

## Historical Perspective on China’s “Tipping Point” with North Korea

*Donggil Kim and Seong-hyon Lee*

*The view that China would not “abandon” North Korea, despite repeated provocations by North Korea, has been strengthened in the context of the US pivot to Asia, which is generally regarded by Chinese strategists as Washington’s ploy to contain China. As the rivalry and competition between Washington and Beijing deepens, North Korea’s strategic value to China increases. However, history shows that Beijing regarded Pyongyang as “expendable” even during the Korean War. Based on Sino–North Korean historical relations, in this article we argue that China’s policy toward North Korea is not fixed but fluid, and that Washington and Seoul could inspire changes within China’s policy toward North Korea. KEYWORDS: Sino–North Korean relations, pivot to Asia, denuclearization, THAAD.*

### **Introduction: North Korea’s Strategic Value to China**

In the wake of North Korea’s nuclear test in 2013, Chinese intellectuals began to publicly voice that China should abandon North Korea, longtime Cold War ally. Some also argued that Beijing should assist Seoul in absorbing Pyongyang to form a unified Korea.<sup>1</sup> They insisted that although China (People’s Republic of China or PRC) and North Korea belong to the same socialist bloc, the differences between the two are larger than those between China and the West.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, they also maintained that the Sino–North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty, signed in 1961, has lost its bona fide relevance today.<sup>3</sup> It is apparent that China’s patience with North Korea has become thinner than in the past.

On the other hand, the view that China should not “abandon” North Korea, despite repeated provocations, is still gaining traction. This view was strengthened in the context of the US pivot to

Asia, which China assessed as Washington's strategic move to contain China's regional rise by strengthening its alliances with Japan and South Korea. In this vein, the traditional Sino–North Korean relationship, often described as “as close as lips and teeth,” still remains relevant in many aspects (Zhou 1990, 20).

However, a careful review of Sino–North Korean historical relations shows that China regarded North Korea as expendable during the Korean War when US forces were marching toward the Yalu River in the fall of 1950, posing an imminent security threat to the newly established PRC (Kim 2016a). It provides support for the view that China's policy toward North Korea could be flexible, suggesting that Washington and Seoul could inspire changes in China's policy toward North Korea.

During the April 2017 summit between US president Donald Trump and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, the two leaders appeared to have found common ground in agreement on the grave nature of the North Korean nuclear issue. However, they failed to reach agreement on how to solve the issue. This raises a policy challenge for South Korea, which must forge its North Korea policy in the midst of US-China discord. The low level of trust between the United States and China was also reflected in the strain between the two countries that resulted from the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) US missile defense system in South Korea.

At present, the Sino-US relationship is increasingly seen as heading toward greater competition, if not conflict. What is more, it is highly improbable that North Korea's nuclear issue will be resolved in the near future. Under these circumstances, Washington and Beijing are unlikely to act in unison on the North Korean issue. Thus, it is questionable whether both nations would make Pyongyang a policy priority by embarking on a fresh initiative (Shin and Straub 2015).<sup>4</sup>

Meanwhile, China's participation in UN sanctions following North Korea's nuclear tests in 2013 and 2015 received keen attention from both Washington and Seoul.<sup>5</sup> As of August 2017, North Korea had conducted five nuclear tests and China had supported all UN resolutions that imposed punitive economic sanctions against North Korea. Concurrently, China's stance on North Korea

and, by extension, its calculus on the Korean unification issue, received increasing attention from the concerned government institutions and academic communities in both capitals.<sup>6</sup>

In light of the aforementioned developments, it is of importance to examine the true nature of the Sino–North Korean relationship as well as to investigate whether the two nations still remain allies in the practical sense. This raises specific questions: Is North Korea still playing a geopolitical buffer role for China?<sup>7</sup> Under what international arrangements would China cooperate with the United States on the issue of North Korea and support the Korean Peninsula’s unification, led by South Korea?<sup>8</sup> These issues preoccupy today’s policymakers as well as scholarly debates in the concerned nations.

We begin this article with an examination of key historical incidents, such as China’s intervention in the Korean War and the true reasoning behind the Chinese People’s Volunteer Army’s withdrawal in 1958 from North Korea. Based on the latest academic work on Sino–North Korean relations, we evaluate the current state of Sino–North Korean relations and seek to offer some predictions about the conditions under which China is likely to change its attitude toward North Korea amid the deepening Sino-US rivalry. Finally, we propose plausible unification scenarios for the Korean Peninsula that could be supported by both the United States and China.

### **New Insights into the Historical Background of Sino–North Korean Relations**

In July 1953, the United States and China signed an armistice treaty and concluded the bitter conflict on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>9</sup> Ever since China’s intervention in the Korean War, both Chinese and North Korean leaders had called the two countries’ relationship *chun chi xiang yi* (as close as lips and teeth) and *chun wang chi han* (if the lips are gone, the teeth will be cold), defining Sino–North Korean relations as such for ensuing decades (Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 1980, 50–54). These maxims captured North Korea’s strategic importance to the security of

China and implied that China would protect North Korea at all costs whenever the latter's security was in grave peril. During the Cold War era, this concept was generally accepted in the West as characterizing the two nations' relations. Even today, this view is still widely embraced in the West.<sup>10</sup>

In October 1950, China dispatched its troops to aid North Korea, which was nearing a complete defeat by US troops. A majority of scholars in both China and the West have argued that China made this decision because the fall of North Korea to the United States would endanger China's own security. This assessment reinforced the view that China regards North Korea as a buffer zone (Foot 1991, 418–419; Qing 2012; Segal 1985, 96; Whiting 1960).

However, a more important question to probe is the motivation and strategic calculus behind China's decision to dispatch its troops. This aspect is critically important in shedding light on today's Chinese strategic attitude toward North Korea. For instance, during the so-called fire and fury standoff in August 2017 between President Trump and Kim Jong-un, an editorial in China's *Global Times* declared, "If North Korea launches missiles that threaten US soil first and the US retaliates, China will stay neutral" (Reuters 2017). Washington and its allies were keenly interested in the part about China's staying "neutral." They interpreted this statement as a vow by Beijing not to intervene if the North Korea crisis became violent.

Both Chinese and Russian documents reveal that, in the prelude to the Korean War, Mao was, in fact, very reluctant to dispatch troops to Korea.<sup>11</sup> Furthermore, recent academic research shows that Mao's eventual decision to send troops was based on the premise that, if China sent troops to Korea, US and South Korean forces would stop their northward advance at the Pyongyang-Wonsan line. In that case, China could secure the northern part of North Korea without fighting with American forces (Kim 2016a; Mao Zedong 2000, 8; Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi 2013, 213–214). This reasoning indicates that the eventual Chinese intervention in the Korean War was made not in order to save North Korea, but rather to secure the northern part of North Korea, aiming to extend China's "defense line"

to the Pyongyang-Wonsan area without bloodshed (Kim 2016a). It underscores that Chinese leadership's strategic calculus regarding North Korea was opportunistic, calculative, and pragmatic.

In fact, before and after the founding of the PRC in October 1949, Mao Zedong turned down Kim Il-sung's request to unify the Korean Peninsula through military means.<sup>12</sup> The reason for Mao's objection was simple. In June 1949, US troops completed their withdrawal from the Korean Peninsula. As a result, the PRC had no existing security threat from the Korean Peninsula. On the contrary, a full-scale attack by the North on the South was likely to call the American troops back to the Korean Peninsula, which is historically regarded as a gateway for invasion to Northeast China. To Mao, the best way to protect the newly established PRC after the ravages of its civil war was to not have the US military in its vicinity at all (Kim 2014; Kim 2016b).

