanctions against the North, Beijing's agreement has come only haltingly and has not included full enforcement of sanctions. China has voted in favor of increasingly harsh sanctions on North Korea after all three nuclear tests in 2006, 2009 and now in 2013, but started from a low point.

China's past enforcement of sanctions has ranged from apparent incompetence to willful ignorance. Despite the Chinese government's best attempts to inhibit reporting by the UN Panel of Experts on North Korea, created by UNSCR 1874 to "monitor, promote and facilitate the implementation of measures imposed" against North Korea, evidence abounds at China's failure to enforce sanctions.[29] The panel released its most recent report publicly in June 2012, as China blocked publication of the 2011 report and still delayed the 2012 report's publication by a month.[30] The report found that China was linked to 21 of 38 reported sanctions violations and that China was a popular trans-shipping port for North Korean proliferation of ballistic missile-related parts and a source for North Korean imports of banned luxury items, including cars and tobacco.[31] Among the most notable violations, the panel's report confirmed that Dalian port was used as a trans-shipping spot for North Korea's export of SCUD-related materials in October 2007, and Wikileaks revealed that China failed to act on US-provided evidence to stop North Korean proliferation of more ballistic missile parts transited through the Beijing Airport at around the same time in 2007.[32] China has also limited the number of North Korean entities the UN Pan-

29 UN Panel of Experts on North Korea, *Panel Of Experts Established Pursuant To Resolution 1874 (2009)* (New York, 2009).

30 "China repeatedly violated economic sanctions against North Korea," *Asahi Shimbun*, June 22, 2012, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/china/AJ201206220038. See also: Louis Charbonneau, "U.N. publishes report on North Korea sanctions violations," *Reuters*, June 29, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/29/us-korea-north-sanctions-idUSBRE85S16Q20120629; and "China to block UN report on North Korean nuclear capability," *Guardian*, February 18, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/feb/18/china-north-korea-nuclear-capability.

31 UN Panel of Experts on North Korea, *Report of the Panel of Experts Established Pursuant to Resolution 1874 (2009)* (New York, June 29, 2012).

32 Ibid. See also: Kathrin Hille, "WikiLeaks: China drags feet on N Korea," *Financial Times*, November

el has been allowed to list as violators of sanctions, most recently for UNSCR 2087, whittling a US and Japan-produced list from 40 entities down to three.[33] This lack of enforcement through some of China's biggest ports raises questions over China's sincerity to stop North Korean proliferation and deter violations of UN sanctions.

China has historically resisted sanctions as a principle of its foreign policy. The guiding tenets of traditional Chinese foreign policy, the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence, include "mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs."[34] China has generally interpreted this principle as resisting influencing the affairs of foreign countries through the United Nations or other means, including sanctions. China's varied record on upholding this principle of non-interference reveals that China's foreign policy is guided more by interest than principle.[35] Most recently, in 2011 China abstained from voting on UNSCR 1973, which created a no-fly zone and ultimately led to intervention in Libya, but vetoed resolutions in 2012 intended to stop bloodshed in Syria.[36] This reinforces arguments that China's principle of non-interference is not a strict policy proscription but a flexible framework to justify actions in the international diplomatic arena.

China's overall North Korea policy, including resistance on sanctions, is driven in large part by a fear of the collapse of the North Korean state. The predominant view amongst Chinese officials and scholars is that a collapse of the North Korean state would lead to a possibly catastrophic cascade of negative

30, 2010, http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/f3b2edda-fbc7-11df-b79a-00144feab49a.html.

33 Bonnie S. Glaser and Brittany Billingsley, "The UN Prepares to Impose New Sanctions on North Korea," *Center for International and Strategic Studies*, March 4, 2013, http://csis.org/publication/un-prepares-impose-new-sanctions-north-korea.

34 Russell H. Fifield, "The Five Principles of Peaceful Co-Existence," *The American Journal of International Law* 52, no. 3 (1958): 504.

35 China supported the Soviet Union's 1956 intervention in Hungary but opposed the 1968 intervention in Czechoslovakia after the Sino-Soviet split, and directly supported anti-colonial movements in the third world through military and economic means throughout the Mao years Likewise, China supported sanctions against the apartheid South African regime for human rights violations but opposed the UN's criticism of China's human rights abuses against Tibetans, calling it "an eager conspiracy of intervention." See: Jerome Alan Cohen, "China and Intervention: Theory and Practice," *University of Pennsylvania Law Review* 121, no. 3 (1973): 491, 493.

36 Zhong Sheng, "China: No interference in Syria's internal affairs," *People's Daily*, October 13, 2011, http://english.peopledaily.com.cn/90780/7616513.html. See also: Rick Gladstone, "Friction at the U.N. as Russia and China Veto Another Resolution on Syria Sanctions," *New York Times*, July 19, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/07/20/world/middleeast/russia-and-china-veto-un-sanctions-against-syria.html; and United Nations Security Council, *Security Council Approves 'No-Fly Zone' Over Libya, Authorizing 'All Necessary Measures' to Protect Civilians, By Vote Of 10 in Favour With 5 Abstentions*, New York: United Nations, March 17, 2011.

consequences for China's security environment, economy and social stability.[37] China views North Korea as a buffer against the United States and strategic asset for bargaining in the US-China relationship, so the continued existence of a pro-China North Korean state is a matter of vital national interest.[38] Strategic thinkers in Beijing are most concerned with the idea that a collapse would lead to a reunification of the Korean Peninsula under the US-allied South on China's border, with the possibility of US troops above the 38th parallel.[39] China also uses North Korea as a bargaining chip with the United States, so North Korea's strategic value rises as US-China relations worsen, exemplified by the fact that the US "Pivot to Asia" raised the strategic value of North Korea to China.[40] North Korea also distracts US and allied military resources away from China and could also possibly be used as leverage in a crisis over Taiwan, as the North and Taiwan have been linked from China's perspective since President Truman dispatched the Seventh Fleet into the Taiwan Straits at the start of the Korean War.[41] North Korea's strategic value to China in military and political terms will remain a powerful factor in Beijing's policy decision-making and is a large impediment to China's willingness to fully enforce sanctions.

China fears that a collapse would lead to an influx of refugees across the border and challenge its control of social stability in the region. Experts estimate that a "significant" number of the possible three million overall refugees will head to China, since the border with South Korea is nearly impassable and there is a large ethnic Korean minority along the Chinese side of the border that includes many familial ties.[42] This refugee influx would add stress to an already poor minority region and threaten social stability with the associated increase of illegal activities, including gangs, drug smuggling and possible irredentism.[43] Beyond collapse, China fears that sanctions alone may exacerbate its current

37 US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, "China's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Players," testimony by Victor Cha, 2011, 102.

38 Stephanie Kleine-Ahlbrandt, "Beijing Is No One's Ally in the Effort to Pressure and Disarm North Korea," *South China Morning Post*, January 5, 2012, http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/asia/north-east-asia/china/beijing-is-no-ones-ally-in-the-effort-to-pressure-and-disarm-north-korea.aspx.

39 Zhu Feng, "Flawed Mediation and a Compelling Mission: Chinese Diplomacy in the Six-Party Talks to Denuclearise North Korea," *East Asia* (2011): 198.

40 Mark E. Manyin, *Kim Jong-il's Death: Implications for North Korea's Stability and US Policy*, Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 2012, 8.

41 Shen Dingli, "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China," *China Security* (Autumn 2006): 21.

42 Carla Freeman and Drew Thompson, "Flood Across the Border: China's Disaster Relief Operations and Potential Response to a North Korean Refugee Crisis," *US-Korea Institute*, 2009, 17.

43 Ibid. See also: John Pomfret, "Why China Won't Do More With North Korea," *Washington Post*, May 29, 2009.

refugee problem and "invite a larger influx of illegal border crossers and the economic and social burden that they would bring."[44]

The collapse of a "pro-China" North Korea would also disrupt China's privileged access to natural resources, business opportunities and normal trade that helps support China's poor northeast economy. China's position as North Korea's lone ally and largest economic partner enables China to gain relatively unchallenged access to North Korea's estimated $6 trillion worth of natural resources, including rare earths and coal.[45] Chinese companies have capitalized on this access, as 41 percent of Chinese investment has focused on natural resource extraction and at least 72 percent of China's imports from North Korea in 2011 were natural resources.[46] China's trade and investment with its neighbor flow primarily through China's border provinces, Jilin and Liaoning. Based on hopeful expectations of future North Korean economic reform, these provinces have incorporated North Korea into their future economic growth strategy and are thus unwilling to sacrifice this opportunity for international sanctions.[47] As Jilin and Liaoning account for a combined 62 percent of Chinese investment in North Korea and at least 60 percent of cross-border trade, their provincial governments have a strong incentive to resist sanctions.[48] Furthermore, the rise of Zhang Dejiang to the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) affords local governments access via personal connections to a favorable advocate of their interests at the highest levels of policy making.[49] Thus, China's economic ties to the North act as another roadblock to sanctions enforcement, especially when related to the economic growth of the border provinces.

This powerful fear of collapse underlies China's belief in a paradox that inhibits China's willingness to enforce sanctions. From China's perspective, the paradox of Chinese leverage is that the more China pressures North Korea, the less influence China has over North Korea and the more likely Kim Jong-un is to court President Obama, if only the US government returned the senti-

44 Anne Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2005): 43.

45 Scott Thomas Bruce, "North Korea's Six Trillion Dollar Question," *The Diplomat*, August 30, 2012, http://thediplomat.com/2012/08/30/north-koreas-six-trillion-dollar-question/.

46 Drew Thompson, Silent Partners: Chinese Joint Ventures in North Korea (Washington, DC: US-Korea Institute at SAIS, February 2011): 4. See also: "Bilateral trade between China and Democratic People's Republic of Korea in 2011," *TradeMap*, http://www.trademap.org.

47 Thompson, *Silent Partners*, 73.

48 Ibid., 4. See also: Ce Liu, "Dandong's Expanding Trade with North Korea, Hopes to Become an Economic Hub," *China Daily*, March 9, 2011.

49 Zhang Dejiang previously served as party secretary of Jilin province and has long-standing ties to North Korea. For more on the potential impact of Zhang's ascension to the PSC, see: Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "The 18th Party Congress Crosses the Yalu: Implications for China's North Korea Policy," *38North*, November 27, 2012, http://www.38north.org/2012/11/nbmustafaga112712/.

ment. Within this context, China views sanctions as an international expectation, largely from Western countries, that China pressure North Korea to alter its behavior at the risk of sacrificing its own interests in the process. Although Wikileaks and other sources have suggested China is increasingly realizing the inevitability of North Korea's collapse and reunification under the South, the Chinese leadership nonetheless seeks to postpone such a reunification as long as possible.[50] Therefore, China's desire for the continued existence of a pro-China North Korean state is an obstacle to full enforcement, as long as China views full enforcement as a threat to the North Korean state.

Another factor in China's lack of enforcement is Chinese bureaucratic politics.[51] Although often overlooked, China's North Korea policy is shaped to a large extent by the contours of bureaucratic politics that play out at every level of policy decision-making and implementation from central authorities in Beijing to the local prefecture government in Yanbian.[52] China's management of its policy towards the North is increasingly bifurcated—centralized policy formulation with diffused implementation. China's North Korea policy is formulated at the highest level of the Chinese government, namely the PSC based on recommendations by the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (FALSG).[53] However, China's policy is implemented by a diverse group of foreign policy actors who each hold their own interests as they implement the policy as outlined by President Xi Jinping and his fellow Standing Committee members. These actors include the bureaucracies the wield the greatest influence over policy, namely the International Liaison Department (ILD), People's Liberation Army (PLA) and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA), and also include organizations that have secondary influence over policy, including the Jilin and Liaoning provincial governments and the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM).

50 Simon Tisdall, "Wikileaks cables reveal China 'ready to abandon North Korea,'" *Guardian*, November 29, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/29/wikileaks-cables-china-reunified-korea.

51 This discussion of the bureaucratic politics of China's North Korea policy is based on conversations by Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga with over 60 high-level government officials, military officers, scholars and journalists from both the United States and China, including ambassadors and foreign policy advisors for both countries.

52 For the three best discussions of the bureaucratic politics of China's policy, see: Bates Gill, *China's North Korea Policy*, 283, United States Institute of Peace, 2011. See also: *Shades of Red: China's Debate Over North Korea*, 129, International Crisis Group, 2009; and US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, *China's Foreign Policy: Challenges and Players*, testimony by Victor Cha, 2011.

53 For a summary of Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga's master's thesis, "Chinese Bureaucratic Politics and Sino-North Korean Relations: Dynamics and Implications," see: Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "Chinese Bureaucratic Politics and Sino-North Korean Relations: Dynamics and Implications," *Sino-NK*, August 5, 2012, http://sinonk.com/2012/08/05/chinese-bureaucratic-politics-north-korea-mplications/.

China's enforcement of sanctions reflects the wider issues of bifurcated policy management within China's North Korea policy. Although China's support of UN sanctions on North Korea is conditional on approval by the PSC, the MFA's International Organizations and Conferences Department is responsible for negotiating sanctions in the UN Security Council. After the PSC, through the MFA, agrees to a new round of sanctions, several different ministries are responsible for implementation. The General Administration of Customs China (GACC) is responsible for enforcement at the border, while MOFCOM's Department of Mechanic, Electronic and Hi-Tech Industry is responsible for export controls on dual-use and weapons of mass destruction-related items and the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology's (MIIT) State Administration for Science, Technology and Industry for National Defense (SASTIND) is responsible for export controls on arms, and the Ministry of Finance is responsible for financial restrictions. This fractured responsibility for sanctions enforcement is compounded by intra-bureaucratic conflicts of interests on adhering to China's legal obligations.

The intended targets of monitoring for enforcement include foreign policy actors with access and influence over the Chinese foreign policy decision-making process, leading to at best a conflict of interest for those responsible for enforcement and at worse a lack of institutional power to stop and punish violations. This conflict of interest is highlighted by state-owned enterprises (SOE) and the Ministry of Commerce. SOEs have recently gained a profit-making interest in pursuing foreign policy goals, thereby creating possible conflicts of interest for enforcement as one government bureaucracy is responsible for enforcing the sanctions that another dodges in an attempt to turn a profit.[54] The significant investment by the Jilin and Liaoning provincial governments' SOEs in the North, estimated at 62 percent of total Chinese investment, creates a conflict of interest when enforcing sanctions against its own companies and thus tensions with the central government in Beijing, and this extends to regional banks earning upwards of 20 percent commission on illegal banking for North Korea.[55] The Ministry of Commerce, which is responsible for overseeing the growth of Chinese trade abroad and increasing employment across the country, is also responsible for sanctions enforcement on dual-use items, among others. This creates a direct conflict of interest within the Ministry, and with the

54 Richard Weitz, "China's Proliferation Problem," *The Diplomat*, May 24, 2011, http://thediplomat.com/2011/05/24/china%E2%80%99s-proliferation-problem/.

55 Drew Thompson, *Silent Partners: Chinese Joint Ventures in North Korea* (Washington, DC: US-Korea Institute at SAIS, February 2011), 4. See also: Leon V. Sigal, "How North Korea Evades Financial Sanctions," *38North*, May 3, 2013, http://38north.org/2013/05/lsigal050313/.

sensitivity the Chinese government affords to North Korea, most bureaucrats likely avoid the diplomatic incident by approving or ignoring dual-use exports to North Korea that should be prohibited under UN sanctions.

