chapter nine

China's Post-Cold War Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula

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Domestic and International Determinants of Chinese Foreign Policy

The period beginning with the Tiananmen Incident of June 1989 initiated the third period of Chinese foreign policy. The first coincided with the rule of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976, and the second extended, after a brief interregnum, from Deng Xiaoping's return to power in 1978 to the Beijing disturbances on 1989. While each period naturally exhibited its own special characteristics, all shared a set of three domestic and three international categories of determinants. To understand those of the post-Tiananmen period, one must inspect, for comparative purposes, those of the first two eras as well. In each era, it is clear that domestic determinants predominated, configuring not only the general direction of foreign policy but much of the specific content. The six determinants influenced Chinese policy toward the Korean peninsula as well, and it is therefore useful to provide a brief sketch in each instance.

In the Maoist era, domestic determinants were three: politics, reducible to Mao's own personal style and proclivities; the influence of the 1921-1949 period of revolutionary struggle for power; and Marxist-Leninist-Maoist ideology. As regards the first, whenever Mao decided to move "left" domestically (as during the Great Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution), foreign policy was also radicalized (as, for instance, the Taiwan Straits crisis and the Sino-Soviet border incidents), and when he settled back somewhat, Chinese foreign policy could be conducted more nearly along "national interest" lines. The revolutionary past influenced many aspects of foreign policy: the tendency to see the world as an external extension of the processes of those times and the Party's propensity to seek safety in a three-sided balance of power. Ideology was commanding, as Mao saw both the United States and the Soviet Union in their turn as ideological opponents against whom only a united front strategy would suffice.

International determinants were also important, if not commanding. Chief among them were the China-related policies of the two superpowers, since between them most of the power resources of the global bipolar conflict were organized. China had to choose between them and could never afford—much as it would have liked and sometimes tried—to stand outside the strategic triangle. The second was the nature of post-World War II international relations. China had no choice but to live with such facts as the initial fall and later restoration of Europe and Japan as power centers, the dominance of the nuclear weapon over military affairs, and the emerging importance of rapid modernization among formerly backward economies and polities (especially in Asia, where the "four tigers" plus Japan pointed the way toward a bright future). Finally, China was no

exception to the "Iron Law of International Relations," which relates change in national power to change in national interest, and hence in foreign policy goals and means. As nations grow in power, their catalogue of interests vary accordingly, and China, like all others experiencing such change, found it could, and hence did, carry out a more active policy whenever its relative power growth permitted. While China under Mao suffered many power-related setbacks (both because of his many domestic mistakes and because of the nature of superpower policies toward Beijing)—the growth in Chinese power was sufficiently great that China could pursue a very active policy toward all its neighbors, including the two on the Korean peninsula.[1]

Under Deng, the specific content of domestic and international determinants, if not the six categories themselves, changed, and Chinese foreign policy varied accordingly. At home, the absolute primacy of politics was dropped and that of economic development substituted. Consequently, China had to establish and maintain good relations with the sources of capital, markets, and technology, which meant the capitalist nations of North America, West Europe, and Northeast Asia. The Party also dropped its emphasis on the revolutionary past and substituted a more watery restoration of the glories of China's traditional dynasties. That allowed Beijing to emphasize shared Confucian virtues and reasonably good relations with its Asian neighbors. Finally, Marxism and Maoism were deemphasized (but not Leninism, still the basis for one-party rule from above), and pragmatism substituted. That enabled China to move gradually from a totalitarian to an authoritarian state, which in turn caused foreign nations to relax somewhat their worries about the extremes of Chinese policy. It was these internal changes that were at base of Beijing's distancing itself from North Korea and its gradual approach to the South.

Changes also occurred in the external world, thus affecting the manner and direction of Chinese foreign relations. As for the states whose policies affected China the most, and to whom, therefore, Beijing had to pay the most attention, these remained the United States and the Soviet Union. But now the endgame of superpower rivalry was being played out, as Washington and Moscow competed in various spots around the globe—Angola and Afghanistan being obvious examples—and in terms of arms buildup, but also cooperated as regards strategic arms control. Of equal importance, the Soviet Union entered an increasingly steep decline that, despite Gorbachev's attempt to effectuate reforms, resulted in the destruction of its economy and, finally, in the breakdown of communist party rule and the sundering of the state itself. International relations changed its nature as well, as the trends toward democracy, marketization, interdepen-

dence, and emergence of global issues all made their influence felt. To conduct a viable policy, China had to bend to each of these, and that in turn further separated it from Pyongyang and set the stage for final rapprochement with Seoul. Finally, the interest-power relationship continued, but now economic power became the driving force and not military prowess. Once again, Chinese policy was influenced, but now Beijing found itself solidly in step with this important international trend.[2]

The Tiananmen Incident suddenly and decisively ended this phase of Chinese foreign policy. That event also was one of the precipitating factors leading to the opening of the Berlin Wall, the collapse of the East German regime, and thence to the end of the cold war. Along with the three other major international developments during the 1989-1991 period—the collapse of communism in Europe and the Soviet Union, the Gulf War, and the breakup of the Soviet Union—a new era of international relations, and thus of Chinese policy, opened. But Beijing could do little but recoil from these assaults against its internal and external position. Internally, the economy went into a tailspin while the Party's rule was shaky at best. From without, near-universal criticism of, and sanctions against, the regime for its excesses reinforced the fluid nature of now-systemless international relations. The consequence for Chinese policy was a period, lasting until early 1991, of retrenchment, circle-the-wagons, and hope that the various storms would blow over without excessive damage. Under such circumstances, no new initiatives could be taken in general, and surely no changes in policy toward the two Koreas.[3]

