

## **A Nuclear Armed Korea as a Factor in Sino-American Relations**

*Elizabeth Van Vie Davis, Ph.D.  
Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies<sup>1</sup>*

Few things have changed China's foreign policy toward the United States more subtly than the issue of a nuclear Democratic People's Republic of Korea, commonly known as North Korea. The catalysts of these events were, on the one hand, the July 5, 2006, long-range missile test and the October 9, 2006, nuclear weapon test. On the other hand, the Six Party Talks that had been designed perhaps to prevent these very events have also been a catalyst to changes in US-China relations. In part these changes in Chinese foreign policy toward the US are because of changes within China itself. Partly these changes in Chinese foreign policy toward the US reflect China's changing role in the international system. And partly they are in response to US policy toward China. The nexus of these three elements has been a more respectful and open relationship between the two powers, but one still fraught with nuances and complexities.

Of course there have been many events and scenarios that have changed China's foreign policy toward the United States in recent years in ways that are less subtle than coping with a nuclear North Korea. For instance, the US EP-3 surveillance plane and the Chinese J-8II fighter plane collision on April 1, 2001, caused Chinese concern over the increased level of American surveillance, among other things, and the Americans' frustration over China's response. In another instance, the May 7, 1999, bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade as part of the NATO conflict with Yugoslavia in Kosovo led Chinese foreign policy to be much more suspicious of Western intentions in humanitarian intervention. Additionally, the June 4, 1989, Tiananmen Incident caused deep divisions to arise between China and the United States that left a residue of banned arms sales and human rights concerns. A nuclear North Korea, however, and the surrounding incidents have had a very different effect in terms of Chinese foreign policy toward the US.

### ***Domestic Changes in China***

A primary reason for the subtle shift in Chinese foreign policy toward the US is the important changes that have occurred within the Chinese leadership. Some of these changes have been related to broad changes in the region and in the international system while other changes have applied directly to a nuclear North Korea. There are several domestic changes occurring within China. Contrary to some predictions, not only has the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) not collapsed in the midst of economic reforms, but the party has also carried out a peaceful leadership transition, revitalized itself, and created a younger and better trained cadre corps. This question of the survivability and adaptability of the CCP is not only a fundamental question within China, but also in many parts of the world, not the least of which is on the Korean peninsula.

CCP leadership itself is intimately concerned about the survivability of its party. Vice president Zeng Qinghong's frank discussion of the "painful lesson of the loss of power" by communist parties in the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe certainly reflects this concern. In addition to the CCP's determination to avoid this fate, Western scholarship has avoided a discussion of a decade of CCP renewal and reform. Learning from the collapse of the Soviet Union, CCP leaders introduced incremental reform at the grass-roots level while strengthening the capacity of state and party institutions at higher levels. The result has been what some have termed a power system characterized as "authoritarian resilience."<sup>2</sup> The true measure of this has been that the CCP has survived to date while so many other communist-run governments have not. While the North Korean communist-run government is organized quite differently than China's, with a family dynasty and limited reforms, the continuation of the Chinese system has been watched closely in the surviving Asian communist governments.

At least four factors explain the CCP divergence from the path of other ruling communist parties: party hierarchy development, economic expansion, unprecedented increases in college-level education, and the slow privatization of state assets.<sup>3</sup> Political leadership determines the fate of the political

regime, and these four factors will alter regime dynamics. With these dynamics, stable evolutionary changes to China's political system have become a real possibility so that China's fate is no longer inevitably repetitive of the fate of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century ruling communist parties in Europe. The Chinese have tried to offer their model as a guide for North Korea, but feel their model has been largely ignored or rejected.

While the CCP leadership has changed the way it manages the People's Liberation Army (PLA), including developing mechanisms to prevent PLA intervention in civilian politics, the relationship between the CCP and the PLA remains fraught with potentially divisive issues. The PLA sustained the CCP leadership such earlier severe political crises as in 1989, but the CCP certainly cannot rely solely on the PLA for legitimacy. Even while the PLA's impact on CCP rule has become more limited, the PLA is protected in many ways, including a provision in the *National Defense Law* that the PLA's budget should rise with the GDP growth rate.<sup>4</sup> It seems Beijing's relationship with the PLA has evolved quite differently than Pyongyang's relationship with the Korean People's Army (KPA).

There is some evidence that the CCP party-state is not necessarily incompatible with limited democratic development. To reconstruct rural governance, the party leadership introduced elections that have now spread to different parts of the country. One impact of these elections on the role of the CCP has been to create a "mixed regime" of village democracy with authoritarianism. From Taiwan's experience, Chinese culture is not necessarily an obstacle to democracy and a Leninist party-state—that practiced by the Kuomintang (KMT) in Taipei—is not necessarily too rigid to transform itself peacefully. Capitalism is generating a Chinese bourgeoisie, and this new rising class is not necessarily a threat to the rule elite as long as the party is dominated by pragmatism, not ideology.

