

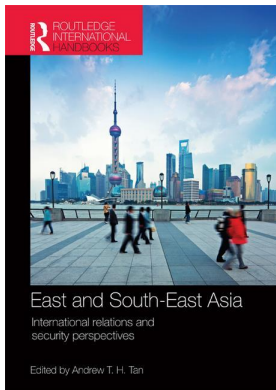
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# China's approach to North Korea

## Seeking stability and influence amid changing circumstances and conflicting imperatives

*Robert G. Sutter*

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### Introduction and overview

After a period of several years of seemingly close US and Republic of Korea (South Korean) co-operation with the People's Republic of China in the Six-Party Talks and other venues in response to Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korean) nuclear weapons tests and related proliferation activities, US and South Korean officials and commentators were surprised and angered by China's refusal to condemn North Korea's military provocations in 2010. The sinking in March 2010 of the South Korean warship *Cheonan* killed 46 South Korean sailors, and the artillery attack on South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010 killed South Korean soldiers and civilians. Chinese commentators also rebuffed US efforts to support South Korea and deter North Korean aggression in military exercises in the Yellow Sea.

China's deepening leadership ties and growing economic relations with and support for Pyongyang during the recent period of leadership transition in North Korea seemed to enable North Korea's egregious nuclear proliferation. They worked at odds with UN sanctions and international pressures in place following the North Korean nuclear tests of 2006 and 2009. Pyongyang's disclosure in November 2010 of what appeared to be a fully operational uranium enrichment facility—a major step forward in North Korea's nuclear proliferation, came following China's months-long block of the release of a report by UN experts charging North Korea with supplying nuclear technology to Syria, Iran and Myanmar (Burma) (Cossa and Glosserman 2011). The death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011 and the ascent of his young and inexperienced son Kim Jong Un to top leadership positions testified to an uncertain dynastic succession. China responded with strong support from top Chinese leaders, expanding relations between the two countries, and active Chinese diplomacy that ignored North Korean recent provocations and encouraged greater dialogue and negotiations in the Six-Party Talks and other venues.

The controversial Chinese actions can be explained as the latest episodes in China's often twisted relations with North Korea since the end of the Cold War. The record shows China repeatedly put in a reactive position as it has been compelled to deal with crises caused by

North Korea's nuclear weapons development and other provocations, often abrupt and wide swings in North Korea's posture toward its neighbours and the USA, and economic crises and leadership transitions in Pyongyang. US policy toward North Korea and that of South Korea also have changed markedly over time, forcing adjustments in Chinese policies and practices (Snyder 2009).

The stakes have been high for China in dealing with the changing and sometime volatile situation on the Korean Peninsula. With the possible exception of Taiwan, there is no more important area around China's periphery for Chinese domestic and foreign policy interests than the Korean Peninsula. The stakes grew with rising Chinese equities in improving relations with South Korea, and often intense US and other regional and international involvement to curb North Korea's advancing nuclear weapons development.

Chinese behaviour toward North Korea in the post-Cold War period has reflected complex and often conflicting objectives. China's leaders following Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping generally have been cautious in foreign affairs. They have carefully adhered to a 'win-win' formula in international dealings where China has to win or at least not lose as far as its tangible national interests are concerned. Thus, China has been reluctant to exert strong pressure or undertake risky initiatives regarding North Korea or elsewhere that could backfire and prove costly to China.

Seeking stability on the Korean Peninsula is vitally important for China's strategic environment, domestic stability and economic development. On the one hand, North Korea's provocations and nuclear weapons development obviously disrupt stability on the peninsula and could lead to destabilizing nuclear weapons development among other East Asian countries. On the other hand, exerting pressure on North Korea, especially in periods of leadership uncertainty in Pyongyang, risks more egregious North Korean provocations or regime decay and collapse.