Beginning with Deng's visit to Shenzhen in early 1991, however, the regime began to regain its confidence. As before, domestic determinants were commanding. Now, the Party promulgated a dual economic-political policy: renewed, rapid economic modernization together with "political stability," i.e., no change in the absolute power of the Party and no outward compromise with the many new groups emerging in Chinese society. The weight given to the Chinese past also varied: instead of the glories of the distant past, now emphasis was placed on the unfairness of the post-1842 era of Western imperialist derogation of Chinese sovereignty. And since all the European/Russian imperialists had left the scene, that left only the United States and Japan as the focus of Chinese ire (despite the patently unhistorical nature of such charges against America and the obvious inability and disinterest of Japan in renewing any such policy toward China). That was important by itself, but when teamed with the switch in ideology from pragmatism to a combination of anti-foreign nationalism and emphasis on the presumed virtues of Confucianism, the resultant was a foreign policy strongly anti-American and increasingly anti-Japanese.

The post-cold war era brought fundamental changes in the international environment as well. With bipolarity and the Soviet Union no more, the United States became the "sole remaining superpower" (in Chinese eyes if not American; the latter exhibited a strong tendency to pull back from many advanced cold war positions). Such a unipolar world could not be said to be a system. Rather, it was a combination of Pax Americana and Group of Seven Concert of Powers-like condominium. China was clearly left on the outside and thus became a classic case of a dissatisfied power, all the more dangerous as its gross power was once again rapidly growing. The nature of international relations, aside from being fluid, was inchoate. No one knew where it was leading, with differential tendencies—regionalism, interdependence, marketization, democratization, and ethnicity, to name several—pulling in sometimes mutually contradictory directions. Beijing could only be confused by the "New World Order" (or lack thereof), and thus chose to emphasize what it knew best: bilateral-based foreign relations, the search for new strategic triangles (America, China, and Japan was the favorite), emphasis on state policy as opposed to cooperation along multilateral lines and formation of new international "regimes," and the need for peace and security as conditions for continued economic development. The interest-power relationship continued in full force, to be sure—perhaps more an obvious verity than ever in China's case—as Beijing began to feel the desire to test the outer limits of its new power through involvement in ever more distant places or participation and intervention in existing situations or disputes. Now, however, it was not just economic power that China increasingly disposed, and projected, but military power. The consequence was both a tendency to stand up more firmly against allegedly suppressive and interventionist American policies but also to use the military instrument to extend the nation's practical policy reach to geographic areas where mainland Chinese had not firmly trod before (or for a long time). Hence its forward policies toward Taiwan, the Spratlys, arms export to Pakistan and the Middle East, and its growing resistance against America in various negotiations and areas of contact, turning what should have been areas of cooperation and compromise into arenas of competition and conflict.[4]

It was against the backdrop of these domestic and international changes, as well as their legacy during the first two periods of post-1949 Chinese foreign policy, that Beijing approached the Korean peninsula from the early 1990s forward.

The First Period, 1991 to Early 1994

Through the joint operation of the six determinants, Korea became an opportunity as well as remained an issue for China in the early 1990s. The

opportunity was provided by South Korea's desire to formally establish diplomatic relations with China; to further its economic well-being through trade with Beijing, and to reinforce its position vis-à-vis North Korea as concerned both defense and the reunification process. With the exception of reunification, these goals dovetailed with those of China. Beijing also perceived an opportunity to further isolate Taiwan through Seoul's switching its formal recognition from Taipei to Beijing and saw the South as a nearby, large, and untapped source of capital, technology, and markets. But China—like all other states—was having increasing trouble with Pyongyang's isolation and belligerence. The major issue was North Korea's nuclear weapons production program, but Beijing also found disconcerting the North's *juche* ideology, Kim Il Sung's monarchist pretensions, Pyongyang's highly threatening military position and policy toward the South, and its faltering economy. The questions for China were: how to achieve a diplomatic and economic breakthrough with Seoul, how to prevent a collapse of the Kim family regime while encouraging it to change both its basic structure and its fundamental policies, and how to decrease the probability of conflict on the peninsula and stop the North's nuclear program while still providing residual security guarantees to Pyongyang.

The Northeast Asian international situation also provided, for the first time, room for China to maneuver. With the improvement of Sino-Soviet (Russian) relations, China no longer had to compete with Moscow for Pyongyang's favor. Further, with the decline in Russian-North Korean relations, which antedated the end of the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Pyongyang depended increasingly on Beijing and thus gave the latter room to maneuver in its approach to Seoul. Another factor was Moscow's own success in gaining diplomatic relations with South Korea; this also impelled Beijing more rapidly in the same direction. Finally, the deterioration in American-Chinese relations, importantly, did not drive Beijing and Pyongyang too close (although that could have occurred, given the fright both took at the collapse of communism most everywhere else). Rather, Washington and Beijing realized that the North Korean problem was one that had to be dealt with, and that only America and China—if they cooperated in keeping Kim Il Sung within bounds—could provide the incentives, positive and negative, to maintain peace on the peninsula, face the North Korean nuclear threat, and secure as high a probability of peaceful succession in the North and eventual reunification as possible.[5]