After the Korean War, the Chinese leadership, assessing that "the Korean situation had reached a deadlock and the United States would not easily engage in war again," concluded that there was little chance of restarting the war on the Peninsula by US initiative (Jin 2008, 11–17). On the contrary, Mao was seriously concerned about Kim Il-sung's penchant to wage war against South Korea and paid specific attention to North Korea's military reinforcement, advising Kim Il-sung to decrease his military forces.<sup>13</sup> Moreover, Mao believed that China had good reason to intervene in North Korea's domestic affairs because of the fact that "China, with its bloodshed, retook the Kim Il-sung regime from the grips of the U.S." and that "the U.S. forces' return to the Korean peninsula poses a serious threat to China's security."<sup>14</sup> After the armistice of the Korean War, China's immediate foreign policy objective was to establish a friendly international environment so as to smoothly roll out its five-year economic development plan (Jin 2003, 111). It is worthwhile to underscore that China's policy toward North Korea today is a continuation of this policy, which was to prevent the recurrence of a war and maintain the status quo. China's current policy goals of keeping the status quo on the Korean Peninsula can be traced to Mao's policy at the end of the Korean War (Kim and Han 2014; Li and Wang 2010, 3–4). To achieve these goals, China proactively interfered in the domestic

affairs of North Korea whenever it felt necessary, while also providing large-scale economic assistance.

Contrary to Mao's wishes, Kim Il-sung, however, reinforced his armed forces and purged his political rivals who had ties with China and the Soviet Union.<sup>15</sup> Against this backdrop, some pro-Soviet and pro-China factions in Pyongyang organized an anti-Kim Il-sung coalition after the de-Stalinization of the Twentieth Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) in February 1956. Taking advantage of the anti-Stalinist atmosphere that had arisen among the socialist countries after this CPSU Congress, the coalition planned to criticize Kim Il-sung's personality cult and autocracy and claim collective leadership in the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) Central Committee Plenum of August 30–31, 1956. At this August Plenum, a pro-China figure, the minister of trade Yun Gong-hum, argued that the "KWP had rejected the decisions of the CPSU twentieth Congress and did not follow the principles of Marxism-Leninism," and he also pointed to the "very serious consequences of the cult of personality . . . being retained inside the KWP." The following day, Kim Il-sung expelled Yun Gong-hum, Lee Pil-gyu, Seo Hwi, and Kim Gang from the KWP for anti-Party activity, also removing Choi Chang-ik and Park Chang-ok as vice-premier and a member of the Central Committee, respectively. Sensing the imminent danger, on August 30, 1956, prior to expulsion, members of the anti-Kim coalition fled to China.<sup>16</sup>

The North Korean government, calling these four escapees "criminals," demanded that China extradite them immediately. However, the Chinese government rejected Pyongyang's demand.<sup>17</sup> Instead, Beijing and Moscow decided to send a joint party delegation to Pyongyang in order to intervene in North Korea's political turmoil. On September 20, 1956, the Sino-Soviet delegation, headed by the Soviet Politburo member Anastas Mikoyan and PRC defense minister Peng Dehuai, went to Pyongyang and demanded the reinstatement of the purged political figures. The Chinese delegation was composed mainly of individuals from the military and intelligence, such as Nie Rongzhen, chief of staff of the PLA, and Li Kenong, the intelligence chief. Kim Il-sung had no choice but to accept the demand from the Sino-Soviet joint

delegation.<sup>18</sup> However, once the joint delegation left, Kim delayed implementing his promise, which led to strong tensions with his two Cold War patrons.<sup>19</sup>

Meanwhile, at the beginning of November 1956, Soviet forces intervened in Hungary, which had declared itself neutral, and arrested Hungarian prime minister Imre Nagy, establishing a puppet regime with pro-Soviet communist leader János Kádár at the helm (Békés 2006; Kramer 1996/1997; United Nations General Assembly 1956). Having observed Imre Nagy's fate, Kim Il-sung became extremely nervous about his own safety. At that time, about 300,000 Chinese troops were still stationed in North Korea, and, if necessary, China could mobilize these armed forces to put pressure on Kim Il-sung to make him obey its (and Russia's) demands. Against this backdrop, Kim Il-sung, on his own initiative, demanded the withdrawal of Chinese troops from North Korea. After carefully gauging the pros and cons, Mao relented to Kim's request.<sup>20</sup> Contrary to widespread understanding, therefore, the withdrawal of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army in 1958 from North Korea was not done voluntarily by the Chinese, but pursuant to Kim Il-sung's demand, suggesting that at the time Kim Il-sung regarded the Chinese troops in North Korea as a major threat to his safety and his grip on power (Kim and Han 2014).

With the withdrawal of Chinese troops, China consequently lost the physical means and leverage to enforce its political will over North Korea. However, after 1958, Sino–North Korean relations improved. Thanks to the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s, the asymmetrical nature of the Sino–North Korean relationship was virtually resolved. China not only stopped intervening in North Korea's internal affairs, but resumed economic assistance at a far greater level than Pyongyang expected.<sup>21</sup> Chinese leaders, including Mao Zedong, also repeatedly apologized to Kim Il-sung for intervening in “the August Incident” in September 1956, attributing the responsibility for the intervention to Peng Dehuai, who had already been purged.<sup>22</sup> Mao also stated that “historically Chinese people invaded Korea many times, but that all invasions were made by past feudal dynasties” to convey to Pyongyang that the new socialist China would never repeat such actions.<sup>23</sup> China also

signed the Sino–North Korean Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Assistance in 1961, which guaranteed North Korea's security (*Renmin ribao* 1961). In the following year, China also concluded a Sino–DPRK border treaty, in which it yielded to North Korea a number of islands along the Yalu River and Tumen River, as well as a quarter of Tian Chi (Lake Tian), located at the peak of Mount Changbai (Mount Baekdu in Korean) (Lee 2014; Shen and Dong 2011). In addition, the Chinese leadership reminded the North Korean leadership several times that the territory of Korea in the past began from the Liao River crossing the heartland of Northeast China, and asked whether North Korea would still want to have that region, implying that China was prepared to yield it.<sup>24</sup>

Most of the socialist countries, except for Albania, supported the Soviet Union in the wake of the Sino-Soviet split in the 1960s. Therefore, China desperately needed North Korea's support on its side and had no alternative but to appease North Korea. Nonetheless, China's fundamental aim toward North Korea was not changed during this period: to keep a stable status quo on the Korean Peninsula. For instance, immediately after the fall of South Vietnam, Kim Il-sung visited Beijing in 1975 and requested Mao's approval for his plan to attack South Korea. Mao flatly rejected the request (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, undated, 17–26).<sup>25</sup> Overall, it could be concluded that Mao's strategic goal of maintaining the status quo on the Korean Peninsula did not change throughout this and the ensuing period. The question is whether this policy still has validity in today's context.

The Cold War is long over, and the United States and the PRC normalized diplomatic relations four decades ago. They even established a partial strategic partnership for several years. Moreover, in East Asia, the Sino–South Korean relationship has developed dramatically across economic, political, and cultural domains.<sup>26</sup> At the same time, however, two conservative South Korean governments under Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye significantly reinforced the ROK military alliance with Washington. The same trend appears to be unfolding under the current liberal president Moon Jae-in as well. China and Japan have been confronting each other on territorial disputes and their competition for hegemony in Asia. In this process, the US-Japan military alliance has become stronger,



and the United States even agreed to allow Japan's Self-Defense Force to conduct operations outside of Japan. Further, the United States has been pushing to establish a formal US–Japan–South Korea trilateral military alliance consistent with its pivot to Asia grand strategy. These new developments have not only constituted unfavorable environments for China's security but might also serve as an incentive for Beijing to reinforce Sino–North Korean ties as well, despite the strains in the relationship caused by Pyongyang's nuclear tests and successive provocations. Under these circumstances, the buffer role that North Korea offers China still holds significance.

### **China's Strategic Priority in the North Korea Crisis**

In 2010, a Chinese think tank report titled “Chaoxian bandao weiji guanli yanjiu” (A study of crisis management on the Korean Peninsula), clarified China's current strategic goals toward the Korean Peninsula as “maintenance of the Korean Peninsula's stability and denuclearization of the whole Korean Peninsula (Li and Wang 2010, 3–4). However, evidence suggests that when these two goals collide, China prioritizes “stability” over “denuclearization” (Lee 2014). Regarding the nuclear issue of North Korea, China's biggest concern is the prospect of a nuclear domino phenomenon in East Asia, as Japan and South Korea would also want to go nuclear should North Korea develop a functional nuclear arsenal. Such an outcome would mean that China would no longer be the sole Northeast Asian nuclear weapons state. It is highly probable that China wants to keep its nuclear monopoly status (Lee 2014).