Changes within the Chinese leadership responsible for the subtle shift in Chinese foreign policy as a result of a nuclear North Korea are a partial reflection of a change in focus. Beijing's policy toward North Korea is ultimately subject to judgment at the highest levels, yet the influence over that policy

wavers between the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the International Department of the Chinese Communist Party's Central Committee (CCPCC). The Ministry of Foreign Affairs focuses on overall coordination with the international community. The CCPCC International Department stresses the relationship between China and North Korea. The CCPCC International Department is generally sympathetic to North Korea, often calling for a strengthened bilateral relationship with the assumption that North Korea will ultimately accept China's advice to reform and China will ultimately have great influence in North Korea.<sup>5</sup> In the aftermath of the missile and nuclear weapons tests, however, it appears that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs now has the dominant voice in North Korean policy, suggesting that China will strengthen coordination of its own diplomacy with that of the international community. The President Hu Jintao-Premier Wen Jiabao leadership has staked Chinese foreign policy strategy on a "harmonious world"<sup>6</sup> in face of opposition from a conservative camp supporting North Korea, possibly dragging China's policy toward North Korea into the domestic struggle over political power, especially in light of the sensitive period in the build up to the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in fall of 2007.<sup>7</sup> Thus, at the moment China and the US seem to be moving closer to an emerging norm toward North Korea in the international system.

### ***China's Changing Role in the International System***

China's role in the international system is changing; this impacts not only its policies toward North Korea and the US specifically, but also its foreign policy in general. Not only is China emerging in terms of tangible, measurable elements of power in areas like military, economic and political power, but China's influence can also be increasingly seen in the less tangible elements of soft power.<sup>8</sup> China's emergence is partly linked to its rapid economic rise.<sup>9</sup> The rapid modernization of China has increased its global influence at an impressive pace. China's emergence is partly linked to its enhanced military preparedness.<sup>10</sup> North Korea serves as China's strategic buffer zone in Northeast Asia, sharing the possible security threat posed by US forces in South Korea and the security threat potentially

posed by Japan. These changes—military, economic and political—mean that China has more stake in the region and in the international system, thus its policy toward a nuclear North Korea assumes new dimensions.

How China's role is changing in the international system cannot be honestly addressed without considering the existing international system or the post-Cold War era. There is too often the misperception that the early post-Cold War era was merely in a holding pattern until a true, new international system emerged. In reality, however, several important shifts occurred. One major shift, of course, was the Russian reposturing, first into the American and European Union (EU) order and then into a closer relationship with China. Another shift was the growing globalization<sup>11</sup> with its empowerment of transnational non-state actors. Yet a third change was the increase in failed or dysfunctional states. The list continues with China's rise from an inward looking Third World power to a vibrant economic and political force; the EU's progression persists, especially after the implementation of the Euro; Japan's shift from an economic powerhouse to a more introverted nationalism; and the apparent Middle Eastern implosion.<sup>12</sup> The most important shift, however, may well be the position of the United States as the sole superpower.

The 9/11 attack in 2001 certainly did not cause the United States to become the sole superpower, but both the way the U.S. was perceived and the way the U.S. has reacted forced this realization, albeit reluctantly by some. After the bipolar system between the United States and the Soviet Union ended in 1989-91, Western international policymakers continued to behave as if the world remained divided between two conflicting superpowers. Although scholars and policymakers acknowledged that only one superpower remained, this did not keep them from searching for the new great world power that would become the United States' next contender, with China as one of the most obvious candidates, given its size and economy. The category of first "rogue nations" and then "axis of evil" was introduced as enemies from which the U.S. had to protect itself, and the National Missile Defense strategy was designed to accomplish that defense. After 9/11, however, it became

apparent that the foreign policies of the sole superpower, as well as those of other great powers, required substantial revision. There continues to be much world debate on whether an international system with a sole superpower is desirable. Nonetheless, 9/11 forced the global community to recognize this as a dominant feature in the immediate post-Cold War system.<sup>13</sup>

After the collapse of the bipolar system, Chinese policymakers and scholars initially tended to believe that the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bipolar system would immediately usher in a transition toward a multipolar system. Many believed that although the US enjoyed a unique position of peerless power relative to other countries, its dominance was temporary and transitional. On the one hand, the US was suffering from a relative decline compared to its earlier strength in the aftermath of World War II. On the other hand, other powers were growing, including a rising India, an integrated Europe and a reemerging China.<sup>14</sup> As a recent book by Liu Xuecheng, who is a senior research fellow at the Foreign Ministry's China Institute of International Relations, argues, "After the end of the Cold War, the multipolar trend accelerated in the Asia Pacific region. A new system with five mutually balancing powers (China, the US, Japan, Russia, and European Union) is gradually emerging. More specifically, we can say that this is a world of multiple power centers."<sup>15</sup> In recent years, however, many in China have moderated their view of the immediate likelihood of the emergence of a multipolar system. US dominance is now being interpreted as more enduring.<sup>16</sup>

Essentially, the choice for China is whether it should accept and participate in a US-led international system or remain outside of it or even become a challenger to American hegemony. This uncertainty about China's position toward American hegemony was demonstrated by a debate on *Strategy and Management*, an influential Chinese journal of international relations.<sup>17</sup> One article in the debate argues that American sole superpower status is detrimental to Chinese national interests. It specifically contends that participating in the Western-dominated global regimes will hurt many aspects of Chinese economic and military security. In another article in the debate, however, a noted Chinese international relations scholar points out that

China does not really have the option of not accepting American hegemony. China's interests can only be served by cooperation with the US. He prescribes a policy of bandwagoning, which means that China accepts and participates in the US-led international system.

