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China's Policy Toward Korea: A Delicate Balance [Redacted] 25X1

In talks with Americans, Japanese, and others, the Chinese have sought to convey a message that they share the interest in maintaining stability on the Korean peninsula and that North Korea does not pose a threat to South Korea. The current round of talks between Pyongyang and Seoul serves Beijing's interests, but the Korean question presents delicate problems for the Chinese in managing their relationships with North Korea and the United States. [Redacted]

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Both Beijing and Pyongyang [Redacted] have begun to acknowledge the strains in the Sino - North Korean relationship. In March, North Korean diplomats conveyed their government's belief that, although the Chinese officially support Korean reunification, they actually oppose it.

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[Redacted] The Chinese have not been as willing to acknowledge that the relationship has deteriorated to this extent, [Redacted]

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A Change of Emphasis

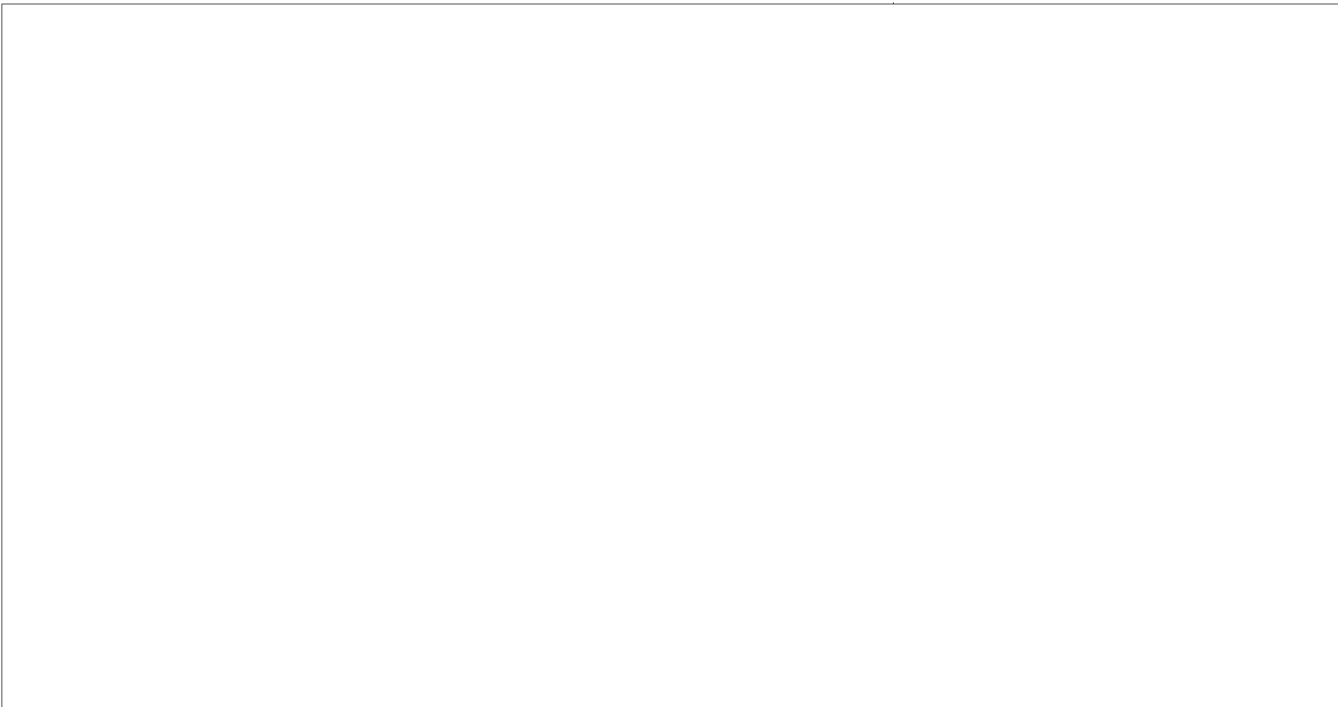
The friction between China and North Korea has arisen from Beijing's moves toward increasingly expanded relations with the United States and Japan. In the face of strong US and Japanese ties with South Korea, the Chinese have felt compelled to redefine their interests regarding the Korean peninsula. Consequently, China has moderated its previous strident propaganda backing for North Korea and has sought to portray a propitious atmosphere for promoting peace and stability on the peninsula through talks between Pyongyang and Seoul. Stability in Korea is vital to the Chinese interests in expanding relations with the United States and Japan; it also allows the Chinese leadership to concentrate on economic modernization. [Redacted]

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For the Chinese, however, an improvement in Soviet - North Korean relations remains a worrisome prospect, especially given Pyongyang's deep suspicions of Beijing's closer relations with Washington and Tokyo. The North Koreans still stress that the United States--not the Soviet Union-- is "the number-one enemy of world peace" and view China's expanding relations with the United States and Japan as threatening to traditional Sino - North Korean ties. It has thus been necessary for China to try to strike a balance between continued support for North Korea and assurances to the United States and Japan that Pyongyang will not cause trouble.

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The Reunification Issue

Beijing has welcomed Pyongyang's recent initiatives that resulted in the current North-South contacts, as they serve China's interest in mitigating the mutual hostility that endangers stability on the peninsula. With this overriding interest in stability, Beijing has moved toward accepting the status quo in Korea and even tacitly approving "two Koreas." As a result, the Chinese,

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have emphasized that China perceives reunification as a long-term development.

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While maintenance of the Korean status quo serves China's interests regarding relations with the United States and Japan, the relaxation of tensions also enables Beijing to pursue other interests. The Chinese are not totally unreceptive to contacts with South Korea, as its more industrialized economy offers opportunities in terms of technology and markets.

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[Redacted] In light of North Korean sensitivities, however, the Chinese at present cannot openly pursue diplomatic or economic relations--or even admit the desire to do so--with South Korea.

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There are limits to how far China can reorient its Korean policy given Beijing's interest in maintaining leverage in Pyongyang. The Chinese will continue to encourage the Korean reunification talks, publicly supporting North Korean statements and positions but muting the more inflammatory rhetoric that could impair relations with the United States, Japan and, indirectly, South Korea. As long as the North - South Korean talks serve both Pyongyang's and Beijing's interests, China should be able to maintain a balance between support for North Korea and continued development of Sino-American and Sino-Japanese relations. If, however, tensions on the Korean peninsula threaten the uneasy stability there, the Chinese will be faced with difficult choices in pursuing their Korean policy.

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