

China's Korea Policy after the 2012 Leadership Transitions in Asia and America

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Abstract

A turbulent leadership transition in China is fracturing the country's political system. The result is that the country's military is implementing its own external policies, often not coordinating with Beijing's diplomats. Moreover, tumultuous internal events appear to be diverting policymakers from critical issues, such as those involving North Korea. Elections this year in the United States and South Korea will not substantially change the landscape in which Chinese policymakers operate because those countries are acting—and will continue to act—within tight constraints.

Keywords: China, North Korea, South Korea, United States, nuclear weapons, military, Kim Jong Un, Bo Xilai

This year, the Chinese political system has been embroiled in an ever-widening drama of ambition, lust, murder, corruption, treason, and intrigue. There have been rumors of attempted military takeovers and stories of near-successful assassination plots. Officials were purged, businessmen arrested, and generals reprimanded. The Communist Party of China, after two decades of apparent stability, is fracturing at the top.

This splintering of the country's political system is undermining Beijing's ability to pursue coherent external policies. The factional infighting, for instance, is resulting in the country's military, a powerful block in the Party, gaining even more latitude to implement its own policies. At the same time, these tumultuous internal events appear to be diverting Chinese policymakers from critical issues, such as those involving the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. While China affects developments on the Korean peninsula this year, instability inside the Chinese regime is affecting China.

Recent events in China have indeed been extraordinary. In the beginning of February, Bo Xilai, then the Communist Party secretary of the metropolis of Chongqing, sent hundreds of armed security troops

across provincial lines to the Sichuan capital of Chengdu. There, his army surrounded the American consulate and began a tense standoff with other forces in a bid to prevent one of his most trusted aides, Wang Lijun, from defecting to the U.S. and surrendering documents incriminating Bo and his wife.

Wang, once Chongqing's police chief, had apparently asked for asylum but eventually left the consulate after spending a night of intense discussions with American diplomats. Officials from the Ministry of State Security escorted him to Beijing where he reportedly made accusations that have torn apart the leadership of the Party. Among other things, Wang appears to have implicated Bo's wife, Gu Kailai, in the poisoning death of British businessman Neil Heywood. Heywood, it is alleged, was helping her smuggle hundreds of millions of dollars out of China. He may have been blackmailing her over his fee for these illegal transfers.

Moreover, it looks as though Wang told authorities that Bo, the most charismatic politician of his generation in China, conspired with others to take over the government by force. Wang was branded a traitor and convicted of assorted crimes, and Bo has been expelled from the Communist Party and handed over to judicial authorities for prosecution. Zhou Yongkang, the member of the Politburo Standing Committee charged with overseeing internal security, is under a cloud of suspicion, accused by many of participating in Bo's treasonous activities. Another suspected plotter is blueblood General Liu Yuan, who may have been recently cleared. The turmoil continued through the fall as Hu Jintao, China's leader, hounded and punished Bo's supporters and friends.

It appears that "the Wang Lijun incident,"¹ as the troubles are now called in official media, was triggered by Hu sometime in 2011 when he ordered a corruption investigation against Wang as a means of putting pressure on Bo, a member of the Princeling faction of the Party. That set in motion a series of events that have ended—for now—the career of the flamboyant Bo. The case has taken on special significance because Bo evidently had upset Hu and other senior leaders with his high-profile campaign to win a seat on the Party's Politburo Standing Committee, the apex of Chinese political power.

Hu Jintao's scorched-earth tactics brought temporary victory to his powerful Communist Youth League faction in the Party, but at the same time they could cause more months of uncertainty and turbulence. They have, in any event, brought back into view sharp politics reminiscent of

the Maoist era. This March, Premier Wen Jiabao issued a public warning that the country could descend into another Cultural Revolution.²

Could the Chinese state really fall apart as the premier suggested? Since the beginning of this year, the country has witnessed events that were considered inconceivable just months ago. There was, then, an almost universally shared assumption that the Communist Party had institutionalized itself with rules, guidelines, practices, and limits and had thereby solved the critical weakness of authoritarian governance, succession. Therefore, virtually all analysts had predicted that the upcoming leadership transition from the so-called Fourth Generation, led by Hu Jintao, to the Fifth Generation, presumably under the command of Vice President Xi Jinping, would be “smooth.”

That transition, evidently, has already proved tumultuous. There are, for instance, indications that Hu may try to hold on to power, perhaps for years. At this time, almost nothing can be ruled out. Senior Communist Party leaders could quickly settle their differences—the majority view in the global China-watching community—or the Party might continue to splinter and eventually lose its ability to govern coherently—my position.

Whatever happens during the remainder of the transition, it is clear that the political turmoil in China is accelerating unwelcome changes in the Chinese regime, and these changes will inevitably influence the country’s Korea policies. Beijing’s policies will also depend, in part, on external events, especially the leadership transition that has recently occurred in North Korea and the upcoming presidential elections in both the United States and South Korea. This article looks at both sets of influences—the political turbulence at home and the electoral contests abroad³—on China’s policy toward its only military ally and friend of more than six decades, Pyongyang.

Effect of Political Developments on Chinese Policy

At present, Hu Jintao has been trying to consolidate his initial gains by closing ranks. At a meeting of the Party’s 200 top leaders in Beijing in early May, 2012, he demanded an end to infighting and insisted on compliance with the view that the Bo matter was an “isolated case.” Insiders say Hu has, at least for the time being, stopped a wider crackdown on the more senior of Bo’s allies to prevent the discord from spreading and that he has even obtained the support of his long-time rival, Jiang Zemin, the leader of the Shanghai Gang faction in the Party. “The leadership won’t turn this into a line struggle,” says political analyst

Chen Ziming, making the argument that there will be no ideological campaign.⁴

If what amounts to a temporary truce holds, then Gordon Flake may be correct in his assessment that there soon could be a subtle but important shift in Beijing's approach toward North Korea. Flake, the executive director of the Maureen and Mike Mansfield Foundation, suggests that the "old-school conservatives" may have lost out in the squabbling this year. "If you look at which of these factions were closer to North Korea and the appearance that, right now at least, the reformists did ascend, that would leave some to have hope that the Chinese would be willing in the coming weeks and months to further mitigate their approach to the North," he observes. "There is some hope, not that China will abandon North Korea but that they will begin to recalibrate their approach and in some ways stop shielding North Korea from the consequences of its actions."⁵

Yet even if Flake is correct that reformists are ascendant in Beijing—and there is, in fact, evidence to support his explanation of ongoing events—there are concurrent transition-related developments suggesting that Chinese policy cannot move in a progressive direction in the short-term. Along with the temporary victory of anti-Bo forces, the leadership struggle is leading to a fracturing of the Chinese regime, and the fracturing of the regime is contributing to an especially dangerous trend, the remilitarization of politics and policy.