The bilateral relationship between China and the US should result in a policy that realistically recognizes US hegemony while at the same time enhances China's national interests.<sup>18</sup> On the one hand, it recognizes the leadership of the US in world affairs. On the other hand, it seeks to promote China's interests through cooperation with the US-dominated world order. In essence, this policy does not challenge the US hegemony and world order but builds on it. It recognizes that, given the current limitations on China's power, China must pursue its interests through cooperation with the rules and regimes of the current world order. In reality, it appears that Sino-US relations remain a top priority for the current Chinese leadership.<sup>19</sup>

One of China's important assets for the US and the international system has been the much discussed influence on North Korea. Antagonism between North Korea and the US creates a complicated strategic situation for China.<sup>20</sup> Chinese influence on North Korea has greatly faded. Not only was the Yan'an faction, the pro-China faction of the Korean Worker's Party (KWP), purged in the 1950s during the establishment of "Kim Il-Song Thought" along with the South Faction and the Soviet Union Faction,<sup>21</sup> but also a nuclear weaponized North Korea is less vulnerable to Chinese political or military pressure. While the US pushed China to use its economic leverage—perhaps threaten North Korea with a loss of Chinese food and fuel<sup>22</sup>—China was hesitant to give up one of its few remaining ties to Pyongyang. Meanwhile, China was making it clear through international channels that the US should be less stubborn in its position and should agree to bilateral talks with North Korea and tone down the bellicose rhetoric coming from top administration officials. Chinese perception of the nuclear North Korea question was that its relationship with North Korea was much more complicated than the US appreciated. China does provide North Korea with basic food and fuel, but in return North Korea provides China with an international barrier to US

military forces, support for the Chinese position on Taiwan, and mutual anti-Japanese rhetoric among other things.

One Chinese perspective toward North Korean nuclear issues is expounded by Zhang Liangui of the Party School of the China Communist Party Central Committee.<sup>23</sup> This perspective sees China as bearing a significant cost as a result of North Korea's nuclear decisions. Before the July 5, 2006, long-range missile test and October 9, 2006, nuclear weapon test, there had been a prevalent theory in China that the North Korean claim to develop nuclear weapons was a bluff. Now that theory has been revised to include a myriad of reasons for North Korea to possess nuclear weapons: First, nuclear weapons are a domestic symbol of national strength and scientific prowess at a time of a stagnant North Korean domestic economy; second, nuclear weapons force American attention and enhanced bilateral relations; and, third, North Korean possession of nuclear weapons may deter an American invasion or militarily-induced regime change. This scenario of North Korean nuclearization sees China as bearing a significant cost because it gives Japan the incentive to take the final step in its own possession of nuclear weapons as well as to change its pacifist constitution and more broadly rearm; additionally, it might push the US to strengthen its military presence in East Asia and be the catalyst for American reassessment of the ideology behind the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). In short, the losses for China include a deteriorating regional security environment due to the now-increased likelihood of a theater missile defense system, a potentially more aggressive North Korea, and a possible regional nuclear arms race with Japan, Taiwan and South Korea. It also puts China in the position of walking a delicate line between denouncing North Korea's acquisition of nuclear weapons while keeping North Korea as a friendly neighbor.<sup>24</sup>

Relations between North Korea and China remain complicated. Soon after the missile tests of July 5, 2006, China voted in support of UN Security Council Resolution 1695, which imposed limited sanctions of North Korea, clearly indicating a significant change in China's policy toward North Korea. Some Chinese scholars see these recent tests as evidence that Pyongyang has refused to accept China's advice, its inability of

carrying out meaningful reform or opening up in emulation of China's model, and its continued tendency to take measures that intensify confrontation and defy the international community.<sup>25</sup> All of this is seen by Beijing as evidence of North Korea's continued obstinacy in the face of a shortfall of almost one million tons of food this year, despite an improved harvest in 2006, according to the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization in a May 2007 report. Even if South Korea makes good on its aid pledge to ship 400,000 tons of rice this year, the North still faces a shortfall of more than a half million tons. "Given the relatively high level of production in 2006, the cereal deficit is estimated to remain just under one million tons, the second-lowest in the past seven years," the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization report said.<sup>26</sup> In April 2007, South Korea did resume its annual food aid to the North, even though Pyongyang had not yet taken steps to start dismantling its nuclear programs. Although China largely supports the South Korean position, in part because both China and South Korea fear some of the same consequences from a potential collapse of the Pyongyang government, the Chinese also fear that the North Korean government may be its own worst enemy if it continues to reform at a snail's pace and continues to irritate international norms.