Moving from opposition to accommodation with Seoul was relatively easy. Once the nadir of China's post-Tiananmen isolation was past, and the various internal and international motivations began to take hold in Beijing, China approached South Korea directly. (Seoul and Beijing had been in

informal contact since the late 1970s, through trade, tourists, exchanges, sports, and diplomatic contacts. Hong Kong served as the meeting grounds for the vetting of issues and settlement of trade questions. Trade, only $40,000 in 1978, surged to $5.8 billion by 1991.) Trade offices were established in the two capitals in late 1990, the South assisted China's (and Taiwan's and Hong Kong's) entrance into APEC, and in late 1991 trade councils set up that year in the two countries signed a joint trade pact. This extended South Korean most-favored-nation treatment to China and was soon followed by an investment treaty. It was perhaps fortuitous that, following the breakdown of communist rule in East Germany, a general movement took place in the United Nations to permit both Seoul and Pyongyang to join simultaneously. That took place in September 1991. It was significant that Beijing did not object to such a change, as well as a kind of measure of the distance China had traveled—or been constrained to travel—away from its erstwhile communist ally and toward the siren of the capitalist South.[6]

So it was not surprising that supposedly secret talks took place thereafter concerning diplomatic ties, with formal relations announced in August 1992. A flurry of high-level state visits, hitherto suppressed, then took place, most occasioned by the North Korean problem. The South Korean President, Roh Tae Woo, went to Beijing in September 1992; the Chinese Foreign Minister, Qian Qichen, went to Seoul in May 1993; consulates were opened in Shanghai and Pusan in July; the South Korean Foreign Minister, Han Sung Joo, went to Beijing in October 1993 to sign agreements on military attachés, aviation, fisheries, and environment, and to open more consulates; the new South Korean President, Kim Young Sam, and the Chinese Party head, Jiang Zemin, met at the Seattle APEC summit in November 1993; and in March 1994 Kim Young Sam, accompanied by several cabinet ministers, visited Beijing to exchange views on North Korea and to sign trade, industrial cooperation, cultural exchange, and aviation agreements. Meanwhile, trade exceeded the $10 billion mark by 1993 (South Korea becoming China's seventh largest trading partner) and South Korean investment in China exceeded $600 million, mostly in the nearby Chinese provinces of Shangdong and Liaoning and in the centrally-governed city of Tianjin.[7]

Taiwan was a short-term loser in this process. It elected to sever all diplomatic, trade, and transport ties with Seoul in response to the latter's switch of Chinese diplomatic partners, even though trade, tourism, and diplomatic contacts were important to both sides. Before the cutoff, trade totaled $3 billion per year, while afterwards trade declined about $700 million annually. But Taipei chose to eat bitterness and, after surprisingly pro-

longed negotiations, the two sides in July 1993 agreed to establish informal ties similar to those in place between Taiwan and most other political entities, with diplomatic embassies replaced with unofficial but quasi-diplomatic missions. Thereupon, airline and shipping links were restored, tourism recovered, and cultural exchanges were renewed. With the loss of South Korean diplomatic ties, Taiwan was totally isolated in Asia in the formal sense, since by then Indonesia had also restored formal ties with Beijing. But in real terms, nothing had changed, except that Chinese and South Korean diplomats could see each other openly and Taiwan and South Korean diplomats had to take care as to what formal names each used for the other.[8]

For China, maintaining reasonably close ties with Pyongyang and assuring the security, political, and economic future of North Korea were more challenging tasks. Beijing had a falling out with Kim Il Sung flowing not only from the international changes mentioned above but from the vastly different domestic directions the two nations took in the 1980s and beyond. China marketized, the North remained frozen in socialist planning; China internationalized its economy, the North stressed economic autarchy; China rejected most elements of Mao-style Marxism-Leninism, the North proceeded even further into the Stalinist dead end; China stressed pragmatism, the North underlined *juche* formalism; China "came alive" societally, the North remained in the deep slumber of stultified and artificial social distinctions. On the other hand, Beijing had to take care that the multiplying problems in the North did not cascade into regime collapse à la East Europe. The parallels were arresting: a stagnant polity centered around artificial adulation of one man (or one family, in the Kims' case); a meaningless ideology; an economy sliding backward to the edge of toppling over; a foreign policy that caused increasing regional and global opposition; and a society totalitarianized to the point where individual and state faced only zero sum choices as to their respective futures.

Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues cajoled and counseled Kim to follow their own lead, but to no avail. They threatened, then began, to withdraw economic ties by insisting on payment in hard currency. Beijing diplomats tried hard to keep a straight face when representatives of other countries made fun of Kim and did not hide their dismay with their lack of influence in the northern capital. The Chinese leadership made plain that their country would in no manner cooperate with, or countenance, Northern aggression against the South. And when, in the early 1990s, Pyongyang even engendered fire fights along the China border, resulting in loss of life on both sides, Beijing made firm what had theretofore been a drifting apart: it recast the security tie into a residual guarantorship oper-

ationalized only if the North were about to be overcome in a South Korean-American invasion.[9]

The consequent decline in Chinese-North Korean relations could be seen in the international economic arena. Chinese aid to Pyongyang, once large, diminished to nothing. Trade, large for Pyongyang if not for Beijing, diminished to the several hundred million dollar mark, most of which was in barter. Military assistance, once a mainstay of the relationship, declined to near zero, as China refused Kim's request for advanced equipment and as training teams were gradually withdrawn. Only in the case of oil and grain exports did China maintain supplies—about a million tons of oil and ca. 800,000 tons of grain per annum. Even here, however, China demanded a mixture of hard currency and hard goods in exchange. North Korea made a pass at opening free trade zones and encouraging foreign investment, at strong Chinese suggestion and through Deng's showing Kim what could come from such places as Shen Zhen. But this effort was stillborn, as Pyongyang surrounded such offers with self-defeating restrictions and as foreign businesses assessed the Northern economic situation as not inviting.[10]