Beginning as early as 2003, the flag officers of the People's Liberation Army began to accumulate influence as Hu Jintao sought their political support in his struggle to shove aside his predecessor, Jiang Zemin, who sought to linger in the limelight. Jiang had, according to schedule, given up his all-powerful post as general secretary of the Party at the 16th Congress in November 2002 and his position as state president at the National People's Congress in March 2003. Yet, he clung to the chairmanship of the Party's Central Military Commission. Hu had to enlist the support of generals and admirals to get Jiang to relinquish that role, something he eventually did in 2004. The new leader thereby made top officers power brokers in Communist Party circles, and some say he even had to give up effective control of the Commission to the flag officers to get Jiang out of the way.

This year, we are witnessing the same dynamic in the current leadership transition, although the military seems far more powerful this time around. The evidence suggests growing PLA involvement in

civilian politics. First, at the height of the crisis in February, when his forces surrounded the American consulate in Chengdu, Bo Xilai went to Kunming to visit the headquarters of the 14th Group Army. His father, Bo Yibo, had established that unit, and analysts naturally speculated that the younger Bo was appealing to its current officers to support his bid for promotion from the Communist Party's Politburo to the Politburo's Standing Committee.

Second, top Party leaders consulted with the top brass before they decided to strip Bo of his Party positions. In early April, Jiang Zemin sat down with military officers before meeting with Hu Jintao and other members of the Politburo Standing Committee to discuss Bo's fate. And when he later met with Hu and the Standing Committee, Jiang did so at the headquarters of the Central Military Commission in Beijing.⁶ The choice of location was, of course, powerfully symbolic. And in an even more disturbing sign of the growing role of the military and the erosion of the standing of civilian leaders, "leftists" during the Bo affair were publicly calling on the army to intervene in the nation's politics.⁷ Everyone, it seems, is looking to the military for support.

Some analysts believe this process of remilitarization of politics and policy has gone so far that the People's Liberation Army will become the most powerful faction in the Communist Party after the 18th Congress.⁸ That could happen as the military has, from all accounts, retained its cohesiveness better than other factions in the Party, especially the amorphous Princeling group, which looks like it is now headed by Xi Jinping. In any event, it is clear that flag officers are sure to protect their turf in the ongoing titanic contest among civilians—and in the intense struggle to fill seats on the next Central Military Commission. The top brass, therefore, looks like it will once again play a pivotal role as the final arbiters among feuding civilians. We are in an age of expanding military influence, not because of a power grab by uniformed officers but because the officers have been dragged into an ever-widening struggle among senior Party officials.

That struggle includes what could become the ultimate prize of this transitional season: the control of the organ that runs the military. Hu Jintao is apparently taking a page out of his predecessor's playbook by angling to retain the indefinite chairmanship of the Party's Central Military Commission.⁹ Jiang, without much success, has in recent months been trying to get Hu to promise to hand over that role to Xi Jinping when Xi becomes the next general secretary. If these rumors are

true—and they have the ring of authenticity—senior generals and admirals will again assume the role of political players in the end game of an historic transition, as the so-called Fourth Generation passes from the scene.

The central role of the military has been confirmed, at least indirectly, by two sets of coup rumors that circulated in China during the early part of 2012. The year was barely a day old when reports suggested there was an active conspiracy between elements in both the navy and air force. According to these reports, given weight by some China analysts, around New Year's Day officers in two Chinese air force units were arrested on suspicion of plotting a takeover. At the same time, the storyline goes, a nuclear submarine on patrol was ordered back to port because some on board were thought to have had links with the plotters. These rumors remain unconfirmed but are thought to be connected to an event that did, in fact, occur, the detention in December of Colonel Tan Linshu of the Chinese navy for subversion.¹⁰

The second set of rumors involved a conspiracy in the Chinese capital. During the early morning of March 20, tanks and armored cars were said to be patrolling the center of Beijing and shots were heard from Zhongnanhai, the headquarters of Communist Party, just west of the Forbidden City. Later, some said there had been a shootout inside the leadership compound as guards, at the last moment, stopped an attempt on the life of Vice President Xi.

The March rumors, essentially denied by the Foreign Ministry,¹¹ were publicized worldwide as they dramatized the erosion of Chinese stability. Yet whether true or not, the reports also highlight the enhanced standing of the People's Liberation Army in the one-party state. These rumors went viral in China, not only because they were sensational but also because, for many Chinese citizens, they were credible. They were credible because top leaders had conditioned the Chinese people over the last several years to believe the top brass had assumed a central role in Beijing politics.

Hu Jintao, for instance, has inadvertently given credence to the rumors of an attempted military takeover by repeatedly issuing a series of public warnings, pointed reminders that the People's Liberation Army is subject to the absolute will of the Party.¹² There have been too many of these statements to think the Party at this moment truly "controls the gun."

From all outward appearances, the military is already playing an

expanded role in policy as well as politics. Senior officers are acting independently of civilian officials, are openly criticizing them, and are making pronouncements on areas once the exclusive province of diplomats. The top brass is not calling the tune in Beijing, but the situation is potentially more dangerous. In recent years there is a growing “disconnect,” as then Defense Secretary Robert Gates called it in January 2011, between military and civilian decision makers.¹³ The regime, from recent indications, is dividing into constituent elements that often carry out their own policies with little evident coordination.

One consequence of the splintering of the Chinese government is that generals and admirals are free to conduct their own North Korea policy and provide even more support for the ruling group in Pyongyang. In 2012, we learned that the links between the People’s Liberation Army and the Korean People’s Army were deeper than once suspected.

These deepening ties were most dramatically illustrated on April 15 when the North Korean military, in a massive parade in Pyongyang, displayed six missile transporters of Chinese design and perhaps of Chinese manufacture. The eight-axle transporter-erector-launcher vehicles—known as TELs in the military community—were carrying the North’s newest three-stage missile, designated the KN-08.

Shortly thereafter, an unnamed White House official, speaking anonymously to the *New York Times*, noted that the Obama administration believed China had sold the chassis and other parts for the missile-transport vehicles.¹⁴ A few military analysts have gone even further. Richard Fisher of the International Assessment and Strategy Center has suggested that Chinese arms manufacturers not only sold the TELs but also transferred the technology for the KN-08s.¹⁵

Some experts argue the KN-08s on display were badly made fakes,¹⁶ but, as noted Korea military analyst Bruce Bechtol points out, Pyongyang has never displayed a missile in a parade that was not either in development or already deployed.¹⁷ Therefore, the Obama administration is probably wrong to suggest that China sold only parts for the launchers. After all, why would North Korea have to buy a chassis from China if it, in fact, had developed, on its own, a sophisticated missile and the intricate launcher interface? It makes more sense to believe that Pyongyang bought the whole package, the missiles and their associated launchers, from China. As Fisher notes, China had sold similar TELs and missiles to Pakistan, so it is possible that it sold the entire package to Pyongyang as well.

