

ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Cooperation Amid Competition: The Korean Peninsula Security Crisis and Building Strategic Trust in US-China Relations

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Thesis Directed By: Dr. Mary Gallagher

The North Korean nuclear program and the resulting security crisis on the Korean Peninsula is an area of great strategic interest and security concern for both the US and China. However, it has consistently perpetuated political contention between the countries despite mutual security cooperation efforts. This thesis aims to evaluate the impact of the Korean Peninsula security crisis on US-China relations through the lens of trust-cooperation linkages, with the purpose of determining the capacities in which bilateral security cooperation on North Korea fosters greater strategic trust between the US and China. It illuminates the circumstances and challenges for US-China security cooperation in contemporary international relations and applies this framework to assess the 2003-2007 Six-Party Talks and the 2016 UN Sanctions as case studies of pivotal US-China security cooperation on North Korea. The thesis demonstrates that these initial engagement efforts have led to expanding US-China security cooperation on both North Korea and other mutual US-China security issues, which reflects a self-reinforcing “cooperation spiral” dynamic that is both representative of increasing strategic trust and conducive to furthering trust-building through cooperation. These patterns have significant long-term implications for developing a security environment in East Asia that reduces US-China tensions and promotes regional stability.

Cooperation Amid Competition: The Korean Peninsula Security Crisis and Building Strategic Trust in US-China Relations

By

Megan Cansfield

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Thesis Committee:

Dr. Mary Gallagher
Dr. Anthony Marcum

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List of Abbreviations

DPRK	Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea)
ICBM	Intercontinental Ballistic Missile
NPT	Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Non-Proliferation Treaty), 1968
ROK	Republic of Korea (South Korea)
SED	US-China Strategic & Economic Dialogue, 2009-Present
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
6PT	Six-Party Talks, 2003-2007

Introduction

I.1 Strategic Linkages: North Korea, the US, and China

The North Korean nuclear dilemma and the US-China bilateral relationship represent two of the most pressing security challenges in contemporary international relations. As a rogue regime that has developed its nuclear capability to successfully conduct multiple weapons tests while flouting international nonproliferation laws and consistently threatening the US and South Korea with nuclear attack, North Korea has proven to be a destabilizing force in East Asia whose actions have provoked militarizing responses from neighboring states in recent years. The US and China – North Korea’s primary opponent and ally, respectively – are the two states with the greatest influence in the Korean Peninsula and the greatest potential to take effective actions towards de-escalating the tense situation. As such, the US and China must inevitably be involved in any possible solution to the unfolding crisis.

Although policy coordination will be crucial, US-China relations at present are characterized by tension over mutual suspicion of each other’s power and intentions in East Asia and the international system at large. The two countries’ bilateral relationship is further complicated by their opposing viewpoints on many critical global issues as shaped by their differing political systems, histories, and cultural heritages. Cooperation between them is thus inherently difficult yet immensely consequential for international security. However, the North Korean crisis offers a rare opportunity for US-China strategic coordination based on shared national security interests in achieving denuclearization and stability on the Korean Peninsula. If the US and China can overcome their differences to increase the frequency and depth of their cooperation efforts regarding North Korea, the Korean Peninsula issue could become a starting

point for building the high-level trust and mutual understanding needed to catalyze further US-China security cooperation, improve long-term bilateral relations, and reduce the risk of a great power conflict through joint management of the East Asian regional security environment.¹

I.2 Security Cooperation as Trust-Building

As it relates to international relations, strategic trust between states is not simply an outcome of but also a key instigator of security cooperation. The parameters of “strategic trust” and “security cooperation” as terms will be more clearly delineated in Chapter 1, but since entering collaborative engagement between states on issues of national security concern requires a certain preexisting degree of trust from each actor, or at least the desire to foster greater trust between them, the two concepts are inherently linked. The very process of communicating and coordinating policies across involved parties to work towards shared security objectives can in turn lead to increased mutual understanding and, ultimately, trust as the outcome as well as the cause of security cooperation.² Since strategic trust is closely intertwined with successful self-reinforcing patterns of security cooperation and is important in mitigating the likelihood of interstate conflict, it is critical that US-China security cooperation on North Korea be analyzed with this trust component in mind to fully account for the impacts of such cooperation on actions and perceptions within the US-China bilateral relationship.

Developing a nuanced understanding of the intersection between trust and security cooperation in US-China interactions on the Korean Peninsula is particularly important in the

1. Denny Roy, “The North Korea Crisis in Sino-US Relations,” *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* 10, no. 2 (2011): 282.

2. Andrew H. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005: 28-29

context of current international affairs at the time of writing this thesis in April 2017. The newest round of United Nations sanctions against North Korea in March 2016 represents an unusual instance of US-China cooperation on North Korea in multilateral forums where the two nations' divergent interests usually inhibit such tangible actions, a development that has not yet been extensively researched and analyzed within the context of broader US-China security cooperation or Korean Peninsula policy. Recent advancements in the North Korean nuclear program over the past year have also heightened the level of urgency and depth of strategic consideration with which both American and Chinese policymakers must now address the growing crisis. These factors provide the impetus for a re-evaluation of the role that US-China relations plays in the Korean Peninsula security crisis as explored in this thesis.

However, while security cooperation between the US and China is understood to play an essential role in facilitating constructive joint approaches to North Korea, the role of strategic trust in this cooperation and the US-China bilateral relationship as a whole is comparatively less emphasized, despite its relevance as both a critical precondition for and desired result of such engagement on the Korean Peninsula. This trust-cooperation nexus for the US and China has not been extensively evaluated by the existing literature specifically in relation to the Korean Peninsula. Current research primarily takes one of two approaches: focusing on either the lack of security cooperation on the Korean Peninsula as a casualty of rivalry and tension in the US-China relationship,^{3 4 5} or analyzing US-China strategic distrust as the source of tension in US-

3. Soo-Ho Lim, "US-China Conflict: Impact on the Korean Peninsula," *SERI Quarterly* 3, no. 4 ((2010): 124.

4. Roy, "The North Korea Crisis in Sino-US Relations," 281.

5. Fei-Ling Wang, "Stability with Uncertainties: US-China Relations and the Korean Peninsula," In *The United States and the Korean Peninsula in the 21st Century*, ed. Tae-Hwan Kwan and Seung-Ho Joo (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2006): 196.

China relations more broadly.^{6 7 8} By contrast, this thesis seeks to emphasize the critical intersections between all three factors by centering its analysis first on the role of strategic trust in fostering US-China security cooperation on the Korean Peninsula, then on the role of this security cooperation in incrementally building the trust needed to lay a foundation for long-term improvements in US-China relations.

I.3 Research Questions and Findings

This thesis seeks to answer two guiding questions: (1) How does the North Korean nuclear security crisis influence US-China security cooperation in the post-Soviet Union era? (2) How does this cooperation contribute to fostering greater strategic trust in the US-China bilateral relationship? In addressing these questions, the thesis will challenge the notion of the Korean Peninsula as a policy challenge fundamentally obstructive to US-China security cooperation and an unequivocal hindrance on US-China relations more broadly. While the thesis does not refute the indication that strategic US-China distrust does still exist and hinders bilateral cooperative efforts, it does also suggest the importance of equally accounting for a parallel effect from existing security cooperation on the Korean Peninsula in facilitating a self-reinforcing trust-cooperation dynamic, which may prove to have a positive effect overall on long-term US-China trust, cooperation, and bilateral relations.

6. Friedberg, "The Future of U.S.-China Relations," 12.

7. Lyle J. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway: How to Defuse the Emerging US-China Rivalry* (Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 2015): 11.

8. Kenneth Lieberthal and Wang Jisi, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust," *John L. Thornton China Center Monograph Series 4*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution (2012): i-iii.

To assess these patterns of interconnected security cooperation and trust-building, this study provides a qualitative analysis of theoretical and practical perspectives on international security cooperation as applicable to the political conditions between the US and China in addressing the North Korean nuclear security crisis. It first evaluates two particularly notable historical cases of US-China engagement on Korea, the 2003-2007 Six Party talks and the 2016 United Nations Security Council Resolution, selected for their significance as breakthrough moments of high-level US-China security cooperation on North Korea. These two events both had pronounced effects in prompting further US-China security cooperation on North Korea and other mutual security issues. Through extended analysis of official records and secondary reports of US-China cooperation patterns in the years following the events analyzed in these case studies, this thesis is able to map and analyze the resulting trajectory of bilateral engagement on North Korea and the three prominent parallel security arenas in US-China strategic interaction most closely connected with the Korean Peninsula issue: the Taiwan strait crisis, military-to-military affairs, and counterterrorism. As a result, a clearer picture emerges of how trust built through the security cooperation process on North Korea helped establish the conditions conducive to broader and deeper US-China cooperation.

The research findings support this thesis' conclusion that although conflicts of national interests and objectives regarding North Korea have heightened discord in US-China relations, the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis has overall led to a beneficial process of gradual strategic trust-building that has fostered greater US-China engagement and security cooperation in practice. However, the lack of a coordinated US-China strategy towards the Korean Peninsula and the remaining paucity of strategic depth and continuity in their cooperation on the issue, despite their increasingly frequent engagement, is ultimately reflective of the prevalence of some

degree of underlying strategic distrust, which propels the US and China to frame their interests and policies towards the Korean Peninsula such that they are at present fundamentally irreconcilable. However, the increase in security cooperation itself, regardless of the depth of cooperation, has enabled the US and China to develop a higher degree of strategic trust in their bilateral relationship that would otherwise be lacking. These patterns indicate the important effects of cooperation on the North Korean nuclear crisis as building the trust necessary to increase the US and China's capacity for deeper-level cooperation in the future. Therefore, despite the apparent political stalemate between the US and China over the Korean Peninsula, the North Korean nuclear crisis could nonetheless provide the necessary precedent and mechanisms for furthering the mutually-reinforcing dynamics of strategic trust and security cooperation to improve long-term bilateral US-China relations and cooperation on other security issues in Northeast Asia.

In structuring these central claims, this thesis begins by contextualizing the historical development and background of the Korean Peninsula security crisis in Chapter 1. The first chapter also outlines the conceptual framework for both security cooperation and strategic trust, the two international relations phenomena whose intersections within the setting of US-China relations on the Korean Peninsula comprise the primary focus of analysis throughout the thesis.

Chapter 2 examines both the US and China's unilateral interests and strategy towards North Korea after assessing current literature and establishing a theoretical framework for understanding US-China security cooperation. It explores the predominant paradigms and dynamics of bilateral US-China engagement of North Korea, critically discussing their implications for the emergence of a mutually-reinforcing trust-cooperation spiral for the US and China in relation to the Korean Peninsula.

Chapter 3 analyzes the two most notable historical instances of US-China cooperation on North Korea – the 2003-2007 Six-Party Talks and the 2016 United Nations Sanctions – as case studies, assessing their significant if limited successes in facilitating subsequent US-China security cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and elsewhere as indicative of improving trust-cooperation dynamics between the US and China. These patterns fit the spiral model of strategic interactions in international relations, a key concept that this thesis applies to the Korean Peninsula crisis. In this context, the model allows for nuanced descriptive and predictive interpretations regarding the emergence of a growing US-China “cooperation spiral” as evident through the patterns of increasing security cooperation on North Korea analyzed in these case studies.