The third problem was the nuclear issue and the attendant Northern military threat to the South, the impending Kim Il Sung succession, and eventual Korean reunification. Beijing was no less concerned than any other nation about Pyongyang's nuclear weapons program. It neither wished to see such weapons in the hands of such an unstable regime, nor to deal with the consequences of follow-on proliferation in Northeast Asia, nor to face the implications of North Korean export of nuclear technology and weaponry to pariah regimes elsewhere. Deng, like South Korean, Japanese, and American leaders, feared the North would kindle another Korean war by using its very large and aggressively-positioned army to suddenly attack the South, possibly in connection with the succession struggle or as part of Kim's promise to reunify the country by 1995. China realized that a conflict would, in all probability, eventually involve its own forces, thereby causing another several decades of separation from the United States, to say nothing of the very high levels of casualties and destruction involved. The immediate question, however, was how to stop Kim from acquiring nuclear weapons.

That posed a critical problem, since Kim would listen to nobody's advice, was no longer dependent—as he had been previously—on Russian nuclear assistance, and was proceeding strictly on the basis of domestic efforts and what technology and equipment could be purloined internationally. China could only gradually distance itself from Kim, offer to carry mes-

sages to the Great Leader from the Americans and the rest of the international community, and try to maximize its own influence in Pyongyang by appearing to hold back the American-led effort to open North Korea's nuclear facilities at Yongbyon to inspection by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). But that was increasingly a losing game, as inspection deadlines came and went, during the 1992 to early 1994 period, and as the United States, at last perceiving the reality of the North Korean threat, began a concerted (although belated and rather tame) effort at bringing Kim to heel. China could be forced to choose between vetoing a Security Council sanctions resolution, thus precipitating a further major crisis with the United States and, concomitantly, with the rest of the international community, or going along with the United Nations, putting Kim in a corner out of which he could emerge only by starting a war or being overthrown himself. If Beijing had a "strategy", it was one of delay in hopes that Kim would die soon, his son, Kim Jong Il, would be ousted in a palace coup, and the follow-on government (probably a military administration) would come to their senses, give up the nuclear option, start down China's own road of marketization and internationalization, and negotiate with Seoul for long term, step-by-step reunification.[11]

The Second Period: Mid-1994 to Late 1996

The problem was that history usually does not proceed in such a rational manner, even though Kim did, obligingly, "go to see Marx" on 8 July 1994. Beijing was the first to receive Pyongyang's notification, and the next day sent a high-level delegation to the North. There, the Chinese took the occasion to spell out their country's continuing policy toward the peninsula: residual support of the North; Chinese-style economic reform as the way to national salvation; the requirement of peace, stability, and absence of military confrontation on the peninsula, especially no possession of nuclear weapons by the North; continued Chinese economic assistance to the North but dependent on progress toward economic reforms; support for Kim Jong Il as his father's successor but conditioned on a program of reforms and peninsular peace; and appropriate amendment of the Chinese-North Korean treaty before it expires (i.e., formal withdrawal of broad Chinese support for the North and replacement with carefully circumscribed security guarantorship only in closely defined situations. To list these concerns was to indicate how far Beijing and Pyongyang had already moved apart from the "lips and teeth" relationship of the cold war.[12]

Kim's demise came in the midst of the crisis over the nuclear weapons production facilities at Yongbyon and elsewhere in North Korea. That was largely driven by the fact that the Americans had tired of Kim Il Sung's obvi-

ous delaying tactics and decided to bring matters to a head. China did play a role, subsidiary to be sure but important in certain particulars. For one, China consistently advised the North not to go nuclear, to adhere to the terms of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and to the details of the IAEA's detailed rules concerning inspection of nuclear facilities. Both of these agreements the North had signed (in 1985 and 1992, respectively). Moreover, Beijing was relieved by, and supported, the December 1991 South-North Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchange and Cooperation, together with the joint declaration of the two Koreas on denuclearization of the peninsula. Beijing also helped arrange American-North Korean talks in the Chinese capital prior to direct negotiations between the two, and constantly approved of the bilateral meetings once they had begun.

But China had its own problems concerning the nuclear issue. Its influence in Pyongyang, throughout the crisis period, indeed before, was declining fast. Economic relations were a bellwether, as noted below, as was Chinese recognition of the South and the rapid melioration of economic and political ties with Seoul. Of perhaps equal importance was the decline in direct security ties, symbolized by persistent if faint reports of actual North Korean initiated military confrontation along the Yalu and more clearly signaled by various Chinese statements from the mid-1980s that China would back the North only under increasingly restricted circumstances. So when the American negotiator, Robert Gallucci, came to Beijing in April 1994 and asked for Chinese assistance in bringing Pyongyang to heel, China could only reply that its actual influence over North Korea was limited. That was probably a true statement as far as it went. It was also true that China lobbied hard in Pyongyang for settlement along the lines of the American/IAEA proposal. It did send a number of missions to the North as the crisis escalated, did invite several North Korean military delegations to Beijing, and did convey its desires for peaceful resolution through several other channels (statements by Jiang Zemin and Foreign Minister Qian Qichen and consultations with both the South and Japan).[13]