The export of the transport-erector-launcher (TEL) that was used to debut North Korea's newest inter-continental ballistic missile (ICBM) in April 2012 exemplifies a possible subversion of higher-level policy in pursuit of profit and is a useful example of Beijing's lack of export controls. The TEL, which appeared at a military parade in Pyongyang following Kim Jong-un's failed April 2012 missile test, was produced by a subsidiary of the state-owned China Aerospace Science and Industry Corporation, which maintains close ties to the PLA to such an extent that previously the largest customer for the vehicle, and possibly only customer, was the PLA itself.[56] While some have argued it was exported as a forestry product, the non-civilian features of the TEL led one expert to conclude that "the Chinese executing the contract certainly knew who they were dealing with and why."[57] Another expert asserted that the sale "would require approval from the highest levels of the Chinese government and the People's Liberation Army."[58] This dual-use nature, if not outright military use, of the vehicle should have brought it under the export control of MOFCOM.[59] A possible scenario is that the state-owned company sold vehicle to North Korea without the knowledge of MOFCOM's enforcement officials, or that the enforcement officials did not have enough power within the Chinese system to stop the sale. The PLA has long been suspected of having business interests in North Korea, and the TEL company's links to the PLA open the possibility that there was Chinese military involvement in the sale. As an influential actor in the Chinese system, the PLA would likely have the power to override any attempts to block the sale of the TELs by enforcement officials. Whether this potential PLA involvement in the sale and export of the vehicle was driven by motivations of profit or strategic covert military assistance to Pyongyang is unknown. In order to avoid further

56 Mark Hibbs, "China and the POE DPRK Report," *Arms Control Wonk*, July 2, 2012, http://hibbs.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/879/china-and-the-poe-dprk-report. See also: Jeffrey Lewis, "More on DPRK TELs," *Arms Control Wonk*, April 23, 2012, http://lewis.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/5162/more-on-dprk-tels.

57 Lewis, "More on DPRK TELs."

58 S. Smithson, "Analysts: China broke sanctions if N. Korea using its missile launcher," *Washington Times*, April 16, 2013, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2012/apr/16/experts-china-likely-gave-n-korea-illegal-missile-/.

59 "China denies exporting North Korean missile launch vehicles," *Associated Press*, June 13, 2012, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/jun/13/china-north-korea-missile-vehicles.

embarrassment, China's representative to the UN POE, a Ministry of Defense official, blocked the Panel from reporting the TELs coming from China.[60]

The luxury items list is another example of domestic interest groups possibly shaping China's enforcement of sanctions. Despite the MFA signing China up to ban exports of luxury goods to North Korea, China has yet to establish a list of luxury goods. This failure to follow the spirit of the sanctions may be due to pressure from Chinese companies, either state-owned or private, to avoid sanctions that would affect their bottom-line. They can pressure the government by exploiting their connections to the decision-making process or by citing the potential unemployment arising from their loss of business due to sanctions enforcement, or simply through bribery.[61] Reports of unabated China-DPRK trade in blatant luxury items in the weeks after approving UNSCR 2094, such as LCD TVs, near the North Korean Embassy in Beijing, located a half mile from the MFA's headquarters, and being transported through Beijing airport, which falls under the enforcement of the GACC, reveals either a willful ignorance of the sanctions violations occurring at its doorstep or an inability to enforce sanctions due to bureaucratic incompetence or impotence.[62] This again highlights the numerous challenges bureaucratic politics plays in full enforcement.

Chinese roadblocks to sanctions enforcement present many obstacles that central authorities in Beijing and foreign countries must overcome in order to see substantial changes in China's stance on North Korea sanctions. Nevertheless, the underlying factors driving China's North Korea policy—namely fear of collapse, strategic value in US-China relations and bureaucratic politics—ultimately remain unchanged and thus China's fundamental strategic calculus on North Korea will remain unchanged for the foreseeable future. Xi and Obama's possible reconciliation in their new administrations also allows China to reassess the value of North Korea in terms of US-China relations, but this process will be slow and not significantly impact China's North Korea policy in the

60 Jeffrey Lewis, "Assessing the DPRK Panel of Experts," *38North*, July 12, 2012, http://38north.org/2012/07/jlewis071712/.

61 A prime of example of a Chinese business injecting its own interests into China's policy towards North Korea was when the Wanxiang Group had Premier Wen Jiabao personally intervene in its dispute with the North Korean government, reportedly in return for a $10,000 payment. See: Peter Lee, "Dear Leader's designs on Uncle Sam," *Asia Times*, December 4, 2010, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/LL04Ad01.html. According to one report, "a bribe of between £40,000-£60,000 is paid to a customs official to send each 40ft container filled with illegal missile components through Dalian;" Julian Ryall, "Chinese firms breaking UN embargo on North Korea," *Telegraph*, June 8, 2012, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/9320339/Chinese-firms-breaking-UN-embargo-on-North-Korea.html.

62 Megha Rajagopalan, "North Korean elite beating sanctions, one plasma TV at a time," *Reuters*, March 19, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/19/us-korea-north-china-idUSBRE92I16720130319.

short-term due to the pragmatic and conservative path-dependency nature of the Chinese government, further compounded by the uncertainty of the transition period to Xi Jinping. In the end, China's enforcement of sanctions will likely run to the middle ground that appeases the international community but remain short of full enforcement to avoid any consequences that would directly affect the stability of the Kim regime, and thus China's interests in the region.

Three Tools to Improve Chinese Enforcement

This likely middle ground approach raises questions over the utility of "casual sanctions" in achieving its initial objective of halting North Korea's nuclear program. While the United States and the international community welcome the Xi administration's symbolic efforts to get tougher on North Korea, sanctions will not be ultimately successful if not enforced to the full spirit of the law, not simply China's version of the letter of the law. The TEL export suggests that China's past efforts have not been vigilant enough to inhibit North Korea's procurement of equipment for its military. This leaves US and other countries' policy makers searching for ways to increase Chinese cooperation on sanctions enforcement. Policy-makers can turn to three tools depending on how they balance desires for better enforcement of sanctions and positive relations with Beijing: viewing sanctions as raising barriers of entry rather than compelling policy change, striking a balance between cooperative and coercive measures to diffuse Chinese fears of instability, and creating expectations of additional unilateral sanctions.

First, regional stakeholders should work to debunk the myth in China that tightly enforced sanctions will lead to the destabilization of the North Korean regime by improving understanding of UNSCR 2094's policy objectives. Rather than the traditional objective of sanctions as pressure tactics to squeeze policy concessions from the target country, a more fitting description of targeted sanctions such as UNSCR 2094 would be sanctions to stunt an ongoing development. Whereas sanctions to compel policy change require heavy pressure on the key stakeholders of the target country, producing negative externalities such as regime instability, sanctions to delay development of a program targets program components instead of the regime.

Key provisions of past UN resolutions on North Korea's nuclear program, such as a ban on luxury goods, targeting of individuals and companies involved in nuclear and missile program development, and freezing of key financial assets, are typical of targeted sanctions, sometimes dubbed as "smart sanctions." The idea of targeted sanctions developed specifically out of a need to amelio-

rate the grave negative externalities of preexisting comprehensive trade sanctions, the biggest example being the UN's comprehensive trade embargo on Iraq throughout the 1990s.[63] Though it is generally agreed that the sanctions were effective in preventing Saddam Hussein from acquiring Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), it is also acknowledged that sanctions created excessive humanitarian and security problems.[64] UNSCR 2094, which contains provisions such as inspecting North Korean vessels on the high seas, tightening customs inspections, and preventing bulk cash flows, is hardly designed to have such nationwide economic and humanitarian impacts, even if it were to be fully enforced. It is unrealistic for China to assume that the full enforcement of UNSCR 2094 will serve as a critical blow to the North Korean regime.

Rather, UNSCR 2094 should be viewed as one of many efforts to mitigate risk on the Korean Peninsula, especially as a key tool in raising barriers of entry for North Korea's nuclear program. The aim of the latest round of sanctions is quite focused—to render the completion of Pyongyang's nuclear arsenal as difficult and costly as possible for the leadership.[65] Perhaps when UNSCR 1718 and 1874 were passed, China was hopeful that the threat of sanctions, rather than the enforcement of sanctions, was enough to induce Pyongyang to reconsider its nuclear program. However, targeted sanctions differ from traditional economic sanctions precisely in that the estimated cost to the regime is less, and therefore less threatening. Any hope that China held for North Korea to stop its nuclear program simply from threats alone should now be long gone. Expectations for policy change have proved unrealistic, with demonstrated proof that North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities have improved significantly. Whereas China regarded adoption of UN resolutions in the past as a useful tool

63 Daniel W. Drezner, "Sanctions Sometimes Smart: Targeted Sanctions in Theory and Practice," *International Studies Review*, 2011. See also: David Rose, "North Korea's Dollar Store," *Vanity Fair*, August 5, 2009, http://www.vanityfair.com/politics/features/2009/09/office-39-200909; and Paul Rexton Kan, Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr. And Robert M. Collins, *Criminal Sovereignty: Understanding North Korea's Illicit International Activities*. Strategic Studies Institute, March 2010.

64 It was estimated that the Iraq sanctions caused up to 227,000 excess deaths among young children, and cut Iraq's GDP to roughly half. Such trade embargoes also increased black markets, organized crime syndicates, and transnational smuggling networks that persisted long after sanctions ended in Iraq. See: Daniel W. Drezner, "Sanctions Sometimes Smart: Targeted Sanctions in Theory and Practice," *International Studies Review,* 2011. For a discussion of North Korea's own illegal money-making activities, see: Paul Rexton Kan, Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr. and Robert M. Collins, *Criminal Sovereignty: Understanding North Korea's Illicit International Activities*, Strategic Studies Institute, 2010. See also: Rose, "North Korea's Dollar Store."

65 For an analysis of UNSCR 2094's intent compared to its endowed capabilities, see: Benjamin Habib, "Deconstructing UNSC Resolution 2094: The Response To North Korea's Third Nuclear Test," *Dr. Benjamin Habib*, March 9, 2013, http://drbenjaminhabib.wordpress.com/2013/03/09/deconstructing-unsc-resolution-2094/.

to send warning signals, China must view UNSCR 2094 as a practical tool to manage the speed of North Korea's nuclear program, one that requires actual enforcement.

Second, the United States should strike a balance between cooperative and coercive measures when inducing China to enforce sanctions. While conveying the increasing security costs of allowing a nuclear North Korea has been effective, the method also inherently creates a fear of real conflict in the peninsula through miscalculation and increased uncertainty over US intentions.

Following North Korea's third nuclear test in February, the United States has been quick to turn the Korean Peninsula into a weapons exhibition show, with nuclear-capable B-52, stealth B-2, and fifth generation F-22 flyovers, as well as the deployment of nuclear powered Cheyenne submarine and the SBX-1 radar system.[66] The US government sees ballistic missile defense cooperation with South Korea and Japan as another lever to pressure Beijing to shift its North Korea policy. The Chinese MFA expressed its displeasure with this increased cooperation but has not acknowledged the link to its North Korea policy.[67] North Korea's missile tests provide a convenient excuse for enhanced cooperation, since missile defense systems could also be used against China and thus affect its second-strike capability.[68] While the US government has asserted that the increased deployment of missile defense systems is not targeted at China or Beijing's policy, US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense Aston Carter said "If the Chinese find them the kinds of things they don't like to see, there's an easy way to address that, which is to talk to the North Koreans about stopping these provocations."[69] The US government has also used joint military exercises with South Korea as a way to express dissatisfaction with China's North Korea policy and temporarily raise the security cost of Beijing's support in a dramatic fashion. The B-2 flyover can also been interpreted as a warning to China.[70]

66 David Chance and Phil Stewart, "North Korea readies missiles after US stealth bombers fly over South," *Reuters*, March 29, 2013, http://uk.reuters.com/article/2013/03/29/uk-korea-north-idUKBRE92R13Q20130329.

67 Chris Buckley, "China Cites Risk of New Tension as US Bolsters Missile Defenses," *New York Times*, March 18, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/19/world/asia/china-cites-risk-of-tension-as-us-bolsters-missile-defenses.html.

68 Neil MacFarquhar and Jane Perlez, "China Looms Over Response To Nuclear Test By North Korea," *New York Times*, February 12, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/02/13/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-test.html?pagewanted=all.

69 Eckert, "Analysis: In bitter irony for China, North Korea furthers US strategic goals."

70 The B-2 was the aircraft responsible for bombing the Chinese embassy in Yugoslavia, which some analysts believe will serve as a signal to Beijing that the United States is serious about North Korea. See: Anna Mulrine, "US stealth bomber as messenger: what it says to China, North Korea," *Christian*

Another example is the use of the George Washington aircraft carrier during November 2010 in waters between South Korea and China, despite strong Chinese protests that the exercise should be conducted on the other side of South Korea.[71] Following Beijing's defense of North Korea's attack on the Cheonan in March 2010, Deputy Secretary of State James Steinberg said, "though [these exercises] are not directed at China, the exercises are a direct result of China's support for North Korea and unwillingness to denounce their aggression."[72] The most blatant security threat from the United States to China over North Korea to be publicly acknowledged was former US President Bush's statement to former Chinese President Jiang Zemin in February 2003 that "if we could not solve the problem [of denuclearization] diplomatically, then [Bush] would have to consider a military strike against North Korea."[73] The fact that China started the Six Party Talks as host six months later suggests this approach may have had some influence over China's North Korea policy.

Yet the apparent success of coercive measures should not dictate that the US government should abandon dialogue and cooperation going forward. Dealing with miscalculations and misperceptions arising out of these military demonstrations is also an integral part in assuring China that sanctions enforcements will not trigger any Chinese fears about instability in the peninsula into becoming a reality. Since part of China's resistance to fully enforcing sanctions is a fear of collapse linked to suspicions of US intentions in the region, increased dialogue between the US and Chinese governments on the crucial issues of "rebalancing," US military posture in the region and post-collapse scenarios would go a long way to decrease Chinese suspicions, and in turn reduce the strategic value of North Korea, finally leading to increased enforcement. US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin Dempsey's April visit to Beijing was one effort to clarify US intensions in the region against the backdrop of the Korean crisis after Secretary of State John Kerry had just visited to urge China

Science Monitor, March 28, 2013, http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Military/2013/0328/US-stealth-bomber-as-messenger-what-it-says-to-China-North-Korea. The B-2 deployment also harks back to the atomic bomber diplomacy under President Harry Truman during the Berlin Crisis of 1949-1950 and at the outset of the Korean War. See: Roger Dingman, "Atomic Diplomacy during the Korean War," *International Security* 13, no. 3 (1988-1989): 50-91.

71 John Pomfret, "US aircraft carrier's arrival off Korean Peninsula also sends a message to China," *Washington Post*, November 25, 2010, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/11/24/AR2010112407028.html.