Chapter 4 builds on the applicability of the spiral model to US-China cooperation on North Korea as established in the previous chapter, assessing how closely the spiral model’s predictions of increasing security cooperation based on increasing trust match the present dynamics of US-China engagement after the events described in the two case studies detailed in this thesis. The chapter identifies patterns of increased US-China coordination on both Korean Peninsula issues and other East Asian regional security issues following on from the patterns of engagement outlined in these case studies, specifically focusing on cooperation pertaining to Taiwan, military-to-military, and counterterrorism affairs. The presence of both vertical and horizontal development in US-China cooperative efforts, referring respectively to continued cooperation on the primary issue of North Korea and expanded cooperation into parallel dimensions of US-China security engagements as listed previously, is thus shown to reflect the presence of an underlying paradigm of incremental trust-building as both caused and influenced by growing cooperation dynamics within bilateral US-China engagement on North Korea.

Chapter 5 revisits theoretical and practical predictions for future US-China cooperation and improved bilateral relations, evaluating them anew in light of the cooperation episodes addressed in the research and within the broader trend of increasing US-China engagement on the North Korean nuclear issue. The thesis concludes that the critical role of US-China security cooperation on the Korean Peninsula in facilitating gradual improvements in the two parties' currently limited engagement towards deeper security cooperation and trust-building efforts will, in the long run, ultimately have significant implications for building a strong foundation for collaborative future US-China relations.

Chapter 1

North Korea and the US-China Rivalry

The North Korean nuclear dilemma is an issue that has evolved significantly over the past six decades since the original Korean Peninsula security dilemma and the North Korean state's founding following the close of the Korean war in 1953. The positions, interests, and stakes of the major actors in the situation have also changed over time, and thus understanding the current conditions fully requires a knowledge of North Korea's national background. Similarly, understanding the present-day conditions of North Korea's nuclear program allows for drawing parallels to history and assessing the degree to which the security cooperation and trust-building concepts are important in efforts from China and the US to stop North Korea's nuclear development using multilateral or bilateral approaches.

To offer these valuable perspectives as an analytical tool for assessing US-China security cooperation on North Korea, this chapter first aims to situate the Korean Peninsula security crisis within the historical development of North Korea's nuclear program and the contemporary geopolitical context, identifying key areas of American and Chinese involvement throughout. The chapter then establishes working definitions of security cooperation and strategic trust, forming a critical conceptual framework for the analysis of notable cases and patterns of US-China security cooperation as examined in subsequent chapters.

1.1 North Korea's Nuclear Development: A Brief History

The North Korean nuclear saga has played out against a backdrop of regional geopolitics shaped by US-China rivalry. The North Korean state was first established with the partition of

Korea following the end of World War II in 1945, which designated the 38th Parallel as the border separating the newly formed Republic of Korea (ROK), the US-backed democratic state in the South, from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the communist regime in the North supported by the Soviet Union. Following the beginning of the Korean War with the North's surprise invasion of the South on June 25, 1950, both the Soviet Union and China provided aid and military training to the DPRK forces to support its attempt to gain control over the full Korean Peninsula. Once the tide began to turn in favor of the combined ROK-US-UN forces with their counter-offensive across the 38th Parallel in October 1950, China entered the war in support of North Korea with 270,000 Chinese People's Volunteer Army troops. After hostilities in the Korean War were brought to an end by the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement on July 27, 1953, the North maintained strong ties with China that culminated in the militarily-binding Sino-North Korean Mutual Aid and Cooperation Treaty signed on July 11, 1961. On the basis of these close historical relations, North Korea has maintained its alliance with China through the present, and China has in turn continued to support North Korea despite its disruptive antics for its centrality to China's core strategic interests in East Asia.

The DPRK initially began its quest for nuclear technology following a nuclear research agreement with the Soviet Union, signed in 1956 on the heels of the Korean War stalemate,⁹ but it was unconfirmed whether the North Korean leadership actually had its eyes on nuclear weapons or simply nuclear energy production. American satellite imagery first revealed evidence of North Korean nuclear activity in 1982 upon sighting the beginnings of a reactor site at Yongbyon, which North Korea progressively enhanced towards operational functionality through

9. Walter C. Clemens Jr., "North Korea's Quest for Nuclear Weapons: New Historical Evidence," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 10 (2010): 129.

1988.¹⁰ It was primarily amidst contemporaneous foreign relations crises in the 1990s – most notably the loss of Soviet patronage with the Soviet Union’s dissolution in 1991– that North Korean leadership fully cemented its ambitions for an internationally recognized nuclear weapons program with diplomatic leverage. Having become convinced by this point of the need for nuclear weapons to guarantee its own survival in the absence of powerful supporters, the North Korean regime soon began earnestly charting a course towards weapon materials and technology acquisition.¹¹

By some measures, the 1990s marked a decade of unprecedented international engagement with North Korea with the beginning of US-DPRK direct bilateral meetings and South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung’s Sunshine Policy, under which South Korea offered aid and collaborative industrial projects designed as incentives for North Korean reciprocal concessions on its nuclear program. However, the decade also saw the first major crisis related to the North Korean nuclear program, which was triggered in 1992 by revelations that the DPRK was secretly proceeding with its nuclear weapons enrichment projects in violation of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT). The DPRK’s withdrawal from the NPT in 2003 prompted an urgent international response in the multilateral Six-Party Talks, which continued from 2003 through 2007 but ultimately failed to produce meaningful progress on curbing the North’s nuclear progress. Following the Talks, North Korea shunned international engagement and single-mindedly strove to improve its nuclear program. North Korea’s first nuclear test in 2006 was followed by others in 2009, 2013, and two in 2016 with greater payloads each time,

10. Don Oberdorfer and Robert Carlin, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History* (New York: Basic Books, 2013), 194-195.

11. Victor Cha and David Kang, *Nuclear North Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 17-18.

demonstrating that Pyongyang possesses both the persisting aim to produce nuclear weapons and the increasing capability to do so.¹²

The development of the North Korean nuclear program is fundamentally tied to the circumstances of the state's foundation, since nuclear weapons capability was framed as the key to state survival in the decades following the end of the Korean War. The North Korean fixation on becoming a nuclear power is most commonly analyzed by international policymakers and North Korea watchers in terms of security, military, and political concerns. North Korea's domestic "military-first" policy indicates that this is also the primary lens through which the DPRK leadership views its own nuclear program.¹³ Indeed, many of the most commonly cited speculations of North Korea's true objectives for nuclear weapons are made on these grounds: possibilities include a quest for nuclear deterrence¹⁴, desire to mitigate the Kim regime's vulnerability,¹⁵ a response to pressure from surrounding nuclear or nuclear-capable states in East Asia,¹⁶ or the promise of reinforcing the DPRK's claim to represent the whole Korean Peninsula. This question of motives lies at the heart of the debate over appropriate policy responses, since the appropriateness of engagement or coercive tactics is subjectively influenced by whether the DPRK's real or perceived intent is to gain a defensive mechanism for nuclear sovereignty or an

12. Nicholas Hamisevicz, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons and the United States: More Difficult, and More Complicated, More Dangerous." In Utpal Vyas, Ching-Chang Chen, and Denny Roy (Ed.), *The North Korea Crisis and Regional Responses* (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center, 2015): 131-132.

13. Kim Keun-Sik, "North Korea's Nuclear Program: Its Rationale, Intentions, and Military-First Politics," *Korea Journal* 45, no. 4 (2005): 62-63.

14. Victor Cha and David Kang, "The Debate over North Korea," *Political Science Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (2004): 244-245.

15. You Ji, "China and North Korea: A Fragile Relationship of Strategic Convenience," *Journal of Contemporary China* 10, no. 28 (2001): 395.

16. Dingli Shen, "Cooperative Denuclearization Towards North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 32, no. 4 (2009): 176.

offensive weapon for plausible first-strike aggression.¹⁷ However, the drive for nuclear weapons is even more central to the North Korean state than is often realized because the concept of absolute sovereignty is a fundamental tenet of the official national ideology known as *juche*, or “self-reliance.”¹⁸ The implications of this association have taken root in North Korea at the psychological and institutional level: After North Korea revised its constitution in 2012 to enshrine the view that North Korea “is a nuclear-armed state and an indomitable military power,” its nuclear weapons program became indefinitely integrated with the nation’s founding and organizational document, revealing the degree of prestige, reputation, and security significance the state officially attributes to its nuclear program. Now, nuclear weapons are framed no longer as just a tool of the state but an integral part of the North Korean state itself, reflecting an extension of national *juche* ideology to nuclear weapons.¹⁹

The overarching geopolitical theme of the Korean Peninsula throughout the post-Korean War period is reflected in a Cold War-era balance of the socialist and communist North Korea supported by the Soviet Union and the democratic and capitalist South Korea supported by the United States. Thus, the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the three subsequent decades marked a major shift in the dynamics of inter-Korean relations and North Korea’s relations with the outside world. This period from 1991-2016 will serve as the temporal focus of this thesis for the purpose of situating its analysis of key instances of US-China cooperation events within the most modern period of North Korean history, resulting in the framework most representative of the current conditions and challenges.

17. Cha and Kang, “The Debate over North Korea,” 232.

18. Jein Do, “Nuclear Weapons as Ideology: The Formation of North Korean Nuclear Independence, 1962-1964,” *Seoul Journal of Korean Studies* 28, no. 2 (2015): 181-182.

19. Hamisevicz, “North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons,” 131.

1.2 Contemporary Context of the Korean Peninsula Security Crisis

North Korea continues to be a particularly relevant challenge to international security and US-China relations into current times due to many significant recent developments in its nuclear adventurism. North Korea claimed in January 2016 to have successfully tested a hydrogen bomb; in February 2016, it accomplished a rocket-mounted satellite launch; and in April and later August 2016, additional missile tests brought North Korea's nuclear activity to new heights in both scale and frequency, with Pyongyang's hostile rhetoric intensifying accordingly. The North is suspected of endeavoring to accelerate its nuclear technology advancement in the subsequent months after claiming to have successfully miniaturized nuclear warheads to fit on missiles conducive to offensive use.²⁰ Most recently, the DPRK has completed six missile launches within the first four months of 2017, raising global alarm over North Korea's unprecedented rate of weapons testing and prompting a renewed focus of political discourse and diplomatic efforts on the threat posed by the country's nuclear program. As of the time of writing in April 2017, it still remains uncertain whether North Korea's current capabilities allow it to credibly threaten the American mainland or Hawaii with either nuclear- or non-nuclear-capable intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs). However, US Pacific forces stationed in Guam, Japan, and South Korea, along with most major East Asian cities and strategic assets that could prove inviting targets for a potential preemptive or retaliatory strike, are all well within the North's ever-expanding missile range.²¹

Despite the international community's recurring paralysis towards policy solutions, the recent escalation of the North Korean nuclear threat has also prompted unprecedented US-China

20. Ibid., 131.

21. Ibid., 131.

collaboration. The most recent and prominent such instance occurred on March 2, 2016, when both nations voted to pass United Nations Security Council Resolution 2270, the strictest and most comprehensive set of multilateral sanctions yet against North Korea.²² This is a rare instance of compromise since China and the US usually clash over North Korea, with China typically hesitating to take punitive action and the US predictably criticizing the resulting shutdown of international efforts contingent on China's cooperation. Considered in light of other prominent historical cases of US-China policy coordination on North Korea – most notably the Six-Party Talks from 2003-2007 – along with US-China security cooperation on related issues, this raises new questions about the feasibility and circumstances of bilateral cooperation that are not adequately accounted for by the older existing research base, creating a need to further analyze and contextualize the issue in the rapidly evolving East Asian security environment.