The Obama official quoted in the *Times* implied that the sale of the TELs had taken place without the knowledge of China's top civilian leaders.¹⁸ If this statement was intended to relieve apprehension, it missed the mark. If the sale had not been authorized by Beijing's civilian leaders, then there has been a noticeable deterioration of their control of central government functions.

In any event, such a sale could not have taken place without the consent of top Chinese military officers, who essentially control China's large arms manufacturers. So the White House explanation of the unauthorized nature of this sale is evidence of the growing independence of China's flag officers in general and their ability to implement their own Korea policy in particular. Furthermore, whether or not civilian leaders knew of the sale beforehand, the transfer of the TELs indicates the two militaries are working more closely than once thought.

Of course, the road-mobile KN-08 is a game-changer, able to strike Alaska and U.S. forces in the Pacific from hard-to-find locations. The sale, at a minimum, shows that Chinese policymakers—or at least elements within the regime—are willing to destabilize the international system by arming the nuclear forces of the North Korean military. The sale of the TELs, which potentially threatens the American homeland, is chilling evidence of not only the breaking down of central control in the Chinese capital but also the general hardening of Chinese attitudes.

This suggests that Beijing will be less cooperative on North Korean matters than in the past. Yet the larger issue is the evident fracturing of the Chinese government, which reveals that no one individual or faction may be speaking for "China" these days as control of external policy erodes. So although, as the astute Gordon Flake suggests, reformists are winning a nasty internal struggle inside the Communist Party, these progressive elements may not actually be able to control Chinese policymaking with regard to the Korean peninsula anytime soon.

The Chinese system is normally opaque, and it may even be becoming more impenetrable at this time of leadership transition. We can, however, see that various parties are acting with less coordination than once understood. If there is in fact a significant erosion of governance in Beijing, then much of the international community's policy toward North Korea is based on unwarranted assumptions about Chinese stability. In short, China is changing fundamentally, rapidly, and in ways we do not fully understand.

Effect of Foreign Leadership Transitions on Chinese Policy

The upcoming elections in the United States and South Korea will affect the way Beijing interacts with long-time ally North Korea, which itself has a new leader. Nonetheless, the effect of these electoral contests on Chinese policies may not be especially significant. By now, the policymakers in these countries are acting within tight constraints, with the range of their choices narrowing in recent years, in some cases considerably.

The United States is the best illustration of this narrowing choice. At the beginning of the administration of George W. Bush, the United States had a full range of options, in part because the country was then at peace, because Pyongyang had yet to detonate a nuclear weapon, and because there were no ongoing negotiations to lock-in diplomacy.

Yet the options quickly narrowed, beginning with President Bush's decision to begin multilateral discussions. Then, it was thought that putting Beijing diplomats at the center of broad-based negotiations would further integrate China into the international system and an integrated China would help "denuclearize" North Korea. As a result, the United States, its allies South Korea and Japan, and Russia began cooperating with China in the Six-Party talks, which first convened in August 2003.

Those discussions, unfortunately, proved fruitless, in large part because China, more often than not, took North Korea's side and used the multilateral format to bind the United States. By now, there is a widespread recognition in Washington that Beijing still calculates its interests in a way different than Americans do. President Bush could correctly say in January 2003 that the North Korean nuclear problem bound the United States and China "in common purpose,"¹⁹ but he apparently failed to recognize that it did not compel the two countries to favor the same approaches or solutions. After years of fruitless Six-Party negotiations—the six countries have not held a formal session of the talks since December 2008—American policymakers today recognize that China is not ready to walk away from its decades-old ties with the North, almost no matter what its troublesome ally may do.

President Obama still calls on the Chinese to help and his representatives will troop to Beijing from time to time to urge them to act constructively, but it often looks as though American diplomats are just going through the motions when they do so. Given this disappointment with China, there is a realization that the United States, if it is to disarm

North Korea, will have to act on its own.

That recognition is perhaps the real story behind the Leap Day deal, a multi-faceted agreement between the United States and North Korea announced on February 29, 2012. This is not to say that Bush diplomats did not have one-on-one discussions with their Pyongyang counterparts—they in fact did talk in such closed settings—but the previous administration was committed to presenting a united front against Pyongyang and to promoting multilateral solutions.

The emphasis of the current administration has been on direct contact with Pyongyang. In fact, when it appeared the North Koreans would launch a rocket in an apparent violation of the recently concluded Leap Day deal, the Obama team sent a “secret mission” to Pyongyang in early April to try to keep the arrangement in place.

Now, American options have further narrowed as the Leap Day deal has come undone with Pyongyang’s launch of a rocket on April 13. The flurry of diplomacy preceding and following the announcement of the arrangement ended because, as Washington insider Chris Nelson reported, that highly provocative event undercut the pro-engagement officials inside the Obama administration.²⁰

The failure of the White House’s recent diplomacy means, in all probability, the end of major initiatives for the remainder of Obama’s current term. The White House may not completely shut the door to Pyongyang, but, as Nelson noted in May, it became essentially “impossible for the White House to reach out to Pyongyang” during the remainder of the year.²¹

The administration, of course, may have to react to further North Korean provocations—a follow-up launch, one more detonation of a nuclear device, or another attack on South Korea, to name just the most important possibilities—but the administration in an election year will not try to drive events as it did in February. The political risk in a tight contest is simply too high. Moreover, the most likely policy choice going forward will be a return to the “strategic patience” doctrine of the first years of Obama’s term, when Washington did little but accept the lead of the generally conservative South Korean president, Lee Myung-bak.

“Strategic patience” was arguably the correct policy choice then because it ignored Pyongyang’s antics. Furthermore, this approach, even though it betrays a lack of initiative, could very well continue into a second Obama term. For one thing, the President will surely have more

promising and pressing objectives. Moreover, the North is obviously not ready to deal with the international community in good faith for the conceivable future, so further negotiations would not only be pointless but counterproductive.

And if Mitt Romney, the Republican challenger, should win in November, it is also unlikely he will make North Korea the centerpiece of his early foreign policy. For one thing, members of his party have bitterly complained about Obama's "appeasement" of the Kim regime,²² so there would be a political cost for him, in the absence of a crisis manufactured in Pyongyang, to put North Korea front and center in his first years in office.

Thus, Washington learns once again that North Korea is, in the memorable words of Kurt Campbell, "the land of lousy options."²³ So, as either Obama or Romney put the North on the back burner, a political transition in the international system's most powerful state may have little effect on China's posture toward the Kim regime. The range of possible American policies has narrowed so much that it probably matters little to Beijing who wins on November 6.

Of more impact on Chinese policy will be the December presidential election in South Korea. In October 2011, it looked as if volatile South Korean politics would roil the peninsula for years to come. Then, Park Won-soon scored a stunning landslide victory in the Seoul mayoral election over Na Kyung-won of the ruling Grand National Party. His stunning win changed South Korea's electoral map ahead of the presidential contest because no candidate for the Blue House has ever prevailed without carrying the capital city, where a fifth of the country's voters reside.