72 Gertz, "New Details Point to Sinking by N. Korean Torpedo."

73 George W. Bush, *Decision Points*, New York: Crown, 2010: 424.

to press North Korea. In return for US dialogue, General Dempsey received his hosts' "assurance that they are working on it."[74]

While the results of coordination may appear to be less tangible, the rhetoric is crucial in mitigating the negative externalities of coercive tactics. The United States took a good step in this direction when Ambassador Rice introduced of the US draft resolution as jointly drafted with China, which sent a strong signal that US-China cooperation over North Korea sanctions was at a high point. Though some were disheartened at the results of the China visit by David Cohen, Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence at the US Department of Treasury, it is important for such dialogues to occur frequently and candidly at the working level as well as in high diplomatic exchanges.[75]

Third, recent history suggests the most effective way to compel Beijing to enforce sanctions on North Korea is to enact unilateral sanctions against North Korea that threaten Chinese economic interests and access to the US market. While Beijing is vehemently opposed to unilateral sanctions, the one instance of true hard-hitting sanctions on North Korea with Chinese cooperation was the US unilateral sanctions on Banco Delta Asia in 2005 for money laundering.[76] Following shortly after the 2005 Joint Statement, in what is widely considered to be a diplomatic bluster resulting from a lack of coordination between Washington bureaucracies, the sanctions scuttled a breakthrough in denuclearization negotiations over North Korea's nuclear program. Nevertheless, the unilateral sanctions immediately drove China to action. According to David Asher, former head of the North Korea Activities Group at the National Security Council, the unilateral sanctions were also directed at China; "Banco Delta was a symbolic target. We were trying to kill the chicken to scare the monkeys. And the monkeys were big Chinese banks doing business in North Korea."[77] Beijing enforced the Bush administration's unilateral sanctions, despite no legal obliga-

74 Jane Perlez, "US General Sees Hope for Chinese Help on Korea," *New York Times*, April 24, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/25/world/asia/us-hopeful-after-talks-with-china.html?gwh=7AA93D19CF9FB4750257252F9E54D0EE.

75 Terri Yue Jones, "US hopeful of strong Chinese action on North Korea," *Reuters*, March 22, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/22/us-korea-north-usa-idUSBRE92L02E20130322. See also: Andrew Browne, "US Believes China to Toe Line on North Korea Sanctions," *New York Times*, March 22, 2013, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424127887324373204578376022445978456.html.

76 Timothy Gardner and Arshad Mohammed, "US grants Iran sanctions exceptions to China," *Reuters*, June 28, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/28/us-usa-iran-sanctions-china-idUSBRE85R16L20120628. See also: David Lague and Donald Greenlees,"Squeeze on Banco Delta Asia Hit North Korea Where It Hurt," *New York Times*, January 18, 2007, http://www.nytimes.com/2007/01/18/world/asia/18iht-north.4255039.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0.

77 Peter Lee, "China in America's sanctions crosshairs," *Asia Times*, June 24, 2010, http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/LF24Ad03.html.

tion to do so, and froze North Korean assets for fear of losing access to the US banking system.

A similar set of unilateral sanctions would likely temporarily strain the US-China relationship, but may be a necessary step to motivate China to reconsider its approach in line with its international obligations under UN sanctions. Indeed, the US government unilaterally sanctioned the DPRK's Foreign Trade Bank in March, the main foreign exchange bank for the country, after China opposed sanctioning the bank in UNSCR 2094.[78] To the surprise of many but in following its track record, the Bank of China announced it would cut ties with the bank, reflecting the effectiveness of US unilateral sanctions when they threaten China's interests.[79] The US government could levy unilateral sanctions against Pyongyang that would hit Chinese companies if they fail to enforce them. The United States could also sanction Chinese companies caught selling goods the United States deems in violation of UN sanctions, according to the US list of banned luxury goods, by banning those Chinese companies from the US market. The US government could also propose sending US customs officials to Dalian port and Beijing airport, the two most popular places for North Korea trafficking through China, similar to US-China cooperation on food security with US Food and Drug Administration officials working in China.

Another sanctions action outside of the UN would be to follow actions against Iran and work with the European Union to have North Korea removed from SWIFT, the international electronic financial settlement system.[80] Since North Korea is not as involved in the international financial system, this would not impact Pyongyang as much as Tehran, but the image of US and European Union pressure would lend credibility to the seriousness of purpose the international community holds against the North's nuclear program, especially if China publicly supported such a move. One scholar suggested "the Treasury Department should declare the entire North Korean government a primary money laundering concern" and sanction Chinese banks if they violate sanctions.[81]

78 Stephan Haggard, "The Foreign Trade Bank Sanctions," *North Korea: Witness to Transformation*, March 22, 2013, http://www.piie.com/blogs/nk/?p=9790. See also: Antoni Slodkowski and Warren Strobel, "Japan, Australia to sanction North Korean bank as part of US-led crackdown," *Reuters*, March 26, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/26/us-korea-north-bank-idUSBRE92P04T20130326; and Leon V. Sigal, "How North Korea Evades Financial Sanctions," *38North*, May 3, 2013, http://38north.org/2013/05/lsigal050313/.

79 Keith Bradsher and Nick Cumming-Bruce, "China Cuts Ties With Key North Korean Bank," *New York Times*, May 7, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/05/08/world/asia/china-cuts-ties-with-north-korean-bank.html?gwh=725EF0E1FC00CC7E258F24AF7B282B43.

80 "Payments system SWIFT to expel Iranian banks Saturday," *Reuters*, March 15, 2012, http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/03/15/us-nuclear-iran-idUSBRE82E15M20120315.

81 Rachel Oswald, "US Should Sanction Chinese Banks Laundering North Korean Money: Experts,"

While these measures may induce a fast Chinese response, there is no guarantee that this response would be favorable and the undoubtedly high cost to US-China relations would be worth an uncertain and possibly intangible benefit to the US's denuclearization efforts.[82]

The three aforementioned tools are by no means a panacea in getting China to consistently and effectively enforce targeted sanctions on North Korea. However, they suggest tangible ways that regional stakeholders can shape China's decision-making framework by increasing incentives for enforcement and mitigating roadblocks on its path. Working to close the incentive gap between the legislator and the enforcer is an important step for regional cooperative in managing heightened risk on the Korean Peninsula.

Conclusion: Tempered Expectations Necessary

The adoption of UNSCR 2094 may be the first evidence that the United States' cooperative approach is paying dividends, but the true test will be China's willingness to fully implement the new round of sanctions to the spirit of the law and not simply the letter of the law over the long-term. On this matter, it is important not to take the recent media hype about a Chinese "recalculation" of North Korea policy at face value, but to carefully gauge where China stands in its incentives in and aversions to enforcing sanctions.

Recent reporting paints a conflicting picture of China's enforcement of UNSCR 2094. North Korea reportedly pulled its money from Chinese banks before the test to avoid any repercussions, and China has reportedly followed through on North Korean fears by warning North Korean banks to not violate sanctions.[83] Furthermore, the Ministry of Transport "said it expected all government departments to follow sanctions and ensure no transport of banned goods."[84]

Global Security Newswire, March 5, 2013, http://www.nti.org/gsn/article/us-should-sanction-chinese-banks-launder-north-korean-money-experts/. See also: Joshua Stanton and Sung-Yoon Lee, "Don't' Engage Kim Jong Un—Bankrupt Him," *Foreign Policy*, January 9, 2013, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/articles/2013/01/09/dont_engage_kim_jong_un_bankrupt_him.

82 For more possible sanctions, see: Colum Lynch, "Is there anything left to sanction in North Korea," *Foreign Policy*, February 13, 2013, http://turtlebay.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2013/02/13/is_there_anything_left_to_sanction_in_north_korea.

83 Mike Richman, "Analysts: China Likely to Support New Sanctions Against N. Korea," Voice of America, February 9, 2013, http://www.voanews.com/content/china-likely-to-support-new-sanctions-against-north-korea/1600524.html. See: Jack Kim and Ju-min Park, "China fires warning shot at North Korea banks: report," *Reuters*, March 19, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/19/us-korea-north-china-idUSBRE92I09P20130319; and Koichiro Ishida, "Fearing sanctions, N. Korean merchants pull their cash from Chinese banks," *Asahi Shimbun*, March 14, 2013, http://ajw.asahi.com/article/asia/korean_peninsula/AJ201303140093.

84 Ben Blanchard, "China steps up customs checks, but North Korea trade robust," *Reuters*, April

At the same time, the Ministry of Finance began to crack down on illegal financial transactions by North Korean banks, which beforehand went largely unenforced. [85] Despite reportedly higher scrutiny of Chinese exports to North Korea at the border, trade remains unaffected and violations are still occurring and Chinese diplomats themselves said that sanctions enforcement will "not go as far as the Obama administration wanted."[86] While US officials initially applauded Chinese enforcement, highlighted by David Cohen's comments, US officials are now reportedly already frustrated by China's lack of enforcement, as evidenced by the continued luxury goods trade in Beijing.[87] This suggests that only time will tell where China's priorities lie and how far the Xi administration is willing to enforce sanctions.

The official refrain remains: China is facing limited options with less influence than previously thought and must prioritize stability over another Korean War and subsequent refugee crisis. Yet the ground situation continues to worsen: North Korea demonstrated that it is making significant inroads into becoming a full blown nuclear state with the capability to launch nuclear attack on countries including the United States, Beijing's diplomatic leverage on Pyongyang consistently continues to deteriorate, and South Korea, Japan, and the United States are increasing military activity in the region. The "muddle through" strategy is generating increasing diplomatic and strategic costs, and it is up to China to decide when the costs are high enough to outweigh the benefits. A good start would be to deliberate on whether some of the existing roadblocks to enforcement stem from old misconceptions and inefficient structural problems. North Korea has always been a land of lousy options, but some options are less lousy than others. **Y**

30, 2013, http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/04/30/us-korea-north-sanctions-china-idUSBRE93T15E20130430.

85 Jenny Jun, "Dealing with a Sore Lip: Parsing China's "Recalculation" of North Korea Policy," *38North*, March 29, 2013, http://www.38north.org/2013/03/jjun032913/. See: Shaun Waterman, "China doing 'quite well' enforcing U.N. sanctions on North Korea, South says," *Washington Times*, April 15, 2013, http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/apr/15/china-doing-quite-well-enforcing-un-sanctions-nort/.

86 Ben Blanchard, "China steps up customs checks, but North Korea trade robust," *Reuters*, April 30, 2013. See also: Malcolm Moore, "China breaking UN sanctions to support North Korea," *Telegraph*, April 13, 2013, http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/northkorea/9991907/China-breaking-UN-sanctions-to-support-North-Korea.html; and Mark Landler, "Detecting Shift, US Makes Case to China on North Korea," *New York Times*, April 5, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/06/world/asia/us-sees-china-as-lever-to-press-north-korea.html?pagewanted=all&gwh=5CFA58A3D7F4FD8C0845499852E265C0.

87 Browne, "US Believes China To Toe Line On North Korea Sanctions." See: Perlez, "Chinese Editor Suspended for Article on North Korea;" and Rajagopalan, "North Korean elite beating sanctions, one plasma TV at a time."

CHALLENGES TO REFORM IN NORTH KOREA: STRUCTURE, AGENCY AND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE SELECTORATE

James Burt
London School of Economics and Political Science

Discussions concerning reform in North Korea have generally spent little time considering the impact of the social structures that underpin North Korean society. Instead, material factors—such as economic restructuring, foreign aid, or subversive new media—have taken precedence in discussions concerning change. Yet predictions of impending reform or collapse in North Korea that have drawn from material cues have, evidently, fallen short of their marks. In light of these failures, this paper seeks to refocus our collective lens upon the foundations of the society that we seek to understand. It asks why and how North Koreans reproduce and sustain a social order that, from the outside at least, appears highly imbalanced. In doing so, North Korean society's enduring ideas and norms, its accepted rules and beliefs, and its collective knowledge and language are all seen to inform how transformative power is employed. This duality between North Korea's social structure and its agency serves as more than an abstract imagining; rather, it is crucial to understanding how reform in North Korean society may materialize. While not denying the impact that material changes have brought to North Korean society—for example, the collapse of the Public Distribution System—this paper places a greater emphasis on understanding society's foundations and the stability of its institutions and power relations. Using Anthony Giddens' Structuration Theory, the social institution of ideology in North Korean society serves to illustrate this approach. The paper concludes by arguing that an understanding of North Korea's social world will be vital to future discussions concerning stability on the Korean Peninsula.

Introduction

Since Kim Jong-un came to power in 2011, the longstanding dichotomy in North Korean analyst circles between "collapsists" and reformists has seemingly swung in favor of the reformists. From the agricultural reforms of the "June 28 New Economic Management Measures" to the development of Spe-

cial Economic Zones, suggestions of change have not gone unnoticed by the more optimistic observer. But what if Kim Jong-un and North Korea's ruling elite at-large are not as free to choose a different path for their country as we may think? What if they are as constrained by its rules, its institutions and its conventions as the North Korean populace? Prevailing physical conditions still matter as impediments to reform in North Korea but more fundamental still is an element that few have held aloft to scrutiny: North Korea's social structures.

Easily misunderstood, North Korea's social structures have endured relative anonymity in academia alongside studies of the country's economic, political and military drivers. Admittedly, minor reforms such as the proliferation of mobile phones or the rise of *jangmadang*[1] offer more immediate and noticeable glimpses of change. Yet these reforms rarely prompt the key question: have these or similar elements, either individually or collectively, rebalanced North Korea's state or society in the last decade? An objective evaluation suggests they have not.

Structure and Agency in North Korea

Rather than getting caught up with microscopic indications of social change, social reform requires an analysis of North Korea's unique social structures and their interaction with human agency. One tool for doing so is Structuration Theory. Developed by Anthony Giddens in the late 1970s, Structuration Theory moved away from the longstanding sociological debate concerning the primacy of either structure or agency in social life and, much like Pierre Bourdieu, saw the relationship between the two as equal in society's constitution.[2] Placing both structure and agent at his theory's axis, Giddens saw the fabric of society—notably its institutions, such as language and government—as the causes and effects of human agency. This interplay, Giddens argued, gradually normalized and created expectations for accepted modes of conduct within society, which then led to the patterning and routinization of social behavior, the legitimization of social institutions and the reproduction of social practices across time and space. To understand why enduring behaviors and institutions within North Korea persist, and how they enable and constrain North Koreans, Structuration Theory offers us a well-placed lens.

At the core of Structuration Theory lie social structures. As the temporal principles that guide social life, structures enable and constrain social interac-

1 For a detailed definition of jangmadang, see "Jangmadang," *Daily NK,* http://www.dailynk.com/english/db_info.php?db_name=jangmadang.

2 Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986).

tions through their existence in "the memory traces... of knowledgeable human agents."[3] Binding time and space, structures make "it possible for discernibly similar social practices to exist" across society and forge a sense of togetherness that provides individuals with a shared understanding of what to do and why to do it.[4] Described by Ludwig Wittgenstein as the "things that cannot be put into words... [but] make themselves manifest,"[5] Giddens terms this human understanding of structure "knowledgeability."[6] Importantly, knowledgeability of how one should and should not act is not innate—it is experienced, learned, and informed by structural rules and resources. These rules may be implicit, such as linguistic norms, or more explicit, like codified laws; while resources, such as influence or control over material capabilities, act merely as the conduits through which power and knowledge is exercised and structures are actualized. In this sense, structural rules and resources do not exist independently from society. Instead, they exist through, and are given meaning by, the agents of society themselves.