China's dilemma was that it could not side with the allied coalition completely, lest its influence in Pyongyang fall away totally and the Pandora's Box of peninsular war or Northern collapse be opened. So it had to tergiversate, turning back American proposals for strong United Nations Security Council resolutions on Pyongyang's obvious violation of IAEA rules and imposition of sanctions against the North. The fact remained that Beijing had to play an increasingly small role as the crisis mounted to its final resolution, seeing matters more and more taken directly into American hands. It therefore mostly watched as Washington and

Pyongyang wrestled throughout the summer and fall of 1994, in various locales and personages to arrive, at the last minute, at the August Joint Statement of Principles and the October Agreed Framework, signed in Geneva. It is surely possible that Beijing put pressure on Pyongyang from behind the scenes, but it was not at the negotiating table, while the North continued to resist such pressure as best it could.

The accord did, of course, satisfy Chinese objectives concerning peace on the peninsula and other Korea-related goals. It also helped preserve the Non-Proliferation Treaty and the spread of nuclear weapons to the South, Japan, and Taiwan, and lessened the likelihood of Northern nuclear threat to China itself. So China greeted the announcement of the agreement and continually supported its implementation (hard as that would be, with five stages, each veto-able by either party, over nine years, with significant Japanese, South Korean, and possibly other nations' monetary, material, and technical support). Beijing also saw the agreement as another step in the direction of full cross-recognition (e.g., by the United States and Japan of North Korea), a means to encourage Pyongyang to open up and reform economically, improve South-North relations, and facilitate a general relaxation of tensions throughout Northeast Asia. Beijing's problems with Pyongyang over the nuclear question were hardly at an end, however. During the next two years, the North deliberately and consistently threw up further obstacles to implementation (Seoul's supply, and funding, of the two light-water reactors; demanding more oil and possibly diverting some of it to military use; the stillborn nature of supposed-to-be-resumed South-North talks; undermining peninsular security by withdrawal from the Armistice Commission, by sending soldiers into the Demilitarized Zone, and inducing spy-soldiers from submarines directly into the South; escalation of economically costly conditions for implementing construction of the reactors; threatening the safety of South Korean and American personnel at Panmunjon, etc.). Resolution of these, and other, issues, was not in Chinese hands, and the Chinese constantly feared that both Northern military excesses plus the rapidly deteriorating internal economic situation would precipitate conflict. It is true that China also withdrew from the Armistice Commission (which saw the Polish and Czech members now representing non/anti-communist regimes), but the North initiated that action and thus forced Beijing's hand. Indeed, China could only keep its fingers crossed that the Kim Jong Il successor regime (if that was what it was) would not act so entirely foolishly as to bring down the whole house of cards.

China had still less influence over the internal situation in the North, both as concerned the economy and the polity. Beijing was outwardly support-

ive of the younger Kim in his bid for full succession, opined that Kim Jong Il was fully in charge, and stated that the North would neither collapse or be overthrown by popular uprising or palace coup. Privately, China was much less sanguine, worrying that Kim Jong Il was unpredictable and irresponsible, with a small support base constantly threatened by both reformers and hardliners, that his reported physical maladies could catch up with him, and that his supposedly mercurial personality and unattractive appearance may cause him to lose power. China had every reason, to be sure, to whistle in the dark about Kim's future, for the last thing Beijing wished to see was a North Korea in internal turmoil or one that (as the outcome of several equally likely scenarios) would attack the South. Best, in Chinese eyes, for the Pyongyang regime to survive, then change (if slowly) in the direction of economic reforms and opening the world, and to negotiate in good faith for eventual, staged reunification with the South. The problem, once again, was that China could do little to affect North Korea internally until Pyongyang itself saw the need to change.[14]

Meanwhile, the northern economy continued to plunge through the floor (with gross national product declining yearly by three to four percent, the economy having contracted by nearly thirty percent by 1996, and massive malnutrition and incipient starvation evident in 1995 and 1996), the succession continued to be unsettled even after the second anniversary of the elder Kim's death, and the *juche* system of totalitarianism was still firmly in place. China could, and did to some extent, participate (indirectly) in the United Nations-centered international effort to make up for the North's major shortfall in food production and could, and did, supply oil to keep the industrial economy from collapsing entirely. In the offing, it was Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington that came up with at least a modicum of rice, in 1995 if not 1996 (despite Pyongyang's foolish foot-shooting actions—detaining a South Korean rice supply boat and other silly activities to the contrary) and not Beijing. Perhaps China assessed the North Korean situation as less dire than did others, perhaps it did not want to be treated as Pyongyang acted toward the others, perhaps it felt that, in order to maximize what little influence it had left it would come in with food aid at the last minute, or perhaps it did not have enough food of its own to spare. Whatever the case, China was little to be noted in alleviating the 1995-1996 presumed food crisis. As for oil, the North has for several years been almost totally dependent on Chinese supplies, especially since the Soviet Union/Russia gradually backed out. (The Russians wanted hard currency, which Pyongyang did not have, and in any case, after 1990, ceased to have an interest in keeping afloat a totalitarian, war-threatening communist state.) Thus, China did, and continues, to have a say in North Korean economic production (perhaps still sending the above-mentioned one million

barrels per annum, representing about half of all Chinese exports). Even here, however, the situation was deteriorating, as Beijing became even more fed up with Pyongyang's excesses and as China gradually changed from an oil exporting to an oil importing nation.[15]