Park, a political novice, got his opportunity to change South Korean politics because of the August resignation of the GNP's Oh Se-hoon, who stepped down as mayor after a loss in a referendum which was nominally over free school lunches but really about the creation of a welfare state. Seoul's voters seemed to be turning their backs on the country's decades-old growth model, developed by former President Park Chung-hee in the 1960s and 1970s.

The factors that propelled Park Won-soon to victory were a growing wealth gap, soaring food and gasoline prices, persistent youth unemployment, and continuing scandals involving the administration of President Lee Myung-bak, also of the GNP. Lee Byong-chul of Seoul's Institute for Peace and Cooperation wrote, "The choice of Park was thus

a grenade rolled into the Blue House bunker by angry citizens.”²⁴

Yet angry citizens not only rejected their country’s leader, more than anything they looked like they were casting aside “old politics,” as Park Won-soon himself said. After all, South Korea’s main opposition group, the Democratic Party, also came away wounded by the mayoral contest. Its candidate was forced to withdraw in the opposition-wide nominating process in favor of a real outsider. Park, a lawyer-turned-activist, ran as “the people’s candidate,” refusing to join the Democratic Party.

Park’s improbable triumph boosted the prospects of another newcomer opposition figure, Ahn Cheol-soo, a professor at the prestigious Seoul National University. As observers noted, Park was running but it really was Ahn on the ballot. And his opponent, Ms. Na, looked as though she was the stand-in for the GNP’s Park Geun-hye, the daughter of former President Park. Prior to the Seoul mayoral vote, Ms. Park was the frontrunner in the race to replace Lee. After initially remaining on the sidelines of the mayoral contest, Park eventually campaigned for Na and thereby tied her presidential hopes to the unsuccessful candidate.

So the mayoral election was really about the race for the Blue House, but it was more than just a contest between two individuals or an argument over domestic policies. At stake were South Korea’s relations with the United States and the country’s place in Asia. The forces represented by Park Won-soon reject the notion that North Korea threatens the South.

The new mayor is famous in his country for blaming President Lee for both the North’s sinking of the *Cheonan* in March 2010—46 dead—and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island in November of that year—four dead, two of them civilians. Moreover, he earned scorn for saying there was no proof of human rights violations in North Korea, calling the matter a right-wing issue.

Park’s election, therefore, threatened the U.S.-Korea alliance, which during the Obama years had effectively replaced the Japan treaty as America’s “cornerstone” in Asia. It would, as a practical matter, be difficult for anyone in the White House to support a so-called “progressive” in the mold of Mayor Park. After all, two progressives in the Blue House, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun, undercut American efforts to disarm North Korea and maintain peace and stability in North Asia. At the time of his election last October, it looked as if Park Won-soon had created a wave.

Analysts had expected that progressive wave to eject the GNP from control of the National Assembly in April because it had been seen as a referendum on the unpopular President Lee. Yet the opposition failed to develop its own platform, and Park Geun-hye retooled the GNP—even changing its name to the Saenuri Party. She somehow engineered a victory of sorts by avoiding an expected catastrophe. Opposition parties at one time looked as though they were going to emerge collectively with a strong majority in the legislature, but the ruling party, with its new image and moniker, won 152 of 300 seats in a national election that in many ways sets the stage for the upcoming presidential campaign.

For fashioning the surprising victory, Ms. Park is now hailed the “election queen”²⁵ and is again considered the frontrunner for December’s presidential contest. Yet Saenuri took only 16 of 48 seats in Seoul and received only 42.8% of the total nationwide vote, so much is in doubt, especially because South Korea has notoriously unstable politics, in which the favorite in the morning of the balloting can very well lose by the evening.

At first glance, it looks as though South Korea’s fluid politics should affect China’s policies because the upcoming presidential election will surely pit against each other candidates with two very different views of North Korea. In short, South Korea could lurch leftward again, as it did when Kim Dae-jung took over the Blue House in 1998 and instituted his famous Sunshine Policy.

Yet there are reasons to think Seoul’s policies will not change radically after the inauguration of the 18th president of the Republic of Korea next year, if they change at all. For one thing, President Lee has been tacking to the center of the political spectrum for the last few years with his various overtures to Pyongyang. And Ms. Park, now the Saenuri Party candidate, can be expected to do the same. In fact, she has already shifted her posture, now emphasizing engagement and cooperation with the North. Both main political camps, therefore, look like they will campaign on platforms of reconciliation.²⁶

Moreover, the next South Korean leader, whatever his or her views, may not be able to change substantially the course set by Lee Myung-bak, a deep skeptic of the North’s intentions. For one thing, the killing of the two civilians in November 2010 during the shelling of Yeonpyeong has undermined the pro-North Korean elements in the South. More important, the regime in Pyongyang appears unable to engage outsiders on reasonable terms, thereby limiting what Seoul can do to establish

better relations.

As a practical matter, the North Korean regime will place real constraints on how far the next occupant of the Blue House will be able to redirect Seoul's policies in a more conciliatory direction. The next president, immediately after taking office, may try to go much further than Lee in building bridges to the Kim family, but in all probability he or she will also be rebuffed, just as the Obama administration was this year by Pyongyang's almost-immediate repudiation of the Leap Day deal.

Therefore, it is unlikely that the next occupant of the Blue House, at least after his or her first year or so, will have a wide menu of options. As a result, the upcoming leadership transition in South Korea, like the one in the United States, does not look as if it will ultimately have much long-term effect on Beijing's policies toward the peninsula.

As suggested above, there can be a long-term change in Washington's and Seoul's policies only if Pyongyang is ready to work constructively with other capitals. At the moment, that does not appear to be the case, in large part because of the uncertainty and turmoil inside the regime after the sudden death of Kim Jong Il in December 2011 and the staged succession of the youngest of his acknowledged sons, the ill-prepared Kim Jong Un.

At first, the father-to-son transition was smooth, unexpectedly so. In events apparently scripted well in advance, Kim Jong Un assumed power quickly. In December, within two days of the end of the short official mourning period, he was named Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army, and the succession looked like it was formally completed in mid-April when he became First Secretary of the Korea Workers' Party and, more importantly, First Chairman of the National Defense Commission. Young Kim did not assume his grandfather's title of Suryong—Great Leader—but he was called “Supreme Commander in Heart,” “Respected General,” and “Dear Father.” Kim Jong Un became his nation's “spiritual pillar and the lighthouse of hope.”

State media then began building another personality cult as it recorded what looked to be his every move around the country, inspecting the Demilitarized Zone as well as seemingly innumerable military units, factories, and farms. The transition, from all outward appearances, had been quick, seamless, and trouble-free, at least on the surface.