Fundamental conflicts of interest and different desired outcomes between China and the US, explained further in Chapter 2, continue to hinder the international community's efforts to overcome the current political and diplomatic impasse on the North Korean nuclear weapons program. This has so far permitted the North to develop its capabilities unchecked and escalate its aggression without substantial repercussions. These tensions have proven emblematic of the mutual suspicion and lack of trust in the broader US-China relationship: China, North Korea's sole ally, is a rising power looking to take a larger role in regional and global leadership, while the US, North Korea's primary declared enemy after South Korea, is the current hegemon in East Asia and aims to maintain its top position in an amenable denuclearized security environment. International relations and political specialists on East Asia generally share a consensus that while security cooperation on North Korea has contributed to strengthening bilateral US-China

22. Scott Snyder and See-Won Byun, "China-Korea Relations: New Sanctions, Old Dilemmas," *Comparative Connections* 18, no. 1 (2016): 91-92.

ties, the feasibility and depth of this cooperation in practice has in turn been shaped by the general trajectory of US-China relations.²³ That is to say, although the US and China hold mutual incentives in bringing about a stable non-nuclear Korean Peninsula – a shared objective that should itself prompt cooperative engagement on both sides to coordinate a joint solution – it is the nature of the very same security issue that emphasizes the ways in which the countries’ unilateral interests diverge in the context of US-China strategic competition. Since this dynamic is emphasized by the geopolitical circumstances of North Korea, the current nuclear crisis simultaneously manifests the obstacles in US-China relations, even as it should theoretically help overcome them.

A substantial amount of scholarship exists on how US-China relations affect the North Korean nuclear issue, featuring varying assessments of the two nations’ disparate strategic interests,²⁴ levels of influence as key regional actors,²⁵ perceptions of each other as competitors, and other factors shaping their policies and North Korea’s reactions. This literature will be further evaluated throughout Chapters 3 and 4 as applied to case studies of key US-China cooperation on North Korea and patterns of expanding cooperation on parallel security concerns.

As established previously, the reverse of this two-way connection is also true: North Korea poses significant high-stakes challenges with wide-ranging implications for the bilateral US-China relationship. This is also evident from US-China diplomatic interactions following

23. Bonnie S. Glaser and Liang Wang, “The North Korean Nuclear Crisis”, in Suisheng Zhao (Ed.), *China and the United States: Cooperation and Competition in Northeast Asia* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 87.

24. David Finkelstein, *The Military Dimensions of US-China Security Cooperation: Retrospective and Future Prospects* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Center for Naval Analyses, 2010), 3.

25. Graeme A. M. Davies, “Coercion or Engagement? A Quantitative Test of the Effect of Regional Actors on North Korean Behaviour 1990-2000,” *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations* 9, no. 3 (2007): 480.

significant developments in North Korean nuclear activity that prompted simultaneous though separate American and Chinese responses. Subsequent sections of this thesis will describe these attempts at diplomatic collaboration between the US and China on the North Korean nuclear crisis in greater detail, using two specific instances of successful joint collaboration as historical case studies to examine the value of such security cooperation on expanding further cooperation and facilitating deeper US-China engagement in the future through incremental trust-building.

1.3 Conceptualizing Security Cooperation

Security cooperation, the focal point for analyzing US-China relations within this thesis, is defined here as any actions with the overarching aim to foster closer ties between participating nations and advance the security-based objectives of either or both parties. Security cooperation at the state level can take the form of assistance from one state to the other with directed military funding transfers, training and equipping forces, humanitarian affairs, arms transfers, military equipment sales, joint exercises, intelligence sharing, or training and education related to security matters.²⁶ Security cooperation can also be measured on an international scale as engagement on security issues in a multilateral capacity, which could include cooperation in peacekeeping operations or aligned participation in security-focused international organizations such as the United Nations Security Council. A third component often overlooked by the common definitions is simply diplomatic engagement on security issues through bilateral or multilateral forums, purpose-specific meetings, and interstate dialogue at any level of formality. These

26. William Aseltine et al., *The Management of Security Cooperation* (Wright-Patterson Air Force Base, OH: Institute of Security Cooperation Studies, 2016), 23.

occurrences indicate positive communication and possible consideration for collaborative action on issues of importance to the fundamental integrity of the states involved.

The value of security cooperation can extend to a range of benefits and functions for both the instigator and partner nations. Peacetime security cooperation on the military front in particular fulfills several key functions that are important for building the foundations for peace and further cooperation: building partner capacity, strengthening trust, and alleviating conditions or tensions that could lead to conflict.²⁷ By developing common thinking about strategic issues and reducing impediments to cooperation, these methods can help to solve information asymmetry issues by assuring allies and partners about a cooperative state's intentions, deter aggression by dissuading potential adversaries, and shorten the duration of pre-existing hostilities by assisting in partner states' military efforts. These well-recognized objectives for security engagement to preempt the potential emergence of conflicts or national security threats have been normalized and integrated into "Phase 0" of the US defense strategy over the past several decades.²⁸ With US-China cooperation in particular, there are no significant patterns of sustained security cooperation between the nations' defense-military establishments with almost no direct military cooperation.²⁹ This absence of cooperation is most likely due to prevailing national security concerns, further indicating that the nations view each other primarily in competitive rather than cooperative terms.

In the context of this thesis, the aforementioned components of security cooperation are applied to the North Korean nuclear security crisis to mean bilateral or multilateral US-China

27. Gregory J. Dyekman, G. *Security Cooperation: A Key to The Challenges of the 21st Century* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2007), 8.

28. *Ibid.*, 2.

29. Finkelstein, *Military Dimensions of US-China Security Cooperation*, 2.

engagement on issues of mutual security concern in East Asia. Two types of security cooperation in particular are evaluated: (1) unprecedented instances of “primary” security cooperation that represent new developments explicitly addressing a given issue in the North Korean situation, as well as (2) further “secondary” cooperation on North Korea or other mutual security issues that represents an effort to build upon a previous instance of primary security cooperation on North Korea and expands the degree or breadth of engagement facilitated by the preceding instance that prompted this new cooperation. Taken together as the basis for larger patterns of increasing cooperation over the full period of analysis from 1991 to the present, these instances of primary and secondary security cooperation are indicative of a larger sustained US-China cooperation spiral whereby strategic trust begets security cooperation and vice versa, resulting in progressively more instances of security cooperation and thus opportunities to further develop trust. Taken separately, these primary and secondary cooperation patterns are themselves self-contained spirals of increasing cooperation, some of many types of engagement that ultimately help build the trust factors necessary to proceed towards US-China security cooperation on North Korea. Chapters 3 and 4 respectively compare the occurrence and effectiveness of primary and secondary security cooperation as related to US-China relations, demonstrating the self-reinforcing nature of the spiral model as applied to security cooperation fostering further cooperation in the future, but also displaying the necessity of trust in moving this cooperation to the deeper level required to move further up the spiral model towards greater cooperation overall.

1.4 Conceptualizing Strategic Trust

Integral to the feasibility and efficacy of security cooperation between two states in an international system is mutual trust in the other side to reciprocate positive engagement and

maintain benign intentions. Kydd defines trust in international relations as “a belief that the other side is trustworthy, that is, willing to reciprocate cooperation, and mistrust as a belief that the other side is untrustworthy, or prefers to exploit one’s cooperation.”³⁰ Trust is an integral component of the theories of international relations detailed in Chapter 2 to frame the North Korean security crisis within US-China relations: the security dilemma exacerbates mistrust by obscuring intentions, power transition theory warns of heightened distrust as a result of rivalry between established and rising powers, and the Thucydides Trap expands on power transition theory to predict that these distrustful dynamics will eventually result in conflict between actors in these positions. In relation to security cooperation as defined in the preceding section, one state’s perception of the other’s trustworthiness will affect whether that state is willing to risk compromising its own security or pursuit of unilateral interests to engage in security cooperation with the other party.³¹ Therefore, a degree of trust is often considered an essential precondition for security cooperation to occur between states.^{32 33} In the long term, a gradual increase of trust between the parties – most feasibly through repeated interactions of security cooperation, as described by the spiral model for cooperation in Chapter 3 – must be present if security cooperation is to increase in depth or breadth.³⁴ Since the linkages between security cooperation and trust are self-reinforcing, the engagement prompted by security cooperation allows for a greater exchange of information and a mitigation of the constraints on perceiving other states’

30. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 3.

31. Aaron M. Hoffman, “A Conceptualization of Trust in International Relations,” *European Journal of International Relations* 8, no. 3 (2002): 376-377.

32. *Ibid.*, 38.

33. Lieberthal and Wang, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” 6.

34. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 15.

true intentions, which can itself have important implications for fostering trust.³⁵ Therefore, both orders can hold true: security cooperation can be the series of actions taken first and through which the trust to continue expanding cooperation is developed, or trust can lead to security cooperation that in turn reinforces and improves the existing levels of trust.

This distinction of the relationship between trust and security cooperation is particularly pertinent in the context of US-China relations. For the US and China, strategic distrust inherently complicates cooperation on mutual issues like the Korean Peninsula, and yet the scarcity of extensive security cooperation also precludes the countries from opportunities to build the trust needed for stronger bilateral relations.³⁶ Besides the framework of the international system and geopolitical context that work to perpetuate US-China strategic rivalry and distrust, the challenges in developing strategic trust in the US-China context may stem from the countries' different cultural and political conceptions of the linkages between trust and security cooperation.³⁷ Finkelstein outlines these different perceptions between the US and China:

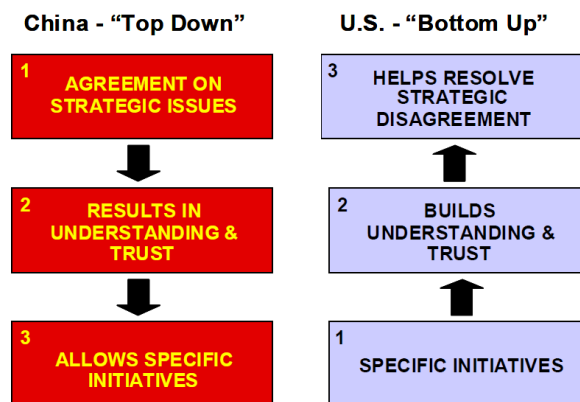


Figure 1.1: Chinese and U.S. Trust-Cooperation Perceptions³⁸

35. Hoffman, "A Conceptualization of Trust in International Relations," 378.

36. Lieberthal and Wang, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust," 6.

37. Ibid., 17.

38. Ibid., 27.

As seen in the diagram, the US and China conceptualize the relationship between trust and security cooperation differently and hold different perceptions of which of these components must exist first to start the cycles of trust-cooperation expansion. China primarily views a degree of broader trust as a requirement to allow security cooperation on issues of mutual importance, while the US prioritizes security cooperation initiatives in contentious areas of the bilateral relationship as a means of building the trust that can in turn lead to broader cooperation and convergence of interests on issues. This dynamic of mismatched perceptions poses a significant obstacle for the emergence of both strategic trust and security cooperation on mutual security issues such as the North Korean nuclear crisis, since the different initial expectations and preferred starting points for beginning the trust-building process through increasing security cooperation inhibits taking the first steps for engagement.³⁹ For North Korea, this has manifested as the present US-China political impasse and lack of a coordinated strategy to address the crisis despite both parties' common interests in achieving denuclearization and stability, as explained in further detail in Chapter 2. Since security cooperation and strategic trust are thus shown to be mutually interdependent and will both be necessary in fostering the US-China engagement needed to resolve the North Korean nuclear crisis, these particular dynamics of trust in international relations and US-China relations offer significant insight into the fundamental importance of fostering a positive self-reinforcing trust-cooperation dynamic.