Yet another complication in China's relationships on the Korean peninsula is a concern centering on the potential flare up of the border dispute between China and North Korea. China is concerned not to weaken its claim to its north-eastern region, the Yanbian Ethnic Korean Autonomous Region, ceded to it after the delineation of the border with North Korea at the Yalu River. The Chinese do not want economic changes, Korean nationalism, and demographic shifts to threaten the integrity of that region.<sup>27</sup> China is deeply concerned with territorial unity overall, not just regarding its border with North Korea but also including Taiwan, Xinjiang, and to a lesser extent, Tibet. Commitment to restoring and maintaining territorial integrity is one of the foundations of the political legitimacy of the CCP to rule China.

In some regards, China sees itself as being caught between two difficult positions, the US with its dominant global position on the one side and North Korea with its belligerent tenacity on

the other side. The Cold War framework and its impact on the international system, according to some Chinese scholars, are still alive and well on the Korean Peninsula. While China and Russia established relations with South Korea in the 1990s, the US and Japan still have not established relations with North Korea.<sup>28</sup> They see the US policy on the Korean peninsula as being impacted by a desire to strengthen the US-ROK alliance while reducing US troops in South Korea, all the while broadening their mandate.<sup>29</sup> There are also fears that the US wants Japan to become the American sheriff for the US in the Asia-Pacific, playing a more important security and political role. China is coping with these fears by actively participating in ongoing meetings with its neighbors. Ministry of Foreign Affairs officials from China, Japan, and South Korea met in Beijing on May 19, 2007. The consultation was part of a consensus reached January 2007 at the seventh trilateral leaders' meeting of China, Japan and ROK when leaders from China, Japan and South Korea agreed to establish a mechanism of regular consultations among senior foreign affairs officials of the three countries. A number of bilateral issues made the agenda, including North Korea.<sup>30</sup>

#### *Change in Response to US Policy toward China*

The third and final reason for the subtle shift in Chinese foreign policy toward the US in the aftermath of a nuclear North Korea is the result of changes in US policy toward China. As with most previous administrations since the 1972 Nixon visit to China, American presidents usually start out by taking a very hard line toward China, but as the weight of international events requires the US and China to cooperate on many issues, including North Korea, the sitting American president usually moves to a more cooperative stance toward China. Certainly this has been the case with the current George W. Bush administration.

An American debate rages over whether a reemerging China will be a revisionist state that seeks to change the world order and challenge US power or a status quo state that respects existing international rules and economically benefits enormously from being a "stakeholder." Some Americans argue

that China is a revisionist state and therefore must pursue a containment policy to suppress China's power, including closer relationships with Japan, Taiwan, India and Australia. Many others, however, believe that China will continue to play by the rules of the world's system for its own benefit, and the US dominates this system. US-China ties got off to a rocky start in President George W. Bush's first term after Washington redefined the bilateral relationship based on competition rather than mutual cooperation. Tensions were further heightened after the collision between the Chinese fighter jet and the US reconnaissance plane over the South China Sea shortly after President Bush took office in 2001.<sup>31</sup>

Then US policy toward China shifted again when the subsequent American focus on the war on terror after 9/11 made China a useful ally. Some, like former Secretary of State Colin Powell, described the current era as the "best relationship that the US has had with China in over 30 years"<sup>32</sup> However, now that the war on terror is no longer the exclusive prism through which Washington sees the world, wariness of China is once again on the rise with a new emphasis on economic exchanges and military modernization. Thus the debate continues over China's current and future policy toward the international system in general and the US in particular.<sup>33</sup>

In a similar stance, the Bush administration also initially took a very hard line toward North Korea, a policy that gradually evolved over time and occurred with a domestic debate over the pros and cons of dialogue with Pyongyang. The administration's stance today stands in sharp contrast to the 2002 administration accusation that Pyongyang was running a secret uranium program—and demanded it be dismantled at once. President Bush told a news conference in November 2002, that "We discovered that, contrary to an agreement they had with the United States, they're enriching uranium, with a desire of developing a weapon."<sup>34</sup> Plutonium and highly enriched uranium provide different routes to building nuclear weapons. However, the accusation about the alleged uranium program presented difficulties, sparking a series of events that may have ultimately led to North Korea's first nuclear test—using plutonium. In 2002, the United States led a drive to suspend shipments of fuel oil

promised to Pyongyang under the 1994 accord that froze a North Korean plutonium facility. The collapse of the 1994 agreement freed North Korea to build up a stockpile of plutonium for nuclear weapons. North Korea conducted its test with some of that plutonium—while the alleged uranium enrichment faded in importance. The North Koreans were able to reprocess spent fuel rods—which had been monitored by U.N. inspectors under the 1994 agreement—to obtain the weapons-grade plutonium for the 2006 nuclear test.<sup>35</sup> This stands in contrast to US policy toward North Korea at the March 2007 round of the Six Party Talks and the ultimate terms of the agreement.