Still, there were periodic reports of unexplained deaths, executions, and purges that seem to be related in varying degrees to the succession.

Many of them occurred in the run up to the transfer of power, such as that of Kim Jong Il aide Ri Je Gang, killed in a mysterious car accident in May 2010. In May 2012, Amnesty International reported that over 200 officials may have been detained in January alone, and some could have been executed.²⁷ The young dictator had called for “gunshots across the country,” and his rule was termed a “reign of terror.”²⁸ Kim Jong Un reportedly ordered a military officer executed by mortar fire so that there would be no trace of him afterward, not even hair.²⁹ In early January, there was a false rumor, perhaps planted by one of Kim’s enemies, of a coup,³⁰ and stories of his assassination circulated in China in February.³¹

It is unlikely that the transfer of power from one leader to the next in a “thuggish” regime could ever be accomplished without fatal incidents. In fact, some believe Kim Jong Un is using his father’s ruthless tactics to eliminate enemies quickly. That may be his only path to survival because the basic structure of the North Korean regime, first devised by Grandfather Kim Il Sung, is inherently unstable, even in the best of times.

The “one-man” regime is essentially a combination of four institutions—the Kim family circle, the security services, the Korean People’s Army, and the Korean Workers’ Party—and the two previous Kim rulers mastered the art of keeping all the groups in proper balance. “No one else has ever had power, except for Kim Il Sung and Kim Jong Il, in any more than one key institution, and thus the leader of the country has always led by ‘divide and conquer’,”³² says Bruce Bechtol, the Korea analyst.

The essential problem for Kim Jong Un is that the divide-and-conquer game is exceedingly complex, and it does not look as though he had time, before his father unexpectedly died, to master the skills, acquire the knowledge, or build the power base needed to balance the constituent elements composing the regime. His father groomed him for about three years while Kim Il Sung gave his father about two decades of on-the-job training. This has given the “Young General,” as the inexperienced Jong Un has been called, little choice but to rely initially on the most powerful institution in society, the Korean People’s Army.

His grandfather, a strong leader, spent decades taming the generals after the Korean War, but his father reversed course and threw in his lot with the flag officers. Kim Jong Un looked as though he would surrender even more turf to them. He signaled this direction in his first public speech, read to a crowd of 100,000 people in Pyongyang on April 15, when he promised to not only pursue *songun*—“military first”—

politics but pledged to defend his country by making the military his “first, second and third” priorities.³³

For a time, there was mounting evidence that the top brass, in fact, were calling the shots in Pyongyang, as illustrated by the quick unwinding of the Leap Day deal. The agreement included a moratorium on the testing of long-range missiles, and Glyn Davies, Washington’s special representative for North Korea policy, made it clear to the North Koreans in numerous private conversations that the ban included tests of long-range rockets as well.³⁴ Moreover, the State Department announced a similar position on March 16; just hours after the North Koreans said they would launch their Unha-3 rocket to orbit an earth-observation satellite, the Kwangmyongsong-3.³⁵ Of course, the event looked like a disguised test of the Taepodong-2 missile, and, as such, a clear violation of the deal they had just agreed to, not to mention various Security Council sanctions.

Nonetheless, the North went ahead with the test, despite its agreement not to do so. Why? It appears the North Korean military overruled civilian policymakers, who did not want to launch the “rocket” because of the deal with Washington.³⁶ Yet whether or not this interpretation of events is correct, the flag officers seem to have lost considerable influence since then. In July, Kim Jong Un removed Vice Marshal Ri Yong Ho, chief of the General Staff. The surprise move was accompanied by reports that the young ruler took away the military’s export privileges, limited its role in the infamous “Room 39” illegal activities, and shuttered an army-controlled investment company.³⁷

Some analysts believe the Korean Workers’ Party is gaining power and that its rise is so pronounced that it changes the nature of the regime. Jang Song Thaek, considered to be Kim Jong Un’s regent, is thought to be behind the restructuring, systematically dismantling the power structure put in place by Kim Jong Il to protect his son. Jang, married to Kim Jong Il’s sister, has been diligently eliminating his own political opponents, including Vice Marshal Ri, Ri Je Gang, and spy master Ryu Kyong.³⁸ So far, the military has accepted Jang’s changes, but it appears just a matter of time before the generals and admirals—or other regime elements—push back. Jang is not a Kim by birth, and so he becomes vulnerable as he accumulates power.

During the first half of this year, it looked as though North Korea would become, in the words of former American Six-Party negotiator Christopher Hill, “a sort of military junta.”³⁹ Now, as various factions

struggle with each other, it is especially unclear what will happen. Yet it seems a safe bet that there will be extreme turmoil inside the regime, and if that in fact proves to be the case, neither the United States nor South Korea will be able to make progress building relations with Pyongyang. Infighting in the North Korean capital has essentially ended the possibility of the North making progress with any nation, friend or foe, for the foreseeable future. This is true even if Kim Jong Un is sincere in his recent signaling that he wants to embark on a program of economic reform. The still-unsettled leadership transition in Pyongyang means no one there—including Jong Un himself—will feel safe enough to take apart the system put in place by the first two Kim rulers.

Beijing's Policies

In both 2006 and 2009, North Korea followed long-range missile tests with detonations of atomic devices. Now that Pyongyang has launched a “rocket,” will it follow its recent pattern and detonate another nuclear weapon soon?

The Kim family regime seemed to signal its intention to do so by, among other things, declaring in early January that such devices embraced a “revolutionary heritage”⁴⁰ and amending the constitution in mid-April to declare the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea a nuclear power.⁴¹ Even if, as some argue, that amendment is not such a sign, there are indications that the regime is going ahead with a test. In late May, a South Korean “senior government official” told Yonhap News Agency that the North was “technically ready” to detonate a nuclear weapon.⁴² Workers have not only dug a tunnel at the spot of the past two atomic tests, but they have, according to some reports, also filled that tunnel in, presumably after inserting the device inside. If the intelligence supporting Seoul’s assessment is accurate, it appears that all that is needed for the test to occur is a political decision from Pyongyang.

