

CHAPTER 6

CHINA'S GOALS AND STRATEGIES FOR THE KOREAN PENINSULA: A CRITICAL ASSESSMENT

Larry M. Wortzel

Like the communist regime in the People's Republic of China (PRC), the communist regime in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has one fixed, principal goal in mind—the survival of a one-party state led by a communist party. Thus, in both countries, even regime legitimacy is sacrificed at the altar of its survival.

Given this primary goal, it is no surprise that between the beginning of the People's Republic of China in 1949, and the collectivization of its agriculture and industry in 1953, Rudy Rummel estimates that over eight million Chinese citizens were starved, beaten, or murdered at the hands of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in CCP-organized tribunals or other entities.¹ Then, according to Rummel, between 1955 and 1967, during the period of collectivization and the "Great Leap Forward," another seven million or so Chinese were killed in the CCP's pursuit of its societal goals.² After that Great Leap Forward, agriculture and food production was in such shambles in China that another ten million people starved to death.³ Through this, supported by a huge military that produced its own food supplies and a strong state security apparatus, the Communist Party of China survived. Therefore, I am extremely skeptical when senior Chinese army or government officials tell me that "things are a little difficult in the DPRK, but the people are tough and can endure hardship."⁴

When an official of China's Ministry of State Security opines that "he does not believe [that] any communist

country will collapse as a direct result of economic troubles," he or she is referring to the phenomena described above—where citizens are tools of the government, rather than the reverse.⁵ It is for these reasons that the strategies of the PRC must be critically analyzed. The statements of Chinese officials must be taken as reflections of the broader communist party "line" and compared to the demonstrated actions of China. Moreover, if past actions are any indication of future behavior, without a regime change in North Korea⁶ short-term changes in policy must be assessed with skepticism and not accepted as representing fundamental changes in the goals of the Kim regime.

Less than a year ago, in discussing the development of long-range ballistic missiles capable of hitting the United States, North Korea's Central News Agency claimed that

the U.S. should see . . . [North Korea's] war capacity and the changed situation. There is no guarantee of safety of the U.S. mainland.⁷

Meanwhile, even when North Korea seemed on the verge of economic collapse, Chinese officials routinely told visiting American academic and military groups that "China will not let North Korea collapse."⁸ The unqualified support given to the DPRK by China, therefore, flies in the face of statements that the proliferation of missiles and nuclear weapons on the Korean Peninsula is not in China's interest.⁹

It is important not to ignore facts in the pursuit of specific political objectives, even when those facts may indicate that American strategies are failing. Remember that in the fall of 1997, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright said in an address at the University of Louisville that "North Korea's dangerous nuclear program has been frozen and will be dismantled." At the end of August 1998, however, North Korea fired a *Taepo-dong* missile into the sea between Japan and Russia.¹⁰ Not long after that, suspicions arose that the North Koreans were working in

caves near Kumchang-ri to develop nuclear, chemical, or biological warheads to be mounted on the *Taepo-dong*.¹¹ The Kumchang-ri caves were believed to have served as an underground work complex for up to 15,000 workers.¹² With regard to a propensity to back away from real concerns to advance a specific policy agenda, a U.S. negotiator with North Korea, Charles Kartman, told the press that there is "compelling evidence" that the Kumchang-ri site is nuclear-related. Two days later, however, Mr. Kartman backed away from that statement, saying that "strong information made the United States *suspicious*" about the site. In April 1999, NHK Television in Seoul reported that North Korea was conducting propulsion tests for a *Taepo-dong 2* missile with a range of 3,750 miles.¹³ Yet, China continues to tell the Americans sent out to prospect around Beijing for opinions that China does not support proliferation, or a hostile Korean Peninsula.¹⁴

The preponderance of evidence shows that China retains good contacts with North Korea; despite what may be Beijing's frustrations over a failure by Kim Jong Il to begin incentive systems in North Korean agriculture,¹⁵ North Korea has:

- added military capability;
- improved its missile systems;
- obtained over \$645 million in aid from the United States while it provided no verifiable access to its nuclear or biological warfare sites;
- made no changes in its military posture along the demilitarized zone; and
- cemented its relations with Russia.