1.5 Chapter Conclusions

To fully evaluate the role of the North Korean security crisis within US-China relations and understand the challenges and significance of security cooperation and trust-building on this

³⁹. Lim, "US-China Conflict: Impact on the Korean Peninsula," 124.

mutual security issue as the subsequent chapters of this thesis will address, it is first necessary to understand the historical context in which the North Korean nuclear program evolved and what the US and China's roles and interests in the situation have been from a unilateral actor perspective. After outlining the current parameters of the nuclear crisis and the stalemate in US-China collaboration on strategic approaches to the crisis, this chapter outlines the concepts of security cooperation and strategic trust and demonstrates the linkages between them as well as their relevance to perpetuating the current political impasse on North Korea. Given the focus of this thesis on the trust-cooperation dynamics as a key mode of US-China engagement on North Korea that stands to foster more substantial strategic coordination between the two countries in the future, the subsequent chapters will all utilize the framework of analysis established in this chapter as a basis upon which to examine the existing instances of US-China security cooperation on North Korea for their potential to foster a deeper-level trust.

Chapter 2:

Theoretical and Unilateral Challenges to US-China Security Cooperation

The Korean Peninsula issue is one of direct importance and great consequence to both the US and China, and the degree of responsiveness in North Korean nuclear developments to the evolving East Asian geopolitical context makes comprehensive analysis of the situation impossible without due emphasis on US-China dynamics. Fundamental conflicts of interest and different preferential outcomes between the two nations give impetus to the international community's political and diplomatic impasse on the North Korean nuclear program, which has thus far permitted the North to expand its capabilities and escalate its aggression unchecked.

These factors are not entirely intrinsically motivated but are driven by the same strategic distrust and the resulting competitive undercurrents sowing the deep-rooted tension in US-China bilateral relations.⁴⁰ Given China's status as a rising global power and the US' position as a dominant regional hegemon in China's natural sphere of influence in East Asia, the difficulty and scarcity of security cooperation between the two is most suitably ascribed to the concepts of a "security dilemma" and great power transition in international relations theory. The presence of these dynamics not only predicts an increased likelihood for conflict—a causal relationship corroborated by historical observation—but also shapes the behavior of the involved states accordingly.⁴¹ Analyzing US-China security cooperation on North Korea through this conceptual lens thus provides an essential framework in which to understand each nation's unilateral approach to North Korea as related to the larger picture of US-China competition in East Asia.

40. Finkelstein, *Military Dimensions of US-China Security Cooperation*, 3.

41. Glaser and Wang, "The North Korean Nuclear Crisis," 121.

In this chapter, I first address the US and China's respective national interests on the Korean Peninsula, shedding light on where and why their unilateral approaches diverge in practice and converge in theory. Through the first three sections, I reveal that these incentives and obstacles ultimately reflect prevailing strategic considerations on both sides as a function of the US-China geopolitical rivalry, making US-China security cooperation on North Korea fundamentally interconnected with the US-China bilateral relationship. Having established this crucial linkage, I then provide an overview of key theories and concepts of international relations and great power relations most relevant to US-China interactions on North Korea: the security dilemma, power transition theory, and the "Thucydides Trap." The fourth and fifth sections discuss each of these theoretical factors' applicability and implications for of US-China security cooperation. Finally, the sixth section of this chapter provides a theoretical and practical assessment of the likelihood of US-China conflict and cooperation under these conditions, both in relation to North Korea and broader geopolitical circumstances. As the two schools of international relations theory with the greatest relevance to the US-China relationship as pertaining to the particular security and competition-based dynamics of the Korean Peninsula issue, institutionalism and realism are the primary theoretical perspectives through which I analyze the prospects of US-China security cooperation and trust-building in this context.

2.1 China's Unilateral Interests and Strategy Regarding North Korea

China's national interests as they align with the North Korean nuclear crisis are fourfold: Beijing fundamentally wants to ensure Chinese border security, maintain domestic stability and economic growth, promote stability on the Korean Peninsula, seek denuclearization through engagement and gradual normalization of tensions, and preserve its strategic positioning within

East Asia in relation to the US. To this end, China's positions as reflective of these interests have broadly been in favor of maintaining the stability of the Kim regime, opposing sanctions and other coercive measures advocated by the US and other international actors, and preserving its own economic and trade relations with North Korea. China's policy towards North Korea, and towards the US in turn, has been demonstrated to conform to this set of strategic objectives.⁴²

China's political leadership has been suspected of seeking to distance itself from the Kim regime⁴³ in recent years since Kim Jong Un's ascent to national leadership in 2011, and especially so following the increased North Korean nuclear activity in 2016 and 2017. However, the Chinese government still wants to avoid a collapse or overthrow of the North Korean regime because of the potential for domestic upheaval and humanitarian crises within China in the event of an inflow of millions of suddenly stateless North Korean refugees, which would have significant negative consequences for Chinese internal order and would place unprecedented strain on state resource distribution. Additionally, total regime collapse in North Korea could trigger endgame scenarios including regional instability, uncontrolled nuclear weapons at risk of seizure by rogue actors, or the necessity of an occupation led by Chinese or US-ROK forces in the interim while stabilizing the North Korean territory and rebuilding a unified Korean state.⁴⁴ These possible outcomes would impose significant political risk and financial or military burdens on China, making them all more strategically disadvantageous for China than maintaining the current predictable if imperfect status quo. However, Beijing recognizes that while the status quo currently represents the comparatively safer option of tentative conflict-free stability, it is

42. David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2003): 53.

43. Anne Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (2005): 41-42.

44. Andrew Scobell, "North Korea End-Game or Mid-Game? Some Scenarios and their Implications for US-China Relations," *Journal of Contemporary China* 16, no. 51 (2007): 322.

uncertain for how long the situation will remain so. China also perceives that the North Korean regime's fragility is ultimately unsustainable, leading it to advocate an end goal of regime reform for North Korea rather than either regime collapse or the status quo.⁴⁵

It is primarily for this reason that China's general policy on North Korea favors engagement over coercion as a primary policy tool, the opposite of the position advocated by the US. China has historically rejected UN sanctions on the grounds that economic coercion cannot meaningfully shrink the Kim regime's resource or power base to force political concessions and are only hurtful to the North Korean people. Instead of seeking to overthrow the Kim regime, China states, a more viable denuclearization strategy would include helping North Korea to internally develop and integrate into the world.⁴⁶ China maintains that such a solution would give North Korea other means for state survival besides clinging to nuclear weapons, and would likely result in a greater North Korean willingness to negotiate away its nuclear program in exchange for aid or other benefits.⁴⁷ As a result of siding with the Kim regime and adopting this non-antagonistic stance, China also gains leverage through its strategic ambiguity regarding the full extent of its control and influence over North Korea,⁴⁸ giving it a negotiating asset foregone by the more detached position and austere measures of the US.

China's apparent support for the Kim regime also stems from the connections between domestic stability in North Korea and wider stability in East Asia. Regime collapse or domestic

45. Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," 45.

46. Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," 43-44.

47. See-Won Byun and Scott Snyder, "China's Approach to North Korea and Northeast Asian Security Cooperation," in Tae-Hwan Kwak et al., *Rethinking Asia and International Relations: North Korea and Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 156.

48. Utpal Vyas, Ching-Chang Chen, and Denny Roy, "Common Interest Without Coordination," In Utpal Vyas, Ching-Chang Chen, and Denny Roy (Ed.), *The North Korea Crisis and Regional Responses* (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center, 2015): 162.

instability within North Korea would inevitably propel a mass exodus of fleeing North Koreans across the Yalu River into China via the northern border; however, China's economically underdeveloped northeastern regions are not equipped to handle the financial and social burden that these refugees would pose. Such social unsettlement could also cause destabilizing tensions within China itself, making the Chinese leadership eager to avoid any contingencies capable of disrupting China's economic development and political status quo that may result from forceful action against the North Korean regime.⁴⁹ Finally, this engagement policy has helped Chinese banks, companies, and manufacturers benefit economically from China's decision to maintain trade with North Korea by exploiting loopholes in UN sanctions and other agreements designed to financially isolate North Korea. This is especially true of sanctions terms restricting imports of key strategic natural resources from the DPRK, such as coal and rare earth minerals, that fuel China's economic growth. Although negligible, this exchange has had a slightly beneficial effect on the Chinese domestic economy at large, especially for the local economics of northeastern border cities where most trade with North Korea takes place.

China's interests in North Korea in respect to bilateral relations with the United States are to defend its position within what China sees as its sphere of influence in East Asia. China remains suspicious of potential US attempts to use the North Korea crisis as an excuse to "contain" China militarily⁵⁰: The Chinese leadership views previous US military engagements in East Asia in recent years through this hostile lens, including the diplomatic initiatives under President Barack Obama's attempted "Asia Pivot" in 2013 and the 2016 decision to deploy the

49. Jooyoung Song, "Understanding China's Response to North Korea's Provocations," *Asian Survey* 51, No. 6 (2011): 1138.

50. Scott A. Snyder, "Instability in North Korea and Its Impact on US-China Relations," in *Managing Instability in China's Periphery* (Washington, D.C.: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2014), 28.

Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) nuclear missile defense system in South Korea.⁵¹ In the former case, China resents a reinforcement of American military alliances with rival East Asian countries. In the latter case, it notes that the THAAD missile technology could also be used for offensive purposes beyond its stated defensive intent, which would allow US missiles to reach strategic targets on the Chinese mainland or to determine Chinese missile locations using THAAD's powerful radar capabilities.