Most analysts think that Chinese leaders can prevent the Kim regime from making that momentous political decision, even though relations in recent months have been tense as incidents, especially the capture of Chinese fishing boats by the North Korean military in May, have complicated matters between the two capitals. For a decade, Chinese policymakers have downplayed their ability to influence the North Koreans so they would have an excuse not to act against them, and in the past they were almost certainly underestimating their clout. Now, however, they may be closer to the truth when they say they cannot call

the tune, and they may no longer be playacting when expressing exasperation with their Korean allies.⁴³

Because of increasing friction, some say, at least privately, that Beijing could actually walk away from its decades-old alliance. That view, however, seems far too optimistic. More realistic is the notion that, after the next nuclear detonation, Beijing will express displeasure in unmistakable fashion. Its reaction will be, in the words of Jonathan Pollack, “very strong, potentially very harsh.” As the prominent Brookings analyst says, “The Chinese are not, in my own view, likely to discard North Korea.”⁴⁴

Harsh words sound about the most China will do because Beijing’s leaders look as though they are trying to avoid major decisions about Pyongyang right now. They are obviously preoccupied by their own leadership transition, and the transition means that Chinese policymakers, whatever influence they may have, are not in a position to exercise their clout effectively. Therefore, we should not be surprised that China’s behind-the-scenes diplomacy of the moment appears half-hearted, even though Defense Minister General Liang Guanglie assured us last year that his country had done “much more than you imagine.”⁴⁵

Maybe so, but China’s supposedly unimaginable efforts were obviously not enough. Beijing summoned North Korean delegations twice before the April 13 launch,⁴⁶ and, after the failed attempt, summoned them again, this time for a lecture in Beijing on why their country should not detonate another nuclear weapon.⁴⁷ Yet, it appears that, after this exchange in the Chinese capital, the North Koreans kept on digging their tunnel for the test.

When they feel the need, undoubtedly the Chinese, can make the North Koreans do what they want. After all, as international affairs analyst Yong Kwon noted in February, China “has the power to strangle North Korea to death.”⁴⁸ But the Chinese obtain compliance from Pyongyang only when they exercise the full range of their considerable powers, and at this time they do not appear willing or able to do that.

With turmoil roiling the Chinese political system in the run up to the crucial transfer of power slated for this fall, there are few people in Beijing paying attention to Kim Jong Un and the provocative acts of his regime. Moreover, the Chinese military is gaining sway, which has to be good news for the North Koreans. All this gives them even more latitude than they normally enjoy. In this situation, they know they can get away with insulting, ignoring, and infuriating Beijing, and, true to form, they

are now pushing the limits.

They also understand that China will continue to support them for its own geopolitical reasons. The North Koreans apparently think—correctly, as it turns out—that almost nothing they can do will change China’s calculation of its interests on the Korean peninsula, and as long as they do not fundamentally prejudice those interests, they do not have to fear Beijing’s retaliation.⁴⁹

The North Koreans are defiant even though in recent months it looks as though they need the Chinese more than ever, given first to the spreading famine in Hwanghae province,⁵⁰ the extreme drought in other places, and then the devastating floods. At the same time, China has further penetrated the North Korean economy, so the Pyongyang regime has been growing even more reliant on its giant neighbor’s assistance.⁵¹ Analysts often talk about Beijing’s “strategic passiveness” or the “illogic” of its Korean policies,⁵² but it’s closer to the mark to talk about its paralysis.

Because both the People’s Republic of China and the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea are suffering from political turmoil inside their ruling circles, neither is in a position to fully engage other nations at this time, not even each other.

Policy Proposals for the Great Democracies

Over the course of a decade, American and South Korean efforts to disarm North Korea have been particularly ineffective. Is there anything Washington and Seoul can do in this transition year to make their policies work?

First, these two nations must recognize that, because of internal political discord, China cannot be a reliable partner for the international community. It was never realistic that Beijing would help disarm North Korea, but the ills of authoritarianism, so visible in the Chinese capital since this February, mean that plan has even less chance of succeeding.

So, if the United States wants to prevent Kim from setting off what may be a now-buried nuclear device, it will have to come up with a new way of looking at North Asia. Since the beginning of George W. Bush’s administration, there has been a notion that the great powers could act in concert to maintain peace across the globe. It’s almost as if the Congress of Vienna had been reconvened to bring order to the international system.

Yet Ronald Reagan was right, the nature of regimes matter. Authoritarian governments—especially great power ones—can rarely act

constructively, at least over the long term. The Bush notion that China would rein in North Korea has proven to be wrong, yet the Obama administration continued with this approach up until the last few months. The White House could have made a clean break from the Bush approach if February's Leap Day deal, an attempt to work directly with the North, had not quickly collapsed. The risk now is that the Obama team will go back to relying on Beijing.

The world at this time is especially dangerous, not only because the threats are particularly acute but also because democracies see themselves incapable of acting on their own. China may not want the North Koreans to detonate a nuke, but it will not be part of any meaningful solution because it will not exercise its considerable power. After all, while Washington has been looking to Beijing, the Kim regime detonated its first two nuclear devices and tested three long-range missiles—evidence of Chinese non-cooperation—and now the situation is even worse because political problems undermine China's policy coherence.

America, if it wants to stop the spread of atomic weapons, will have to act with the democracies in the region. In 2006, Taro Aso, when he was Japan's foreign minister, proposed an "arc of freedom and prosperity" for Asia. Then, the concept went nowhere, as Asian diplomats were optimistic about engaging China.

These days, however, a grand coalition of democracies is slowly gaining traction, in large measure because countries on the periphery of China are becoming even more concerned about an increasingly arrogant, spiteful, and occasionally belligerent Beijing. As a part of this trend, the United States is working more closely with its friends and treaty allies, as was evident from the June 2012 tour of Asia by Defense Secretary Leon Panetta. Panetta, along with Joint Chiefs Chairman Martin Dempsey and Pacific forces commander Admiral Samuel Locklear, looked like he was developing a trilateral process with two meetings in Singapore on the sidelines of the 2012 Shangri-La Dialogue.⁵³ The first such meeting was with Japan and South Korea, the American allies most affected by North Korea's build up of atomic weaponry, and it concentrated on the threat posed by Pyongyang. The second meeting, involving Japan and Australia, was about alliance building in general, expanding an initiative to get America's friends to coordinate their policies more closely. Panetta also worked on other initiatives involving, most notably, the world's most populous democracy, India. And this knitting together of

allies and friends is taking place while the U.S. is committing resources to the region. In Singapore, Panetta began to give substance to Washington's promise to "rebalance" forces by announcing that 60% of the American fleet will be in the Pacific by 2020.

Washington, therefore, is updating for the present decade Aso's fundamentally sound concept. As we can see from the ills of Chinese and North Korean authoritarianism, the notion that liberal states can partner with hardline ones on a long-term basis looks overly hopeful and optimistic. History—and common sense—demonstrates that partnerships between great power democracies and authoritarian states can only be short-term or unsuccessful. This is not to say the United States and the region's democracies, by banding together, will be able to peacefully disarm the Kim family regime or that they will convince it to liberalize, but it is to state that their acting in concert is the only sustainable way forward. It is not wrong for democratic states to try to engage China, but they make a strategic mistake by attempting to denuclearize North Korea *by* engaging Beijing. Trying to achieve two objectives at the same time substantially decreases the odds of success of either of them, and internal troubles in both regimes make achievement of either goal more improbable as time goes on.