Some Chinese tend to have a rather simplistic view of the American policy-making process, as David Lampton observes in a recent book on Sino-US relations.<sup>36</sup> It is possible to either be overwhelmed by the plethora of voices that create US policy or to choose whatever voice supports one's fears or suspicions about the US. In truth, the pluralistic nature of the American political system assures that there are many competing views of China at any one time. An anti-China view does not mean that it is going to become the official policy of the US, anymore than a pro-China view does. The US decision-making system is one of checks and balances. Voices of containment are counter balanced by voices of engagement. Recent US policies toward China show that a combination of both engagement and suspicion continue to dominate.

In sum, there are differences in how China and the US view national security and international relations, including their views toward a nuclear North Korea.<sup>37</sup> The Chinese view is one of a rising power with aspirations to increase the welfare of its people and enhance the justice of the international system. The US view is that of a status quo power which maintains its power with greater certainty in an unchanging world system. While the US can and must accept some subtle shifts, perhaps including China's increased visibility and engagement in the world system, it is adverse to any radical or revolutionary changes in the international system. The US position as sole superpower means that while this bilateral relationship is important to both sides, China often has to give a little bit more, although US policy is by no means unchanging. While the differences in perspective

between the US and China are dramatic and important, they are not insurmountable.

### **Conclusion**

The post-Cold War era has found the US and China looking for a fresh basis for their relationship. During the Cold War this bilateral relationship was founded on a mutual animosity toward the Soviet Union, but in the post-Cold War era the relationship between China and the US is much more nuanced and complex. There are some areas of disagreement and some areas of mutual interest. Although changes brought about as a result of a nuclear North Korea have been subtle, some of these areas of agreement and disagreement are much more obvious.

One major area of disagreement has been and will likely continue to be trade policy. The role of perceptions, bias, and value judgments in analyzing the bilateral trade relationship is immediately evident because not only are the implications of trade figures in dispute, but also the numbers themselves are a source of contention.<sup>38</sup> Shipments of large volumes of Chinese mainland-manufactured goods and large quantities of US goods destined for China's mainland all go through Hong Kong, resulting in major discrepancies between official trade data compiled in Washington, DC versus official trade data compiled in Beijing. In addition to these numerical discrepancies and whatever the real US trade balance is with China, there are also disagreements and misperceptions about each other's economic policies,<sup>39</sup> including currency, labor practices, stock market realities, monetary reserves, and investment in each other's national economy. If the history of US trade disputes with Japan is any measure, these trade disputes between China and the US are likely to plague the relationship for a long time to come.

Another area of major disagreement has been the important difference in how the US and China view Iran. In the words of a noted Chinese scholar, "Iran is a friendly country for China and an important partner for energy cooperation in the Persian Gulf." Liu Xuecheng goes on to say, "If China and the US confront each other, there can be no winners..."<sup>40</sup> In contrast, the US has grave concerns about Iran's political, regional and nuclear ambitions. As opposed to agreeing to disagree, the US official

position in the past year has implied that China's relationship with the US will be determined by how it responds to Iran's nuclear program. Robert Zoellick, then-deputy secretary of state, elevated Iran's nuclear program to the single most important issue at stake in US-China relations rather than the usual concerns over the strength of China's currency and its trade surplus. He said China's relationship with the US was "going to be determined by how they act in Iran in dealing with this nuclear issue."<sup>41</sup> Following a May 2007 U.N. report that Tehran has expanded its uranium enrichment program, China's deputy U.N. ambassador, Liu Zhenmin, said the talks will be scheduled in June 2007 to focus on how to bring Iran back to negotiations and what the Security Council could do if Tehran doesn't budge. Although the UN Security Council imposed sanctions on Iran in December 2006, for refusing to suspend enrichment and modestly increased them in March after Tehran stepped up the program, Iran responded by giving the U.N. nuclear watchdog less access to its nuclear facilities.<sup>42</sup> While China has moved slightly closer to the US position on Iran, the gulf between them remains large.

Despite major disagreements in trade and policy toward Iran, there are also areas of agreement in economics, security and stability. Trade issues are and will continue to pose problems for the bilateral relationship, but overall the trade between China and the US is vitally important for both parties: For China, the US market and currency has been central to their economic takeoff.; for the US, China's cheap goods and manufacturing have helped keep down domestic inflation. Although there are bilateral tensions concerning the best method of achieving security, both the US and China are concerned with regional and global stability. One set of security threats common to them both, as well as to many other countries, are the transnational threats of drug trafficking, human trafficking, the global environment, pandemic disease, and transnational crimes of passport fraud and money laundering. While China wants stability in order to continue its economic dynamism and the US wants stability to maintain the status quo of American supremacy, the desire for stability is mutual for the time being.