Until the present, North Korea has conducted nuclear tests five times. Prior to the first nuclear test in 2006, China's fundamental policy on the Korean Peninsula was to achieve stability through denuclearization. Until then, denuclearization did not collide with stability, and North Korea's nuclear capability at the time was seen as manageable. To this end, China had either hosted or mediated various levels of US–DPRK bilateral talks, as well as four-party and six-party talks. When necessary, China was even

not averse to putting pressure on North Korea so as to nudge Pyongyang to be more forthcoming in participating in such multi-lateral consultations.

After North Korea's second nuclear test in 2009, however, stability and denuclearization began to clash with each other. Washington, together with its Asian allies South Korea and Japan, placing priority on the denuclearization of North Korea, began to press China to implement heavier sanctions on North Korea.<sup>27</sup> China assessed that the robust international sanctions on North Korea would cripple North Korea's social, economic, and even political stability, possibly leading to the regime's collapse. This then would seriously undermine regional stability, China's bottom-line goal for the Korean Peninsula. Using that logic, China decided not to support harsh sanctions. This Chinese strategy clearly manifested itself after North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in 2009. Washington called for stronger sanctions on North Korea. China, however, did the opposite.<sup>28</sup> China not only provided economic assistance, but resumed high-level contacts with North Korea to ease the DPRK's diplomatic isolation as well. For instance, China dispatched Premier Wen Jiabao after the nuclear test, despite the fact that such a visit could be seen as rewarding North Korea's bad behavior (*People's Daily* 2009a; *Rodong sinmun* 2009).<sup>29</sup>

In Pyongyang, Premier Wen discussed new economic assistance.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, China invited Kim Jong-il, the supreme leader of the DPRK, and other senior officials, including Jang Song-thaek, to China.<sup>31</sup> China calculated that a diplomatically isolated and economically impoverished North Korea would pose a more grave regional threat and far more uncertainty than a stable North Korean regime that had high-level communication channels with Beijing.

The priority assigned by Beijing to the stability of North Korea was particularly pronounced in the wake of the sinking of the South Korean *Cheonan* corvette and North Korea's shelling of the South's Yeonpyong Island in 2010. Instead of criticizing North Korea, Beijing simply called for calm and stability from both Koreas.<sup>32</sup> However, with continued North Korean provocations, the long-range rocket launch in December 2012 and the third

nuclear test in February 2013, regional tensions heightened sharply and China's patience with North Korea inched closer to its breaking point. At this time, China changed its previous stance and decided to actively join in supporting the UN's punitive measures on Pyongyang, agreeing to UN Resolutions 2087 and 2094 in April 2013 (United Nations 2013a, 2013b). Regarding this matter, the PRC ambassador to the UN, Li Baodong, stated, "We want to see these resolutions completely enforced" (*China Daily* 2013). Kim Sook, South Korean ambassador to the UN, recognized that China had played a "decisive" role in passing the UN resolutions (*Newsis* 2013).

In the aftermath of North Korea's third nuclear test, a number of Chinese academics, state-run think tank researchers, and even a retired People's Liberation Army (PLA) general joined an uproar of public criticism of North Korea (Wang 2014). Some argued that China should condone a North Korea collapse and even called on China to join the UN forces to punish North Korea militarily (Deng 2013). Some Chinese scholars called for either stronger than ever sanctions against North Korea because North Korea "went too far" this time or a complete review of the friendship treaty China made with North Korea (Zhu 2013; Shen 2013; VOA 2013)<sup>33</sup>.

Although China has held to a nonintervention policy with regard to North Korea's internal affairs since the withdrawal of Chinese troops in 1958, it is highly logical to suggest that China's policy shift on North Korea would depend essentially on what strategic advantages North Korea could offer to China.<sup>34</sup> At the same time, China could ask, What disadvantages would China suffer from condoning continued North Korean provocations? It is unlikely that North Korea could threaten China with its nuclear weapons. China's biggest potential rivals in the region are the United States and Japan, not North Korea. Moreover, the security threat that the United States poses to China is much larger than the threat China poses to the United States. This can be gleaned from the fact that the Chinese government exhibits a highly sensitive reaction whenever American aircraft carriers and nuclear-powered submarines make appearances in the Yellow Sea close to China (Mearsheimer 2010, 380).<sup>35</sup> In addition, the United States has military allies surrounding China with military bases in South

Korea and Japan, not to mention in other parts of Asia. In the Asia-Pacific region, the United States has military allies that are South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand. Chinese analysts fear the country is encircled by US allies. On the contrary, the operational ranges of China's only aircraft carrier, *Liaoning*, and its submarines are still insufficient to reach US coastlines. China also does not have any military bases near the United States, such as in Central or South American nations, not to mention that it lacks military allies in the region.

Under these circumstances, the existence of North Korea offers a way to keep US forces south of the 38th parallel of the Korean Peninsula, the current inter-Korean borderline. Historically, China has regarded the Yellow Sea and Bohai Gulf as the gateway to Beijing and thus assigned paramount importance to protecting these channels. Understandably, China has been extremely wary of foreign powers' approaching the Yellow Sea and the Bohai Gulf. Well aware of this, in the late nineteenth century, world powers such as Russia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Germany occupied Lushun, Weihai, and Qingdao one after another—coastal cities located along the Yellow Sea and the Bohai Gulf. In this context, it was natural that China reacted vehemently to the approaching US aircraft carrier in the Yellow Sea, in the aftermath of North Korea's shelling of South Korea's Yeonpyong Island in 2010 (*People's Daily* 2010). Taken together, keeping US forces within South Korean territory on land and at sea is the biggest structural benefit North Korea could offer to China at the present time.

Second, for China, a divided Korea allows China to better manipulate the two Koreas. "Divide and rule" has been China's traditional tool for controlling neighbors.<sup>36</sup> In some cases, the two rival Koreas could be driven to compete in seeking China's support, the region's hegemon. This is especially effective in exploiting South Korea, a US ally. If Seoul leans too closely toward Washington, Beijing can use "the Pyongyang card" to check Seoul. A divided Korea also serves to prevent South Korea from concluding a military alliance of some kind with Japan, China's historical nemesis. In addition, China has almost exclusive access to North Korea's natural resources and its untapped market of 25

million people.<sup>37</sup> In conclusion, the existence of North Korea, despite its continued provocations, therefore, is still in China's strategic interests.

### **Conclusion: Conditions for China's Policy Change and Plausible Scenarios for a Unified Korea**

A state's geopolitical calculus undergoes change with time, and China's should be no exception to this general rule. As previously stated, key traits of China's policy toward North Korea are opportunism and pragmatism. Logically speaking, the starting point of China's policy shift on North Korea is when the disadvantages generated by North Korea exceed the advantages. In this regard, the key is how to figure out the tipping point at which North Korea's liability to China begins to outweigh its value as an asset (Lee 2014). Surely, recent provocations of Pyongyang have pushed China's patience with North Korea near the threshold. However, it has not yet crossed the tipping point (Lee 2016). After climaxing at the 2013 nuclear test, China's reactions to North Korea's belligerence in the 2016 nuclear tests were more measured. This moderation continued even after North Korea's test of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) in July 2017 that can potentially target the continental United States. China called for calm from both Pyongyang and Washington, instead of unilaterally rebuking Pyongyang.

Besides the North Korean factor, two other major variables, which could bring about China's policy shift, are the attitudes of the United States and South Korea. If Sino-US relations fundamentally improve, then Washington and Beijing hypothetically could become allies.<sup>38</sup> That would render all the strategic benefits North Korea could offer to China null. However, conflicts between China and Japan over territorial disputes and regional hegemony, plus the emergence of a far more robust US-Japan military alliance, are currently unfolding in East Asia. In this process, if South Korea were to join a formal US-South Korea-Japan trilateral alliance, a shift in Chinese policy becomes basically impossible.<sup>39</sup> In any case, so long as the United States is leaning

more heavily toward Japan, North Korea's strategic value to China is enhanced. In addition, the recent US attempt to deploy its THAAD antimissile system in South Korea can be seen as improving the strategic importance of North Korea to China (Hwang 2015).