In short, internal turmoil in China and North Korea roils the entire international system. "Whenever peace—conceived as the avoidance of war—has been the primary objective of a power or a group of powers, the international system has been at the mercy of the most ruthless member of the international community," wrote Henry Kissinger long before the emergence of Kim Jong Un or his father. "Whenever the international order has acknowledged that certain principles could not be compromised even for the sake of peace, stability based on equilibrium of forces was at least conceivable."⁵⁴

It is almost inconceivable that the democracies of the world, because of their own policies, have put themselves at the mercy of a dictatorial North Korea and are looking to authoritarian China, the North's most enduring friend, for solutions. Worse, these notions are doing precisely these things at a time when both hardline regimes are passing through especially unstable periods.⁵⁵

Kissinger was drawing his lessons from Metternich's era, a period now two hundred years old, yet his words perfectly capture the situation today as well. If the world's democracies do not adjust their outmoded notions fast enough, our time could be a period that generations

remember with regret.

Notes:

¹ See, e.g., “Premier Wen Presses Chongqing Authorities to Reflect on Wang Lijun Incident,” Xinhua News Agency, March 14, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/14/c_131466824.htm

² See “Wen Says China Needs Political Reform, Warns of Another Cultural Revolution If Without,” Xinhua News Agency, March 14, 2012, http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/china/2012-03/14/c_131466552.htm

³ This paper looks at the effect on Chinese policy of the leadership transitions in the United States, South Korea, and North Korea. Russia this year had a leadership transition of sorts, but it does not appear Vladimir Putin’s formal assumption of the presidency in May will significantly change Kremlin policy, in light of his previous role in the Russian government.

⁴ Benjamin Kang Lim and Chris Buckley, “Exclusive: China Leadership Rules Bo Case Isolated, Limits Purge: Sources,” Reuters, May 25, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/05/25/us-china-politics-idUSBRE84O09E20120525>

⁵ Kim Young-jin, “ ‘Bo Xilai Case Affects China Policy on NK,’ ” *Korea Times* (Seoul), May 8, 2012, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/05/116_110579.html

⁶ See “Jiang Zemin Signed Off On Bo Xilai After Concession from Hu: Boxun,” *Want China Times*, April 19, 2012, <http://www.wantchinatimes.com/news-subclass-cnt.aspx?cid=1101&MainCatID=11&id=20120419000076>

⁷ Beijing has censored many of these calls this year. The Utopia site, which has been shut down by the government, carried this prominent—and now unavailable—piece: “Cannot Forget the Nature of the Military, Loyal to the People Loyal to the Party!” Utopia, March 2, 2012, <http://www.wyzxsx.com/Article/Class22/201203/301340.html>

⁸ See, e.g., Verna Yu, “Reshuffle at the Top ‘Will Give PLA More Power’ ” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), October 7, 2011 (comments of Bo Zhiyue of the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore), <http://www.scmp.com/>

⁹ See Jeremy Page and Lingling Wei, “Bo’s Ties to Army Alarmed Beijing,” *Wall Street Journal*, May 17, 2012, http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304203604577398034072800836.html?mod=wsj_share_tweet

¹⁰ See Gordon G. Chang, “Was There a Recent Coup Attempt in China?” *World Affairs*, January 11, 2012, <http://www.worldaffairsjournal.org/blog/gordon-g-chang/was-there-recent-coup-attempt-china>

¹¹ See “China’s Closed-Door Politics Risks Blindsiding Traders After Bo,” *Bloomberg News*, March 21, 2012 (comments of Foreign Ministry Spokesman Qin Gang), <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2012-03-21/china-s-closed-door-politics-risks-blindsiding-traders-after-bo.html>

¹² See, e.g., Minnie Chan, “Hu Reminds PLA of Their Allegiance to Party Rule,” *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), March 14, 2012 (comments to plenary meeting of PLA deputies to the National People’s Congress), <http://www.scmp.com/>

¹³ Dan De Luce, “Gates Warns of Civil-Military Disconnect in China,” AFP, January 13, 2011, http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5iv49xdS1Zf7EIwKrRFCTf6S8_4Ag?docId=CNG.206e9da30bbd9b6afd57691fa13ac2fe.521

¹⁴ See Mark Landler, “Suspected Sale by China Stirs Concern at White House,” *New York Times*, April 20, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/21/world/americas/suspected-sale-by-china-to-north-korea-stirs-concern.html?_r=3

¹⁵ See Richard D. Fisher, Jr., “China’s Strategic Assistance to North Korea’s Nuclear Program,” International Assessment and Strategy Center, April 21, 2012, http://www.strategycenter.net/docLib/20120423_Fisher_ChinaAssistanceNK_042112.pdf

¹⁶ See, e.g., Choe Sang-hun, “New North Korean Missile Is Called Into Question,” *New York Times*, April 27, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/27/world/asia/new-north-korean-missile-is-called-into-question.html>

¹⁷ Bruce E. Bechtol, Jr., e-mail to author, June 6, 2012.

¹⁸ In one sense, it is right for the Obama administration to be cautious, initially at least, about Beijing’s knowledge of the sale of the parts for the TELs as it did not at that time know exactly how the North Koreans came into possession of the launchers. Yet, on the other hand, it was also premature to come to the immediate conclusion that China sold only the chassis and that its proliferation had not been “willful.” Ted Parsons of *IHS Jane’s Defense Weekly* said this sale “would require approval from the highest levels of the Chinese government and the People’s Liberation Army.” Choe Sang-hun, “This Time, a Less Predictable Pyongyang,” *New York Times*, April 18, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/19/world/asia/this-time-a-less-predictable-pyongyang.html>

¹⁹ “Bush, Jiang Discuss N. Korean Treaty Move,” UPI, January 10, 2003, http://www.upi.com/Top_News/2003/01/10/Bush-Jiang-discuss-N-Korean-treaty-move/UPI-10031042233523/

²⁰ See Nelson Report, May 24, 2012.

²¹ Nelson Report, May 22, 2012. As Chris Nelson writes about undertaking a major initiative toward Pyongyang this year, “The political risk to the President is simply too large.”