China's relations with North Korea are better than those of any other foreign power but they remain mixed and subject to potentially abrupt change. Beijing seeks a friendly and dependent North Korean regime that would preclude a strong and unified Korean state, especially one with close security ties with the USA. China also has a stake in the preservation of this communist regime, which is said to enjoy varying degrees of support from party, military and older generation Chinese leaders.

Despite a sometimes active public debate in China over policy toward North Korea, the Chinese administration has adhered to a moderate approach seeking to influence North Korea's behaviour through economic development and encouraging economic reform, rather than applying strong pressure. Supporting US and South Korean-backed sanctions in the UN or elsewhere could result—in the Chinese calculus—in gains for the latter and losses for China in relations with Pyongyang. China does have a strong interest in improving Chinese relations with South Korea, but when forced to choose between North and South Korea in recent years, China has devoted higher priority to sustaining and developing close ties with North Korea.

This chapter shows how China has responded to changing circumstances involving the Korean Peninsula in the post-Cold War period and how China's often conflicted objectives noted above have been reflected in shifts in Chinese policy and behaviour. At bottom, the situation shows rising Chinese influence but an ascendance that has been encumbered by circumstances, subject to setbacks and lacking a clear path to success.

### **China's encumbered rise in the Korean Peninsula**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the demise of East–West and Sino–Soviet competition for influence in the Korean Peninsula after the Cold War, Beijing adjusted Chinese

relations to take advantage of economic and other opportunities with South Korea while sustaining a leading international position in relations with North Korea. The international confrontation caused by North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and related ballistic missile programmes and the sharp decline in economic conditions and the rise of political uncertainty there following the sudden death of Kim Il Sung in 1994 raised uncertainties in China about the future stability of the peninsula. In general, Chinese officials used economic trade and aid and continued military and political exchanges to help stabilize and preserve Chinese relations with the North while working closely with South Korea and at times the USA in seeking a peaceful resolution to tensions on the peninsula. In response to the crisis created by North Korea's provocative nuclear proliferation activities beginning in 2002, China was even more active, taking a leading role in international efforts to seek a diplomatic solution that would preserve China's influence and interests in stability on the peninsula (Kim 2006).

Foreign observers often judged that China had a longer-term interest in expanding Chinese influence and reducing US and Japanese influence on the peninsula (Roy 2004). However, Beijing generally was careful not to challenge directly US leadership in Korean affairs. It apparently judged that Chinese interests were best met with a broadly accommodating posture that allowed for concurrent improvements in China's relations with South Korea and effective management of China's sometimes difficult relations with North Korea. Striking the right balance between sometimes conflicting Chinese objectives in relations with North and South Korea, without alienating the USA has proven to be difficult, especially in the recent period of unsteady North Korean leadership succession accompanied by egregious North Korean nuclear proliferation and military aggression. The result up to the middle of the past decade was a marked increase in China's relations with South Korea and continued Chinese relations with North Korea closer than any other power, without negatively affecting Beijing's relations with the USA. More recent developments have led to a significant step backward in Chinese relations with South Korea and the USA over North Korea's proliferation and provocations.

Reviewed below are some of the important developments in the past few years; several have challenged and slowed China's rising influence in the Korean Peninsula. They come against the backdrop of China's efforts to sustain and advance its interests and influence amid repeated changes challenging stability and related Chinese interests on the Korean Peninsula in the post-Cold War period.

### **Post-Cold War developments, 1989–2009**

An assessment of Chinese policy and practice toward North Korea since the end of the Cold War shows the Chinese administration endeavouring to sustain a leading position in relations with both North and South Korea as it reacts to changing circumstances on the Korean Peninsula. Growing Chinese frustration with the twists and turns of North Korean behaviour, especially Pyongyang's nuclear weapons development, has not resulted in a major change in China's reluctance to pressure North Korea to conform more to international norms and eschew provocations and confrontation. China's focus has been to preserve stability in an uncertain environment caused by internal pressures and international provocations of North Korea, and erratic policies by the USA and South Korea. China continues to follow practices that give priority to positive incentives rather than pressure in order to elicit North Korean willingness to avoid further provocations and to return to negotiations on eventual denuclearization.