All of the foregoing occurred despite the fact that China does have influence with North Korea:

- In 1996 and 1997 China donated a total of about 200,000 tons of food to the DPRK.

- The Chinese donated more rice in August 1997.

• At the 70th anniversary of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) on August 1, 1997, the Chinese Defense Attaché to Pyongyang told the Director of the General Political Department (GPD) of the Korean People's Army (KPA) that the armies, the people, and the communist parties of China and the DPRK had close links sealed in blood.

- North Korean Vice Marshal Jo Myong Rok (Nok), head of the GPD, responded by saying,

The people and armies of the two countries will remain intimate brothers and comrades in arms who help and support each other in the common struggle against imperialism and socialism.

- An official of the PRC's GPD, Zhou Kunren, visited Pyongyang again in November 1997.

• In 1998, China sent another 100,000 tons of rice and 20,000 tons of fertilizer.

• The PRC Xiantong Group modernized the Rajin-Namyang railway line and is making improvements that will increase rail volume "14 times."

• Scientific and technological and hydropower cooperation protocols were signed between the two countries in 1998.

• Xiong Guangkai, Deputy Chief of the General Staff Department of the PLA, visited Pyongyang in August 1998, just before the *Taepo-dong* launch over Japan.

• China provided 80,000 tons of crude oil to the DPRK after the *Taepo-dong* launch, while Japan cut its assistance.

• On June 3-4, 1999, Jiang Zemin and Li Peng accepted delegations from North Korea. (Note dates.) China gave 150,000 tons of food and 400,000 tons of coke to DPRK (it could have done nothing, like Japan) which were delivered in February 2000.

- Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian and DPRK Vice Marshal Kim Il Chol met on June 21, 1999.

- Korean Vice Defense Minister Ryo Chun Sok met Chi Haotian at a reception on August 1, 1999, and explicitly linked the inviolate territorial integrity of Korea and that of China with Taiwan.

- Beijing continues to provide hydropower cooperation to North Korea.

- Kim Jong Il visited the Chinese Embassy in Pyongyang in March 2000 as part of the Spring Festival visit, a sign of a certain amount of tributary homage to his benefactor.

The Kim Dae Jung Visit and the Albright Visit to Pyongyang.

Beijing's influence over the North is perhaps best illustrated by the way that Kim Jong Il visited China on the eve of his summit with South Korean President Kim Dae Jung. In my view, China pushed Kim Jong Il to moderate his positions on family reunification slightly and to soften his rhetoric, for two reasons. First, Beijing still depends on investment from South Korea that would stop in the event of a war between North and South. Second, Beijing can use the appearance of a more moderate North, with at least an orientation towards peace, as an argument to undermine the effort of the United States to move forward with national missile defense programs and to advocate theater missile defense programs for its allies and friends in Asia. Beijing intensely dislikes such programs because they undermine the PLA's ability to coerce China's neighbors, Taiwan, U.S. forces, and the United States with nuclear and missile blackmail.

Despite Pyongyang's failure to change its policy of harboring fugitive terrorists inside its borders (e.g., the Japanese Red Army bombers who took refuge in North Korea), a visit to New York by Vice Foreign Minister Kim

Kye-gwan to negotiate with the U.S. Government was followed by a rushed trip to Washington by Jo Myong Rok. A meeting with President William Clinton at which Jo wore his military uniform was the culmination of the visit, although Secretary Albright hosted a somewhat anticlimactic dinner at the State Department. President Clinton came close to agreeing to visit Pyongyang after this meeting in October 2000.