The situation on the Korean peninsula has highlighted one of the areas of mutual interests, particularly stability. The Six Party Talks have provided an opportunity for the US and China, with their varying rationales for wanting stability on the peninsula, to work together to achieve some sort of stability. To some extent, the history of the Six Party Talks reflects a moving closer together of US and Chinese policies toward a nuclear North Korea.

The North Korean nuclear crisis erupted a second time in October 2002, when then-US Assistant Secretary of State James Kelly visited Pyongyang and understood North Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Kang Sok Chu to state that North Korea had a uranium enrichment program. The US accused North Korea of violating the 1994 Framework Agreement and cut off the supply of oil. In response, Pyongyang withdrew from the NPT Treaty and expelled inspectors in early 2003. By August 2003, the first round of Six Party Talks was being hosted by Beijing, followed by a second round of talk on February, 25-28, 2004. After working group meetings in May and June, the third round of Six Party Talks was held June 23-26, 2004, reaffirming their commitment to a peaceful nuclear-weapon free Korean peninsula. After a tense period, North Korea publicly announced that it possessed nuclear weapons on February 10, 2005. The fourth round of Six Party Talks was held in September 2005, and produced an Agreement on a Joint Statement of six articles including verifiable denuclearization, normalization steps, nuclear energy potential, and economic cooperation. The fifth round of talks began in November 2005 and concluded in February 2007, with a series of huge issues including the US decision to freeze North Korean assets and a North Korean nuclear test with a resulting UNSC Resolution condemning that test, ending with a Joint Statement for action. The sixth round of talks on March 19-22, 2007, saw some concrete action such as the US decision to unfreeze funds in Macao.<sup>43</sup> The Chinese will invite the six parties to meet again—once the money actually flows back into North Korean banks and the Yongbyon nuclear reactors are shut down—to discuss subsequent steps.

In the process of these Six Party Talks, Chinese distancing from North Korea increased, while the American policy of total

refusal to address North Korea thawed, moving the US and Chinese positions closer together than they were before the Six Party Talks. The reasons that China and the US want peace and a peninsula free of nuclear weapons are not the same. Nonetheless, the desired outcomes coincide. The comparative convergence of policies is partly explained by the changes that have been and will continue to occur within the CCP leadership, perhaps most notably the Hu Jintao/Wen Jiabao focus on an domestic “harmonious society” that requires peace and stability in the international system. The shift in China’s role in the international system also partly explains this converging position on a nuclear North Korea. As China becomes more powerful, it not only has more to lose if there is conflict, but also it has more to gain from a stable system, what the US has called becoming an international “stakeholder.” Finally, this convergence on policies toward a nuclear North Korea has resulted from shifts in US policy toward China. As the various US administrations have become more deeply involved in the complexities of the international system, US policy has tended to gravitate from a very hard line to a more nuanced, negotiated policy. All of these elements, and more, have influenced the direction of Chinese foreign policy toward the US.

It is also possible to see how a nuclear North Korea and the resulting Six Party Talks have impacted events beyond North Korea itself, especially in terms of the convergence in Sino-US relations and Chinese foreign policy toward the US. A similar but opposite occurrence has applied to the South Korean situation, for instance. On the one hand, there is now more distance in the US-South Korean relationship. Some of the issues at play in the US-South Korean relationship are increasing nationalism marked by a rising standard of living, tragic incidents involving Korean civilians and US military personnel, and an economic shift in trade. On the other hand, China and South Korea have rapidly improved their bilateral relations in the 15 years since recognition on 24 August 1992. Not only has trade between these two powers increased dramatically so that China is now South Korea’s top trading partner, but also the coincidence of their positions in the Six Party Talks has helped erase some of the suspicion that still has existed between the two



governments. Again, although there are still huge differences in these relationships, the US and Chinese positions have moved closer together than they were before the Six Party Talks.

The US has been relatively relaxed regarding North Korea's a short-range missile launches on May 25 and June 7, 2007, towards the Sea of Japan. North Korea has conducted similar tests in the past. Although the US is not happy with the Pyongyang's missile program, arguing that it poses a threat to the region and the international community at large and increases regional tensions, there was not undue alarm in either Washington, DC, or Beijing as a result of the test launch. The recent launches involve short-range missiles that would not be covered by either North Korea's September 1999 missile moratorium or the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration since both dealt with long-range missiles.

None of this is to say that future Chinese policy toward the United States, or future American policy toward China for that matter, will be a gradual process of convergence. In fact, most Western China scholars believe that Sino-US relations will continue to be a very bumpy road. Not only will the issues of trade and policy toward the Middle East continue to beleague the relationship, but also different perspectives on what the international system is and should be will also bedevil US-China relations. It is also quite likely that a new American administration will come in 2009 with some very distinct policies toward both China and the Korean peninsula. Part of the American discourse on China that has not been reflected in recent years, but still brews in Washington DC, includes issues like human rights and religion in China. Similarly, a new American administration will examine the North Korean question and may come up with a totally different view regarding nonproliferation as the bottom line, perhaps making new demands on Pyongyang. Also, it is fair to assume that the current Chinese President Hu Jintao and Premier Wen Jiabao will continue to create more mature policies, reflective of a more prosperous country with greater ambitions and increased ties to the international system. In sum, the issues will continue to be lively for the foreseeable future.