In this context, it emerges that China is uniquely able to use North Korea as a bargaining chip in its foreign policy, especially to counter perceived or threatened influence from the US. As North Korea's only ally and a reliable if reluctant supplier of financial⁵² and material⁵³ assistance, China's unique position of influence over the North Korean leadership allows it to use these ties to its advantage in international negotiations. Continuing strategically ambiguous relations with the DPRK therefore allows China to maintain this upper hand and position of power relative to other actors with an interest in North Korea, namely the US.⁵⁴ Furthermore, maintaining non-hostile relations and engaging in food aid donations or trade with the North allows China to increase the isolated state's economic and political dependence on China, ultimately strengthening China's hand to punish or coerce should North Korea try to take action that would harm China's interests later on.⁵⁵ Seemingly contrary to these trends, Chinese cooperation against North Korea with the UN sanctions in 2016 from Resolution 2270 prompted

51. Jonathan Pollack, "China and the United States post-9/11," *Orbis*, 47, No. 4 (2003): 617-627.

52. Scott Snyder, "China's Rise and the Two Koreas," Lynne Rienner Publishing (2009): 174.

53. Fei-Ling Wang, "Stability with Uncertainties," 196.

54. Tianyi Wang, "Small State, Big Influence: China's North Korea Policy Dilemma." Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press (2013): 17-18.

55. Gregory J. Moore, "How North Korea Threatens China's Interests: Understanding Chinese 'Duplicity' on the North Korean Nuclear Issue," *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 8 (2008): 23.

speculation that the Chinese leadership was tired of its partnership with North Korea and did not actually have as much influence over North Korea as it claimed.⁵⁶ This conclusion too has been debated, with limited information outflows and vague Chinese policy statements providing little more than speculation by way of concrete evidence. However, the Chinese “dual strategy” of defending yet also condemning the Kim regime diminishes the degree of certainty that the two countries are in actuality drifting apart as much as many North Korea watchers may hope.⁵⁷ Most significantly for China, a breakdown of order in North Korea—which any reduction of Chinese support would certainly accelerate—would invite a renewed or expanded US presence on the Korean Peninsula in order to keep the peace and uphold its treaty obligations to protect South Korea, in addition to pursuing its own interests in defending US military and economic installations in South Korea.⁵⁸ Naturally, China would strongly oppose any increased presence of its rival hegemon on its doorstep, revealing the value of North Korea as a strategic geopolitical buffer for China against US influence.⁵⁹ As a result, China’s actions can best be understood as primarily seeking to maintain the status quo, since it only reacts to North Korea when Pyongyang’s actions heighten the risk of US military action.⁶⁰

56. Wu, “What China Whispers to North Korea,” 37.

57. Moore, “Chinese ‘Duplicity’ on the North Korean Issue,” 18.

58. You Ji, “China and North Korea,” 387.

59. Shambaugh, “China and the Korean Peninsula,” 51.

60. Song, “China’s Response to North Korea’s Provocations,” 1134.

2.2 The United States' Unilateral Interests and Strategy Regarding North Korea

The United States' unilateral interests on North Korea can be characterized by four main objectives: protecting its national security from nuclear threats, initiating regime change in North Korea, reassuring key at-risk regional allies of US defense commitments,⁶¹ and maintaining a strong strategic presence in East Asia. While American policies towards the Korean peninsula have featured a mix of engagement and coercion at different times since the years following the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991,⁶² the underlying motives in adopting these policies have remained constant throughout the past three decades despite different policy interpretations across different presidential administrations.

Along with South Korea, the US is one of the two main targets of the North Korean regime's aggressive rhetoric and threats. This role leads the US to view a nuclear North Korea as a potentially grave national security threat should the rogue state acquire the capabilities to miniaturize nuclear warheads and mount them on ICBMs capable of reaching US territories. Additionally, a completed North Korean nuclear weapons program could trigger further proliferation in a dangerous arms race throughout East Asia as Japan and South Korea – two regional allies threatened by Pyongyang's offensive capabilities yet currently dependent on the US nuclear umbrella for security guarantees – would likely race to acquire their own nuclear weapons.⁶³ This would threaten US economic and military interests in the region, undermine US efforts to establish a global norm and legal regime surrounding nonproliferation as embodied by

61. Hamisevicz, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons," 133.

62. Snyder, "China's Rise and the Two Koreas, 171.

63. Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," 55.

the NPT,⁶⁴ and heighten China's strategic distrust towards the US by arming its US-allied regional rivals.⁶⁵

Furthermore, the US maintains that long-term negotiation and engagement with North Korea should be based on a prerequisite of regime change and the Kim family's removal from power without triggering the complete collapse of the North Korean state. Unlike China, the US includes human rights violations by the North Korean state as a stated concern in its policy formulation on the Korean Peninsula.⁶⁶ The US Department of State has also allocated funds for projects supporting efforts to launch an "information campaign" among the North Korean people intended to prompt internal opposition to the regime that could potentially help achieve this objective, thus becoming part of US policy towards North Korea.

The United States' bilateral relations with China fundamentally influence its interests in the Korean Peninsula, especially since the countries' divergent strategic interests and objectives for the nuclear issue create discord and obstruct the formation of a coordinated policy approach despite their nominally shared goals of denuclearization and stabilization. The most readily evident example of bilateral dynamics concealed within the larger North Korean issue is that the United States continues its military presence in and collaboration with South Korea while China maintains its alliance with North Korea. The United States' policy approach to North Korea for the better part of the past two decades, first under President George W. Bush and to a lesser extent under President Barack Obama, has been to utilize coercion, seeking to gain the international community's support in economically and diplomatically isolating North Korea as

64. Hamisevicz, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons," 133-34.

65. Bonnie S. Glaser and Liang Wang, "North Korea: The Beginning of a China-U.S. Partnership?" *The Washington Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (2008): 174.

66. Hamisevicz, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons," 134.

an attempt to reduce it into a position of weakness and force it to the negotiation table. The United Nations is the primary tool for the United States to symbolically rally the world's nations behind sanctions to punish North Korea for transgressions with its nuclear program, a policy tactic that China most often notably opposes. Since China vetoes many Security Council resolutions against North Korea and is accused of only partially enforcing sanctions when it does allow resolutions to pass, the common rhetoric among American international relations and political circles is to blame China for obstructing meaningful action towards North Korea by not leveraging its full influence over North Korea.⁶⁷ However, Chinese officials and scholars in turn hold largely critical views of the American approach, deriding US attempts at hard coercion and economic isolation as an ill-suited and ultimately ineffectual approach.⁶⁸

The persistence of these divergent and in many ways opposite views on the Korean Peninsula between China and the US, despite their nominal common objectives, indicates the need for careful consideration of the other party's strategic calculations for any meaningful action on the issue to take place. In turn, moving the US and China towards a more coordinated strategy on North Korea will require a level of greater mutual understanding and communication, which could be facilitated by engagement in dialogue and other trust-building cooperative forums on the issue that emphasize where the two countries' strategic interests naturally align.

67. Roy, "The North Korea Crisis in Sino-US Relations," 282.

68. Wenzhi Song and Sangkeun Lee, "China's Engagement Patterns towards North Korea," *Pacific Focus* 31, no. 1 (2016): 11.

2.3 The US and China's Mutual Interests Regarding North Korea

Despite their different interests as related to their unique national conditions and security concerns, the US and China's core interests for North Korea do align around their shared goals of ensuring a stable and denuclearized Korean Peninsula, giving both nations a common vision for the future outcome of the nuclear dilemma. However, the US is driven to pursue these stances by different national interests than those propelling China towards these goals, ultimately resulting in a lack of consensus over how exactly the states should jointly work towards bringing about a nuclear-free North Korea.

As indicated in the preceding sections, stability in East Asia is a concern for both parties: in the case of a North Korean regime collapse or elite faction coup, China would be reluctant to care for refugees or become involved itself to stabilize a potential post-regime power vacuum, while the US would face threats of nuclear proliferation or could be forced to mobilize its military forces in East Asia on its treaty allies' behalf.⁶⁹ Denuclearization, however, is the ultimate goal of both parties regarding North Korea, since both nations view as the essential key to long-term stability. Conversely, non-action on the Korean Peninsula and by default allowing North Korea to advance its nuclear program runs counter to these core interests for both parties. In light of these considerations, why are the US and China not consistently incentivized to forego narrow unilateral concerns in pursuit of cooperation towards larger and more strategically consequential shared goals?

China and the US are independently motivated by concerns specific to their respective national contexts as part of their individual reasoning for holding stability and denuclearization as key priorities on the North Korean nuclear issue. However, their divergent individual interests

69. Scobell, "North Korea End-Game or Mid-Game?" 322.

in how these objectives should be achieved – including different views on the future of the Kim regime and the North Korean state as a whole – are indicative of an underlying conflict of different strategic preferences, which are prompted by the corresponding disconnects and competition in the broader US-China relationship. The exclusive unilateral and shared mutual interests of the US and China regarding the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis as discussed so far in this thesis are summarized in the following diagram:

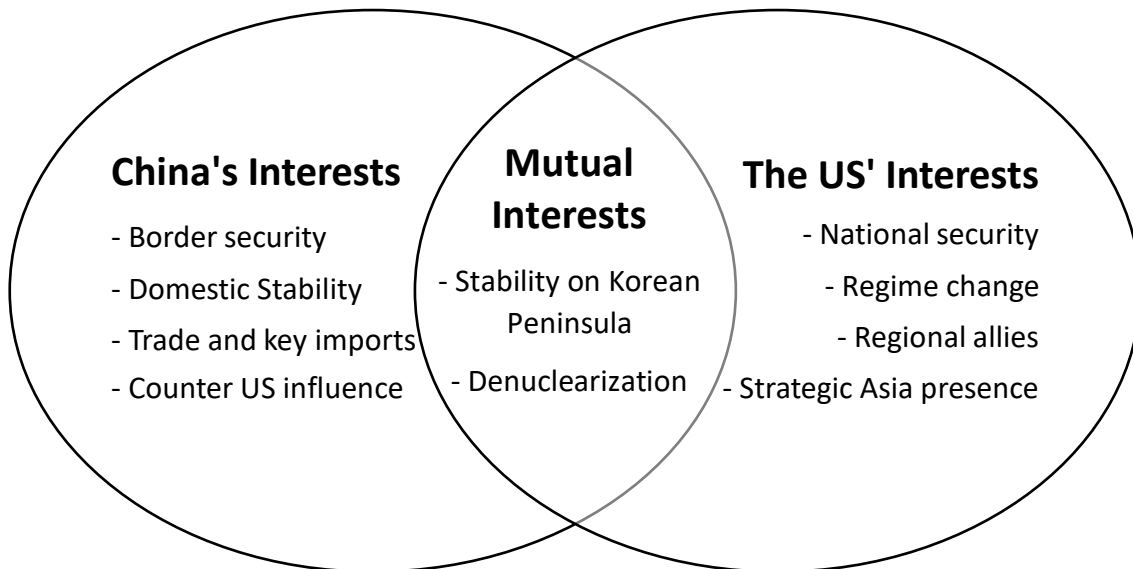


Figure 2.1: Unilateral and Mutual Interests of the US and China on the Korean Peninsula

While the first three factors listed in each unilateral column of the diagram are relevant only in a unilateral context, the fourth set of considerations – “counter US influence” for China and “strategic Asia presence” for the US – show two directly conflicting incentives that are relevant only in the context of competition with the other party. In the sense that all other unilateral interests listed for each actor can be seen as at least in part a function of their overarching geostrategic objective, it thus emerges that the distrust evident in the US and

China's assumptions of each other's political motives vis-à-vis the other is the primary factor driving the US and China's divergent interests and strategies on the Korean Peninsula.⁷⁰ Since the US-China impasse over the North Korean nuclear crisis is emblematic of the larger suspicions in US-China relations as conceptualized by the key concepts of international relations theory enumerated in the remaining sections of Chapter 2, enhancing trust through security cooperation on a mutual issue like North Korea as established in Section 1.4 thus seems a potent prescription to gradually realign the two nations' thinking towards cooperation and action.