Taken together, policy shifts on the part of China are highly unlikely to happen in the near future. Furthermore, even if China changes its policy on North Korea, it is uncertain whether this would lead to North Korea's collapse. Long isolated, North Korea has repeatedly demonstrated the resilience of its economy, which has been hobbled but has never been brought to a complete stop.<sup>40</sup>

That there is a tipping point for China's patience with North Korea, however, means that China sees North Korea as inherently expendable, should a viable alternative appear. Under the current situation, China prefers the status quo on the Korean Peninsula. In the same vein, China is not enthused about supporting the unification of the Korean peninsula, led by South Korea.

From China's perspective, a unified Korean Peninsula, therefore, should not undermine China's interests, currently served by North Korea. This is a prerequisite in seeking Beijing's consent to the unification of the Korean Peninsula. A unified and economically more prosperous Korean Peninsula should not only benefit China, but energize China's northeastern provinces as well, long regarded as China's economic backwater.<sup>41</sup>

For China, a neutral unified Korea would be the most preferred state. However, this option is very hard for the United States to consent to because it would be predicated on the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea. Therefore, it is highly unlikely that a neutral Korea would be chosen as the future of a unified Korea. Besides, South Korea's conservatives, currently very dominant in Korean society, could not accept this objective, either.

The second option is a unified Korea that maintains a capitalist system but with the withdrawal of US forces.<sup>42</sup> Mao was greatly satisfied with the withdrawal of US troops from South Korea in June, 1946 and opposed Kim Il-sung's insistence to attack the South (Kim Sang-won 2012). This indicates that China attaches a great importance to the Korean Peninsula that is without US troops. Thus, there is a high likelihood of China's consenting to

this arrangement. However, this option would also seriously undermine America's military interests in the region, making it difficult for Washington, not to mention Korean conservatives, to accept.

In contrast to the above options, the following two options could enjoy a higher probability for acceptance by both China and the United States. First, US troops would continue to remain in a unified Korea. US military assets, however, could not be deployed north of the 38th parallel. This option would undermine neither US nor Chinese current security interests regarding the Korean Peninsula and could likely gain China's support (*Dong-a Daily* 2013). In this case, a unified Korea could spur the economic development of northeast China, and even Outer Mongolia and Russia's Siberia, while facilitating the establishment of a new economic bloc in Northeast Asia, which could also serve US economic interests in the region (Fukumoto 2000/2001; *People's Daily* 2015; *Yonhap News* 2015a). China could also find this option attractive, while the United States will not strongly oppose it.

Considering China's well-known security concerns, a unified Korea would only deploy a constabulary force to maintain social order in the current North Korea region after unification. This approach could gain China's support for Korean unification. In response, China could be asked to make a corresponding move by pulling back PLA forces, which are deployed along the Sino-Korean border, back to the Shenyang-Changchun line. In this case, the newly created demilitarized zone—the current North Korea with part of northeast China—could be designated as a Peace Zone in East Asia. This option could gain strong support from China. It also has a fair chance of being accepted by the United States if China made the necessary concessions. This outcome would enhance regional stability in East Asia; thus, it would be welcomed by other neighboring countries as well.

This article presents Chinese preferences and the underlying strategies that inform Chinese behavior toward the Korean Peninsula. The bottom line is that China's policy on North Korea is flexible rather than fixed. The issue of North Korea has often served as a touchstone for US-China strategic cooperation in East Asia. This has been particularly the case during the Trump administration, as seen by the weight given the North Korean issue at

the April 2017 Mar-a-Lago summit between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping. It is high time for the Trump administration to implement viable approaches to find a solution to North Korea's nuclear programs and ease regional tensions surrounding the Korean Peninsula by brainstorming creative solutions with China. The outcome of such a solution would be a deepening of strategic cooperation between Washington and Beijing, and more predictable stability in East Asia, still shepherded by Washington.

## Notes

Kim Donggil is associate professor in the Department of History and director of the Center for Korean Peninsula Studies, Peking University. He is coauthor of *History of Sino-Soviet Relations (1931–1945)* (2009). He has published articles in journals such as *Diplomatic History*, *Cold War History*, *The Chinese Historical Review*, *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, *Lishi yanjiu* (Historical research), *Dangde Wenxian*, and others. He is presently at work on a Sino-Korea Cold War project. He can be reached at dgkim@pku.edu.cn. Seong-hyon Lee is a research fellow at the Sejong Institute in Seoul. His research focuses on US-China relations and China-DPRK relations. His recent journal publications appear in *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, *Journal of Korean Studies*, *Quarterly Diplomacy*, with book chapters in *The New Arctic Governance* (2016), *China Insight* (2017), and *Japan's Search for Strategic Security Partnerships* (2018). He was a Pantech Fellow, Stanford University, and Salzburg Global Fellow. Currently he is nonresident Senior Research Fellow at the Center for Korean Peninsula Studies at Peking University. He can be reached at sunnybbsfs@gmail.com.

1. A professor at the CCP Central Academy, Deng Yuwen, proposed a bold new policy prescription when he said, "The best way is to take the initiative to facilitate unification with South Korea." See Deng (2013).

2. Niu Jun, a professor at Peking University, insists that "North Korea in the past offered a protective wall for China against powerful Western rivals, but now China provides a protective shield for North Korea for the latter's continued provocations." Niu (2013). Zhang Liangui, an expert on North Korea at the CCP Academy, argues, "But now, even China, the long viewed ally of North Korea, sees North Korea's defiance as a nuisance" (Zhang 2013a). Also see Wang (2014).

3. Specifically, Article 2 of this treaty declares the two nations guarantee to adopt immediately all measures to oppose any country or coalition of countries that might attack either nation. See Harrison (2002).

4. Shin and Straub (2015, 238) argue, "Neither China nor the U.S. is likely to take new initiatives in the foreseeable future" on North Korea. The usefulness of the Six-Party Talks was met with serious doubt even by some



Chinese scholars. For instance, Zhang Liangui points out that the original purpose of the talks was to persuade North Korea to give up nuclear weapons. But with North Korea's owning nuclear weapons now, the multi-lateral consultation platform lost its founding spirit of purpose. More importantly, Zhang points out that North Korea now attempts to use the forum to have a discussion on nuclear arms reduction, meaning that Pyongyang now wants to be recognized for its *he shenfen* (nuclear status), prompting the United States to boycott the talks. Washington conditions that Pyongyang should make a significant gesture of will to forgo its nuclear weapons (Zhang 2013b). This sentiment is more pronounced among Americans than Chinese. Roger Cohen argues that Obama was elected to lead a nation exhausted by the two longest and most expensive wars in its history. He said, "Iraq and Afghanistan consumed trillions without yielding victory. His [Obama's] priority was domestic . . . the real pivot was not to Asia but to home" (Cohen 2015). In the authors' interview with Lim Dong-won in Seoul in 2011, former head of the ROK National Intelligence Service, he also remarked, "Recently, there has been no expectation to resolve North Korea's nuclear issue through the Six-Party Talks" (Lim 2011).

5. After North Korea's third nuclear test, UN sanctions were passed with China's agreement on March 7, 2013. The US government welcomed the Chinese move.

6. The scholarly community regards the year 2009 as the watershed moment in which China began to place "stability" of DPRK as the prime operational logic for its DPRK policy. South Korea's former minister of unification even argues, "China-North Korea relations developed to become much closer since the fall of 2009 than those times before North Korea's second nuclear test" (Lee 2014).

7. Many Western scholars and government agencies have a general belief that North Korea continues to function as a buffer for China and, therefore, won't likely give up Pyongyang. For instance, Ted Galen Carpenter, a senior fellow for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, states, "Chinese officials are not willing to turn their backs on a long-standing ally, a buffer between China and a U.S.-led East Asia" (Carpenter 2013).

8. South Korean president Park Geun-hye told reporters during a return flight from China that "South Korea and China will soon launch a number of consultations on peaceful unification" (*Yonhap News* 2015b). Scholars in China think she may have misunderstood the Chinese side. China has all along said it supports a "peaceful unification of the Korean Peninsula." That doesn't mean that China supports Seoul-led unification (Shin 2015).