²² See Josh Rogin, “Senate Republicans Accuse Obama of North Korea ‘Appeasement,’ ” *The Cable*, March 16, 2012, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/03/16/senate_republicans_accuse_obama_of_north_korea_a_appeasement

²³ Ronald Brownstein, “For Wary U.S. and Asia, North Korea Is ‘Land of Lousy Options,’ ” *Los Angeles Times*, November 10, 2003, <http://articles.latimes.com/2003/nov/10/nation/na-outlook10>

²⁴ Lee Byong-chul, “Seoul Mayor’s Election: Grenade in the Blue House Bunker,” *Asia Sentinel*, November 1, 2011, http://www.asiasentinel.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=3904&Itemid=164

²⁵ Kang Hyun-kyung, “Our Next President?” *Korea Times* (Seoul), April 12, 2012, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2012/05/116_108846.html

²⁶ See, e.g., “Rival Party Leaders Offer to Engage with N. Korea’s New Leadership,” Yonhap News Agency, February 28, 2012, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2012/02/28/97/0301000000AEN20120228006900315F.HTML>

²⁷ See Amnesty International, *Annual Report 2012*, <http://www.amnesty.org/en/region/north-korea/report-2012>

²⁸ “N.Korean Regime Intensifies ‘Reign of Terror,’ ” *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), January 13, 2011, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2011/01/13/2011011300997.html

²⁹ See “Kim Jong-un’s Barbaric Purge of ‘Unsound’ Military Brass,” *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), March 22, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/03/22/2012032200933.html

³⁰ See Luisetta Mudie, “Bid to Ease Tensions,” *Radio Free Asia*, January 4, 2012, <http://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/coup-01042012152349.html>

³¹ See Lucas Shaw, "Twitter, Weibo Spread Rumors of North Korean Leader Kim Jong-un's Assassination," Reuters, February 10, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/02/10/idUS232818209920120210>

³² Bill Gertz, "Pyongyang Power Game," *Washington Free Beacon*, May 4, 2012, <http://freebeacon.com/pyongyang-power-game/>

³³ "Kim Jong-un Makes 1st Public Speech," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), April 16, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/04/16/2012041600655.html. The reinforcement of *songun* politics can have practical effects. Kim Jong Un's first inspection tour, on January 1, 2012, to the birthplace of the *songun* doctrine was perhaps meant to send a message to Seoul. See "Was Kim Jong-un's 1st Tour a Warning to S.Korea?" *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), January 2, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/01/02/2012010201271.html

³⁴ See, e.g., Nelson Report, April 4, 2012.

³⁵ See Department of State, Daily Press Briefing, March 16, 2012, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/dpb/2012/03/185935.htm>

³⁶ See Benjamin Kang Lim, "Exclusive: North Korea's Nuclear Test Ready 'Soon,'" Reuters, April 24, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/24/us-korea-north-nuclear-idUSBRE83N1DN20120424>

³⁷ See, e.g., "N. Korea Shuts Down Military-Controlled Investment Firm," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), August 6, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/08/06/2012080601275.html

³⁸ See "Kim Jong-un's Uncle Gains Control of N.Korea," *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), July 30, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/07/30/2012073001542.html

³⁹ "S. Korea Expresses Sympathy to N. Korean People," CNN, December 20, 2011, http://www.cnn.com/2011/12/20/world/asia/north-korea-leader/index.html?hpt=hp_c1

⁴⁰ "DPRK Blasts Lee Myung Bak's New Year Address," Korean Central News Agency, January 5, 2012, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2012/201201/news05/20120105-52ee.html>

⁴¹ See "North Korea Declares Itself Nuclear State in New Constitution," *Dong-A Ilbo* (Seoul), May 31, 2012, <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?biid=2012053188218>

⁴² See "N. Korea 'Technically Ready' for Nuclear Test: Seoul Official," Yonhap News Agency, May 23, 2012, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2012/05/23/42/0301000000AEN20120523003400315F.HTML>

⁴³ For a discussion of the complicated nature of China-North Korea ties, see Gordon G. Chang, “Policy Implications of China-North Korea Relations,” *International Journal of Korean Studies*, Spring/Summer 2012, p. 23.

⁴⁴ Song Sang-ho, “North Korea May Not Proceed with Nuke Test in Immediate Future: Pollack,” *Korea Herald* (Seoul), April 29, 2012, <http://view.koreaherald.com/kh/view.php?ud=20120429000374&cpv=0>

⁴⁵ General Liang Guanglie, Shangri-La Dialogue, Fourth Plenary Session—Question and Answer Session, Singapore, June 5, 2011, <http://www.iiss.org/conferences/the-shangri-la-dialogue/shangri-la-dialogue-2011/speeches/fourth-plenary-session/qa/>. Liang also said this at the time: “We have been advising North Korea, via different channels, not to take the risk.”

⁴⁶ See Evan Ramstad and Laura Meckler, “North Korean Launch Fails,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 13, 2012, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304444604577340343672810680.html>

⁴⁷ See NightWatch, May 31, 2012.

⁴⁸ Yong Kwon, “US Misreads Sino-North Korean Equation,” *Asia Times Online*, February 25, 2012, <http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Korea/NB25Dg01.html>

⁴⁹ Jonathan Pollack of Brookings says this: “China’s larger worries concern North Korea undertaking actions to which the ROK would respond this time, and then, this triggers an environment that draws in both the U.S. and China on the peninsula.” Song Sang-ho, “North Korea May Not Proceed with Nuke Test in Immediate Future: Pollack.”

⁵⁰ See Choi Song Min and Kim Kwang Jin, “Starvation Deaths Reported in Southern Areas,” *DailyNK*, May 20, 2012, <http://www.dailynk.com/english/read.php?cataId=nk01500&num=9258>

⁵¹ In recent months, China has stepped up assistance to the North Korean regime. For instance, in January there were reports of “thousands of Chinese cargo trucks” carrying aid to the North. “China Sends Rice to N.Korea,” *Chosun Ilbo* (Seoul), January 31, 2012, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/01/31/2012013100733.html. In March, Beijing began delivery of \$94.8 million in nutritional aid—rice and corn—the largest donation of food in the history of the two people’s republics. See “China Offers N. Korea Record Aid Package of \$94.8 Mln,” *Dong-A Ilbo* (Seoul), March 14, 2012, <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?biid=2012031566098>. There have also been shipments of crude oil. See “China Decided on Food, Oil Aid for N. Korea After Kim’s Death: Report,” Yonhap News Agency, January 30, 2012, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/01/30/84/0401000000AEN20120130006800315F.HTML>. Moreover, commerce between the two states has

increased substantially, and this trend is reflected in the record trade for the first calendar quarter of this year. See “N. Korea-China Trade Hits Record High in First Quarter,” Yonhap News Agency, May 1, 2012, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/northkorea/2012/05/01/47/0401000000AEN20120501001900315F.HTML>

⁵² Ralph Cossa and Brad Glosserman refer to “the illogic of the Chinese position: “Indeed, it would be hard to create a policy toward North Korea that does more damage to Chinese national interests than Beijing’s current approach toward Pyongyang.” Ralph A. Cossa and Brad Glosserman, “The Illogic of China’s North Korea Policy,” PacNet #32, May 17, 2012, <http://csis.org/files/publication/Pac1232.pdf>

⁵³ See Josh Rogin, “U.S. Expands its ‘Trilateral Diplomacy’ in Singapore,” The Cable, June 3, 2012, http://thecable.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/06/02/us_expands_its_trilateral_diplomacy_in_singapore

⁵⁴ Henry A. Kissinger, *A World Restored: Metternich, Castlereagh and the Problems of Peace, 1812-22* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1957), p. 1.

⁵⁵ See Gordon G. Chang, “Policy Implications of China-North Korea Relations.”