Developments in the two decades since the end of the Cold War can be divided into three periods (Sutter 2010: 19–34):

- 1989–2000 featured Chinese angst over North Korean leadership transition and instability and economic collapse, and crisis with the USA prompted by North Korea's nuclear weapons development. China supported US efforts to negotiate the Agreed Framework of 1994 which eased tensions over North Korea's suspected nuclear weapons programme; it provided measured material support for North Korea in a period of economic collapse; and it markedly improved economic and political ties with South Korea.
- 2000–01 featured a period of unprecedented *détente*, when China facilitated North Korean outreach and endeavoured to keep pace with expanding North Korean contacts with South Korea, the USA, Russia and others.
- 2002–09 featured periodic and intense North Korean provocations and wide swings in US policy ranging from thinly disguised efforts to force regime change in North Korea to close collaboration with Pyongyang negotiators. South Korean policy also shifted markedly from a soft to a harder line in dealing with North Korea.

A careful review of the gains China has made in improving relations with Asia, neighbouring and elsewhere, in recent years shows South Korea to have been an area of considerable achievement, at least until very recent years. The Chinese advances with South Korea also coincided with the most serious friction in US–South Korean relations since the Korean War during the first term (2001–05) of the George W. Bush Administration. Thus, China's influence relative to the USA grew on the Korean Peninsula.

Meanwhile, US policy evolved in dealing with North Korea. By 2003 the Bush Administration was working much more closely with China in order to facilitate international talks on North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. North Korea at that time seemed to prefer to deal directly with the USA on this issue. While such bilateral interchange with North Korea presumably would have boosted US influence relative to that of China in peninsula affairs, the US government tended to see such US–North Korean contacts as counterproductive for US interests in securing a verifiable end of North Korea's nuclear weapons programme. Thus, China's influence grew as it joined with the USA in the multilateral efforts to deal with the North Korean nuclear weapons issue on the one hand, while Beijing sustained its position as the foreign power having the closest relationship with the reclusive North Korean regime on the other (Kim 2004).

Against this background, China's relations with South Korea improved markedly (Chung 2009). China became South Korea's leading trade partner, the recipient in some years of the largest amount of South Korean foreign investment, and the most important foreign destination for South Korean tourists and students. For many years, it was a close and often like-minded partner in dealing with issues posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and related provocations on the one hand, and dealing with the Bush Administration's hard-line policy toward North Korea on the other.

South Korea's trade with China grew rapidly in recent years. In 2004 it was valued at US \$79 billion, with a trade surplus for South Korea of \$20 billion. In 2005 South Korean exports to China were valued at \$62 billion in total trade of \$100.6 billion, resulting in a trade surplus for South Korea of \$24 billion. Trade reached \$115 billion in 2006 (Jiang 2006). Despite the global economic crisis of 2008–09, the two countries met a goal of \$200 billion in trade in 2010, according to Chinese figures. Chinese trade figures showed that about 30% of South Korean exports went to China and that China ran a \$70 billion trade deficit with South Korea in 2010. South Korean investment in China in 2004 amounted to \$3.6 billion, almost half of South Korea's investment abroad that year. The amount in 2008 was \$3.14 billion. South Korea has become the third largest source of foreign investment in China, and China is the largest destination of foreign investment from South Korea. Meanwhile, in the face of the Bush

Administration's tough stance toward North Korea in 2001–06, South Korea and China were close partners in dealing more moderately than the USA with issues posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons programme and related provocations (Snyder 2008a).