9. The treaty was a temporary moratorium of the war, not a permanent ending of the conflict state.

10. Although China-North Korea relations transformed from "comrades-in-arms" to "allies at arm's length" over the years, observers didn't fail to notice China retains its Cold War "league mentality" when it is inclined to treat North Korea's various provocations with leniency. For instance, China remained silent when North Korea killed fifty South Koreans when Pyongyang sank a

South Korean warship in March 2010 and shelled a South Korean island in November the same year. After North Korea's third nuclear test in 2013, China signed up for punitive international sanctions to punish North Korea economically, but its bilateral trade with North Korea that year marked a record high. It raised eyebrows whether China's harsh rhetoric on North Korea was at the same level with its actual actions.

11. On October 3 and 12, 1950, Mao Zedong informed Stalin that China would not send troops to Korea. Mao's verbal message to Stalin via Roshchin, 3 October 1950, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii [Russian State Archives on Social-Political History, cited as RGASPI], Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 105–106; Telegram from Roshchin to Stalin, 12 October 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 140; Telegram from Mao Zedong to Stalin, 12 October 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 141.

12. Telegram from Kovalev to Stalin, 18 May 1949, Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, cited as APRF], Fond 4, Opis 01, Delo 333, Listy 59–61; Telegram from Stalin to Mao Zedong, 26 October 1949, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 332, Listy 47–48; Kim (2011).

13. Mao stressed that the Chinese People's Volunteers could remain in North Korea and if necessary China could dispatch more troops, asking Kim Il-sung to reduce its military forces down to 100,000 troops, while objecting to North Korea's building an air force and mechanized unit, citing the exorbitant cost. Mao advised Kim Il-sung to use the resources saved from lowering the military expenditure for "improving the standard of people's living." Record of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Mikoyan, 23 September 1956. Authors' personal collection.

14. Mao demonstrated that "the distance between the 38th Parallel and the Yalu River is merely 400 kilometers, therefore, it would put China's northeastern region in danger if something went wrong with the DPRK." Record of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Mikoyan, 23 September 1956. Authors' personal collection.

15. US Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–1957, vol. 23, part 2, Korea, pp. 287–288, 322–325; Confidential US State Department Special Files, Korea, First Supplement, 1951–1966, Reel 7, pp. 569–573; Central Committee of Korean Worker's Party, "Park Il-woo ui bandangjeog jongpahaengwie daehayeo" [On Park Il-woo's anti-Party sectarian behavior (December 2–3, 1955)], *Gyeoljeongjip* (1955) [Collection of policy decisions (1955)] (Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, 1955), pp. 51–56; Central Committee of Korean Worker's Party, "Munhwayesulbunnyaeseo bandongjeong bureujyosa sasanggwau tjaengeul deoung ganghwahal de daehayeo" [On the reinforcement of struggle against reactionary bourgeois mentality in the field of culture and arts, January 18, 1956], *Gyeoljeongjip* (1956) [Collection of policy decisions (1956)] (Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, 1956), pp. 49–58.

16. "Choechangik, yungongheum, seohwi, ripilgyu, bakchangong deung dongmudeurui jongpajeong eummohaengwie daehayeo" [On the sectarian

and conspiratorial behaviors of comrades Choi Chang-ik, Yun Gong-hum, Seo Hwi, Lee Pil-gyu, and Park Chang-ok, August 30–31, 1956], *Gyeoljeongjip (1956)* [Collection of policy decisions (1956)] (Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, 1956), pp. 12–17; “Letter from the member of KWP Central Committee Seo Hwi, etc., et al., to Central Committee of CCP: On the situation of KWP,” 5 September 1956; Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiiskoy Federatsii [Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (AVPRF)], Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 161–181.

17. “Diary of ambassador of the USSR to the D.P.R.K. V.I. Ivanov for the period from 29 August to 14 September 1956,” September 01, 1956, RGASPI, Fond 05, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 319; “Conversation record between Soviet ambassador Ivanov and Chinese ambassador Qiao Xiaoguang,” September 4, 1956, RGASPI, Fond 05, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 322–325; Record of Conversation between Mao Zedong and representatives of Central Committee of CPSU, 18 September 1956, authors’ personal collection.

18. “Report of Mikoyan to Central Committee of CPSU: Record of meeting with Central Committee of KWP on the draft of decision,” 22 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 9–11; “Report of Mikoyan to Central Committee of CPSU: Record of meeting with Kim Il-sung and of meeting between Kim Il-sung and Peng Dehuai,” 21 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 12–16; “Report of Mikoyan to Central Committee of CPSU: On the discussion of Central Committee of KWP in September 20,” 21 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 17–34; “Choechangik, yungongheum, seohwi, ripilgyu, bakchangong deung dongmudeure Daehan gyuryulmunjereul gaejeonghal de gwanhayeo [on the revision of punishment on comrade Choi Chang-ik, Yun Gong-hum, Seo Hwi, Lee Pil-gyu, and Park Chang-ok (23 September 1956)],” *Gyeoljeongjip (1956)* [Collection of policy decisions (1956)] (Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, 1956), 24.

19. “Report of Ponomarev to Central Committee of CPSU: Record of Conversation on delay of promulgation of KWP Central Committee’s decision,” 26 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 2; “Report on conversation between ambassador Ivanov and Kim Il-sung,” 15 October 1956, September, RGASPI, Fond 05, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 296.

20. Mao Zedong’s Conversation with Yudin, 30 November 1956, authors’ personal collection; Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi, *Zhou Enlai nianpu: 1898–1949* [A chronicle of Zhou Enlai: 1898–1949], vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1997), 5–6.

21. Reference Materials for the Sino-Korean Negotiations on Supplying Equipment and Constructing Power Plants, 5 August 1958, PRCFMA, no. 204-00315-04, 57–67, 69–71; Shen Zhihua (2010); Li and Xia (2008); Shen and Xia (2012, 38).

22. “Record of Liu Shaoqi’s conversation with DPRK ambassador Lee Yong-ho,” 15 February 1962, CFMA (Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives), no. 106-01380-10; Mao Zedong’s Conversation with Kim Il-sung, 21 May 1960, authors’ personal collection; Mao Zedong’s Conversation with Kim Il-sung, 13 July 1961, authors’ personal collection; Mao Zedong’s Conversation

with Park Keum-churl, 21 June 1962, authors' personal collection; Mao Zedong's Conversation with Rodong Sinmun Delegation, 25–26 April 1963, authors' personal collection.

23. Mao Zedong's Conversation with the delegation of DPRK Party and Cabinet, 7 October 1964, Authors' personal collection; Mao Zedong's Conversation with DPRK Academy of Sciences Delegation, 25 August 1963, Authors' personal collection; Mao Zedong's conversation with Park Sung-churl, 20 March 1964, Authors' personal collection.

24. Mao Zedong's Conversation with DPRK Government Delegation, 25 November 1958, authors' personal collection; Mao Zedong's Conversation with DPRK Party and Government Delegation, 7 October 1964, authors' personal collection.

25. Mao Zedong's Conversation with Kim Il-sung, 18 April 1975, Foreign Ministry, No. 19, 17–26, Authors' personal collection.

26. Chinese ambassador to South Korea Qiu Guohong remarked in December 2015 that the two countries have entered into an era of “three highs” marked by political trust, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange (*Yonhap News* 2015c).

27. Official statements from the United States summarily emphasize the role of China in moving forward the North Korean nuclear negotiations. See statements from Sung Kim, special representative for North Korea Policy: “China has a very special relationship with North Korea. They have a long history of ties with North Korea, and we expect that China will use its leverage and its leadership of the Six-Party Process to try to persuade North Korea [to come] back to serious and credible negotiations” (US Department of State 2015). Also see statements by Thomas M. Countryman, assistant secretary, Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation: “China is the first line of defense against North Korea's non-proliferation activities. . . . China can do more to prevent such exports and the US will continue to work cooperatively with Beijing to that end. . . . As North Korea's last remaining patron, the PRC has a critical, indeed unique, role to play in addressing the North Korean nuclear challenge. That is why North Korea remains at the top of our bilateral agenda with China. . . . Can China do more to exercise its unique levers of influence over Pyongyang? Of course. And we remain in close touch with Beijing about ways we can work together to bring the DPRK to the realization that it has no other viable choice but to denuclearize” (US Department of State 2014). In response to China's lack of cooperation on the North Korean issue, South Korea adopted the “Kill Chain” strategy in which the South Korean president would authorize a preemptive attack on North Korea.