2.4 The US-China Security Dilemma and the Korean Peninsula

To evaluate why US-China security cooperation on North Korea does not occur as often as their mutual objectives for the Korean Peninsula might suggest, it is essential to examine how the fundamental distrust between the US and China provides the conditions for a security dilemma dynamic to emerge in East Asia, which shifts how both states perceive one another strategically. A central concept in the study of international relations, the security dilemma was originally coined by John Herz and has been extensively analyzed and reassessed for its applicability in a variety of contexts. The root of the problem as is commonly identified by Herz and others is that in an anarchic system of sovereign states who cannot gauge each other's intentions with absolute certainty and who are beholden to no higher global governing power capable of mediating affairs, sharing information, preventing conflict, or guaranteeing security, states are forced to look out for their own security and subsequently seek to acquire more power

70. Lieberthal and Wang, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust," vi.

each time a rival actor in the system does.^{71 72} In this world order, the security dilemma dictates that even though cooperation and disarmament are the ideal outcomes for all parties, none can trust the others or discern whether military preparations are intended as defensive rather than offensive measures,⁷³ leading actors to feel threatened and develop their own arms to counteract any possible security threat from the other. These developments could then in turn pose a security threat to the original actor, which might want to continue further developing its military as well in response. This escalating spiral of threatening perceptions, militarizing responses, and barriers to cooperation not only creates ample room for conflicts to occur,⁷⁴ but can also extend beyond just the notion of military security to include comprehensive political, social, and economic aspects of security as well, demonstrating the abundance of insecurity inherent in the international system.⁷⁵

The security dilemma is a particularly relevant analytical tool for understanding US-China relations because in big-power relations where both parties are of comparable military or weapons capability, the stakes are much higher and the scale is larger. These circumstances make the state actors involved less likely to take risks in compromising their own security by allowing their counterpart to build its strength unchecked. The same situation of the inability to discern defensive from offensive capabilities applies once again in regard to the question of nuclear sovereignty and the dual-use capabilities of nuclear weapons for deterrence or offense. When

71. John H. Herz, *Political Realism and Political Idealism*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1951: 157.

72. Robert Jervis, "Under the Security Dilemma," *World Politics* 30, No. 2 (1978): 167.

73. Max G. Manwaring, *The Strategic Logic of the Contemporary Security Dilemma* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, 2011): 6.

74. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 11.

75. Manwaring, *Contemporary Security Dilemma*, 12.

two nations consider each other real or potential rivals—as the US and China do—the driving factor for their actions is fear of the other party.⁷⁶ As a result, they are more sensitive to responding to actions taken by the other party in kind with a “tit-for-tat” exchange of corresponding reactions, which can escalate the situation quickly and heighten tensions while reducing the actors’ willingness to pursue other routes to compromise or communicate.

This “spiral model,” a key representation of state interaction under the security dilemma, describes the process whereby initially small measures prompt exponentially more serious actions from both sides in future rounds of strategic interaction. The model is self-reinforcing and can be used to predict both great power competition in cases where the actors threaten each other under a security dilemma (an “escalation spiral” or “conflict spiral”)⁷⁷ and great power cooperation in cases where the actors accommodate each other instead (a “cooperation spiral”).⁷⁸ Since the principle of “tit-for-tat” exchanges remains the core dynamic in both context-based interpretations, the determining factor for which direction the spiral moves in – towards conflict or cooperation – depends on whether the initial actions are fueled by suspicion and retaliation or trust and engagement. In cases where trust is absent, the states’ actions and perceptions are more likely to be inherently rivalrous in nature rather than inclined towards cooperation, leading towards situations that further entrench and exacerbate the underlying security dilemma between the two actors.⁷⁹ The opposite, then, is true of states that are able to show cooperative and

76. Shiping Tang, “The Security Dilemma: A Conceptual Analysis,” *Security Studies* 18, No. 3 (2009): 604.

77. Jervis, “Under the Security Dilemma,” 169-170.

78. Greg Cashman, *What Causes War?: An Introduction to Theories of International Conflict*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013: 291.

79. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 28-29.

trusting intent towards each other, even in the security dilemma conditions:⁸⁰ after pursuing initial actions to reassure their counterpart through small-scale cooperation, the parties are more and more likely to trust their partner and respond to that cooperation reciprocally, which can in turn improve trust to prompt further security cooperation down the line.

Thus, the dual nature of the spiral model emphasizes the role of trust as the main determinant of cooperation or conflict under security dilemma conditions.⁸¹ Since trust is a fundamental determinant of a state's perceived security in relation to other states in the international system, it is relevant to analyze the intersection of trust and cooperation on security issues from the security-focused international relations theory of realism. Realism maintains that states are ultimately preoccupied with guaranteeing their own security and thus their survival in the international system, and to this end they seek to maximize their security to the greatest extent possible. However, this search for security can be focused either outwards, towards seeking to minimize other states' relative or absolute power and influence, or inwards, involving maximizing a state's own strength.⁸² These two conceptions of realism – aptly labeled offensive and defensive realism – also have different predictions for cooperation under the security dilemma. For offensive realists, war is the rational and inevitable way for great powers to ensure that no other nation develops the capacity to overtake them when they cannot guarantee their rivals' benign intentions. For defensive realists, however, the security dilemma itself enables genuine interstate cooperation between states so long as they are faced with a common threat, which would prompt defensive security-seeking states to band together to hedge against the

80. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 11.

81. Kydd, *Trust and Mistrust in International Relations*, 28.

82. John J. Mearsheimer, "Structural Realism," In Tim Dunne, Milja Kurki, and Steve Smith (ed.) *International Relations Theories: Discipline and Diversity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press (2006): 72.

threat.⁸³ This distinction reveals the critical importance of the applicability of trust as a foundation for these interactions through spirals. Where trust is present, these conditions imply, positive spirals fostering engagement approaches and a deeper level of security cooperation that reinforce mutual trust in return are more likely to prevail. However, where trust is absent, the opposite is true, and the pursuit of one-sided interests to hedge against the other party as a perceived threat is more likely to erode trust while prompting a greater risk of escalating these tensions into conflict due to the growing distrust throughout the phases of the escalation spiral. Therefore, when interpreting the spiral model's implications for security cooperation in a security dilemma situation like that of the US and China's interactions on the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis, it is critical to account for the level of either pre-existing trust to organically prompt cooperation or the level to which the leaders of each state are willing to risk cooperation as a means of overcoming distrust with the purpose of avoiding conflict.

This thesis argues that although US-China security cooperation has demonstrated an increasing pattern of prompting further cooperation in a manner fitting a cooperation spiral, the level of security cooperation on the Korean Peninsula overall remains limited, thus indicating an underlying sense of distrust in their bilateral relationship that can be gradually improved by trust-building efforts resulting from this repeated cooperation. The applications of these dynamics in relation to the North Korean nuclear crisis will be further explored in Chapter 3 through case studies of notable bilateral cooperation towards the issue and in Chapter 4 through an exploration of patterns of expanding security cooperation as a result of these instances from Chapter 3, thus demonstrating the self-reinforcing nature of the cooperation spiral in promoting trust-building and further cooperation through each round of security cooperation.

83. Tang, "The Security Dilemma," 588.

2.5 Theories of Power Transition and Conflict

The relative positions and power of the US and China in 21st Century world politics are the lens through which most predictions for future US-China interaction assess the prospects of bilateral security cooperation. America, as the dominant global hegemon in the Post-World War II international system and the sole remaining superpower after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, is currently stronger and more influential than China, a nation that only began its modernization process in 1978 under Deng Xiaoping's "Reform and Opening" (改革开放) policy. However, China is now assuming a greater role and importance within the contemporary world order through its rapidly growing political, economic, and military power, leading some to speculate that a rising China could overtake a receding America to assume its superpower status at some point in the near future. Scholars, diplomats, and policymakers on both sides fear that this strategic competition between China and the US could escalate tensions between the two wary nations to the point of conflict.^{84 85} They argue that this possibility is also distinctly acknowledged by both sides and is centrally considered in formulating policies of mutual hedging towards the other to further their own interests.⁸⁶

According to prevailing theories of international relations, the moment of transition between a rising power and an established superpower would mark a pivotal tipping point in the balance of world power whose volatility can be explained by Power Transition Theory, first pioneered by Kenneth Organski.⁸⁷ The theory states that a conflict of some type is more likely to

84. David Lai, *The United States and China in Power Transition* (Carlisle Barracks, PA: U.S. Army War College, 2011), 13.

85. Zhong & Shen, "America's China Scholars," 368.

86. Shen, "Cooperative Denuclearization," 179.

87. A.F.K. Organski, *World Politics* (New York, NY: Knopf, 1958), 43.

occur at the time when the rising power is about to surpass the established power. While rising powers inherently want to keep rising and assume the role of a regional or global hegemon, Organski argues, the current hegemons must decide whether to peacefully accommodate the new powers within the same sphere of influence or instead try to prevent the usurper from eclipsing its current rule. Since the hegemonic role objectively affords valuable strategic and economic benefits, along with a greater persuasive or coercive advantage over the rest of the world that allows a hegemonic actor to pursue its agendas and interests more freely, there are great incentives for the hegemon to attempt to hold onto its advantageous position and prevent the other nation from overtaking it.

In the context of great power relations, this type of power transition situation with a potential to spark conflict between superpower nations is known as a “Thucydides Trap”. The term was originally coined in 2012 by American political scientist Graham Allison as a reference to Greek historian Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War*, which describes a 5th Century regional conflict in Ancient Greece where Sparta, the established power, felt threatened by the rising power of its rival neighboring state, Athens.⁸⁸ The resulting fear and tensions escalated exponentially in a manner conforming to the predictions of the spiral model conditions favoring competition, ultimately prompting Sparta to pre-emptively attack Athens in an attempt to prevent Athens from overtaking Sparta and to reassert unequivocal dominance within its perceived sphere of influence.⁸⁹

This theory could apply to potential conflict between the US and China in any sphere in which they hold fundamentally incompatible interests and objectives, which are criteria that

88. Graham Allison, “Thucydides’ Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific,” *Financial Times* (2012).

89. Lai, *Power Transition*, 9.

characterize the tense East Asian security environment surrounding the North Korean nuclear crisis particularly well. A historical case analysis by Allison found that 12 out of the last 16 cases of major rising power-ruling power rivalries that threatened shifts in the worldwide balance of power did result in armed conflict.⁹⁰ This finding indicates that the tensions and conflict incentivized by Power Transition Theory do in a majority of cases hold true, fueling abundant pessimism that the US and China will achieve the same fate.