Since structures exist solely through human agents and are "temporally 'present' only in their instantiation," agency—that is, the capacity of an individual to affect an outcome—is as central to Giddens' theory as structure.[7] In essence, every human is an agent and all agents draw upon knowledge gained from their social environment to perform day-to-day acts. As an agent is invariably pre-existed by social structures and institutions, their choices will inevitably be bounded by the knowledge they have acquired from society.[8] Acting within their known boundaries, agents unavoidably monitor their actions to adhere to social rules and norms, which in turn reproduce, legitimize and reinforce structures. This interplay between structure and agency is, Giddens contends, the "duality of structure."[9]

The most important and deeply embedded social structures within any society are its institutions. Defined by Giddens as "the more enduring features of social life," institutions embody structure, agency and power relations within

3 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 17.

4 Ibid.

5 Ludwig Wittgenstein, "Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus" (First published in Annalen der Naturphilosophie, 1921), quoted in Stephen P. Schwartz, *A Brief History of Analytic Philosophy: From Russell to Rawls* (Chichester, Sussex: John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 2012), 57.

6 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 21.

7 Anthony Giddens, *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure, and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979), 64.

8 Furthermore, agents will inevitably be constrained by their physical capabilities.

9 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 19.

society.[10] They reinforce structure and are realized through agency. Visible in formal arenas, such as government, and in less perceptible arenas, like ideology, institutions will compel and imitate the dynamism of human society.

As Giddens' notion of duality suggests, social structures and institutions are not as deterministic for human agency as many Structuralists, such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, would insist. For while structures and institutions may indeed be compelling, Giddens contends that human agents can always exercise at least a modicum of power. Termed the "dialectic of control," power may simply be an agent's choice between living and dying, or for agents with greater social capital, power may be exercised to "regulate the overall conditions of system reproduction either to keep things as they are or to change them."[11] Power is, therefore, both enabling and constraining for agents.

The strength of Structuration Theory for studies of North Korea is two-fold. Firstly, Structuration Theory moves the debate on reform away from the reductionism of micro and macro theories that seek to explain North Koreans *or* North Korea. Just as domestic and international politics cannot be separated, North Korea's social structures and human agents are similarly indivisible. Secondly, Giddens' notion that agency and structure are inherently relational, not just in theory but also in praxis, ensures that our scope of analysis can be concentrated on the *processes* of social interaction that will either enable or constrain reform on the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea's One Percent

When we look at the potential for reform, we look for the agents in society who hold truly transformative power. As a totalitarian state, power in North Korea—in both its allocative and authoritative forms[12]—is highly concentrated within the various political, military and economic institutions that are dominated by individuals from the three "rings of power"—the Kim family, the Korean People's Army and the Korean Workers' Party (KWP).[13] However, true transformative power—that is the ability of individuals to alter embedded social structures—is held by an even smaller group of North Korean agents.

10 Ibid., 24.

11 Ibid., 28.

12 Allocative resources refer to material entities while authoritative resources refer to the tools that enable control over other agents.

13 Ken Gause, "The Role and Influence of the Party Apparatus," in *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*, ed. Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 30.

Known as the "selectorate,"[14] this group has long fulfilled the role of "system *Guardian*s."[15] Comprised of "between 200 and 5,000 people"[16] who occupy the most influential seats in North Korea's principal institutions—such as the National Defense Commission and the KWP—as per Michel Foucault's power-knowledge nexus, the selectorate's preponderance of social capital has granted it the ability, and the legitimacy, to construct a "regime of truth" in society and to "intervene…with the effect of influencing a specific process or state of affairs" through institutional rules and resources.[17]

Yet power has not been limitlessly enabling, it has simultaneously restricted space for autonomy. Given meaning by the social system and thus subject to society's rules and norms, power is a means rather than an end. In this vein, power has not simply been a resource for elite self-interest in the halls of Pyongyang. Instead, power has been given meaning by structure and agency—and it is this interplay that merits further analysis in any discussion of reform on the Korean Peninsula. Following this outline of Structuration Theory, a brief exploratory impression of the interplay between structure and agency within one of North Korea's principal institutions—ideology—is offered.

Ideology

What makes North Korea's system so sustainable is its ideology. To be sure, such a status is difficult to achieve and therefore highly valuable. It takes a long time to be built and for its sustainability needs symbols and rituals that are replicated and performed again and again. Importantly, there is little room for flexibility: in order to turn a process into a ritual and an image into an icon, *stability* and *consistency* are key strategies.[18]

Charles Armstrong has commented that "in no country in the world is political ideology more visible than in North Korea."[19] Yet—structurally speaking—ideology is a virtual institution. It exists within the memory traces of knowledgeable agents and unlike other institutions, such as government, ideology is

14 Daniel Byman and Jennifer Lind, "Pyongyang's Survival Strategy: Tools of Authoritarian Control in North Korea," *International Security* 35, no. 1 (2010): 60.

15 Nicolas Levi, "A Big Day for the Elite Clans," *Daily NK,* http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk03600&num=9051.

16 Byman and Lind, "Pyongyang's Survival Strategy," 60.

17 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 14.

18 Ruediger Frank, "North Korea's Ideology after April 2012: Continuity or Disruption?," *38North*, http://38north.org/2012/05/rfrank050912/. [emphasis added]

19 Charles Armstrong, "The Role and Influence of Ideology," in *North Korea in Transition: Politics, Economy, and Society*, ed. Kyung-Ae Park and Scott Snyder (Plymouth: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2013), 3.

not easily materialized or codified. Indeed, ideology may only be instantiated through its reproduction in the behavior of agents. For this reason the *visibility* of ideology within North Korea is not only indicative of its embeddedness as a social institution, but it also hints at the power that North Korea's selectorate have invested in its subsistence.

Existing as a virtual structure, ideology, Giddens argues, becomes embedded and institutionalized by way of "signification."[20] Referring explicitly to the *communication* of ideology through modes of language, discourse and symbolic orders, ideology conveys a set of rules—language, beliefs and norms—and sanctions a set of resources—knowledge, authority and education—for agents to interpret and draw upon in everyday life. As agents utilize these rules and resources, ideology will increasingly mirror their social reality and provide agents with a very real "ontological security."[21] Once these structured social practices are embedded across time and space, ideology can then be said to have become the "medium and outcome of the conduct it recursively organizes."[22]

In affording society with an understanding of its social reality, ideology can be utilized by those agents who hold authoritative power to justify an existing social hierarchy, to enact some form of social-good, or, conversely, to protect a set of unequal power relations. In this regard, Giddens' observation that domination, power, and ideology are coterminous[23] is not dissimilar to Antonio Gramsci's notion of a hegemonic political bloc that manufactures consent through its control of knowledge. Still, ideology will not always be enabling for those who wield power. Ideological structures also impose normative constraints upon agency and the use of power—and this is no more evident than in North Korea's selectorate.

Juche

Inside North Korea, Juche ideology functions as the sole "legitimate Weltanschauung."[24] Signifying a distinctive philosophy of social life, Juche is communicated through a set of implicit and explicit rules that help to constitute meaning and sanction social conduct in day-to-day life. In Giddens' terminology, Juche ideology is one of North Korea's "more enduring features of social

20 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 29-33.
21 Ibid., xxiii.
22 Ibid., 374.
23 Anthony Giddens, *Sociology*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997), 582-583.
24 Han S. Park, "Military-First (Songun) Politics: Implications for External Policies," in *New Challenges of North Korean Foreign Policy*, ed. Kyung-Ae Park (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 96-97.

life."[25] Open to a plethora of translations, Juche can broadly be defined as the "essence of self-determination" (from the Chinese character *ju*, meaning rule, and *che*, meaning essence).[26] Whether Juche stems from, or even masquerades as, the Confucian logics of self-defense and sovereignty, Marxism-Leninism, anti-colonialism, Korean race-based nationalism, or even Kim Il-sung's understanding of Woodrow Wilson's concept of self-rule is debatable. One certainty, however, is that Juche's durability owes much to the ongoing interplay between institution and agent.

Evidently, the failures in the practical application of Juche are glaring—but we must always bear in mind that ideology exists in the "memory traces orienting the conduct of knowledgeable human agents."[27] Hence, structures will exist both within and apart from the material world. For this reason, the application of Juche in North Korean policies should be seen as distinct from the application of Juche within the practical consciousnesses of North Korea's agents. In this vein, the restrictions that Juche imposes upon the selectorate can be viewed as "more 'internal' than exterior," and rather than being limited by material factors, are born from a tacit knowledgeability of structural constraints and negative sanctions.[28] Here, structural constraints refer to the limits that an agent's knowledgeability imposes upon their perceived choices for action; while negative sanctions refer to the limitations placed upon choice and action by other agents that exercise power, which may range from "the mild expression of disapproval" to "the direct application of force or violence."[29]

Considering these constraints upon autonomy, are North Korea's selectorate able to reform the meaning of Juche? Despite enabling the selectorate's domination within society, no North Korean agent—from Kim Jong-un down—is immune from the cognitive pushes and structural pulls of their social—and in this case, ideological—environment. Even those who are frequently exposed to competing narratives and philosophies—such as Jang Seong-taek, Kim Yong-nam, or Choe Thae-bok—cannot retreat fully from their knowledge, their identities and their learned ideological bounds. Theories of cognitive consistency demonstrate that agents will, more often than not, discount dissonant information that runs contrary to their beliefs.[30] This intrinsic human preference for

25 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 24.
26 Kenneth Quinones, "Juche's Role in North Korea's Foreign Policy," in *North Korea's Foreign Policy Under Kim Jong Il: New Perspectives*, ed. Tae-hwan Kwak and Seung-ho Joo (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 18.
27 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 17.
28 Ibid., 25.
29 Ibid., 175.
30 Craig A. Anderson, Mark R. Lepper and Lee Ross, "Perseverance of Social Theories: The Role of Ex-

consistency not only buttresses belief, it also results in the hardening of belief. As such, no amount of foreign travel, material goods, access to media,[31] or inflowing capital is likely to induce a mass ideological-rethinking within North Korea's selectorate.

Correspondingly, the participation of the selectorate in the application of negative sanctions—such as the removal of Pak Nam-gi, Kim Yong-sam and Ri Je-gang—evidences not just factional wrangling, but the upholding of tacit established social practices in the memory traces of agents. As Armstrong has rightly observed, "behavior [in North Korea]—both at the individual and the collective level—refers back to ideology and is justified by it."[32]

Structuration Theory does not imply that change within one of North Korea's most enduring and powerful institutions is unachievable. Instead, it puts reform into context. Even though individual agency and the dialectic of control may have afforded North Korea's selectorate with the *capability* to act outside of their learned ideological bounds, Juche's structural constraints and existing sanctions have, on balance, proved to be far more compelling. Faith in Juche does not imply a blind obedience or an unadulterated fideism on behalf of the selectorate—instead it demonstrates how structure interacts with agency to become an essential part of cognitive reasoning, practical and discursive consciousness, self-legitimation and social knowledge. As Giddens notes, "the knowledge they [agents] possess is not incidental to the persistent patterning of social life but is integral to it."[33]

Conclusion: Refocusing our lens on reform

This paper has argued for a third method to study reform in North Korea.[34] In this approach, the false dichotomy between structure and agency is rejected and replaced by a more equitable and interpretive analysis of the social structures and human agency that govern action. This third way finds that social change is not dependent upon the material world, but rests upon transformations in the agency and the structures that constitute society. Free from determinism and objectivism, social transformation will always be possible. While this approach

planation in the Persistence of Discredited Information," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 39, no. 6 (1980): 1037-1049.

31 See for example: Nat Kretchun and Jane Kim, "A Quiet Opening: North Koreans in a Changing Media Environment," http://audiencescapes.org/sites/default/files/A_Quiet_Opening_FINAL_InterMedia.pdf.

32 Armstrong, *Influence of Ideology*, 4.

33 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 26.

34 Not to be confused with Giddens' advocacy of a political "Third Way" that sought to reconcile diverging politico-economic policies. Still, this essay's intent to move beyond bifurcated theoretical standpoints is not dissimilar in its underlying objective.

does not deny the value of micro-transformations to society's inhabitants, it does point to certain factors—such as meanings, beliefs, language, norms and institutions—as the crucial drivers for transformative social change.

If reform in North Korea is possible, what conditions are required for the transformation of society? Significantly, societal reform will—almost certainly—be unintentionally constructed, for as Giddens argues, social happenings are "everyone's doing and no one's."[35] Bearing this in mind, the scores of social processes and daily interactions that constitute North Korean society suggest that changes to its social ordering are likely to be the consequences of complex, constantly evolving and multifaceted alterations to the relationship between the selectorate and the institutions that they dominate. However, if ideology can act as an approximate benchmark in North Korea, the routinized reproduction of rules and resources appear relatively stable, as does the social reality it generates. Juche's reification and accompanying power structure has left little room for competing norms, discourses, or agents to challenge its institutional underpinnings, implying that the social practices that support Juche will, for the time being, remain relatively fixed. **Y**

35 Giddens, *Constitution of Society*, 10.

LOOKING PAST THE REGIME: A REVISED POLICY OF "ENGAGEMENT" WITH NORTH KOREA

Shirley Lee
University of Oxford

In our shrinking world, cross-linguistic and intercultural collaborations have become increasingly important. This is especially true for North Korea, a country so often misunderstood and relatively distant in Western discourse. Nevertheless, western commentators on North Korea traditionally lack engagement with a group that has much to offer on the subject: North Koreans in exile, particularly those who not only have first-hand experience of the country, but base their studies of North Korea on this experience and/or continue to maintain ties with those inside the country. We should learn from and build on the lessons of the Orientalist and post-colonial eras by working through the clashes of frameworks that accompany one culture's study of another.

Entry Points into a Closed Society Undergoing Change

The North Korean regime continues to enforce a closed society and prohibits its organic information-flow on multiple fronts. There is no independent media, every kind of art must be approved before publication, and North Koreans cannot communicate freely with outsiders. Those who do pass through these informational borders are either part of a political elite that exists to enforce the regime's communications blockade,[1] or are members of the business classes. While examining those who work in business may provide interesting

1 See, for example: Jang Jin-Sung, "The Propaganda Officers' Latest Coup: South Koreans Mourn The Death of Kim Jong-Il," *New Focus International*, August 2, 2012, http://newfocusintl.com/the-propaganda-officers-latest-coup-south-koreans-mourn-the-death-of-kim-jong-il/.

perspectives,[2] they are an exclusive group set apart from the rest of North Korean society.[3] Moreover, they work for companies that come under the auspices of the regime's institutions, such as the military or domestic security, and their interests are necessarily vested in support of the political elite.[4]

Most significantly, however, if we wish to study a North Korea undergoing change, they are not the driving force behind change; rather, they are people who rely on the changes to gain advantage for themselves.[5] We need the wider context of the behavior. In fact, if we talk to these people of the business class, we will realize that there is a group of traders— mainly Chinese—who really dominate the North Korean economy in a way that is relevant for changes that affect the rest of the country. This is crucially linked, in an interesting relationship, to the increasing number of channels of communication in and out of the country that fall outside the authorities' control. This is the jangmadang: the unauthorized markets comprised not solely of traders, but also of consumers across the vast majority of the country.[6] Through this porous border of illicit trade, goods are entering North Korea,[7] as well as a new mindset and informational awareness is entering into North Korean society.