28. In 2009, Pyongyang's belligerence evoked explicit Chinese disapproval, but China renewed its policy of economic engagement not long after North Korea softened its stance (Szalontai 2015).

29. North Korea conducted its second nuclear test in May 2000. Four months later, Chinese premier Wen Jiabao visited Pyongyang. At the airport, Wen was personally greeted by Kim Jong-il in a show of solidarity. Wen pledged massive economic aid to North Korea. The visit was the first time a Chinese Premier visited North Korea since Li Peng's visit in 1991. Dur-

ing the visit, Wen offered a huge economic aid package to North Korea, including a new Yalu Bridge that links China to North Korea. Chinese media said the bridge would cost 1.7 billion yuan (\$258 million) (*Global Times* 2011). South Korean media speculated the total aid package would reach \$2 trillion (*Chosun Daily* 2009).

30. Chinese foreign minister Yang Jiechi characterized the visit as “further deepening the traditional China-DPRK friendship and boosting their good-neighborly relations of cooperation” (*People’s Daily* 2009b).

30. North Korea’s delegation, headed by Jang Song-thaek, visited China August 13–18, 2012. In Beijing, he met with then President Hu Jintao and then Premier Wen Jiabao. Jang held the title of chief of the central administrative department of the Workers’ Party of Korea (WPK) that controls North Korea’s intelligence and police apparatus. He was also a WPK Political Bureau member and vice chairman of the National Defense Commission (*People’s Daily* 2012). Choe Ryong-hae, a confidant of Kim Jong-un, visited China May 22–24, 2013 (Korean Central News Agency 2013; *Renmin ribao* 2013).

31. Chinese state councilor Dai Bingguo visited Seoul, where he reportedly displayed a lack of diplomatic decorum during a meeting with President Lee Myung-bak, giving a long “lecture” on the history of the Korean Peninsula. South Korean conservatives saw it as reflecting Beijing’s overbearing attitude (*Yonhap News* 2010).

32. In addition to the growing Chinese negative sentiment shown in Footnote 1 and 2, other open source news reports and opinion columns in this regard are numerous. For example, see Zhu Feng (2013), Shen Dingli (2013), and Lv Chao quoted in VOA (2013).

33. When Kim Jong-il died in December 2011 and his young son, Kim Jong-un, took power, China made no negative statements on the three-generation family power transfer—a first time ever among socialist countries—not to mention doing so would go against socialist tenets. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the PRC even expressed a hope that North Korea would quickly restore its stability under the leadership of Kim Jong-un. See Chinese ambassador to North Korea Liu Hongcai’s statement of December 20, 2011 (Central People’s Government 2011).

34. According to Mearsheimer, China’s reaction is natural because, as he argues, the United States, in fact, reacted the same by displaying displeasure whenever distant powers’ military assets approached near its shores. Especially see Mearsheimer (2010, 380).

35. *Fen er zhi zhi* in Chinese.

36. North Korea’s dependence on China in trade increased slightly from 89.1 percent in 2013 to 90.1 percent in 2014. In particular, most of North Korea’s natural resources are exported to China (KOTRA 2015).

37. For the recent scholarship on the US-China relations, see Mearsheimer (2010); Lieberthal and Wang (2012). On the issue of whether China can attain “peaceful rise,” see Buzan and Cox (2013). For China’s diplomatic strategy, see Odgaard (2013). For China’s foreign policy under Xi Jinping, see He and Feng (2013). For the latest update on the same issue, see Shambaugh (2015); and for a compilation of views by experts, including Ezra

Vogel, Alison Kaufman, Jacques deLisle, Andrew Erickson, and Robert Sutter, see *The Asan Forum* (2015); also see Ringen (2015).

38. During the Lee Myung-bak administration, Seoul's move to sign a military intelligence sharing pact with Japan backfired in South Korea's domestic public opinion; consequently, it didn't materialize. The agreement was made later during the Park Geun-hye administration in December 2014, signaling a strengthening of the military cooperation among the United States, South Korea, and Japan.

39. During North Korea's famine in the 1990s, called the Arduous March, North Korea proved to survive it with almost little economic support from China, a demonstration of the regime's economic self-sustenance.

40. South Korean scholar Yang Woon-chul said the unification of the Korean Peninsula would significantly contribute to the economic development of China's northeastern provinces. Transcript from the conference remarks on November 13, 2015, held by Peking University Center for Korean Peninsula Studies and the Sejong Institute of South Korea, Beijing, China.

41. For how the US–South Korea alliance gets on China's nerves and for a historical examination of China's views on the South Korea–US alliance, see Chung (2014).

## References

- The Asan Forum. 2015. "Assessing Xi Jinping's Impact Following Three Years at the Helm." *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, October 15, [www.theasanforum.org/category/special-forum/?dat=&country=](http://www.theasanforum.org/category/special-forum/?dat=&country=).
- Békés, Csaba. 2006. "The 1956 Hungarian Revolution and the Declaration of Neutrality." *Cold War History*, vol. 6, no. 4 (November), pp. 477–500.
- Buzan, Barry, and Michael Cox. 2013. "China and the U.S.: Comparable Cases of 'Peaceful Rise'?" *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 6, no. 2 (June), pp. 109–132.
- Carpenter, Ted Galen. 2013. "Learn to Live with a Nuclear North Korea." *Washington Post*, February 14, [www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/learn-to-live-with-a-nuclear-north-korea/2013/02/14/0c6dad22-6fa9-11e2-aa58-243de81040ba\\_story.html?utm\\_term=.b0d1f031e7ea](http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/learn-to-live-with-a-nuclear-north-korea/2013/02/14/0c6dad22-6fa9-11e2-aa58-243de81040ba_story.html?utm_term=.b0d1f031e7ea).
- Central Committee of Korean Workers' Party (KWP). 1955. "Park Il-woo ui bandongjeong jongpahaengwie daehayeo" [On Park Il-woo's anti-Party sectarian behavior (December 2–3, 1955)]. *Gyeoljeongjip (1955)* [Collection of policy decisions (1955)]. Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, pp. 51–56.
- . 1956. "Munhwayesulbunnyaeseo bandongjeong bureujyoha sasangg-wauwi tjaengeul deoung ganghwahal de daehayeo" [On the reinforcement of struggle against reactionary bourgeois mentality in the field of culture and arts, January 18, 1956]. *Gyeoljeongjip (1956)* [Collection of policy decisions (1956)]. Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, pp. 49–58.