Trade, as always, was a measure of the relative degree of China's policy success, as well an indicator of the direction of that policy. This is true in the case of both North and South Korea. As concerned the North, trade declined steadily both before and after Tiananmen. The reasons were clear: as China marketized and became increasingly dependent on trade with, and investment from, the capitalist nations, it lost interest in non-hard currency, largely barter trade with a North Korea whose economy was, comparatively as well as absolutely, shrinking. So long as Pyongyang remained a hermit kingdom economically, and so long as there was no non-state sector, the North had relatively little to offer China. Beijing could thus well afford to ignore North Korea. It did not proceed quite that far, as we have seen above, as trade and economic assistance possessed at least the residual value of exerting some degree of influence. But by and large, China chose to extrapolate from trade/aid as a tool of policy vis-à-vis the North and also found that Pyongyang was relatively impervious to Chinese economic enticements. Figures bear this out: two-way trade declined by the early 1990s to less than $1 billion, compared with a constantly increasing trade with the South, reaching $17 billion in 1994. There was essentially no North Korean investment in China, nor Chinese in the North, whereas in 1994 the South had invested more than $2 billion in China. The North was greatly dependent on China in trade (upwards of forty percent) despite the very small totals, and while the South also counted China as a major trading partner (third largest in 1993), its total trade volume was so large and so dispersed around the globe as to make it much less dependent on China than the North. South Korea rose, in the 1990s, to become an important trading partner of China (seventh), while the North nearly disappeared in a total Chinese trade volume in 1996 of over $300 billion.[16]

China's policy toward North Korea could be summed up by several descriptors: cautious, minimally supportive, barely tolerant, and hopeful that things would not get worse. Pyongyang could involve China, against Beijing's will, in a new Korean war; the North could break down, sending droves of refugees into China; the country could collapse economically, requiring massive Chinese assistance; the North could collapse politically, begetting a unified Korea under Southern rule and subtracting one more communist state from the small number remaining. Any of these outcomes could bring great woes upon Beijing, if not total disaster. It is not surprising, therefore, that Chinese foreign policy toward North Korea was

not one of its successes. It shared interests, in fact, with the United States, South Korea, Russia, and Japan in trying to manage relations with the North, keeping Pyongyang within bounds, and hoping it would not make a bad situation very much worse.[17]

All the more reason, then, why China was pleased with the rapid and positive development of its ties with the South during the middle 1990s. Much of the new relationship came to be centered in the continuation of high-level contacts and visits initiated in the first period and noted above. Thus, the South Korean foreign minister, Han Sung Joo, went to Beijing in June 1994 in connection with the North Korean nuclear crisis; Chinese foreign minister, Qian Qichen, visited Seoul in November, followed by Chinese Prime Minister Li Peng; Kim Young Sam sat down with Chinese Party head Jiang Zemin at the Jakarta APEC meeting the same month; Kim Young Sam saw Li Peng again in Copenhagen; Qiao Shi, the Chinese head of the National People's Congress, went to Seoul in March 1995; the next South Korean Prime Minister, Lee Hong Koo, journeyed to Beijing in April to see Li Peng; Jiang Zemin made a historic, and lengthy (five day) visit to Seoul in November 1995, where he not only talked with Kim Young Sam but addressed the National Assembly and announced that China would "ignore" the automatic involvement clause of the Chinese-North Korean security treaty; Kim and Jiang met again at the APEC Jakarta summit that same month; Kim met Li Peng once again, this time in Bangkok, during the Taiwan crisis in March 1996; the next South Korean Foreign Minister, Gong Ro Myong, went to Beijing in April to see Qian Qichen and Jiang Zemin to ask China to help "mediate" the South-North dialogue; and Qian and other Chinese spokesmen issued several statements concerning the South-Korean-American (Kim Young Sam-Clinton) proposal for four-party talks concerning peace on the Peninsula and replacing the 1953 Armistice agreement. Most of these visits and talks took place during the two-year crisis concerning the North Korean nuclear weapons question and served to buttress Seoul's (and Washington's) position in opposition to that of Pyongyang. China also offered Shanghai and Beijing as locales for South-North rice aid talks, three rounds of which occurred in 1995 and 1996.[18]

There is no doubt the South Koreans were pleased with this level of Chinese attention. And in terms of personal relations, always of considerable importance in Confucian cultures, such continuing and intense contacts were essential. But the Koreans eventually became disappointed in China. Their purpose, and original intent, was to draw Beijing away from its exclusive relationship with the North and, more importantly, to use Chinese pressure on Pyongyang to drop plans to attack the South. The presumption was that, by canceling the security treaty with the North, by turn-

ing the screws tight economically, and by using what was thought to be enormous and exclusive influence over Kim Il Sung and his son, China could pull Seoul's chestnuts out of the fire for it. The South Koreans discovered that Beijing neither would nor could do that. It was true that South Korea, along with Vietnam, drew special attention from Beijing in China's post-cold war approach to its Asian neighbors. But in Korea's case, the Chinese interest was perhaps equally divided between obtaining the South's economic goodies, assuring that no war would break out on the peninsula, and continuing to support the existence—despite all—of the North. China did not have the power to require Pyongyang to do its bidding. Nor was Beijing willing to push the northern regime too far, even in the nuclear crisis. And even in the economic sphere, South Korean business people began to sour on the China market and Chinese, regionally and nationally, reacted negatively to the harsh conditions imposed on their workers by South Korean factory managers in China. Thus, while there was a smoothing out of Chinese-South Korean relations in the first years after recognition, a plateau was soon reached that, in terms of prior Korean and Chinese expectations, was much lower than anticipated.[19]