These openings have not yet been given sufficient coverage either by mainstream media or by academic studies of North Korea. With regard to media, although there is said to be "excessive" coverage of North Korea on the security issues and even on human rights issues, the angles of entry into a holistic view of change as is happening in North Korea remain grossly underreported. In academic studies, there are also particular entry points into North Korea regarded as standard, such as sources stemming from within the sanctioned framework of state media. Moreover, there are polarizations and assumptions that are particularly striking. What follows is not a comprehensive survey, but rather an assessment of the main areas on which commentary on North Korea appears to focus.

Participatory Understanding

2 Felix Abt, *A Capitalist in North Korea* (Amazon Digital Services, 2013).

3 This is detailed in John Everard, *Only Beautiful Please* (Stanford: Asia-Pacific Research Center, 2012).

4 "The New North Korean Elite: the 10% and the 1%," *New Focus International*, March 1, 2013, http://newfocusintl.com/the-new-north-korean-elite-the-10-and-the-1/.

5 "The 'Money Makers' of North Korea," *New Focus International*, March 6, 2013, http://newfocusintl.com/the-money-makers-of-north-korea/.

6 Jangmadang in Korean means, literally, "street/ground market."

7 See: Max Fisher, "Along the Chinese Border, defectors say North Korean province is quietly liberalizing," *Washington Post*, December 28, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2012/12/28/along-the-chinese-border-defectors-say-north-korean-province-is-quietly-liberalizing/.

There is a large community of people whose work with North Koreans takes place out of the public eye. The secretive world of Korean-Chinese migrants with links to border crossings and the dangerous work of South Korean missionaries and human rights activists fall into this category, along with those who maintain business ties to North Korean agents of the state, both directly and indirectly.

This spectrum of activities is not normally used as material to be dealt with in mainstream or academic discourse. With regard to the humanitarian efforts, there are wo general reasons. First, it is necessary to keep off the radar; and second, perhaps this material is too closely associated with advocacy. Stories and information that deserve an audience are sometimes filtered through the lens of the activist, whose views may not be shared by all.[8] Sometimes, the language barrier exacerbates the situation; at other times, cultural barriers prove to be further obstacles.[9] This is especially clear even in South Korea, where there is no linguistic barrier. The indifference in South Korean mainstream attitudes on issues pertaining to North Korea is perhaps more insidious than the ignorance of the western audience. This phenomenon is in part intertwined with the history of "progressives" being seen as apologists for North Korea in the context of their opposition to authoritarian rule in South Korea.[10] Although it should not be the case, these polarizing presentational barriers appear to get in the way of proper academic treatment of these subjects.

With regard to illicit North Korea-related business activities, there is also the necessity of keeping a low profile. Commentary in this field is historically plagued with a lack of rigor, and this, unsurprisingly, leads to a mixed reaction from the public: generally, either people are already aware of these activities and do not want to hear more, or they find them to bizarre to believe. Unfortunately, a middle ground between these two reactions is probably required for constructive discourse.

As for other types of understanding about North Korea gained through participation, we may mention initiatives that base their activities on taking full advantage of "sanctioned" channels of engagement to enter into a section of North Korea. Tourism falls into this category, as well as academic exchanges, such as those undertaken by Cambridge University, the Pyongyang Project and

8 Adam Cathcart, "Red State, Blue State, Slave State: Reviewing Melanie Kirkpatrick's 'Escape from North Korea,'" *Sino-NK*, November 6, 2012, http://sinonk.com/2012/11/06/red-state-blue-state-slave-state-reviewing-melanie-kirkpatricks-escape-from-north-korea-part-i/.

9 The work done by Rimjingang falls into these categories.

10 Interestingly, North Korean psychological warfare officers cultivated this tendency. See: Jang, "The Propaganda Officers' Latest Coup."

Choson Exchange. There is nothing wrong these kinds of activities *per se*; but as with engagement in the business sphere, we must remember not only that these are limited in scope, but also, that there are other openings. The "Engage Korea" conference held at Oxford University in 2013, for example, states that our understanding and engagement with North Korea must be based on deep study and experience. Yet the statement seems to be compromised by the lack of participation of any North Korean exiles or those who engage in channels outside those that are sanctioned by the regime.[11]

This leads us to the crux of the problem: the polarization of agents in North Korean studies. Those who engage in North Korean studies outside the regime's framework are left out in the cold, according to the current rigid and static dichotomy of "engagement or isolation," which effectively means "engagement with or isolation of the regime."

Part of this can be attributed, of course, to short-term practical circumstances—collaborating with those who fall outside the regime's sanctioned framework may jeopardize one's chances of engaging with the regime through officially permitted channels. However, the point is missed that the regime is not the entirety of North Korea. There is a growing, underreported, and understudied fissure, not only between the regime of North Korea and the society of North Korea, but also between our presentation of North Korea and the reality of North Korea. In this changing context, pursuing engagement solely within the regime's framework—and ignoring the holistic framework of continued transformation—carries with it repercussions: isolating the general population of North Korea from the world. We should realize that participatory understanding as achieved within the regime's sanctioned framework is a limited understanding. We have to deconstruct the harmful and polarizing dichotomy of "engagement or isolation" with the regime and increase our horizons to a North Korea beyond the state.

Observational Understanding

In academic debate, the dichotomy functions in an insidious way. Security analysis, by nature, examines the harmful possibilities of the North Korean regime. Political analysis, in contrast, tends to look at the positive possibilities of political engagement. There is nothing wrong with either approach, yet, if we are trying to understand more about North Korea than the regime's actions with regard to foreign relations, our outlook may perhaps be too narrow.

11 See the Engage Korea's conference homepage, www.engagekorea.org.

For example, arguments about North Korea's July 1, 2002, measures generally conclude that they were made in a reformist spirit.[12] In particular, a belief in the (assumed) existence of "hawks and doves" within the North Korean state is associated with this view. At its essence, this kind of study is based on, and reinforces, the notion that engagement occurs within the regime's framework in order to drive positive change. This may be characterized as "engagement within the sanctioned framework." Yet this type of approach ignores the large and relevant subject of what is really driving change in North Korea. According to reports coming out North Korea (through unofficial, and "unsanctioned" channels), there is overwhelming evidence that the regime is not truly in control of North Korean society. With the collapse of the Public Distribution System and increased reliance of the people on the illegal markets (*jangmadang*), market forces appear to be transforming North Korea in fundamental ways and affecting the regime's decisions.[13]

Moreover, in addition to the fact that change in North Korea may be driven by agents other than the leadership, what if the North Korean leadership does not, in fact, wish for these changes to occur? There is evidence to suggest that reformist attitudes have never been held by the decision-makers of North Korea. There are two ways of approaching this: first, to ask whether reform is in the interest of the decision-makers, (putting aside, for the moment, the composition of this group); second, to ask in whose interest it would be to pursue reform.

With regard to the first question, the current research is problematic in that it focuses on the decision makers, ignoring the larger context of change in North Korea that may be motivating these decision makers. We cannot, of course, blindly assume that these agents are behaving out of altruistic, and not self-interested, motives. Moreover, we can pursue this question in the following context: how is it in their interest to improve the state economy, if the vast majority of North Koreans have ceased to rely on that state economy? It may be an intent to seize control over the economy, rather than to reform it—as has often been suggested.

With regard to the second question, we need to ask which factions would benefit from reform. Yet in my experience of dealing with elite North Korean defectors, there has not been a single one who adheres to the theory of the existence of political factions in North Korea in the sense of "hawks and doves."

12 See: Robert Carlin and Joel Wit, *North Korean Reform* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

13 Essay by Jang Jin-sung in "Tumen Triangle Project." See: "The Tumen Triangle Documentation Project: Sourcing the Chinese-North Korean Border," Issue 1, Adam Cathcart and Christopher Green, eds., *Sino-NK*, http://sinonk.com/2013/04/15/the-tumen-triangle-documentation-project-sourcing-the-chinese-north-korean-border-issue-1/.

Although there are "factions," they appear to be based on the authority of individual ringleaders rather than on shared motives. For example, the increased focus on light industry in North Korea on various occasions could be interpreted not as an increased emphasis on the development of light industry in North Korea by "reformists," but as Kim Kyong-hui (responsible for light industry) reinforcing the basis of her authority.

This leads us to another problematic area, which is our excessive dependence on insecure sources, such as North Korea's state press. Although scholars such as Carlin and Wit have attempted to draw out the existence of factions using state press to voice their viewpoints by relying on a close reading of North Korea's state press, we cannot dismiss the notion that all stances taken in the state press were first ratified by Kim Jong-il.[14]

Similar contradictions arise when we depend on trying to read Kim Jong-il's intentions through his wish to engage in dialogue. Madeleine Albright apparently heard Kim Jong-il say that he wished to reform North Korea but could not, because of the resistance of "hardliners."[15] If we examine this statement in light of what is purported to have been Kim Jong-il's three tenets of diplomacy, in which his orders for dealings with the US were "Ply them with lies, and make sure they are logical lies,"[16] we may reach a different interpretation.

Scholars such as Noland and Haggard have attempted to focus attention on the larger context, basing their studies on data from interviews with North Koreans in exile from all levels of society.[17] Kwon and Chung have also based their studies on conversations with North Koreans in exile, and as a result, have given readers a glimpse into that other framework of thought that exists in North Korea.[18] The former work rests on a quantitative study and the latter on a theoretical study; more comprehensive work in this vein in the qualitative fields would be welcome.

Ultimately, if we miss the larger context of change in North Korea and ignore the fact that looking and engaging within the sanctioned framework is limited, it is likely that we will continue to be confined to a myopic view of North Korea.

---

14 Christopher Green, "Red Box, Blue Box, Green Box: Arguing against Institutional Pluralism," *Sino-NK,* February 8, 2013, http://sinonk.com/2013/02/08/red-box-arguing-against-institutional-pluralism/.

15 Carlin and Wit, *North Korean Reform*.

16 Jang Jin-sung, "The market shall set North Korea free," *New York Times*, April 27, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/27/opinion/global/The-Market-Shall-Set-North-Korea-Free.html?pagewanted=all.

17 Marcus Noland and Stephan Haggard, *Witness to Transformation* (Washington DC: Peterson Institute, 2011).

18 Heonik Kwon and Byung-ho Chung, *North Korea: Beyond Charismatic Politics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2012).

A Policy of "Engagement" with the North Korea Beyond the Regime

The concern here is not to present a single perception of North Korea as "correct," but rather, to scrutinize our current methodology and sources when studying North Korea. Aside from our inability to enter the country freely, there appears to be an intellectual bias in how we are failing to use the resources to which we do have access.

There is certainly value in seeing what can be gleaned from exposure to a limited range of the country's facets, these comprising what the regime chooses to show or promote, and in some cases, what they unwittingly reveal. It seems, however, that a disproportionate amount of energy and resources is given to studies that represent this kind of narrow context. Such studies on North Korea perhaps appeal to that part of the Western mindset that still seeks to study an exotic Other—despite the hindsight of Orientalism.

Take the world's obsession with commenting on and trying to understand the North Korean tears that fell after Kim Jong-il's death. The process of understanding could be taken much further than what is offered by journalistic interviews, which formed the majority of our commentary. For Westerners to understand even their own emotional reactions requires specialist work and much reflection, and it is surely a much more difficult task to grasp the psychological workings of a poorly understood people under a regime as alien as that of North Korea.

One remedy is to conduct more psychological studies with North Koreans in exile in order to understand the nature of their worldviews in greater objective depth. Another related solution is not only to study, but to also work with, North Koreans in exile. At present, engagement in this way is perhaps stunted not only because of a perceived "bias" on the part of those in exile,[19] but also due to our reliance on shared literature as a basis for discussion. This poses some difficulty in making the North Koreans' shared experience the start of our discourse about North Korea.

Arguably, the problem is not limited to the field of North Korean studies. The dichotomy that exists between the writings of agents and that of observers, or of writing that is based on a subjective impulse versus an objective one, appears analogous to features of post-colonialist thought in the humanities.

Edward Said's theory of Orientalism argues that Western studies of the East largely reflected those qualities the West wished to think were contrary to their

19 The vast majority of North Korean exiles are not "defectors" in the political sense. They may perhaps be more accurately described as "exiles"—those who would prefer to remain in their home country, if only they had not been forced out by harsh circumstances.

nature, rather than reflecting the reality of the subject or people being studied. In the sphere of Classics, arguably the cradle of Western civilization and therefore a rich field of application for Said's theory, scholars such as E. Hall have applied Orientalism's lessons to untangle our distorted view of the (artificial) divide between "West" and "East," while writers like Tom Holland have done the same for a popular readership with books such as "Persian Fire."

The philosopher Thomas McEvilley has put forward a similar argument in his book, "The Shape of Ancient Thought." This takes the form of a comparative examination of the scholarly traditions of Eastern and Western philosophies. His discussion of the post-colonial dilemmas within the academic field of Indian studies makes the following points. India gained independence from Britain in the mid-twentieth century but this event did not necessarily lead to intellectual liberation. Many Indian scholars perceived that inaccurate or selective narratives were being used to describe their history and present identity. Understandably frustrated at not being in control of the ways in which their identities were being characterized, a number of oppositional works were produced by Asian writers which were, predictably, dismissed by the West as politically motivated (the subtext of this critique being that the Western perspective was not). Neither could it be assumed that the West was objective in its stance. In fact, the initial judgment of Easterners as less intellectually rigorous than Westerners had arisen from a prejudiced and subjective study of Eastern scholarly traditions.

To my view, this shared experience appears to stem not so much from inherent friction between East and West, but rather from the tension that arises between those traditionally describing and those traditionally being described. There appears to be an element of power play, of a desire to speak louder than those whose world and lives are being described—although it is their world and lives that we are describing. **Y**

WHY DOES CHINA PREVENT NORTH KOREA FROM COLLAPSING?

Shawn Ho
Rajaratnam School of International Studies

Why does China continue to support North Korea and prevent its collapse? Much research has been done on China's pursuit of its various security and economic interests in North Korea. Less research has been conducted on China's geopolitical interests in North Korea (defined here as how China uses North Korea as a tool to enhance its own political position relative to other states in Northeast Asia). Most importantly, there has been no study done on which of these three independent variables—China's geo-political, economic or security interests in North Korea—is the key variable that makes China do its best to prevent North Korea from collapsing. This paper aims to fill that academic gap. Through a critical analysis of the research done thus far by scholars in this field, and through an examination of the latest open-source materials, I arrive at the conclusion that China's North Korea policy is largely driven by a pursuit of its own geo-political interests and less so by its security and economic interests in North Korea.

Introduction

This paper aims to answer a question which remains a puzzle in international relations: why does China continue to support North Korea and prevent its collapse?[1]

1 For this paper, China's policy decisions towards North Korea are those made by the Foreign Affairs Leading Small Group (FALSG) and not those made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) International Liaison Department or the People's Liberation Army (PLA). The apex of Chinese foreign policy-making is in the FALSG which is the primary consultative body of the CCP for foreign policy. Ning Lu, "The Central Leadership, Supraministry Coordinating Bodies, State Council Ministries, and Party Departments," in *The Making of Chinese Foreign and Security Policy in the Era of Reform*, ed. David M. Lampton (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2001), 45-49; and Gregory Moore, "Less Beautiful, Still Somewhat Imperialist: Beijing Eyes Sino-US Relations," in *Handbook of China's International Relations*, ed. Shaun Breslin (London: Routledge, 2010), 135.