However, there are still notable exceptions, including the peaceful shift of global hegemony from Great Britain to the United States from 1865-1945 amidst gradual global systemic shifts including decolonization and the establishment of the US-led post-WWII liberal international order.⁹¹ Many of the same institutional and structural circumstances that allowed for this smooth transition, such as linkages within and integration into the international economic and political system, are still present in the current US-China context, as are favorable geopolitical and economic factors that make this situation even less readily comparable to the rough power transitions predicted by the Thucydides Trap theory alone. Therefore, although sensationalized conflict scenarios may seem increasingly likely in the current tense circumstances, the threat of a US-China war is in fact less salient than often imagined, especially since both sides demonstrate a capability to de-escalate the potential causes and a rational desire to avoid the potential consequences.

90. Graham Allison, "Thucydides Trap Project" (Presentation, Harvard University, Boston, MA, September 22, 2015).

91. Zhiqun Zhu, *War and Peace Between Great Powers: Power Transition in the Historical Perspective* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003).

2.6 Escaping the Thucydides Trap: Avoiding Conflict and Improving Trust through Cooperation

The majority of American and Chinese scholars specializing in US-China relations ascribe to the optimistic view that China and the US will be able to avoid a war at the point of power transition: out of 131 experts surveyed, 70.99% said that a US-China war in the next 20 years was “not likely” or “absolutely no,” 17.56% said that it was “hard to say,” and only 11.45% said that conflict was “likely” with none responding “absolutely yes.”⁹² When asked to rate the overall change in US-China relations in the next 5 years, however, only 10.69% of those experts said that bilateral relations would “get better,” while 26.72% said they would “get worse,” another 29.01% said it was “hard to say,” and 33.59% predicted “no change.”⁹³ These results indicate that while experts are pessimistic about tensions worsening between the US and China in the coming years, they do not think that it will ultimately result in conflict, thus demonstrating their belief in the US-China relationship as a power shift able to evade the Thucydides Trap.

According to scholars and international observers, there are many compelling reasons why the US and China will more than likely be able to counter the tide of history and avoid full-scale war. The Thucydides Trap notion when applied to the US-China context is itself anachronistic, not fully accounting for the dynamics of today’s globalized and multilayered international system including economic interdependence⁹⁴ and embeddedness in multilateral

92. Yang Zhong and Cai-Hui Shen, “Reading China: How Do America’s China Scholars View US-China Relations and China’s Future?” *PS: Political Science and Politics* 41, no. 2 (2008): 368.

93. *Ibid.*, 368.

94. Aaron L. Friedberg, “The Future of U.S.-China Relations: Is Conflict Inevitable?” *International Security* 30, no. 2 (2002): 12.

institutions⁹⁵ that have worked to decrease the occurrence of interstate wars since World War II. Even with the most recent conflict at a point of great power transition occurring between Great Britain and Germany at the start of World War I in 1914,⁹⁶ the abundant international institutions, partnerships and organizations established since then have provided unprecedented avenues to resolve disputes between nations in alternative forums to the theater of war. This line of reasoning, aptly labeled Institutional Theory, is often held in opposition to the power transition theory as the primary means of prediction for managing relations and conflict mitigation between great powers.⁹⁷ This greater interconnectedness not only creates more opportunities for communication but also elevates the potential of sanctions, diplomacy, and other non-military tools to achieve policy goals against states with equal effectiveness and lower costs than war. The US and China have indeed followed the pattern of engagement with increasing frequency when operating within this context: the two nations established the bilateral Security and Economic Dialogue annual meetings in 2009 to create direct high-level channels between their governments, mirrored by recent collaboration in the United Nations and other multilateral forums on issues of common interest such as North Korea. While these developments do show a conscious joint effort from the US and China towards coordination and interchange, the institutionalist theory framework on conflict mitigation still leaves ample room for destabilizing suspicions to take root or for fatal miscalculations to occur on either side.

The second fundamental difference between historical Thucydides Trap conflicts and the present US-China situation is that the US and China have different incentives, capabilities,

95. *Ibid.*, 13.

96. Allison, "Thucydides Trap Project."

97. Avery Goldstein, "Power Transitions, Institutions, and China's Rise in East Asia: Theoretical Expectations and Evidence," *The Journal of Strategic Studies* 30, No. 4-5 (2007): 639.

conditions, and considerations that make war unthinkable from a cost-benefit analysis standpoint. These factors are most commonly emphasized in the economic sphere.⁹⁸ Currently, China and America are each other's largest and second-largest trading partners. China holds trillions of US foreign debt, and US companies are heavily invested in China. This exceptional economic interconnectedness and the centrality of each nation to the growth and stability of the other's economy would greatly increase the short- and long-term costs of a conflict that cuts those ties, making US-China war not only tougher to fight but harder to justify. The vested financial interests in maintaining current bilateral ties also create greater domestic opposition to wars that would harm citizens' and companies' well-being, making such an outcome too politically invidious to be likely. Ultimately the degree of interdependence, economic and otherwise, between China and the US will make them more inclined to favor conciliatory approaches to their bilateral relations, since outright confrontation would be devastating for both and in the interest of neither.⁹⁹ These conclusions fit the characterizations of US-China relations prescribed by both liberal institutionalism, with its emphasis on security from interstate linkages within formal organizations and mechanisms, and defensive realism, with its emphasis on security from comparative power advantages.

While strong economic ties contribute to the US and China's active aversion to war, the school of realism indicates that it is more so the geopolitical context that strongly diminishes incentives to push war into the realm of plausible consideration for either side. As two geographically large nations separated across a long distance over the Pacific, neither the US nor China poses an immediate military threat to the other's mainland territorial integrity. Unlike the

98. Lim, "US-China Conflict: Impact on the Korean Peninsula," 124-129.

99. Lai, *Power Transition*, 4.

smaller European states in closer proximity to rivals during history's previous power transition periods,¹⁰⁰ the US and China thus have a more credible guarantee of their existential security. From the perspective of defensive realism – which, unlike offensive realism, argues that dominant states in the global system are driven by power concerns to primarily defend their dominant role rather than actively opposing potential rivals¹⁰¹ – this degree of guaranteed security makes conflict less likely, thus making tensions easier to overcome and trust easier to build in a lower-stakes security environment.¹⁰² Again due to the geopolitical situation of China and the US, offensive contingencies such as a Sino-American war could not be easily won by conventional military means, increasing the likelihood of escalation to nuclear war with other tactical options limited. The US and China both possess enough nuclear weapons to decimate the other; as with the Cold War logic of “Mutually Assured Destruction” and deterrence as peacekeeping paradigms, the US and China will ultimately continue seeking to avoid national obliteration by defusing flashpoints for conflict, knowing the risks are too great and the rewards too meager for war to be worthwhile.

While many of the unique circumstances surrounding the US-China relationship at this time of power transition are thus argued to be more conflict-mitigating than conflict-provoking as the Thucydides Trap might suggest, a peaceful scenario of China's rise is anything but assured. The possibility of existing and emerging tensions irrevocably escalating into war cannot be prematurely discounted, and policymakers in both nations do continue to incorporate an element of strategic hedging against the other party with preparation for conflict contingencies in

100. Allison, “Thucydides Trap Project.”

101. Mearsheimer, “Structural Realism,” 76-77.

102. *Ibid.*, 84-85.

mind.¹⁰³ However, both nations' leaders have also acknowledged a desire to avoid such scenarios and have stated their respective intents to build a more cooperative bilateral relationship. This is envisioned by Chinese President Xi Jinping as a "new type of great power relations" (新型大国关系),¹⁰⁴ of which the core idea is that greater US-China cooperation will be crucial in the two nations' efforts to escape the Thucydides Trap and reduce the security dilemma in which they currently operate in East Asia.

In connection with the theoretical framework presented in the preceding sections, the presence of dynamics that heighten US-China tension and suspicion (security dilemmas, power transition, and the Thucydides Trap) make security cooperation on critical issues of mutual interest like the Korean Peninsula all the more desirable. Additionally, since both sides openly recognize the urgent need to avoid the disastrous consequences of lingering distrust as predicted by these models and have stated their willingness to cooperate towards this end, the US and China seem to have indicated they are more likely to take action accordingly to foster trust, which lays the psychological groundwork enabling security cooperation and in turn strengthening the bilateral relationship over time through continued rounds of deeper and more frequent trust-building security cooperation. Therefore, although great power conflict may ultimately be unlikely for the US and China from institutionalist and realist perspectives, it is up to the two nations themselves to make engagement efforts to ensure that a spiral of greater cooperation rather than escalation prevails in East Asia.

103 . Shen, "Cooperative Denuclearization," 179.

104. Lampton, David M. "A New Type of Major-Power Relationship: Seeking a Durable Foundation for U.S.-China Ties." *Asia Policy* 16 (2013): 53.

The North Korean security crisis thus emerges as one arena in which bilateral policy coordination is simultaneously the most necessary and the most difficult due to the sensitivity and sanctity of matters concerning national security. However, even where there is apparent surface-level cooperation in US-China engagement on North Korea, the underlying tensions and conflicts of interest still inhibit the emergence of the higher-level trust needed to facilitate deeper-level cooperation when opposing strategic interests are at stake on the Peninsula. These circumstances make bilateral efforts towards engagement rather than isolation between both China and the US on security issues in the early stages of strategic interaction – an inclination so far indicated by both sides – the most essential factor for defusing conflict, rather than passively hoping that advantageous geopolitical and institutional factors can safely steer the rocky bilateral relationship into a conflict-free future.

2.7 Chapter Conclusions

Without full evaluation and understanding of how the tensions in the US-China bilateral relationship shape each state's foreign policy on the Korean Peninsula and give rise to the longstanding political stalemate over North Korea's nuclear program, we will be left with an incomplete understanding of one of the most dangerous and complex international security issues of the 21st Century. This chapter primarily elaborates on the links between US-China relations and the nuclear insecurity surrounding North Korea to demonstrate that these two factors' deep interconnectedness necessitates their close association in conceptual and policy approaches to the North Korean nuclear threat. In doing so, it demonstrates that the protracted Korean Peninsula issue within US-China relations should be understood as ultimately emblematic of the fundamental distrust between the US and China. This conclusion arises from the prevalence of

US-China distrust in creating theoretical and practical obstacles in the crisis, since this characteristic perpetuates the security dilemma and power transition dynamics that cause misalignment of US and Chinese strategic interests on North Korea. Although the US and China do also hold incentives for collaboration in this area – namely their shared goals of denuclearization and stability along with their stated aim of mitigating the likelihood of a great power conflict between them – the Korean Peninsula poses a paradoxical challenge in that the salience of US-China distrust in perpetuating the crisis prompts a greater need for US-China cooperation to resolve this mutual threat yet also makes this cooperation inherently more difficult. The implications of this strategic distrust for the feasibility, efficacy, and importance of US-China security cooperation on North Korea will be discussed in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 3

US-China Security Cooperation in Practice: Engagement on North Korea

Having established the centrality of US-China relations to the North Korean nuclear issue and identified the resulting theoretical and political challenges to bilateral cooperation, it becomes imperative to understand how US-China security cooperation could be initiated and sustained in this context to advance towards a resolution of the Korean Peninsula security crisis. Although the objectives of this security cooperation are determined by the parameters of the working definition outlined in Chapter 1, the form and feasibility of the ideal level of US-China engagement raise new questions: Under what circumstances might bilateral security cooperation on North Korea occur? What would such engagement look like in practice? What would be the conditions for successfully prompting repeated iterations of cooperation? Finally, if the North Korean issue is so polarized anyway, with American and Chinese interests directly at odds, then is deeper cooperation on such an important security matter even possible?