As relations developed, however, China's economic importance for South Korea was seen by South Koreans more in both negative and positive ways. Periodic trade disputes came with growing concerns by South Korean manufacturers, political leaders and public opinion about competition from fast-advancing Chinese enterprises. China's economic attractiveness to South Korean consumers declined markedly as a result of repeated episodes of Chinese exports of harmfully tainted consumer products to South Korean and other markets. South Korean leaders strove to break out of close dependence on economic ties with China through free trade agreements and other arrangements with the USA, Japan and the European Union (EU), which would ensure inputs of foreign investment and technology needed for South Korea to stay ahead of Chinese competitors.

Other differences between the two countries focused on competing Chinese and Korean claims regarding the scope and importance of the historical Goguryeo kingdom, China's longer-term ambitions in North Korea, and Chinese treatment of North Korean refugees in China and of South Koreans endeavouring to assist them there. The disputes had a strong impact on nationalistic South Korean political leaders and public opinion. Public opinion polls showed a significant decline in South Korean views of China and its policies and practices since earlier in the past decade (Snyder 2008b).

Regarding Chinese relations with North Korea, China's frustration followed the North Korean nuclear weapons tests in 2006 and 2009 and other provocations (Glaser 2009). Contrary to past practice, the Chinese administration allowed a public debate where relations with North Korea often were depicted as a liability for China, requiring serious readjustment in Chinese policy. Meanwhile, some foreign experts and commentators suspected that China, in order to weaken US power and influence in North-East Asia, was somehow manipulating the North Korean brinkmanship and avoiding using its influence in conjunction with the USA in order to get North Korea to reverse its nuclear weapons development (Blumenthal and Kagan 2009).

The evidence of growing Chinese frustration with North Korea was strong while the evidence to support the charge of self-serving Chinese manipulation of the North Korean nuclear crisis was not. On balance, the overall record of Chinese policy and practice has shown continuing caution; China endeavours to preserve important Chinese interests in stability on the Korean Peninsula through judicious moves that strike an appropriate balance among varied Chinese relations with concerned parties at home and abroad. China remains wary that North Korea, the USA and others could shift course, forcing further Chinese adjustments in response.

Chinese leaders recognize that their cautious policies have failed to halt North Korea's nuclear weapons development; they probably judge that they will be living with a nuclear North Korea for some time to come, even as they emphasize continued diplomatic efforts to reverse North Korea's nuclear weapons development and create a nuclear-free peninsula. They appear resigned to joining with US and other leaders in what is characterized as 'failure management' as far as North Korean nuclear weapons development is concerned (Twomey 2008: 422). They will endeavour to preserve stability and Chinese equities with concerned powers. As in the recent past, they probably will avoid pressure or other risky initiatives on their own, waiting for the actions of others or changed circumstances that would increase the prospects of curbing North Korea's nuclear challenge and allow for stronger Chinese measures to deal with nuclear North Korea.

China's frustration grew with North Korea's continued development of nuclear weapons and other provocative actions. Chinese officials obviously miscalculated when they argued in the past that North Korea's nuclear weapons programme was not a serious one but represented an

effort to elicit aid and other support from the USA, South Korea and others. China's more recent working assumption seemed to be a more realistic one: North Korea is intent on keeping nuclear weapons. In response, China was more willing, albeit with continued reservations, to join US-backed efforts in the UN to criticize and impose limited sanctions on North Korea until it resumed negotiations leading to denuclearization. Meanwhile, a debate about the need to shift Chinese policy toward a harder line toward North Korea became more public in active discourse in official and unofficial Chinese media. Chinese officials frequently referred in recent years to the need to take account of opinions noted in such public debates. In general, the public Chinese discussion of policy toward North Korea showed more frustration with North Korean provocations than the officially recorded interchange between Chinese and North Korean officials, which tended to emphasize the positive and provide support and reassurance for Pyongyang (Shambaugh 2011).