In recent years, North Korea's third nuclear test and its attacks on South Korea's Cheonan warship and artillery shelling of Yeonpyeong Island were provocations that were widely condemned by the international community. Despite these condemnations, China continued to maintain an overall policy of supporting North Korea despite knowing that this would result in high costs to China in the form of tremendous damage to both its bilateral relationships with other states and to its international image as a responsible rising power.[2]

Some scholars have attributed China's continued support for North Korea to the "special" relationship between the two states that had first begun during the Korean War when "hundreds of thousands" of Chinese soldiers died fighting alongside North Korean soldiers.[3] However, over the decades, this "special" bilateral relationship has deteriorated significantly and "the ideological fabrics that bound the two together have eroded beyond recognition."[4] China's establishment of diplomatic ties with South Korea in 1992 started China's "Two Koreas" policy and confirmed that "the bond once touted as that of teeth and lips" was "no longer as special."[5] As there is "no altruism in international relations, including those between China and North Korea," it is clear that China has its own interests in mind when it continues to support North Korea.[6] Numerous studies have concluded that China's greatest interest with regard to North Korea is in ensuring that the regime does not collapse.[7]

---

2 For more details on the impact that China's responses to the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong incidents had on its bilateral relationships with the US and South Korea, see: Scott Snyder and See-won Byun, "Cheonan and Yeonpyeong: the Northeast Asian Response to North Korea's Provocations," *Rusi Journal* 156, no. 2 (April/May 2011): 74-81.

3 In October 2009, Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao referred to the "hundreds of thousands" of Chinese casualties and 130,000 Chinese soldiers buried in North Korea. "Wen Jiabao paid visit to People's Volunteer Army Cemetery," *Phoenix*, October 5, 2009, http://news.ifeng.com/mainland/special/wenjiabaofangchao/news/200910/1005_8202_1376953.shtml.

4 Chong-wook Chung, "The Korean Peninsula in China's Grand Strategy," RSIS Working Paper, no. 192, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, March 8, 2010, http://www.rsis.edu.sg/publications/WorkingPapers/WP192.pdf.

5 Samuel Kim, "The Future of China and Sino-ROK Relations," in *The Future of China and Northeast Asia*, eds. Tae-hwan Kwak and Melvin Gurtov (Seoul: Kyungnam University Press, 1997), 271; and Chong-wook Chung, "The Rise of China and the Security Dynamics in the Korean Peninsula," in *China and East Asian Strategic Dynamics: the Shaping of a New Regional Order*, eds. Ming-Jiang Li and Dong-min Lee (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2011), 97.

6 Ding-Li Shen, "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China," *China Security* 2, no. 3 (Autumn 2006): 20. In addition, in his survey of Chinese scholars, Sunny Lee also found that the majority of the scholars he surveyed (at 47 percent) felt that the current relationship between China and North Korea is one which is best described as "ban xin ban yi di peng you" (half trusting, half suspicious friend) and it is no longer one of true friendship or one that reflects a true alliance. Sunny Lee, "Chinese Perspectives on North Korea and Reunification," Korea Economic Institute of America, January 24, 2012, http://www.keia.org/event/chinese-perspectives-north-korea-and-reunification-0.

7 Numerous studies have concluded that China's highest priority in North Korea is the prevention of

Much research has been done on China's pursuit of its various military-strategic interests (defined here as an interest in avoiding situations that will adversely affect China's military and strategic calculus in its Northeastern region, should North Korea collapse) and economic interests in North Korea. Less research has been conducted on China's geopolitical interests in North Korea (defined here as how China uses North Korea as a tool to enhance its own political position/standing relative to other states in Northeast Asia). Most importantly, there has been no study done on which of these three independent variables—China's geopolitical, economic or military-strategic interests in North Korea[8]—is the key variable that causes China to proceed with its policy of preventing North Korea from collapsing. This paper aims to fill that academic gap.

My hypothesis is that China's decision to continue to support North Korea and prevent its collapse is driven more by the pursuit of geopolitical interests and less so by military-strategic and economic interests in North Korea. The starting point of this paper is that China's North Korea policy is guided by its grand strategy which seeks to "engineer China's rise to great power status" by making the best use of a "20 years' period of strategic opportunity."[9] From the Chinese perspective, this 20-year period (until 2022) is a rare window of opportunity for China to rise rapidly to become a "great power" and, should it not make the best use of this opportunity, a similar opportunity may not come for a very long time.

---

regime collapse: "Shades of Red," *International Crisis Group Asia Report* no. 179; "China and North Korea: Comrades Forever?," *International Crisis Group Asia Report* no. 112, February 2006, http://www.crisisgroup.org/~/media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/northkorea/112_china_and_north_korea_comrades_forever.pdf; David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 43-56; Jae-cheol Kim, "The Political Economy of Chinese Investment in North Korea: A Preliminary Assessment," *Asian Survey* 46, no. 6 (2006): 898-916; Andrew Scobell, China and North Korea: From Comrades-in-Arms to Allies at Arm's Length (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2004); Jin-moo Kim, "North Korea's Reliance on China and China's Influence on North Korea," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 23, no. 2 (June 2011): 257-271; David Kang, "USC Director Reflects on Kim Jong Il's 'Great Successor,'" December 19, 2011, http://uscnews.usc.edu/global/usc_director_reflects_on_kim_jong_iis_great_successor.html; Bates Gill, "China's North Korea Policy-Assessing Interests and Influences," (USIP Special Report, no. 283, US Institute of Peace, July 2011); and Gilbert Rozman, "Why Beijing-Seoul Ties So Fraught," *The Diplomat*, January 28, 2012, http://the-diplomat.com/2012/01/28/why-beijing-seoul-ties-so-fraught/?all=true; Congressional Research Service, "China-North Korea Relations," January 22, 2010, http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/138774.pdf.

8 A key difference between the categories of China's "military-strategic interests" and "geopolitical interests" is that the former concerns/affects China's Northeastern region whereas the latter concerns the status/strength of China's political position vis-à-vis other states in Northeast Asia (including the US).

9 For more about China's grand strategy, see: Avery Goldstein, *Rising to the Challenge: China's Grand Strategy and International Security* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005); the phrase "20 years' period of strategic opportunity" was coined by Jiang Zemin in 2002 and quoted in: Ji-Si Wang, "China's Search for a Grand Strategy," *Foreign Affairs* 90, no.2 (March/April 2011): 68-79.

There are three sections in this paper. The first section will cover the main military-strategic and economic interests that China supposedly has in North Korea and offer a critique of both these often-cited interests and an explanation on why neither of them is the main reason behind China's continued support of North Korea. The second section contains my research on the geopolitical benefits that China gains via North Korea and in relation to the US and South Korea as well as an evaluation of the significance of these geopolitical interests to China. The third and final section will sum up the key arguments and findings of this paper.

Critique of China's Military-Strategic and Economic Interests in North Korea

This section will focus on a critical analysis of the military-strategic and economic interests that China is often assumed to have in North Korea. I will first briefly mention what these supposed interests are and then proceed to explain why neither of these factors can be the main reason behind China's interest in preventing North Korea's collapse.

China's Military-Strategic Interests in North Korea

There are three often-cited military-strategic interests that China has in North Korea, all of which are related to scenarios that might unfold and adversely affect China's Northeastern region should North Korea collapse: 1) the loss of a buffer zone against US troops; 2) a refugee crisis; and 3) loose nuclear weapons/materials.[10]

Firstly, the mainstream argument goes that China does not want North Korea to collapse as this will mean the loss of a buffer zone against US troops currently stationed in South Korea. In the immediate aftermath of North Korea's collapse, US troops might cross the 38th parallel to "provide relief, enhance

10 Andrei Lankov, "Why Beijing Props Up Pyongyang," *New York Times*, June 11, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/06/12/opinion/12iht-edlankov.html; Feng Zhu, "China's North Korean Contradictions," Project Syndicate, December 2, 2010, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/zhu1/English; Bonnie Glaser and Brad Glosserman, "China's Cheonan Problem;" Bonnie Glaser and Scott Snyder, "Preparations Needed for North Korean Collapse," *PacNet*, no. 27, May 20, 2010, http://csis.org/files/publication/pac1027.pdf; Bonnie Glaser, Scott Snyder and John S. Park, "Chinese Debates on North Korea," *PacNet*, no.11, February 8, 2008, http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/pac0811.pdf; Bonnie Glaser, Scott Snyder and John S. Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor-Chinese Views of Economic Reform and Stability in North Korea," (USIP Working Paper, US Institute of Peace, January 3, 2008), http://csis.org/files/media/csis/pubs/071227_wp_china_northkorea.pdf; and You Ji, "China and North Korea: A Fragile Relationship of Strategic Convenience," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no.28 (2001): 387-398.

stability, or increase their influence."[11] In the longer run, the US may also reach an agreement with its South Korean ally (since a collapse of the North Korean state would lead to the emergence of a reunified Korea led from Seoul) to base US troops and military facilities in the Northern part of the Korean Peninsula. This is of greater concern to China in an era of increasing security competition between China and the US and China does not want US troops to be based even closer to Chinese territory.

Secondly, should North Korea collapse, it is expected that a large number of North Korean refugees will cross into the northeastern provinces of China. China would then have to provide the necessary humanitarian resources in terms of food and shelter to a very large number of North Koreans. In such a scenario, unlike current instances of North Korean refugees being labeled as "illegal economic migrants" and repatriated back to North Korea,[12] China will not be able to give the same rationale for refusing these North Koreans, especially if armed conflict breaks out on the Korean Peninsula.

Thirdly, with regard to North Korean nuclear weapons/materials, there is a possibility of these weapons/materials getting into China as it would be impossible to fully secure all of the approximate 100 sites in North Korea that are related to its nuclear program immediately after North Korea's collapse.[13] The presence of nuclear weapons/materials in China would pose a direct threat to the safety of its people and could also be sold to rogue individuals and groups.

Critique of China's Military-Strategic Interests in North Korea

In this section, I will explain why these often-cited military-strategic concerns cannot be the main variable that determines China's North Korea policy. This is because there is no certainty that these problems will definitely unfold in the manner that is often assumed. Besides, even if some of these problems will unfold in the way that is often assumed, China certainly has the resources and capabilities to deal with them.

11 M. Taylor Fravel, "International Relations Theory and China's Rise: Assessing China's Potential for Territorial Expansion," *International Studies Review* 12, no. 4 (2010): 518.

12 US House of Representatives Committee on Foreign Affairs, "China's Forced Repatriation of North Korean Refugees Violates International Law," March 23, 2012, http://foreignaffairs.house.gov/press_display.asp?id=2272.

13 "Seoul Suspects about 100 Sites in N.K. Linked to Nuclear Program," *Korea Times*, October 5, 2009, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2009/10/113_52920.html; and Bonnie S. Glaser and Scott Snyder, with See-Won Byun and David J. Szerlip, "Responding to Change on the Korean Peninsula: Impediments to US-South Korea-China Coordination," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, May 2010: 13-19, http://csis.org/files/publication/100506_Glaser_RespondingtoChange_Web.pdf.

With regard to the possibility of US troops being based north the 38th parallel should North Korea collapse, this may be an unfounded fear for China. Christopher Hill had publicly stated that China and the US could come to an agreement that US troops cannot be stationed north of the 38th parallel in a reunified Korea. Moreover, Hill added that given the current political mood in the US and given the disappearance of the North Korean threat following its collapse, "it might be difficult… to continue to station any US troops on the peninsula at all."[14] Steve Tsang was also of the view that, should North Korea collapse, the "US rationale for keeping its own military forces in South Korea would disappear" and "if the US wished to maintain bases in Korea in the longer term, it would have to secure permission from a proud and newly united Korean nation" which is "hardly a foregone conclusion."[15]

From the Chinese perspective, its senior leaders also do not appear to be too concerned about the loss of this buffer zone. Former Vice Foreign Minister Chun Young-woo had said that senior Chinese leaders increasingly felt that North Korea was of little value to China as a buffer.[16] This is especially so in the post-Cold War era where China no longer views Seoul or Washington as a "direct military threat."[17]

With regard to the possible refugee crisis China might face in the event of North Korea's collapse, it could also be untrue that that there will definitely be hundreds of thousands (or even millions) of North Koreans who will cross over into and remain indefinitely in Chinese territory. North Korea's collapse could unfold in many different ways. For instance, if there is no outbreak of armed conflict and if foreign countries are able to provide food to the North Korean people following the regime's collapse, some of them may choose not to leave their home/ancestral land where they have lived all their lives. Even if there is an armed conflict which would result in a desperate rush for survival away from the conflict zones, the option of going to China would probably be limited mostly to people who live above the peninsula's "narrow neck" and especially

14 Christopher Hill, "After Kim Jong-Il," *Project Syndicate*, December 20, 2011, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/hill14/English.

15 Steve Tsang, "China Without North Korea," *Project Syndicate*, February 14, 2013, http://www.project-syndicate.org/commentary/why-a-north-korean-collapse-would-not-threaten-china-by-steve-tsang.

16 A senior researcher interviewed by Bonnie Glaser had added separately that keeping a buffer zone had declined in importance with the end of the Cold War and "won't be important unless there is a new Cold War." He also said that "the Chinese military doesn't have special interests in preserving a buffer zone." Glaser, Snyder and Park, "Chinese Debates on North Korea." This *PacNet* commentary is based on a report that covers Chinese views of North Korea in more detail: Glaser, Snyder and Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor;" "US Embassy Cables: China 'Would Accept' Korean Reunification," *Guardian*, December 1, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/us-embassy-cables-documents/249870.

17 Scobell, *China and North Korea*, 17.

those who live close to the China-North Korea border.[18] The people based in Pyongyang might find it difficult to venture northwards even if they wanted to due to difficult and rough mountain terrain.[19]

In addition, for those North Koreans who choose (and are able) to leave North Korea, they might adopt other options such as leaving en masse to South Korea,[20] or even go to other parts of China or Japan via sea routes seeing that the majority of North Koreans live along coastal areas and in the greater Pyongyang area. As such, this fear of an influx of refugees to China may be unfounded or exaggerated.

Even if one of the worse scenarios happens, Chinese officials had assessed that it could cope with an influx of 300,000 North Koreans without outside help although they might need to use the military to seal the border should the refugees arrive "all at once."[21] China's PLA has also reportedly developed contingency plans for such humanitarian missions.[22] Given its massive troop presence of approximately 430,000 troops stationed in the Shenyang Great Military Region that borders North Korea,[23] China certainly has the manpower to handle this problem. Moreover, Bruce Bennett and Jennifer Lind have estimated that it would require China only about 24,000 troops to "assume border control responsibilities" along the border.[24]

With regard to the issue of loose nuclear materials following North Korea's collapse, China's PLA has also reportedly developed contingency plans

18 Moreover, in the view of Steve Tsang, such a refugee crisis for China would be "short-lived" and "international assistance would be readily available." Tsang, "China Without North Korea."

19 Bruce W. Bennett and Jennifer Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," *International Security* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2011): 97.

20 In the event of North Korea's collapse (and depending on the nature of its collapse), there is a possibility that North Koreans might be granted access by the South Korean government to enter South Korean territory (either through sea travel or via roads such as those leading from the Kaesong Industrial Complex to South Korea). The point I am trying to make is that it is too simplistic to assume that, should North Korea collapse, the one and only place North Koreans are likely to flee to (even if they choose to and are able to) is across the Sino-North Korean border into China. As such, the often-cited refugee crisis that China will face in the event of North Korea's collapse may be unfounded.