Secretary Albright was dispatched to Pyongyang on short notice after she announced that she was exploring a Clinton visit in November 2000, as the President left the Socialist Republic of Vietnam. In Pyongyang, during the week of October 22-25, Albright was maneuvered into a visit with Jo in the same location as the shrine and statue of Kim Il Sung, and found herself at a celebration of the Korean Workers Party. In what proved to be a more embarrassing moment for the Secretary and the United States, Chinese Defense Minister Chi Haotian arrived in Pyongyang while Albright was still in town to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the entry of the Chinese People's Volunteers (the PLA) into North Korea during the Korean War. Albright was maneuvered by Beijing and Pyongyang to be in the city on the anniversary of the battles in which Chinese soldiers and their North Korean allies were mauling the U.S. 1st Marine Division, the 7th Infantry Division, and allied United Nations forces in the area around the Chosin (Changjin) Reservoir. Chi Haotian noted this while Secretary Albright was still in Seoul conferring with the South Korean and Japanese foreign ministers. It would be difficult to find more concrete evidence of the way that Pyongyang and Beijing are coordinating on Korean Peninsula and U.S.-related matters.

PRC Goals.

China has a clear set of goals in its actions on the Korean Peninsula: maintaining a peaceful periphery to facilitate foreign investment and the modernization of its arms and

combat forces; reducing the likelihood that missile defenses will be deployed in the region; creating a buffer from financial crises that might retard science and technology modernization; replacing American alliances with regional security dialogues; and creating a web of strategic partnerships as a means to place itself at the hub of inter-state diplomacy in the Asia-Pacific region.

To demonstrate China's influence and power on the Korean Peninsula, one needs only to remember that at the mere suggestion that "relations with China would be difficult" the Clinton Administration refused to approve badly needed air and cruise missile defenses for Taiwan in 1999. When China suggested that "it would not be good for relations" in 1999, the Republic of Korea opted not to participate in research even on theater missile defenses in Asia with the United States. Looking beyond Korea, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) regional forum (ARF) was formed as a means to respond to China. Vietnam is seeking a new form of security relationship as a balance against China. And the Chinese military industry managed to supply Pakistan with a nuclear and ballistic missile capability.

North Korea's Short- and Long-Term Strategies and the U.S. Role.

There could be changes on the Korean Peninsula leading to reduced military tensions and some reform in the North. Although such changes are more symbolic than substantive to date, symbolic changes are important as a beginning. The dilemma for the people of Korea and the United States, as well as Japan, is to ensure security and stability in the region while encouraging substantive progress on a lasting peace and the end of the Cold War. If the Cold War was about fighting and containing communism then it really is nearly over. While communist systems are repressive and economically unsound, regime change in the North is not the primary goal of the United States and the allies.

Instead, the goal is to bring North Korea out of its isolation from international institutions and the international system of commerce and diplomacy.

From the time of the Korean Energy Development Organization (KEDO) Agreement and the Agreed Framework, North Korea seemed to be operating on a short-term strategy aimed at regime survival. North Korea operated in the international and regional arena by a combination of threats involving missiles, weapons of mass destruction, and arms sales. It blackmailed the West, particularly the South, the United States, and Japan into supporting its fuel and food needs. Yet, it made no substantive changes in its economic system.

A Long-Term Strategy for Beijing and Pyongyang.

After Kim Il Sung's death in the summer of 1995, there did not seem to be a distinct change in the long-term strategy of regime survival and control, and the maintenance of a closed, communist system. The present long-term strategy in Pyongyang and Beijing appears to involve coming to some kind of accommodation with South Korea, Japan, and the United States that preserves North Korea as a separate entity and keeps the Korean Workers' Party in power.

In the economic realm, however, the North appears to realize that some kind of economic change is necessary. North Korea will opt for gradual and controlled reform, but it must resolve or at least seriously consider several critical issues to make progress. Pyongyang must address:

- The harboring of terrorists from the Japanese Red Army. They are still given sanctuary in the North.
- The missing people from South Korea and Japan believed to have been kidnapped by the North.
- The threatening military deployments by the North on the DMZ.

- Transparency of the North Korean missile, chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs.

- The continuing arms sales by North Korea to other countries that seek to destabilize the international system.