Complementing some modest steps that China has taken against North Korean provocations were a series of recent positive steps China took to offer unspecified but apparently substantial economic and other incentives to North Korea amid a major burst of high-level official engagement between the two sides during the past three years (Snyder 2010a). The mix of Chinese actions, seemingly involving more carrots than sticks, underlined Chinese concern to preserve stability and China's position as the foreign power with the best relationship with North Korea. China was prepared to acquiesce to a continued nuclear North Korea for the foreseeable future, rather than risk dangers associated with strong pressure on Pyongyang. The future of North Korea could be violent and disruptive. China sought to avoid such negative outcomes and to sustain a position of influence in determining the future of the peninsula.

## Recent developments

### *Setbacks for China*

China continued to make gains since the start of 2010 in solidifying its position as the most important and avid supporter of the North Korean leadership as it undergoes the most significant leadership transition in a generation amid poor domestic conditions and generally unfriendly international circumstances (Snyder 2010b, 2011). China also deepened economic relations with both North and South Korea. Though China-North Korean discussions remain secret, it appears that bilateral relations have registered significant improvement despite differences over North Korea's proliferation and military provocations.

The same cannot be said about China's relations with South Korea. In 2010 those ties reached the lowest point since the establishment of China-South Korea diplomatic relations. Recent contacts designed to improve relations, notably a visit of one of China's rising 'fifth generation' leaders, Vice-Prime Minister Li Keqiang, to Seoul in 2011 and a visit of President Lee Myung-Bak to Beijing in 2012, have barely hidden deep differences. China's refusal to criticize North Korean military attacks against South Korea left a lasting and widespread impression of where China's priorities lay when choosing between North and South Korea. Against this background and contrary to China's longer-term objective to diminish US and Japanese influence on the Korean Peninsula, China has faced strengthened US-South Korean and US-Japanese alliance relationships, and closer strategic co-ordination between South Korea and Japan, over North Korean issues. Adding to South Korea and US differences with China was Beijing's unexpectedly strong public opposition in 2010 to US-South Korean military exercises in the Yellow Sea which were targeted at showing allied resolve and deepening deterrence against further North Korean military provocations (Snyder 2010b, 2011).

### *Chinese advances*

China's top leader Hu Jintao was in the vanguard of Chinese representatives seeking to underline Chinese support for the leadership transition in North Korea. Hu hosted visiting North Korean leader Kim Jong Il during two trips to China, in May and August 2010, and one in May 2011. The visits presumably were related to the beginnings of a formal transition from Kim Jong Il to leaders, including Kim's son Kim Jong Un, who were elevated to top positions at the first Workers Party of Korea party conference in 44 years in September 2010. There followed a blizzard of speeches and publicity marking close China–North Korea relations. An important speech by China's heir apparent Vice-President Xi Jinping and a wide range of high-level party and security exchanges came in 2010 and high-level attention continued into 2011, including the Hu–Kim Jong Il meeting in Beijing in May (*China Daily* 2011). High-level party, government and military exchanges marked the rest of the year. When Kim Jong Il died suddenly in December, all of China's top leaders went to the North Korean embassy to pay their respects and pledge continued strong support. China endeavoured to breathe new life into dormant negotiations in the six party talks, though it remained unclear how this approach would mesh with the stated emphasis of the new Kim Jong Un leadership on a hard-line 'military-first' policy.

The public displays of Chinese–North Korean solidarity came along with some reports of differences between Beijing and Pyongyang over North Korea's proliferation activities and military attacks against South Korea. On balance, the Chinese leadership was clearly emphasizing the positive in its public posture toward Pyongyang. It backed up its support by thwarting South Korean-led efforts in the UN and elsewhere to press North Korea to bear consequences for sinking the *Cheonan* and attacking Yeonpyeong Island, and for its nuclear proliferation activities at home and abroad.