- Central People's Government of the People's Republic of China. 2011. "Chinese ambassador to DPRK Liu Hongcai's statement on December 20th on the death of Kim Jong Il." December 20, [www.gov.cn/jrzg/2011-12/20/content\\_2024919.htm](http://www.gov.cn/jrzg/2011-12/20/content_2024919.htm).
- China Daily*. 2013. "China Backs DPRK Sanctions." March 8.
- "Choechangik, yungongheum, seohwi, ripilgyu, bakchangong deung dongmudeurui jongpajeong eummohaengwie daehayeo" [On the sectarian and conspiratorial behaviors of comrades Choi Chang-ik, Yun Gong-hum, Seo Hwi, Lee Pil-gyu, and Park Chang-ok, August 30–31, 1956]. *Gyeol-jeongjip (1956)* [Collection of policy decisions (1956)]. Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, pp. 12–17.
- "Choechangik, yungongheum, seohwi, ripilgyu, bakchangong deung dongmudeure Daehan gyuryulmunjereul gaejeonghal de gwanhayeo" [On the revision of punishment on comrade Choi Chang-ik, Yun Gong-hum, Seo Hwi, Lee Pil-gyu, and Park Chang-ok, 23 September 1956]. *Gyeol-jeongjip (1956)* [Collection of policy decisions (1956)]. Pyongyang: KWP Central Committee Publishing House, p. 24.
- Chosun Daily*. 2009. "Jung, Haekhyupsang danggeunero buk-e seonmul botali pu-re" [China offers a gift package to DPRK as nuclear negotiation inducement]. October 7.
- Chung, Jae Ho. 2014. "China's Evolving Views of the Korean-American Alliance, 1953–2012." *Journal of Contemporary China*, vol. 23, no. 87, pp. 425–442.
- Cohen, Roger. 2015. "Obama's Doctrine of Restraint." *New York Times*, October 12, [www.nytimes.com/2015/10/13/opinion/obamas-doctrine-of-restraint.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/10/13/opinion/obamas-doctrine-of-restraint.html).
- Confidential US State Department Special Files, Korea, First Supplement, 1951–1966, Reel 7, pp. 569–573.
- "Conversation record between Soviet ambassador Ivanov and Chinese ambassador Qiao Xiaoguang." September 4, 1956, RGASPI, Fond 05, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 322–325.
- Deng Yuwen. 2013. "China Should Abandon North Korea." *Financial Times*, February 27.
- "Diary of ambassador of the USSR to the D.P.R.K V.I. Ivanov for the period from 29 August to 14 September 1956." September 01, 1956, RGASPI, Fond 05, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 319.
- Dong-a Daily*. 2013. "Interview with President Lee Myung-Bak." February 15.
- Foot, Rosemary. 1991. "Making Known the Unknown War." *Diplomatic History*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Summer), pp. 411–431.
- Fukumoto, Mayumi. 2000/2001. "Impact of Economic and Technical Cooperation on Northeast Asian Countries." In Satoru Okuda, ed., *APEC in the 21st Century—Selected Issues for Deeper Economic Cooperation*. Chiba, Japan: Institute of Developing Economies, APEC Study Center. [www.ide.go.jp](http://www.ide.go.jp).
- Global Times*. 2011. "Work Begins on New Bridge to North Korea." January 4.
- Harrison, Selig S. 2002. *Korean Endgame: A Strategy for Reunification and U.S. Disengagement*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

- He Kai and Feng Huiyun. 2013. "Xi Jinping's Operational Code Beliefs and China's Foreign Policy." *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 6, no. 3 (September), pp. 209–231.
- Hwang Il-do. 2015. "Will China Get Revenge?" *Dong-a Daily*, June 13.
- Jin Chongji. 2003. *Mao Zedong zhuan: 1949–1976* [Biography of Mao Zedong: 1949–1976]. Vol. 1. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe.
- . 2008. *Zhou Enlai zhuan* [Biography of Zhou Enlai]. Vol. 2. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, pp. 11–17.
- Kim, Donggil. 2011. "Stalin's Korean U-Turn: The USSR's Evolving Security Strategy and the Origins of the Korean War." *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 24, no. 1 (June), pp. 89–114.
- . 2012. "Prelude to War? The Repatriation of Koreans from the Chinese PLA, 1949–50." *Cold War History*, vol. 12, no. 2, pp. 227–244.
- . 2016a. "China's Intervention in the Korean War Revisited." *Diplomatic History*, vol. 40, no. 5, pp. 1002–1026.
- . 2016b. "New Insight into Mao's Initial Strategic Consideration Towards the Korean War Intervention." *Cold War History*, vol. 16, no. 3, pp. 239–254.
- Kim, Donggil, and Sangjun Han. 2014. "Je-2-ui haebang: Bughan jajuhwa, 1956–1957 nyeonui junggug-bughangwangye" [The second liberation: Struggle for equal and Sino–North Korea relations in 1956–1957]. *Kukka Chŏnlyak* [National strategy], vol. 20, no. 2, pp. 69–108.
- Kim, Sangwon. 2014. "The Chinese Civil War and Sino–North Korea Relations, 1945–50." *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies*, vol. 27, no. 1 (June), pp. 91–113.
- Korean Central News Agency. 2013. "Chinese President Xi Jinping Meets Choe Ryong Hae." May 24.
- KOTRA (Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency). 2015. "North Korea's Foreign Trade in 2014."
- Kramer, Mark, trans. and annotated. 1996/1997. "The 'Malin Notes' on the Crises in Hungary and Poland, 1956." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin*, Nos. 8–9 (1996/1997), pp. 385–410.
- Lee, Jong-Seok. 2014. "China–North Korea Relations in the Post–Cold War Era and New Changes in 2009." *Chinese Historical Review*, vol. 21, no. 2 (November), pp. 143–161.
- Lee, Seong-hyon. 2014. "Jungguk Daebukzhengcheck-ui tipping point" [China's tipping point on North Korea]. *JoongAng Sunday*, May 12, <http://news.naver.com/main/read.nhn?mode=LSD&mid=sec&sid1=004&oid=353&aid=0000018655>.
- . 2016. "Why Did We Get China Wrong? Reconsidering the Popular Narrative: China Will Abandon North Korea." *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, vol. 25, no. 1 (June), pp. 65–93.
- "Letter from the member of KWP Central Committee Seo Hwi, etc., et al., to Central Committee of CCP: On the situation of KWP," September 5, 1956, Arkhiv Vneshney Politiki Rossiiskoy Federatsii [Archive of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation] (AVPRF), Fond 5446, Opis 98, Delo 721, Listy 161–181.



- Li, Danhui, and Yafeng Xia. 2008. "Competing for Leadership: Split or Détente in the Sino-Soviet Bloc." *International History Review*, vol. 30, no. 3 (September), pp. 545–574.
- Li Xiaodong and Wang Yisheng, eds. 2010. *Chaxian Bandao weiji guanli yanjiu* [A study of crisis management on the Korean peninsula]. Beijing: Junshi kexue chubanshe.
- Lieberthal, Kenneth, and Wang Jisi. 2012. "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust." Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, pp. 49–50.
- Lim Dong-won. 2011. Interview with authors, Seoul, South Korea, January 18.
- Mao's verbal message to Stalin via Roshchin, 3 October 1950, Rossiiskii Gosudarstvennyi Arkhiv Sotsial'no-Politicheskoi Istorii [Russian State Archives on Social-Political History, cited as RGASPI], Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 105–106.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with DPRK Academy of Sciences Delegation, 25 August 1963. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with DPRK Government Delegation, 25 November 1958, authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with DPRK Party and Government Delegation, 7 October 1964. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with the Delegation of DPRK Party and Cabinet, 7 October 1964, authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with Kim Il-sung, 21 May 1960. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with Kim Il-sung, 13 July 1961. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with Park Keum-churl, 21 June 1962. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with Park Sung-churl, 20 March 1964. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with Rodong Sinmun Delegation, 25–26 April 1963. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong's Conversation with Yudin, 30 November 1956. Authors' personal collection.
- Mao Zedong. 2000. "Mao Zedong's telegram to Zhou Enlai on military operations and deployment of the CPV after entering Korea (14 October 1950)." *Dang de wenxian* [Party documents], issue 5 (2000), p. 8.
- Mearsheimer, John. 2010. "The Gathering Storm: China's Challenge to US Power in Asia." *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 3, no. 4 (December), pp. 380–396.
- Ministry of Foreign Affairs, PRC, "Record of conversation between Chairman Mao Zedong and Kim Il-sung, the first secretary of KWP and Chairman of D.P.R.K (April 18, 1975), *Mao zedong jiejianwaibin tanhua waijian tanhua jiluhuibian* [Collection of Mao Zedong's conversations with foreign guests], vol. 19, pp. 17–26.
- Newsis. 2013. "See Interview with U.N. Ambassador Kim Sook." March 8.
- Niu Jun. 2013. "Zhong dui chao zhengce yao zouchu lishi" [China's North Korean policy should walk out of history]. *Shincheu Daily*, September 24.