#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily represent those of the Asia-Pacific Center, the Department of Defense, or the United States government.

<sup>2</sup> Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard & Zheng Yongnian (eds.), *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> See Andrew G. Walder, "The Party Elite and China's Trajectory of Change," in Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard & Zheng Yongnian (eds.) *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>4</sup> See You Ji, "The People's Liberation Army as a Key Interest Group in Chinese Party Politics," in Kjeld Erik Brodsgaard & Zheng Yongnian (eds.) *The Chinese Communist Party in Reform* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> Zhu Feng, "Shifting Tides: China and North Korea" *China Security* Autumn 2006 p. 44.

<sup>6</sup> Lee Yongxie, "The Chinese Diplomacy Advances to the World Stage," *Global Times*, September 8, 2006.  
[http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2006-09/08/content\\_5063698.htm?rss=1](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2006-09/08/content_5063698.htm?rss=1).

<sup>7</sup> "Party congresses are important for two reasons. First, they establish the party's line in all major policy sectors. In principle, the party congress is the most authoritative body in the CCP's organizational hierarchy, and so its policy prescriptions reflect the CCP's authoritative line on all issues that the congress addresses. A party congress brings together roughly 2,000 delegates from all levels of the CCP and normally lasts about a week. Over the course of its session, a party congress sets down a consensus evaluation of the party's work over the five-year period since the preceding congress and of the party's present situation, and it sets forth general guidelines for the party's priorities, emphases, and tasks for the coming five-year period until the next congress. These supremely authoritative judgments about past work and future tasks are incorporated into a long "political report," normally delivered by the party's top leader, the general secretary." Lyman Miller, "The Road to the 17<sup>th</sup> Party Congress" *China Leadership Monitor*, No. 18, Spring 2006.

<sup>8</sup> “A country’s soft power rests upon the attractiveness of its culture, the appeal of its domestic political and social values, and the style and substance of its foreign policies.” Joseph Nye Jr. “Soft Power Matters in Asia” *Japan Times* (Tokyo: December 5, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Stephen D. Cohen “The Rise of China and the Rise of China-US Trade Frictions” *International Review*, Spring 2006, Vol. 42, p. 105.

<sup>10</sup> “China’s rapid rise as a regional political and economic power with global aspirations is an important element of today’s strategic environment – one that has significant implications for the region and the world. The United States welcomes the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China, and it encourages China to participate as a responsible international stakeholder by taking on a greater share of responsibility for the health and success of the global system. However, much uncertainty surrounds the future course China’s leaders will set for their country, including in the area of China’s expanding military power and how that power might be used. The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) is pursuing comprehensive transformation from a mass army designed for protracted wars of attrition on its territory to one capable of fighting and winning short-duration, high intensity conflicts against high-tech adversaries – which China refers to as “local wars under conditions of informatization.” China’s ability to sustain military power at a distance, at present, remains limited but, as noted in the 2006 *Quadrennial Defense Review Report*, it “has the greatest potential to compete militarily with the United States and field disruptive military technologies that could over time offset traditional U.S. military advantages.” See US Department of Defense, “2007 Military Power of the People’s Republic of China” Report, May 25, 2007 <http://www.defenselink.mil/pubs/pdfs/070523-China-Military-Power-final.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> It is not my intention to engage in an in-depth discussion of globalization. Stanley Hoffman delves into this admirably in “Clash of Globalizations,” *Foreign Affairs* (July/August 2002):107-8.

<sup>12</sup> Francois Heisborg, “Europe and the Transformation of the World Order,” *Survival* Vol. 43, No. 4 (Winter 2001-02).

<sup>13</sup> For a more complete discussion of this topic, see Elizabeth Van Wie Davis, “New Perceptions of the International System After 9/11” in *Political Science And China In Transition* v. IV (Beijing: Renmin University, July 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Chen Dongxiao. “‘Complex’ and the Changing Structure of Sino-US Relations,” *International Review*, Spring 2006 Vol. 42.

<sup>15</sup> Liu Xuechang, *Zhongguo he Meiguo: duishou haishi huoban (China and the United States: Foes or Partners)* (Beijing: Jingji kexue chubanshe, 2000) pp. 52-53.

<sup>16</sup> Zhang Baohui, “American Hegemony and China’s US Policy,” *Asian Perspective* Vol. 28, No. 3 2004, pp. 87-113.

<sup>17</sup> *Strategy and Management*, Special Issue, January-February 2001.

<sup>18</sup> For a wonderful discussion on this topic, see Kokubun Ryosei & Wang Jisi (eds.), *The Rise of China and the Changing East Order* (Tokyo: Japan Center for International Exchanges, 2004).