China also advanced various economic ties with North Korea. According to Chinese customs data, China–North Korea trade in the first half of 2010 amounted to US \$1.29 billion, a 16.8% annual increase. North Korea imported \$940 million in goods from China and exported \$350 million during the period. North Korea imports from China rose markedly, with flour imports rising by 383%. North Korea's crude oil imports from China remained the same. Minerals and other natural resources continued to account for a large portion of North Korean exports to China. China also provided unspecified humanitarian assistance in 2010. According to Korean sources, trade between China and North Korea was valued at \$5.62 billion in 2011, with North Korea running a \$700 million trade deficit with China. By contrast, trade between North and South Korea that year amounted to \$1.71 billion. Meanwhile roads, railways, bridges and other projects facilitating transportation between China and North Korea were under construction (Snyder 2011, 2012).

China's trade, aid, investment and other economic ties with North Korea raised South Korean concerns and other international worries about the effects of those ties on UN and other international sanctions. They also raised concerns in South Korea that North Korea's growing economic dependence on China works against South Korea's influence in North Korea and South Korea's longer-term goal of promoting Korean unification. Underlining South Korean concern, some prominent international observers have forecast North Korea's future as a *de facto* 'province' of China.

Economic ties also grew between China and South Korea. China–South Korea trade during 2010 amounted to US \$171 billion according to official South Korean figures, a 21% increase from \$141 billion in 2009. The anticipated trade figure for 2015 is \$300 billion. China remained South Korea's top destination for investment, which totalled over \$30 billion in 2010 and



represented 21% of South Korea's total foreign direct investment (FDI). It was anticipated that China in 2010 would overtake the USA as South Korea's top FDI destination. The cumulative amount of South Korean investment in China in July 2011 was almost \$50 billion, according to Chinese sources.

After South Korean efforts to stabilize South Korea's currency with the help of a US \$30 billion line of credit from the US Federal Reserve in October 2008, China joined Japan in December in pledging its own \$30 billion currency swap with South Korea. The amount of the China-South Korea swap arrangement was doubled in 2011.

Meanwhile, the number of Chinese visitors to South Korea rose 48% in 2009, reaching 1.21 million. South Korean tourists were the largest group of foreign tourists visiting China in the first half of 2010, totalling 1.95 million; this marked an increase of 30% from the same period in 2008, and accounted for 15.5% of the total foreign tourists in China (Snyder 2010b). In all of 2010 China was the most important foreign destination for South Korean tourists (4 million South Korean trips to China and 2 million Chinese trips to South Korea in 2010), and students (68,000 South Korean students in China in 2010 and 78,000 Chinese students in South Korea in 2010). One Chinese expert said in 2012 that 'about one third of South Korean people' had travelled to China.

### *Chinese setbacks*

China's response to the *Cheonan* incident and other North Korean military provocations and proliferation activities placed the greatest strain on China-South Korean relations in a generation. As noted earlier, they brought relations to a new low. They sparked significant debate in South Korea, highlighting the relative weakness of China-South Korean political and security ties and strategic co-ordination despite close trade ties and people-to-people exchanges. These weak links contrasted sharply with Beijing's concurrent strengthening of political ties with the current leadership in Pyongyang and increasing trade and economic exchanges at a time of stalled inter-Korean relations (Cossa and Glosserman 2010).

Among other setbacks for China were:

- China's political and economic support of North Korea at a time of international condemnation of Pyongyang undermined perceptions of China's regional and international role as mediator of the Six-Party Talks and as a responsible stakeholder in the international community. US President Barack Obama seemed to capture the sentiment of many world opinion leaders in publicly criticizing China's 'willful blindness' in the face of North Korean provocations (Landler 2010).
- North Korea's provocations introduced a high level of frustration into China's relations not only with South Korea but also the USA, Japan, Australia and a number of Western powers.
- North Korea's provocations pushed the North Korean issue to the top of the US policy agenda with China. China's failure to act to curb North Korea was accompanied by senior US leaders, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, warning bluntly in public that the North Korean nuclear programme is now viewed as a direct threat to the USA. An implication is that if China does not act to rein in North Korea, the USA will have to take action on its own (Bumiller and Sanger 2011).
- China's weak response to North Korea's provocations and its unanticipated assertions in 2010 that US-South Korean military exercises to counter North Korea were a threat to China helped solidify the already close US relationship with South Korea. They also enhanced trilateral co-operation among the USA, South Korea and Japan in order to deal

effectively with North Korea in the absence of significant support from China (Cossa and Glosserman 2010).