Notwithstanding these problems, there are some positive results from the courageous initiative by President Kim Dae Jung: the Nobel peace prize, which is richly deserved; and the talks between Kim Dae Jung and Kim Jong Il, which are critical to ensuring high-level political direction to future contacts. Meanwhile, the strategy of the North appears to be gradually shifting. The North still seeks to maintain a robust military. The North still seeks to maintain control of the nation by the Korean Workers' Party. However, North Korea's economic strategy appears to be changing as it comes to realize that any economic development will require some opening to the outside world.

There are some 138 small and medium-size South Korean businesses operating in the North. Private volunteer organizations are active in the North, some involved in establishing "micro-economies" in agricultural production and marketing. South Korean conglomerates are participating in economic projects. Nonetheless, without substantive moves by North Korea to address the fundamental security issues, we cannot be sure that some of its recent moves are not tactical in nature designed to bring in money, food, and economic aid.

North Korea's attitude appears to be undergoing some change, which might be due in part to pressure from Beijing. Like China, the United States has a role in fostering that change. The United States cannot dismiss China's influence over Pyongyang, or be blind to areas where American and Chinese foreign policies may be at cross-purposes. The United States must work closely with the allies in the Trilateral Coordination Oversight Group (TCOG). The continued U.S. presence in and security commitment to Korea is the security architecture and umbrella for Northeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. The U.S.

commitment has a stabilizing effect. Although reluctant to admit it, even security planners in Beijing acknowledge that the U.S. presence keeps historical tensions and animosities from resurfacing.

Conclusion.

The United States has responsibilities to the region and interests of its own that make its presence important. Toward such ends, the United States will encourage the North to join international financial organizations and become a full, responsible member of the international community.

The bottom line for good U.S. policy: continue to trade with China; maintain a strong, forward-deployed American military in Korea; keep an active foreign policy in Asia; provide strong security backing for Kim Dae Jung; and keep its powder dry.

ENDNOTES - CHAPTER 6

1. R. J. Rummel, *China's Bloody Century: Genocide and Mass Murder since 1900*, London: Transaction Publishers, 1991, pp. 219-226.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 241-145; see also Richard L. Walker, *The Human Cost of Communism*, a Study of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1971, p. 16.

3. Rummel, p. 251.

4. Comments by Chinese officials, July 1997, Beijing, China, and Washington, DC.

5. Quoted in Eric A. McVadon, "China's Goals and Strategies for the Korean Peninsula," a paper prepared for the workshop titled "Competitive Strategies: Planning for a Peaceful Korea," co-sponsored by the Non-Proliferation Education Center, The Hyatt Arlington, Arlington, VA, June 12-14, 2000, p. 20.

6. The Democratic People's Republic of Korea, DPRK, and North Korea will be used interchangeably in this chapter to refer to the North;

the Republic of Korea, ROK, and South Korea will be used to refer to the South.

7. "What will war on the Korean Peninsula bring?" Korean Central News Agency, August 2, 1999, , quoted in Jack Spencer, *The Ballistic Missile Threat Handbook*, Washington, DC: The Heritage Foundation, 2000, p. 49.

8. This author served in the U.S. Embassy in Beijing, China, for two tours of duty, the latest of which was as Army Attaché between May 1988 and June 1990, and between July 1995 and December 1997. The phrase asserting that China would not allow North Korea to collapse was like a mantra, repeated to all visiting American delegations.

9. McVadon, p. 28.

10. "Korea's Provocation," *The Courier-Journal*, Louisville, KY, September 1, 1998, p. A6.

11. Arnold Kramish, letter to the editor, "Great Expectations for North Korea," *The Washington Post*, December 6, 1998.

12. F.J. Khergamvala, "Pressure Mounts on North Korea," *The Hindu*, December 8, 1998, p. 1.

13. World In Brief, "U.S. Craft Head to Troubled Korean Waters," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1999, p. A31.

14. McVadon, pp. 13-14.

15. Discussion with the Chinese Academy of Sciences, Beijing, March 2000, .