<sup>19</sup> Wang Jisi, “China’s Search for Stability with America,” *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2005, pp. 35-48.

<sup>20</sup> Shen Dingli, “North Korea’s Strategic Significance,” *China Security*, Autumn 2006.

<sup>21</sup> The demise of the Yan’an Faction meant opposition to both “serving the big”, referring to China’s historical influence in Korea, and also “self-defense” in military affairs. See Zhang Liangui, “The Unification of the Korean Peninsula and China’s Role,” *Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, 2005, Issue 5.

<sup>22</sup> China is now Pyongyang’s sole source for between 300,000 and one million tons of oil annually. According to operators at the transfer station outside the Chinese border city of Dandong, the oil comes from the Daqing Oil Fields 800km to the north, is refined on the North Korean side and then distributed. “North Korea’s Lifeline: The Oil Pipeline from China”, Part 2 in series “Is North Korea becoming China’s fourth north east province?”, *Chosun Ilbo*, July 15, 2004 (in Korean). The financial terms under which the oil is delivered remain unclear.

<sup>23</sup> See Zhang Lianguo “Coping with a Nuclear North Korea,” *China Security*, Autumn 2006.

<sup>24</sup> See Zhang Lianguo “Coping with a Nuclear North Korea,” *China Security*, Autumn 2006.

<sup>25</sup> Zhu Feng, “Shifting Tides: China and North Korea,” *China Security* Autumn, 2006.

<sup>26</sup> The UN's World Food Program in March 2007 also estimated a one-million-ton shortfall. It said North Korean officials had agreed with its estimate. "North Korea faces huge food shortage: UN," *Channel News Asia*, May 17, 2007.

[http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp\\_asiapacific/view/276793/1/.html](http://www.channelnewsasia.com/stories/afp_asiapacific/view/276793/1/.html).

<sup>27</sup> International Crisis Group, *China and North Korea: Comrades Forever?* Asia Report, No. 112, February 1, 2006.

<sup>28</sup> Xia Liping, "US Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula and the North Korean Nuclear Issue," *International Review*, Vol. 42, Spring 2006.

<sup>29</sup> Xia Liping, "US Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula and the North Korean Nuclear Issue," *International Review*, Vol. 42, Spring 2006.

<sup>30</sup> "China, Japan, ROK to converge for foreign affairs consultation" *People's Daily*, 17 May 2007,

[http://english.people.com.cn/200705/16/eng20070516\\_374935.html](http://english.people.com.cn/200705/16/eng20070516_374935.html).

<sup>31</sup> Antoaneta Bezlova, "China yawns at Bush freedom rhetoric" *Asia Times*, February 4, 2005,

<http://www.atimes.com/atimes/China/GB02Ad06.html>.

<sup>32</sup> Colin Powell, as quoted on CNBC's "The Wall Street Journal Report," November 14, 2004.

<sup>33</sup> Elizabeth Van Wie Davis, "China and the Asia-Pacific: A US Perspective" in Rouben Azizian & Boris Reznik (eds.) *Russia, America, and Security in the Asia-Pacific* (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2006).

<sup>34</sup> As quoted in Glenn Kessler, "New Doubts on Nuclear Efforts by North Korea," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2007, p. A1.

<sup>35</sup> Glenn Kessler, "New Doubts on Nuclear Efforts by North Korea," *Washington Post*, March 1, 2007, p. A1.

<sup>36</sup> David M. Lampton, *Same Bed, Different Dreams: Managing US-China Relations 1989-2000*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

<sup>37</sup> Elizabeth Van Wie Davis, "China and the Asia-Pacific: A US Perspective" in Rouben Azizian & Boris Reznik (eds.) *Russia, America, and Security in the Asia-Pacific*, (Honolulu: Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Stephen Cohen asserts, based on US Commerce Department data, that US exports to China over the past two decades have risen a modest 10%--\$3.6 billion to \$38 billion—versus a 10,000 percent increase of Chinese exports to the US. See Stephen D. Cohen, "The Rise of China and the Rise of China-US Trade Frictions," *International Review*, Vol. 42, Spring 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Stephen D. Cohen, "The Rise of China and the Rise of China-US Trade Frictions," *International Review*, Vol. 42, Spring 2006.

<sup>40</sup> Liu Xuechang, "Duet with the Dragon," in *The Second Bush Presidency: Global Perspectives*, Amit Gupta & Cherian Samuel (eds) (New Delhi: Eastern Book Corporation, 2006).

<sup>41</sup> Guy Dinmore, "US Presses China to Toughen Stance on Iran," *Financial Times*, May 11, 2006, <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/a5cf086c-e086-11da-9e82-0000779e2340.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Edith M. Lederer, "World Powers Weigh Options Against Iran," *Washington Post*, May 24, 2007.

<sup>43</sup> Xia Liping, "US Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula and the North Korean Nuclear Issue," *International Review*, Spring 2006, Vol. 42.