- The closer collaboration among the USA, South Korea and Japan in dealing with North Korea increasingly seen as enabled and supported by China coincided with the high public profile accorded President Obama's interaction with Asia-Pacific leaders during a trip to the region and participation in regional multilateral meetings in late 2011. They added to the challenges that China faced throughout its eastern and southern periphery by independent-minded regional governments developing closer ties with the USA as they took issue, sometimes publicly and more often privately, with various Chinese policies and practices, including its consolidation of relations with North Korea despite the latter's provocations and proliferation.

## Outlook

China in 2012 faced a Korean Peninsula marked by growing tension and deepening involvement by the USA and Japan at odds with Chinese interests. China's credibility and broader international reputation were battered. In return, China had solidified relations with North Korea. Unfortunately for China, there remained large questions about North Korea's future trajectory. North Korea's uranium enrichment programme and other proliferation activities showed nuclear ambitions opposed to Chinese efforts to lead North Korea to denuclearization. North Korea's emphasis on self-reliance as its national development strategy contradicted Chinese efforts to promote Chinese-style reform and opening of the North.

Chinese frustration with North Korea appeared on display as Pyongyang on the one hand moved along lines encouraged by China in reaching a tentative agreement with the USA on 29 February 2012 which included a moratorium on the North's nuclear and missile programmes and the provision of 240,000 tons of US food aid to North Korea. On the other hand, Pyongyang later insisted on going ahead with a planned long-range missile launch of a satellite. The announcement of the launch and the carrying out of what turned out to be an unsuccessful launch on 13 April saw the tentative agreement with the USA collapse. The USA, South Korea, Japan and others strongly condemned North Korea for launching the long-range missile in violation of UN Security Council Resolutions (Cossa and Glosserman 2012).

The year 2012 also marked the most important leadership transition in China in a decade. Chinese leaders tend to seek stability at home and abroad in such circumstances and are even less inclined than in other periods to take potentially risky initiatives or make controversial changes in policy and practice. Given Chinese leaders' preoccupation with the succession and an unanticipated leadership scandal and purge of a member of the Chinese Communist Party's *Politburo* in March, circumstances in China argued for continuing along established policy lines in dealing with the frustrating and troubled situation on the Korean Peninsula. Thus, it appeared most likely that China would seek to strengthen ties with and reassure North Korea's shaky leadership. These actions would come at the cost of deteriorating relations with South Korea and strengthening of US and Japanese strategic co-operation with one another and with South Korea in order to prepare for North Korean contingencies (Cossa and Glosserman 2012).

The argument continued to be heard in China that Beijing should not be putting so many of its eggs regarding the Korean Peninsula in the North Korean basket. However, senior leaders failed to voice these judgements, suggesting that they sought to persist with current policy. A shift in direction seemed more likely to arise from a crisis brought about by some eruption of instability inside North Korea or by an international confrontation caused by North Korean provocations.

## Conclusion

Over time, China may be able to put the negative implications of events of the recent period behind it and continue efforts to advance Chinese influence on the Korean Peninsula as the overall economic, diplomatic and military power of China grows. The experience of the recent period none the less makes clear that not only are Chinese goals in the Korean Peninsula in conflict, but China is not in control of salient variables determining developments on the peninsula. Thus, China will continue to face trade-offs that will hamper and complicate advancing Chinese influence; and South Korea, the USA, Japan and others have been put on guard in anticipation of further Chinese actions that work against their interests.

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