Conclusion

Minimal Chinese aims regarding the Korean peninsula were surely achieved. The northern government remained in power and was still communist (in some sense, at least); no war occurred; the North did not go nuclear; good ties with the South were restored and developed; and southern money, goods, and technology flowed in large volumes into China. That was all well and good. But Beijing could not attain a more advanced position. It did not become the arbiter of inter-Korean relations; it did not weaken the American position on the peninsula; it did not separate the South from the United States (any movement in that direction was a consequence of strictly bilateral differences and in any case remained marginal); reunification on Chinese terms was not even on the agenda; in the continuing (if gradual) decline of Chinese-Japanese relations, neither Korea—but particularly the South—signed up as a Chinese partner; and its influence in Pyongyang actually declined and in Seoul did not increase to the degree expected.

Indeed, during the first years of the post-cold war era, China found the Koreans increasingly in charge of their own affairs, whatever dangers these entailed, discovered the Americans still to be the more important outside power, and themselves to be relegated increasingly to the sidelines, as was the case during the nuclear crisis. Moreover, the Kim family succession outcome still could precipitate civil war in the North with the probability of peninsular conflict rising to a peak; the northern economy could still col-

lapse, inducing the prospect of a East Europe-like society-versus-state confrontation that could be resolved only by replacing the Kim dynasty, and North Korean communism, by a strong anti-communist regime and instantaneous Korean reunification under the South's leadership; and a post-reunification Korea could still retain the range of foreign policy choices it desired, only one of which involved a close, traditional tribute-like relationship with Beijing. The fact was, Beijing still had no more a concerted winning policy toward Korea than did any other state. It could only hope and play for time, which was about all the other interested parties could do.[20]

notes for chapter nine

1. For an expansion of these ideas, see Thomas W. Robinson, "Chinese Foreign Policy: From the Forties to the Nineties," in Thomas W. Robinson and David Shambaugh, eds., *Chinese Foreign Policy: Theory and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994): pp. 554-567.

2. This period is covered, in greater detail, in Robinson, op. cit., pp. 567-587.

3. See, for details, Robinson, op. cit., pp. 587-600.

4. The present author explicates these factors and developments in Chapter III, "Chinese Foreign Policy From 1992 to the End of the Deng Era: General Political/Diplomatic Orientation," in his *Chinese Foreign Policy Post-Tiananmen* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

5. For details and references, see Thomas W. Robinson, "Relations with Northeast Asia: Korea," Chapter IVC of his forthcoming *Chinese Foreign Policy Post-Tiananmen.*

6. William H. Liu, "The Politics of Dètente in Sino-Korean Relations," *Journal of East Asian Affairs* (Summer/Fall 1992): pp. 284-313; Ilpyong J. Kim, "The Normalization of Chinese-South Korean Diplomatic Relations," *Korean and World Affairs* (Fall 1992): pp. 483-492; Young Whan Kihl, "South Korea in 1990: Diplomatic Activism and a Partisan Quagmire," *Asian Survey* (January 1991): pp. 64-70; Jia Hao and Zhuang Qubing, "China's Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula," *Asian Survey* (December 1992): pp. 1137-1156; and Gerrit W. Gong, "China and the Dynamics of Unification in Northeast Asia," *Proceedings* vol. 38, no.2 (Academy of Political Science, 1991): pp. 107-115.

7. Ahn Byung-joon, "Prospects for Sino-South Korean Relations: A Korean View," *Journal of East Asian Affairs* (Winter/Spring 1992): pp. 51-65; Hong Yung Lee, "South Korea in 1991: Unprecedented Opportunity, Increasing Challenge," *Asian Survey* (January 1992): pp. 64-73; Hong Liu, "The Sino-South Korean Normalization: A Triangular Explanation," *Asian Survey* (November 1993): pp. 1083-1094; and Kim Hak-joon, "The Establishment of South Korean-Chinese Diplomatic Relations: A South Korean Perspective," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* (Summer 1994): pp. 31-48.

8. Kim Woo-sung, "South Korea's Diplomatic Normalization with China and Its Impact on Old Ties Between South Korea and Taiwan," *Journal of*

East Asian Affairs (Summer/Fall 1993): pp. 371-403; Ming Lee, "The Impact of Peking-Seoul Diplomatic Ties on Northeast Asia," *Issues and Studies* (September 1992): pp. 122-124; Jurgen Domes, "Taiwan in 1992: On the Verge of Democracy," *Asian Survey* (January 1993): pp. 54-60; and Yu-Shan Wu, "Taiwan in 1993: Attempting a Diplomatic Breakthrough," *Asian Survey* (January 1994): pp. 46-54.

9. Tao Bingwei, "The Korean Peninsula and Northeast Asia: Moving Toward a New Era," *Korea and World Affairs* (Winter 1992): pp. 685-694; "China's Policy Toward the Korean Peninsula," in *U.S. Policy Dialogue and China* (The Asia Society, 1993): pp. 15-20; and Ilpyong J. Kim, "North Korea's Relations with China" and Harish Kapur, "China and North Korea," in Kim Doug Joong, ed., *Foreign Relations of North Korea During Kim Il-sung's Last Days* (Seoul: The Sejong Institute, 1994): pp. 247-268 and 293-304, respectively.