- Odgaard, Liselotte. 2013. "Peaceful Coexistence Strategy and China's Diplomatic Power." *Chinese Journal of International Politics*, vol. 6, no. 3 (October), pp. 233–272.
- People's Daily*. 2009a. "Chinese Premier Arrives in Pyongyang, Greeted by Kim Jong Il at Airport." October 4.
- . 2009b. "China, DPRK Sign Cooperation Agreements." October 4.
- . 2010. "Why China Opposes U.S.–South Korean Military Exercises in the Yellow Sea." July 16.
- . 2012. "Chinese President Vows More Cooperation with DPRK." August 18.
- . 2015. "Xi Eyes Future of NE China, Stresses Role of SOEs." July 19.
- Qing, Simei. 2012. "The U.S.-China Confrontation in Korea: Assessment of Intentions in Time of Crisis." In James I. Matray, ed., *Northeast Asia and the Legacy of Harry S. Truman: Japan, China, and the Two Koreas*. Kirksville, MO: Truman State University Press, pp. 93–118.
- "Record of Conversation between Mao Zedong and Mikoyan," September 23, 1956. Authors' personal collection.
- "Record of Conversation between Mao Zedong and representatives of Central Committee of CPSU." September 18, 1956. Authors' personal collection.
- "Record of Liu Shaoqi's conversation with DPRK ambassador Lee Yongho," 15 February 1962, CFMA (Chinese Foreign Ministry Archives), no. 106-01380-10.
- Reference Materials for the Sino-Korean Negotiations on Supplying Equipment and Constructing Power Plants, 5 August 1958, PRCFMA, no. 204-00315-04, pp. 57–67, 69–71.
- Renmin ribao* [People's daily]. 1961. Full text of the Sino–North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Friendship Treaty. July 12.
- . 2013. "Xi Jinping Meeting with Kim Jong-un's Special Envoy Choe." May 25.
- "Report of Mikoyan to Central Committee of CPSU: Record of meeting with Central Committee of KWP on the draft of decision," 22 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 9–11.
- "Report of Mikoyan to Central Committee of CPSU: Record of meeting with Kim Il-sung and of meeting between Kim Il-sung and Peng Dehuai," 21 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 12–16.
- "Report of Mikoyan to Central Committee of CPSU: On the discussion of Central Committee of KWP in September 20," 21 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 17–34.
- "Report of Ponomarev to Central Committee of CPSU: Record of conversation on delay of promulgation of KWP Central Committee's decision," 26 September 1956, AVPRF, Fond 5446, Opis 98c, Delo 718, Listy 2; "Report on conversation between ambassador Ivanov and Kim Il-sung," 15 October 1956, September, RGASPI, Fond 05, Opis 28, Delo 410, Listy 296.
- Reuters. 2017. "Chinese Paper Says China Should Stay Neutral if North Korea Attacks First." August 11.
- Ringen, Stein. 2015. "The Love Affair with China Is Over." December 2, <http://thechinesestate.com/2015/12/02/the-love-affair-with-china-is-over/>.

- Rodong sinmun* [Worker's daily]. 2009. "Comrade Wen Jiabao Arrives in Pyongyang." October 5.
- Segal, Gerald. 1985. *Defending China*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Shambaugh, David. 2015. "Watching the Signs: Can Honesty and Candour Define Xi Jinping's First State Visit to the US?" *South China Morning Post*, September 22.
- Shen Dingli. 2013. "Lips and Teeth: It's Time for China to Get Tough with North Korea." *Foreign Policy*, February 13.
- Shen Zihua, ed. 2010. *ZhongSu guanxi shigang, 1917–1991* [An outline of the history of Sino-Soviet relations, 1917–1991]. Beijing: Xinhua chubanshe, pp. 222–236, 253–295.
- Shen Zihua and Dong Jie. 2011. "The Solution of Sino–North Korean Border Dispute." *21st Century Commentary* (Hong Kong), vol. 124 (April), pp. 34–51.
- Shen, Zihua, and Yafeng Xia. 2012. "China and the Post-War Reconstruction of North Korea, 1953–1961." North Korea International Documentation Project Working Paper Series, Issue 4 (May), p. 38.
- Shin, Gi-Wook, and David Straub. 2015. "The Evolving Sino-American Relationship and the Korea Problem." *China Quarterly of International Studies*, vol. 1, no. 2, pp. 223–246.
- Shin Yongho. 2015. "Hanjung pyonghua tongyil wihae dayanghan nonyi shi-jak halguk" [South Korea–China will embark on a diverse channel of consultations for peaceful unification]. *JoongAng Daily*, September 5.
- Szalontai, Balazs. 2015. "If the Neighborhood Catches Fire, One Will Also Come to Brief: Chinese Attitudes Toward North Korea's Confrontational Acts, 2009–2014." *Tiempo devorado*, vol. 2, no. 2, pp. 68–97.
- Telegram from Kovalev to Stalin, 18 May 1949, Arkhiv Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Archive of the President of the Russian Federation, cited as APRF], Fond 4, Opis 01, Delo 333, Listy 59–61.
- Telegram from Mao Zedong to Stalin, 12 October 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 141.
- Telegram from Roshchin to Stalin, 12 October 1950, RGASPI, Fond 558, Opis 11, Delo 334, Listy 140.
- Telegram from Stalin to Mao Zedong, 26 October 1949, APRF, Fond 45, Opis 1, Delo 332, Listy 47–48.
- United Nations. 2013a. "Security Council Condemns Use of Ballistic Missile Technology in Launch by Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in Resolution 2087 (2013)." Security Council, 6904th Meeting (PM), January 22, [www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc10891.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc10891.doc.htm).
- . 2013b. "Security Council Strengthens Sanctions on Democratic People's Republic of Korea, in Response to 12 February Nuclear Test." Security Council, 6932th Meeting (AM), March 7, [www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc10934.doc.htm](http://www.un.org/press/en/2013/sc10934.doc.htm).
- United Nations General Assembly, First Emergency Special Session. 1956. "Cablegram Dated 1 November 1956 from the President of the Council of Ministers of the Hungarian People's Republic addressed to the Secretary General." A/3251, November 1, 1956.

- US Department of State. 2014. "The Future of North Korea: Implications for Regional Security." May 31, <http://www.state.gov/t/isn/rls/rm/2014/228541.htm>.
- . 2015. "Remarks by Special Representative for North Korea Policy Sung Kim: Remarks to Reporters at the Westin Chaoyang Hotel." January 30, <http://translations.state.gov/st/english/texttrans/2015/01/2015013031.3300.html#ixzz3odmO6w63>; [https://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng\\_report/2015030416253110.pdf](https://www.eai.or.kr/data/bbs/eng_report/2015030416253110.pdf).
- US Department of State, Foreign Relations of the United States (FRUS), 1955–1957, vol. 23, part 2, Korea, pp. 287–288, 322–325.
- VOA. 2013. "Chinese Exports to North Korea Fell During First Half of 2013." September 9.
- Wang Hongguang. 2014. "Chaoxian ruo bengkui zhongguo jiubuliao zhongguoren bubiwei chao dazhang" [Should North Korea collapse, China cannot save it, China won't save North Korea if country goes to war]. *Huanqiu Shibao*, December 1.
- Whiting, Allen S. 1960. *China Crosses the Yalu: The Decision to Enter the Korean War*. New York: Macmillan.
- Yonhap News*. 2010. "China's Dai Bingguo Didn't Mention Yeonpyong, Not Even Once." December 9.
- . 2015a. "Unification of the Korean Peninsula Is the Foundation for Establishing a Northeast Asian Economic Community." May 13.
- . 2015b. "S. Korea, China to begin discussions on Koreas' unification." September 4.
- . 2015c. "Chinese Ambassador Hails Progress in Ties with S. Korea." December 3.
- Zhang Liangui. 2013a. "China Living in Denial of NK's Status as an Ally." *Global Times*, February 24.
- . 2013b. "Chaoxian xiang yihua liufanghuitan" [North Korea wants to change the basic nature of the Six-Party Talks]. *Huanqiu Shibao* [Global times], September 24.
- Zhonggong zhongyang wenxian yanjiushi. 1980. "Zhou Enlai xuanji" [Collected documents of Zhou Enlai]. Vol. 2. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, pp. 50–54.
- . 1997. *Zhou Enlai nianpu: 1898–1949* [A chronicle of Zhou Enlai: 1898–1949]. Vol. 2. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, pp. 5–6.
- . 2013. *Mao Zedong nianpu: 1949–1976* [A chronology of Mao Zedong: 1949–1976]. Vol. 1. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, pp. 213–214.
- Zhou Enlai. 1990. "Kangmei Yuanchao" [A war of fighting Americans and assisting Koreans]. *Zhou Enlai Waijiao Wenxuan* [Diplomatic document collection of Zhou Enlai]. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe, 1990.
- Zhu Feng. 2013. "North Korea's Step Too Far?" *Project Syndicate*, April 9.