21 "Wikileaks Cables Reveal China 'Ready to Abandon North Korea,'" *Guardian*, November 29, 2010, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2010/nov/29/wikileaks-cables-china-reunifiedkorea.

22 Glaser, Snyder and Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor," 19; Drew Thompson, "Border Burdens: China's Response to the Myanmar Refugee Crisis," China Security 5, no. 3 (2009) 16; and Chang-Hee Park, "North Korean Contingency and Prospects of China's Military Intervention," (IIRI Working Paper, no. 5, Ilmin International Relations Institute, October 2010).

23 Of China's seven Great Military Regions (GMR), the Shenyang GMR is the one bordering North Korea. It has a 430,000-strong army. Cheong Ching, "China will not let North Korea collapse," *Straits Times*, December 29, 2011, A2.

24 Bennet and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea," 119.

for counter-WMD-related missions in North Korea, especially since most of North Korea's critical WMD facilities are located closer to the Chinese border.[25]

While it would not be possible to secure all the known nuclear sites (let alone the unknown ones that China may not even know about) immediately after North Korea's collapse, fortunately for China, Korea is a peninsula and given China's enormous military resources in the Shenyang Great Military Region bordering North Korea, it could technically "contain weapons, fissile material and WMD personnel by sealing off North Korea's coastline and its borders" in cooperation with other states.[26]

China's Economic Interests in North Korea

There are two often-cited economic interests that China has in North Korea: 1) access to Rajin-Sonbong Special Economic Zone (Rason SEZ) and its ports; and 2) access to untapped minerals in North Korea.[27]

Firstly, by having access to the Rason ports which are located in the northeastern part of North Korea, China can significantly reduce the transport time required for shipments from its Northeastern regions to its southern or to Japan and South Korea. For instance, it takes three days to ship goods from Hunchun in China to the Shanghai port (via Rason) instead of the usual 11 days by train. The use of cargo ships requires also just about one third of the money spent for inland train transport. From Hunchun to Japan's Niigata port, it would take just over 10 hours through Rason port instead of the three or four days it would take via the ports in Liaoning province.[28] Gaining access to the Rason ports is part

25 Bennet and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea," 101; Glaser, Snyder and Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor," 19; Thompson, "Border Burdens," 15-18; and Chang-hee Park, "North Korean Contingency and Prospects of China's Military Intervention," (IIRI Working Paper, no. 5, Ilmin International Relations Institute, October 2010).

26 A detailed proposal on how this can be done is contained in: Bennet and Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea," 100-104.

27 Yeon-ho Lee and Jeong-shim Kang, "The Changjitu Project and China-North Korea Economic Cooperation: Beijing's and Pyongyang's intentions," (paper presented at the British International Studies Association (BISA) Annual Conference, Manchester, April 27, 2011), http://www.bisa.ac.uk/index.php?option=com_bisa&task=view_public_papers_author_char_search&char_search=K; Daniel Gearin, "Chinese Infrastructure and Natural Resources Investments in North Korea," (US-China Economic and Security Review Commission Staff Backgrounder, October 20, 2010), http://origin.www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/ChineseInfrastructureandNaturalResourcesInvestmentsinNorthKorea.pdf; and "China Secures Right to Use 3 Piers to be Built on N. Korean Port for 50 years," *Yonhap News*, February 15, 2012, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/02/15/88/0401000000AEN20120215007600315F.HTML.

28 Andray Abrahamian, "A Convergence of Interests: Prospects for Rason Special Economic Zone," (KEI Academic Paper Series, Korea Economic Institute, February 24, 2012), http://www.keia.org/sites/default/files/publications/rason_sez_paper.pdf; "Hunchun Sees New Benefits of Location on the Border," *China Daily*, February 22, 2011, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/usa/business/2011-02/22/

of a larger plan that China has which is known as the "Changjitu Project" (an abbreviation for Changchun City, Jilin City and Tumen River area) which aims to develop China's landlocked northeastern region.[29]

Secondly, China views North Korea as a good source of high quality anthracite coals that can be obtained at a lower cost (at an average of around $101 per ton as compared to the international average of around $200 per ton).[30] From January to September 2011, out of the 8.42 million tons of minerals that China imported from North Korea, 8.19 million tons (or 97.3 percent) were anthracite coals.[31] China also views North Korea as a good source of other minerals since North Korea hosts sizable deposits of more than 200 different minerals and it has among the top 10 largest reserves of magnesite, tungsten ore, graphite, gold ore and molybdenum in the world.[32]

Critique of China's Often-Cited Economic Interests in North Korea

In this section, I will explain why these often-cited economic interests cannot be the main variable that affects China's North Korea policy. Should North Korea collapse in the near future, it is certain that a reunified Korea (led from Seoul)

---

content_12055979.htm; "China Poised to Secure East Sea Shipping Route," *Chosun Ilbo*, May 23, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/05/23/2011052300645.html; "Chinese People's Daily on Operation of Rajin Port," *NK News*, June 1, 2011, http://nknews.org/2011/06/chinese-people%E2%80%B2s-daily-on-operation-of-rajin-port/; and "China Gains Sea of Japan Trade Access," *Global Times*, March 10, 2010, http://china.globaltimes.cn/diplomacy/2010-03/511351_2.html.

29 Rason comprises of three ports of which the primary one is Rajin port which has three piers. Chinese companies have leased the use of the first and second piers while a Russian company has leased the use of the third pier. Andray Abrahamian, "A Convergence of Interests;" "Report on Rason SEZ," *Choson Exchange*, September 2011, http://chosonexchange.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Choson-Exchange-Rason-Report-August.pdf; Yeon-ho Lee and Jeong-shim Kang, "The Changjitu Project and China-North Korea Economic Cooperation;" and Scott Snyder, "Rajin-Sonbong: A Strategic Choice for China in Its Relations with Pyongyang," Jamestown Foundation China Brief 10, no. 7 (April 1, 2010), http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews[tt_news]=36215&cHash=b8c79b916c.

30 North Korea had an estimated production capacity in 2007 of 25 million tons per year and it has approximately 20.5 billion tons of coal reserves. Drew Thompson, "Silent Partners: Chinese Joint Ventures in North Korea," US-Korea Institute, February 2011: 22, http://uskoreainstitute.org/wpcontent/uploads/2011/02/USKI_Report_SilentPartners_DrewThompson_020311.pdf.

31 These 8.42 million tons of minerals were worth $852 million which is triple the amount compared to the previous year. "North Korea's Mineral Exports to China Tripled from Last Year," *Yonhap*, November 6, 2011, http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/news/2011/11/06/0200000000AEN20111106000300315.HTML.

32 A large percentage of Chinese companies in North Korea are engaged in its minerals industry. Of the 138 Chinese companies registered as doing business in North Korea in 2010, 41 percent were involved in extracting coal, iron, zinc, nickel, gold and other minerals. Kyung-soo Choi, "The Mining Industry of North Korea," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 23, no. 2 (June 2011): 211-230; "North Korea, New Land of Opportunity?;" and John C. Wu, "The Mineral Industry of North Korea," (US Geological Survey 2005 Minerals Yearbook, June 2007).

will emerge as a pro-US state that borders China.[33] This will mean that China will lose economic benefits it currently gains in or via North Korea.[34] However, this should not be a major concern for China, (and thus should not be the main factor behind China's continued support of North Korea) because China does have alternatives it can look to for similar benefits.

With regard to China's loss of access to the Rason ports should North Korea collapse, China does not have to be overly concerned about this as it has alternative ports in Liaoning province. China has in fact put aside 220 billion RMB ($35 billion) in infrastructure investment into a new coastal economy development strategy whereby 59 port projects are scheduled for early development in Liaoning province.[35] For instance, China has been developing its Donggang Economic Development Zone (Donggang EDZ) with the aim of making it the "sea gate, logistics center and manufacturing base for Northeast China."[36] Located close to the Donggang EDZ is the Dandong ice-free port which is also in the process of being expanded to handle more cargo.[37] As such, the multiple ports in this entire development area of Liaoning Province coastal route could serve as an effective alternative to the Rason ports in enabling China to accelerate the development of these provinces.

Secondly, the minerals that China will lose access to in the event of North Korea's collapse do not represent significant losses for China. China's main mineral interest in North Korea is its coal—from January to September 2011, 8.19 million tons (i.e., 97.3 percent) of the 8.42 million tons of minerals that China had imported from North Korea were anthracite coals. If China were to

33 Christopher Hill himself said that, should North Korea collapse, "The successor state on the Korean Peninsula would be South Korea, a treaty ally of the US." Hill, "After Kim Jong-Il."

34 Given the extremely high financial costs of reunification, a reunified Korea led from Seoul will definitely need to use these ports and minerals in Northern Korea for its own reunification efforts. The amount of money required for reunification varies according to different studies and is impossible to determine. Estimates are around $1 trillion if reunification were to take place between 2020-2029. The costs of reunification will only increase if it happens at a later time. Chang-min Shin, "Costs, Gains and Taxes," Publication by the Ministry of Justice, Republic of Korea, Unification and Law 3, November 2010; and "South Korean President Calls for Reunification Tax," *Reuters*, August 15, 2010, http://www.reuters.com/article/2010/08/15/us-korea-north-tax-idUSTRE67E08K20100815.

35 "Donggang District," *China Daily*, http://liaoning.chinadaily.com.cn/dandong/2011-01/13/content_12498842.htm; "Donggang Economic Development Zone," *China Daily*, http://liaoning.chinadaily.com.cn/dandong/2010-09/15/content_12498772.htm.

36 Ibid.

37 There are plans to invest 45 billion yuan (approximately $7.07 billion) between 2011 and 2015 to boost Dandong port's annual handling capacity from its current 60 million tons of cargo to above 100 million tones. The aim is to make the port the largest along the Yellow Sea coast in China and to "cement its role as a transport hub in Northeast Asia that connects the Korean Peninsula with Eurasia." "China Expands Hub Port that Connects Korean Peninsula to Eurasia," *Xinhua*, October 25, 2011, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/business/2011-10/25/c_131211901.htm.

lose access to this approximate 11.2 million tons of annual coal shipments (this figure is obtained by extrapolating the figure above to obtain an annual import figure), it would not be a big loss for China as it would only be a loss of about six percent of its total coal imports of 182.4 million tons for 2011.[38] China can quite easily replace these lost amounts of coal by either increasing its own domestic production or by importing more from its current top two suppliers of Indonesia and Australia.[39]

For China's import of non-coal minerals from North Korea, China also has alternative markets it can look to for these minerals. For minerals such as magnesite and tungsten which North Korea has an abundance of, Russia also has massive amounts and thus China need not be solely reliant on North Korea.[40] Given that China-Russia relations "are now at their best in history" according to the Chinese Ambassador to Russia,[41] and given that Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin just visited Beijing in October 2011 to sign off on trade deals worth $7 billion,[42] Russia is likely to be open to the idea of giving China increased access to more of its resources in exchange for other benefits from China.

China's Geopolitical Interests in North Korea

Having offered a critical analysis of why China's often-cited military-strategic and economic interests in North Korea cannot be the main reasons behind China's continued support of North Korea (given the high costs involved for China),[43] I shall now focus on evaluating whether China's geopolitical benefits gained via North Korea—defined here as how China uses North Korea as a tool to enhance its own political position or standing relative to other states in North-

38 For 2011, China's total coal imports were 182.4 million tons. "China Overtakes Japan as World's Top Coal Importer," *Reuters*, January 26, 2012, http://in.reuters.com/article/2012/01/26/coal-china-japan-idINDEE80P02720120126.

39 "Understanding China's Rising Coal Imports," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, February 16, 2012, http://www.carnegieendowment.org/files/china_coal.pdf.

40 Deborah A. Kramer, "Magnesium, its Alloys and Compounds," US Geological Survey Open-File Report 01-341, 2001, http://pubs.usgs.gov/of/2001/of01-341/of01-341.pdf; and Kim B. Shedd, "Tungsten World Mine Production, Reserves, and Reserve Base," US Geological Survey, January 2005, http://minerals.usgs.gov/minerals/pubs/commodity/tungsten/tungsmcs05.pdf.

41 Remarks made by Chinese Ambassador to Russia Hui Li. "China-Russia relations at their Best: Ambassador," *Xinhua*, September 26, 2010, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english2010/china/2010-09/26/c_13530762.htm.

42 Iain Mills, "A New Era in China-Russian Relations?," *World Politics Review*, October 18, 2011, http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/10369/a-new-era-in-china-russia-relations.

43 As mentioned earlier, China's continued support of North Korea has resulted in high costs to China in the form of tremendous damage to both its bilateral relationships with other states and to its international image as a responsible rising power.

east Asia—is the main reason behind China's North Korea policy. Particular reference will be made to the geopolitical benefits that China gains in relation to the US and South Korea which are two key states that are inseparable from any analysis on China's foreign policy approach towards North Korea.[44]

China's Geopolitical Gains in Relation to the US

As Andrew Scobell said, "China's North Korea policy is more about Beijing's view of Washington than their view of Pyongyang."[45] Sunny Lee added that "when Chinese scholars, experts, government officials talk about Korea… their eyes are in Washington."[46] As such, in light of the above statements, coupled with the importance of the China-US relationship to China and the US' efforts to contain China's rise,[47] I would argue that China's main geopolitical benefits (gained via North Korea's continued existence and relatively high dependence on China's support for its survival) are gained against the US. These geopolitical benefits to China include: 1) a reduced amount of resources that the US can devote to the Taiwan issue; 2) an increased ability to obtain concessions from the US; and 3) maintenance of status quo in the regional balance of power.

Firstly, China wants North Korea to continue to distract the US in the region and prevent it from devoting more of its resources to Taiwan. From China's strategic perspective, "Taiwan and North Korea are intrinsically linked" and "China's relations with the DPRK are largely subject to its strategic calculus vis-à-vis the US, and with Taiwan in the background."[48] With a continued threat

44 You Ji wrote that: "Under the current international situation… North Korea is an indispensable chip in China's dealing with the US, the Republic of Korea." Ji, "China and North Korea: A Fragile Relationship," 391.

45 Official Korea Economic Institute Twitter page: Andrew Scobell, "China's North Korea policy is more about Beijing's view of Washington than their view of Pyongyang," March 16, 2012, 8.47pm. Tweet, https://twitter.com/KoreaEconInst.

46 Lee, "Chinese Perspectives on North Korea and Reunification."

47 There is ample evidence to suggest that at least in a military sense, the US has already been attempting to contain China in recent years: US technology transfer restrictions on trade with China, US pressure on the European Union and Israel not to sell weapons to China, the upgrading of US military capabilities in Guam, the offer of advanced weaponry to Taiwan, increased defense coordination and consultation with Taiwan, and the push for a more active Japanese role in the US-Japan alliance. Thomas J. Christensen, "Fostering Stability or Creating a Monster? The Rise of China and US Policy Towards East Asia," *International Security* 31, no. 1 (Summer 2006): 109. US efforts to contain China's rise were arguably confirmed by US President Obama's announcement in late 2011 that the US government is going to "pivot" to Asia. This is seen in some circles as a euphemism for a broader US containment strategy of China which is a theory that I subscribe to. "Obama Tells Asia: US 'Here to Stay' as a Pacific Power," *Guardian*, November 17, 2011, http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/nov/17/obama-asia-pacific-address-australia-parliament.