10. Nicholas Eberstadt, "China's Trade with the DPRK, 1990-1994: Pyongyang's Thrifty New Patron," *Korea and World Affairs* (Winter 1995): pp. 695-729.

11. James Cotton, "The Unravelling of 'China' and the Chinese-Korean Relationship," *Korea and World Affairs* (Spring 1994): pp. 67-82; Han Yong-sup, "China's Leverage Over North Korea," *Korea and World Affairs* (Summer 1994): pp. 233-249; and Ahn Yin-hay, "PRC-DPRK Relations and the Nuclear Issue," *Korea and World Affairs* (Winter 1995): pp. 665-685.

12. Chu Sung-po, "Peking-Pyongyang Relations in the Wake of Kim Il-sung's Sudden Death," *Issues and Studies* (August 1994): pp. 121-123.

13. Chang Ya-chun, "Peking's Influence in the Nuclear Crisis on the Korean Peninsula," *Issues and Studies* (November 1994): pp. 121-123. An entrè into the Chinese and Korean sides of the crisis is provided by the quarterly chronical and documentation sections of *The China Quarterly* and *Korea and World Affairs*. Beijing's role is poorly understood, but a reading of the relevant publically released material plus scrutiny of the *Daily Report—China* and *Daily Report—East Asia* (Washington, D.C.: Foreign Broadcast Information Service) drives the writer to the conclusion that China played an important, if subsidiary, role in holding back Pyongyang from more peace-threatening actions. Washington held itself back, since the Americans discovered they did not possess military options that could be tailored to the North Korean violations, maximize the probability of success, and minimize the probability of major conflict. China had little, if anything, to do with that.

14. Samuel S. Kim, "Chinese and Russian Perspectives and Policies Toward the Korean Reunification Issue," *Korea and World Affairs* (Winter 1994): pp. 695-729; James T. Myers, "Issues and Prospects for Cross-Recognition," *Korean Journal of National Reunification* (1994): pp. 997-110; and Yi Xiaoxiong,"China's Korea Policy: From 'One Korea' to 'Two Koreas,'" *Asian Affairs* (July 1995): pp. 119-133.

15. Banning Garrett and Bonnie Glaser, "Looking Across the Yalu: Chinese Assessments of North Korea," *Asian Survey* (June 1995): pp. 538-545; and Robert Bedeski, "Sino-Korean Relations: Triangle of Tensions, or Balancing a Divided Peninsula?", *International Journal* (Summer 1995): pp. 516-538.

16. Choi Eui-chul, "China's New Round of Economic Reforms and Sino-South Korean Relations," *The Korean Journal of National Reunification (1992)*: pp. 27-44; and Jang Son Suh, "South Korean-China Economic Relations: Trends and Prospects," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* (Winter 1994): pp. 21-36. China's trade with South and North Korea can be followed in *China Customs Statistics* (monthly), *Almanac of China's Foreign Economic Relations and Trade* (annual), and trade statistics gathered by the United Nations.

17. Shen Qurong, "Security Environment in Northeast Asia: Its Characteristics and Sensitivities" and Li Zhongwei, "Security of Northeast Asia and Prospects for Multilateral Consultation," in *Contemporary International Relations* [Beijing] (December 1992): p. 19 and (November 1992): pp. 12-20, respectively; and Hu Weixing, "Beijing's Defense Strategy and the Korean Peninsula," *Journal of Northeast Asian Studies* (Fall 1995): pp. 50-67. Chinese publications on Korea during the post-1992 period are notable for their absence of material on Korea, especially North Korea. Recourse must be had to the *Daily Report—China* and *Daily Report—East Asia* and occasional secondary gleanings from the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and *Asian Wall Street Journal*. South Korean and American government institutions have much more, but such material is not publically available.

18. Yu Shaohua, "ROK's Internal Developments and Foreign Relations Since Kim Young Sam Took Office" and Cheng Qizhen, "East Asian Countries' Response to U.S. Asian Policy," *International Studies* no. 3 [Beijing, in Chinese] (1994): pp. 36-39 and no. 3 (1995): pp. 27-32, respectively; and *Far Eastern Economic Review* (4 May 1995): p. 17; (18 May 1995): pp. 14-15; (29 June 1995): p. 22; (3 August 1995): pp. 50-51; (10 August 1995): p. 22; (17 August 1995): pp. 63-65; (28 September 1995): pp. 24-30; (14 December 1995): p. 20; and (21 December 1995): p. 17.

19. Robert Sutter, "Korea: Improved South Korean-Chinese Relations—Motives and Implications," *Congressional Research Service [CRS] Report for Congress* (17 January 1996) 4 pages; B.C. Koh, "South Korea in 1995: Tremors of Transition" and Samuel S. Kim, "North Korea in 1995: The Crucible of 'Our Style Socialism,'" in *Asian Survey* (January 1996): pp. 53-60 and 61-72, respectively; and *Far Eastern Economic Review* (26 January 1996): p. 54; (8 February 1996): p. 29; (29 February 1996): p. 14; (14 March 1996): p. 16; (18 April 1996): p. 14; (13 June 1996): pp. 14-25; (18 July 1996): pp. 12-15; (25 July 1996): p. 22; (3 October 1996): pp. 18-19; (10 October 1996): pp. 26-36; and (7 November 1996): p. 32.

20. Yuan Ming, "Relations Among the Major Powers in Northeast Asia in the Early 21st Century," *International Affairs* no. 4 [Beijing, in Chinese] (1996): pp. 19-23.