48 You Ji, "Dealing with the 'North Korea Dilemma:' China's Strategic Choices," (RSIS Working Paper, no. 229, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, June 21, 2011): 12; and Shen, "North Korea's

from North Korea, the US will be forced to have a significant amount of diplomatic resources and troops "tied down on the Korean Peninsula and looking north toward the DPRK" rather than looking south toward Taiwan.[49] As reunification with Taiwan remains China's core national interest, China does not want the US to interfere too much in what it considers to be an internal matter.

Secondly, China wants to use its influence over North Korea to increase its own bargaining power and to get more concessions from the US. Being the only major state in the world that has a relatively higher influence over and access to the top North Korean leadership, China can use this as a bargaining chip against the US which does not have diplomatic relations with North Korea.[50] China's influence over North Korea was acknowledged when both the US State Department spokesman Philip Crowley and the Chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Michael Mullen said that China does have unique influence with North Korea.[51] In addition, China is also the only major state that has "eyes on the ground" in North Korea.[52] Kurt Campbell added that the US had "asked China to share information on developments" in North Korea following Kim Jong-il's death.[53] Even the CIA seems to lack intelligence about North Korea as a former CIA official pointed out that US intelligence has a "failure to penetrate deep into the existing leadership."[54] This unique (and relatively higher level of) influence that China has over North Korea, coupled with the insider information that China has, strengthens China's position to seek concessions from the US on a broad range of bilateral issues.

Thirdly, China wants to prevent North Korea's collapse because it wants to maintain the status quo in the regional balance of power. Should North Korea

---

Strategic Significance to China," 19.

49 Congressional Research Service, "China-North Korea Relations," 8.

50 While there is constant debate and uncertainty over the amount of absolute influence that China has over North Korea (i.e., will North Korea actually obey China's instructions?), China undoubtedly has relatively higher influence over North Korea (and relatively higher level of access to its top leadership) compared to any other major state in the world. This relatively higher level of influence and access is the source of China's bargaining strength vis-à-vis the other states in Northeast Asia (including the US).

51 "Obama Dispatches Aircraft Carrier to Yellow Sea After North Korean Attack," *Bloomberg News*, November 25, 2010, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-11-23/obama-to-callsouth-korea-s-lee-after-attack-by-north-kills-two-soldiers.html; and "Admiral Mike Mullen's Speech in Seoul," US Joint Chiefs of Staff, December 8, 2010, http://www.jcs.mil/speech.aspx?id=1502.

52 Victor Cha, "North Korea: What Not To Do," *PacNet*, no.1, January 9, 2012, http://csis.org/files/publication/Pac1.pdf.

53 "Assistant Secretary Campbell's Remarks to Media in Tokyo," US State Department, January 9, 2012, http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2012/01/20120109104517su0.901527.html#axzz1mtqzal00.

54 "Veil of Secrecy Keeps Foreign Intelligence Agencies in the Dark," *Straits Times*, December 22, 2011, A8.

collapse in the near future, a pro-US reunified Korea (that is run from Seoul) would emerge on China's border. China would rather "maintain the geopolitical status quo rather than face the possibility of a peninsula unified in South Korea's image" which would greatly tilt the regional balance of power in favor of the US since China would be flanked by US allies (i.e., reunified Korea, Japan, Taiwan) all along its eastern coast and border.[55] Moreover, should China cease to support North Korea with the result of it to be on the brink of collapse, a desperate North Korea might reach out to the US to ensure its survival.[56] In the worst case scenario from China's perspective, North Korea might rapidly improve relations with the US and might cease to be a clear pro-China state.[57] In addition, China also wants to prevent North Korea's collapse as it is concerned that a reunified Korea would emerge as a much stronger nation in the long run—a Goldman Sachs study reported that a reunified Korea's GDP could exceed that of France, Germany and Japan in 30 to 40 years.[58] This would also affect the regional balance of power especially if this economically powerful and reunified Korea is a pro-US state.

China's Geopolitical Gains in Relation to South Korea

China can also use its influence over and access to North Korea as a bargaining chip to strengthen its political position against other Northeast Asian states. For this paper, I shall focus on the geopolitical benefits that China gains vis-à-vis South Korea.[59] China's main geopolitical benefits gained vis-à-vis South Korea include: 1) China is able to obtain more concessions from South Korea; and 2) China buys more time to attract South Korea into its sphere of influence.

Firstly, China can use its relatively higher levels of influence over and access to North Korea to get more concessions from South Korea. Since the ef-

55 Thompson, "Silent Partners," 76; and Shen, "North Korea's Strategic Significance to China," 21-22; Victor Cha has a similar view and he said that "China does not want to see a unified Korea." Cha, "North Korea: What Not To Do;" and Glaser, Snyder and Park, "Chinese Debates on North Korea."

56 This ability of North Korea to look to the US for assistance was again shown in early 2012 when North Korea struck a deal with the US to suspend its nuclear program in return for 240,000 tons of food aid. "North Korea Agrees to Halt Nuclear Activities for Food," *CNN*, March 1, 2012, http://edition.cnn.com/2012/02/29/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-deal/index.html.

57 This is one of the four "intense debates" surrounding China-North Korea relations that Chinese analysts have had and which is documented in: Glaser, Snyder and Park, "Keeping an Eye on an Unruly Neighbor."

58 Goo-hoon Kwon, "A United Korea? Reassessing North Korea Risks (Part 1)," Goldman Sachs Global Economics Paper, no. 188, September 21, 2009, http://www.scribd.com/doc/29410664/Goldman-Sachs-Global-Economics-Paper-a-United-Korea-Reassessing-North-Korea-Risks.

59 It must be added that China can also gain similar benefits in relation to Japan since Japan does not have diplomatic relations with North Korea.

fective management of inter-Korean relations is always very high on South Korea's diplomatic agenda and since inter-Korean relations/dialogues remain at a low point at this moment,[60] China can use its close links to the top North Korean leadership to convey messages to North Korea and also help South Korea defuse the tensions that it has with North Korea. Given that, following Kim Jong-il's death, South Korea is "desperate for information about the situation in North Korea," China can discreetly offer to supply South Korea with the information it needs (since it is the state that knows most about what is going on in North Korea's elite circles) in exchange for other concessions from South Korea on a broad range of bilateral issues.[61]

Secondly, by preventing North Korea's collapse, China can buy time to attract South Korea into its sphere of influence and away from the US sphere of influence. Should North Korea collapse in the near future, it is certain that a pro-US reunified Korea led from Seoul will emerge which would be detrimental to China's interests in maintaining the status quo in the regional balance of power. By preventing North Korea's collapse, China can continue to work on attracting South Korea into its sphere of influence in the hope that when Korean reunification (led from Seoul) does eventually happen—a view even held by senior Chinese officials but under certain conditions[62]—it will at least be a neutral state that is neither pro-China nor pro-US. This was also the view expressed by the majority (at 43 percent) of the 46 top Chinese scholars surveyed by Sunny Lee when they were asked for the circumstances under which they would support Korean reunification.[63] Since China is becoming an increasing important and attractive trade partner for South Korea, given more time, China hopes to lure South Korea away from the US.[64]

---

60 South Korea drastically reduced its bilateral dealings with North Korea following its 2010 attacks. Seoul suspended inter-Korean trade and suspended most of its humanitarian aid. South Korean economic aid to North Korea was slashed from about $370 million in 2007 to $45 million in 2008 and $1.9 million in 2010 and the number of inter-Korean talks dropped from an average of 19 per year between 1993 and 2007 to a total of 20 for 2008-10. "Seoul Keeps an Open Mind on North Korea," IISS Strategic Comments, March 9, 2012, http://www.iiss.org/en/publications/strategic%20comments/sections/2012-bb59/seoul-keeps-an-open-mind-on-north-korea-5e0c; and Snyder and Byun, "Cheonan and Yeonpyeong."

61 Cha, "North Korea: What Not To Do."

62 "US Embassy Cables: China 'Would Accept' Korean Reunification," *Guardian*, December 1, 2010; and "Wikileaks Cables Reveal China 'Ready to Abandon North Korea,'" *Guardian*, November 29, 2010.

63 Lee, "Chinese Perspectives on North Korea and Reunification."

64 In January 2012, during an official state visit to China, then South Korean President Lee Myung-bak took part in a business forum that was co-hosted by the Korea Chamber of Commerce & Industry (KCCI) and the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade. He remarked on the phenomenal results of the bilateral relations in all areas over the past two decades and acknowledged the realization of the bilateral trade target of $200 billion at an earlier date than targeted. He added that:"I believe

The Significance of China's Geopolitical Interests in North Korea

In this section, I will argue that China's geopolitical interests obtained via North Korea represent the key variable and consideration behind its decision to continue supporting North Korea and to prevent its collapse. China is aware of and keen to hold on to the geopolitical benefits that it currently attains from North Korea's continued existence.[65] Should North Korea collapse, China's power position in Northeast Asia will be significantly weakened, especially since China cannot obtain similar geopolitical benefits via any other state in Northeast Asia. I shall elaborate more on why North Korea is so geopolitically significant to China to the point that this is the main reason why China does its best to prevent North Korea's collapse.

Firstly, North Korea is the only clear anti-US state in Northeast Asia that China can get to be on its side. Given that Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are clearly on the US side and since Mongolia is not a significant political actor in the region, the only other states in Northeast Asia that China could look to in order to help it maintain the balance of power in the region are Russia and North Korea. Given that Russia wants to be neutral (as far as possible) between China and the US in this post-Cold War era and "does not wish for an alliance with either country even if one were on offer,"[66] North Korea is China's only option left. Should North Korea collapse, the resulting regional balance of power would be tilted in favor of the US and China would be left without an ally in Northeast Asia.

Secondly, North Korea is the only state in Northeast Asia that is directly and openly hostile to the US. Given that Japan, South Korea and Taiwan are all pro-US at the moment (and for the foreseeable future), coupled with the fact that Russia no longer possesses the same level of threat to the US as it once did during the Cold War, North Korea poses the most serious direct threat to the

---

that the two countries will reach the trade goal of $300 billion by 2015 without difficulty." South Korean Presidential Website, "The President Brings Consolidated Partnership from Beijing," January 13, 2012, http://english.president.go.kr/pre_activity/summit/diplomacy_view.php?uno=6207&board_no=E05&search_key=&search_value=&search_cate_code=&cur_page_no=1&code=13. In addition, in a commentary written by Sunny Lee, he discussed whether China is trying to (and whether it will be able to) "pull" South Korea away from US influence. Sunny Lee, "Will China's Soft-Power Strategy on South Korea Succeed?," *PacNet*, no. 23, April 8, 2013, http://csis.org/files/publication/Pac1323.pdf.

65 Moreover, the geopolitical benefits that China attains via North Korea are multi-dimensional in the sense that China can use their influence over and information about North Korea to gain concessions from any state in the world that has certain interests in North Korea. For this paper, I shall just focus on the geopolitical benefits that China gains in relation to the US and South Korea.

66 Anatol Lieven, "US-Russian Relations and the Rise of China," *New America Foundation*, July 11, 2011, http://newamerica.net/publications/policy/us_russian_relations_and_the_rise_of_china.

US. North Korea's continued existence means that it will continue to command a large amount of attention and resources from the US. Should North Korea collapse, there is no direct threat to the US on the same scale as North Korea in Northeast Asia and this would enable the US to channel more resources (having had them freed up from the Korean Peninsula) to the Taiwan issue.

Thirdly, as North Korea is highly dependent on China for its survival, China is the only major state in the world that has relatively higher levels of influence over, access to and insider information about North Korea's leaders.[67] North Korea is still highly dependent on Chinese economic support for its own survival—up to 90 percent of its energy supply, 80 percent of its consumer products and 40-45 percent of its food supply comes from China[68]—therefore it is still subject to certain demands from China in return for continued assistance. No other state in Northeast Asia is as dependent on China for its own survival and thus subject to such a degree of external influence from China. Should North Korea collapse, China would be left without an alternative state that it could "use" as a bargaining chip to strengthen its negotiating position against states such as the US and South Korea.

Conclusion

Robert Jervis said that "only rarely does a single factor determine the way politics will work out" in the post-Cold War future of world politics.[69] In the case of China's North Korea policy, its geopolitical, military-strategic and economic interests all play some part (but to different degrees) in its decision to support North Korea and to prevent its collapse. Following a critical analysis of the research done thus far by scholars in this field and through an examination of open-source materials, I arrive at the conclusion that China's North Korea policy is largely driven by a pursuit of its own geopolitical interests and less so by its military-strategic and economic interests in North Korea.

In this paper, I have shown that the often-cited military-strategic concerns China has (with regard to North Korea's collapse) are largely unfounded. There is no strong evidence to suggest that the US actually has concrete plans to station its troops for the long haul north of the 38th parallel following North Ko-

67 "Obama Dispatches Aircraft Carrier to Yellow Sea After North Korean Attack," *Bloomberg News*; "Admiral Mike Mullen's Speech in Seoul," U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, December 8, 2010; and Cha, "North Korea: What Not To Do;" US State Department, "Assistant Secretary Campbell's Remarks to Media in Tokyo."

68 Lee, "Chinese Perspectives on North Korea and Reunification."

69 Robert Jervis, "The Future of World Politics: Will It Resemble the Past?" *International Security* 16, no.3 (Winter 1991/1992): 4.

rea's collapse. Even if some of the other problems such as the influx of refugees into China's northeastern region and the problem of loose nuclear weapons/materials do arise, these are problems that China has the resources and capabilities to manage, especially since it has already formulated contingency plans to deal with these scenarios.

Regarding the economic interests that China has in North Korea, I have also shown that, should North Korea collapse, the loss of economic benefits in North Korea will not represent significant losses for China as it does have alternatives it can look to. In the case of the loss of access to the Rason ports, China has alternative ports in Liaoning Province that can do just as effective a job in guaranteeing sea access for shipments out of northeastern China that are aimed at accelerating the development of China's landlocked Northeastern provinces. In the case of the loss of access to the minerals that China currently obtains from North Korea, China is also not overly concerned about this issue as its coal imports from North Korea do not represent a large percentage of China's total coal imports and the non-coal minerals that China wants are also attainable in other parts of the world.

Most importantly, I have shown that China's key interest in preventing North Korea's collapse is actually the geopolitical benefits that it is currently gaining via North Korea. These geopolitical benefits include: getting the US tied down on the Korean Peninsula so that they can devote less resources to Taiwan; China using its influence over and access to North Korea as a bargaining chip to obtain more concessions from the US and South Korea over a broad range of bilateral issues; and the use of North Korea to maintain the status quo in the regional balance of power. China cannot afford to lose these geopolitical benefits which are highly significant to it especially in a period of increasing China-US competition. Moreover, there is no other state in Northeast Asia that China can "use" to obtain similar geopolitical benefits to what North Korea can provide it with.

In sum, in an era where the US is still the dominant superpower in the world and when it is trying to contain China's rise, if China wants to make full use of what Jiang Zemin termed the "20 years' period of strategic opportunity" to rise to become a great power, it will definitely need to continue to support North Korea and to prevent its collapse for the foreseeable future. **Y**