These questions can ultimately be answered with increasing certainty because US-China security cooperation on North Korea is not unprecedented. The largest-scale official dialogues on the situation were the Six-Party Talks (6PT) from 2003-2007, which, although not the first joint meeting on the subject, were notable for the earliest tangible emergence of patterns of coordination and compromise between the US and China regarding the Korean Peninsula. A decade later into the ongoing crisis, the newest round of United Nations sanctions against North Korea in 2016 not only demonstrates the lasting legacy of incremental steps towards cooperation but also an unprecedented convergence of US and Chinese efforts to intensify diplomatic pressure on Pyongyang. Selecting these two instances of US-China cooperation as the most

recent and significant examples within the history of US-China interaction and strategic policy formation in regard to each other on the North Korea issue – one the first historical instance of formal diplomatic engagement and high-level cooperation on the security dimensions of the Korean Peninsula conundrum, the other at the forefront of contemporary developments in the ongoing crisis – creates a framework for comparative analysis enabling an assessment of the impacts of security cooperation on the development of the Korean Peninsula security crisis.

This chapter begins by conceptualizing security cooperation as applied to US-China engagement on North Korea, proposing that the spiral model for reciprocal cooperation is both the most realistic and likely the most effective form. The chapter then examines two successful examples of US-China cooperation on North Korea – the Six Party Talks and the 2016 UN sanctions – as selected case studies, focusing on the most groundbreaking instances of further multilateral cooperation that were directly prompted by or influenced by the cases. In doing so, I determine that US-China cooperation on North Korea does prove successful in improving the frequency and depth of future security cooperation. Broader concurrent patterns of unrelated US-China collaboration on North Korea and increasing cooperation on parallel security issues are discussed in Chapter 4.

3.1 The Spiral Model for Cooperation

The spiral model for cooperation, or a “cooperation spiral,” is the model for improving coordination between key actors that is most suited to specifically assess security issues otherwise stuck in political inertia. Goldstein defines the basic premise as a scenario where “trust and confidence are built over time through incremental and reciprocal steps that gradually lead to

larger and more significant compromises.”¹⁰⁵ These small steps may not represent significant policy shifts or concessions at first, but are nonetheless important to develop trust and cooperative mechanisms between actors in the hope of signaling both sides’ trustworthiness as a partner for future joint efforts. The cooperation spiral was conceived as the equal and opposite foil to an “escalation spiral,” a more common construct in international relations scholarship. As discussed earlier in Chapter 2 in relation to the risk of such dynamics arising in the face of security dilemmas as with contemporary US-China relations, the escalation spiral model depicts rising tensions in security dilemma situations with the same tit-for-tat retaliation tactics as those observed in the cooperation spiral, except moving negatively towards militarization and aggression rather than positively towards engagement and détente.¹⁰⁶ If this escalation is the vehicle by which a conflict would most likely be started, the reasoning goes, then mutual engagement could have the opposite effect if operating under the same principles and patterns. In context, this illustrates that US-China cooperation is possible beginning with US engagement and security guarantees for North Korea to be matched by reciprocal Chinese concessions over each of five rounds, resulting eventually in successful denuclearization of North Korea.¹⁰⁷ In the diagram below, Goldstein illustrates this concept as applied to US-China relations on North Korea by presenting one possible series of theoretical steps that each side could take to build the missing bilateral trust over repeat interactions as needed to move towards the US and China’s common goal of denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula:

105. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 12.

106. Jennifer M. Lind and Thomas J. Christensen, “Spirals, Security and Stability in East Asia,” *International Security* 24, no. 4 (2000): 193.

107. Lyle J. Goldstein, “Time to Think Outside the Box: A Proposal to Achieve Denuclearization by Prioritizing the China-DPRK Relationship,” *North Korean Review* 12, no. 1 (2016): 93.

Figure 8.1 Cooperation Spiral: The Korean Peninsula 合作螺旋：朝鲜半岛

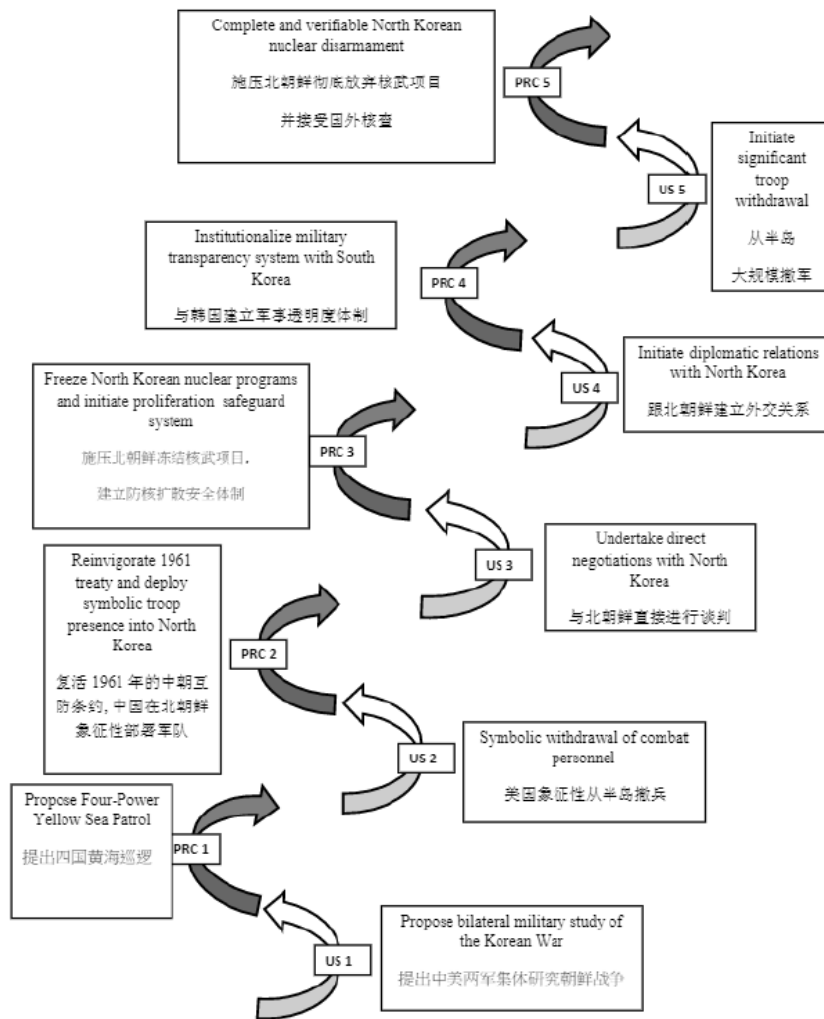


Figure 3.1: Example US-China Cooperation Spiral on the Korean Peninsula¹⁰⁸

The exact course of action proposed by Goldstein's simplified model includes significant security concessions that run counter to core US and Chinese interests as early as the second round of interaction, ultimately making such a scenario seem far-fetched and theoretically idealized rather than realistic given the strained tensions in China-US relations at present. However, his conceptualization of a cooperation spiral in practice on the North Korean nuclear

108. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 211.

dilemma nonetheless illustrates in greater clarity how initial low-stakes cooperative efforts can prompt reciprocal cooperation in a cycle that is exponentially expanding or deepening the level of security cooperation, fueled by a gradual increase in the strategic significance and trust-building benefits of policy concessions through collaboration between two or more parties with initially divergent stances and interests at stake.

No matter the model or expected form of interaction, this common theme of a heightened level of engagement is expected to continue and expand in the future, thus mitigating the likelihood of conflict according to the spiral model theoretical framework. The need for both China and the US to play central roles in any efforts to address the Korean Peninsula security dilemma has prompted the nations to preemptively recognize the importance of planning for long-term contingencies and building an understanding of each other's positions in the present.¹⁰⁹ Several notable instances of such collaboration have resulted between the two nations, namely the Six-Party Talks from 2003-2007 and the latest round of United Nations Security Council sanctions against North Korea in 2016. These high-profile instances of productive US-China cooperation towards North Korea are often touted as bright spots within an otherwise unsynchronized series of widely criticized failures by the US and China to overcome their bilateral differences on the issue. By comparison, as indicated in the introductory chapter of this thesis, the gradually improving frequency and level of cooperation between the US and China in responding to North Korea¹¹⁰ and its positive implications for bilateral trust-building according to the cooperation model are more often sidelined by the scholarly literature, as is the corresponding positive effect of successful collaboration on North Korea prompting greater US-

109. Lampton, "A New Type of Major-Power Relationship," 53.

110. Ralph A. Cossa, "A Rejoinder: Building 'Positive, Cooperative and Comprehensive' China-US Relations," *The International Spectator* 44, no. 2 (2009): 18.

China collaboration efforts on other security issues. The following sections will examine these two instances of security cooperation on North Korea first in terms of the circumstances that allowed for the US and China to pursue collaborative engagement, and then with an eye towards the additional mutual cooperation efforts undertaken after each event.

3.2 Case Study 1: The Six-Party Talks, 2003-2007

Circumstances and Outcome

The Six-Party Talks (6PT) marked a concession from the US with a reversal of Washington's former policy of non-engagement with North Korea. Delegations from the participating nations of the US, China, South Korea, North Korea, Japan and Russia convened in Beijing on August 27, 2003 to begin a series of six rounds of talks that ran until their indefinite suspension in June 2007. The talks were prompted by an international crisis following North Korea's revelation during meetings with the US in 2002 that it was pursuing a secret nuclear weapons program in violation of the nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which North Korea then dropped out of in 2003. At that point, North Korea itself demanded bilateral talks with the US in the hopes that such an arrangement would prove advantageous, offering a chance to extract legitimacy-enhancing concessions from the US more easily without China's presence while also addressing its perceived nemesis directly and reducing reliance on China as a mediator in the affair. However, the US continued to resist engagement altogether until North Korea first acquiesced to doing so via multilateral rather than bilateral platforms in the Six-Party Talks. This setting proved favorable because it afforded the US additional leverage against North Korea and a numerical counterbalance to China through the inclusion of staunch US allies in South Korea and Japan, which China unwillingly but eventually conceded to.

Although the very existence of the Six-Party Talks demonstrated an unprecedented level of initiative and attempt at collaboration between China and the US to make progress on the nuclear issue, coupled with an increasing number of parallel forums and attempts at negotiating through their differences outside of the formal talks, the talks ultimately failed to secure significant concessions from North Korea. There were only three formal international agreements to emerge from the Talks with significance for denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula: the “Statement of Principles” in September 2005, the “Initial Actions of the Implementation of the Joint Statement” in February 2007, and the “Agreement on Second Phase Actions” in October 2007.¹¹¹ The 2005 Joint Statement was notable in that the DPRK promised to abandon its nuclear weapons and nuclear development programs in return for US pledges of nonaggressive intent towards it, yet the remainder of the document’s six points simply echoed previous points of agreement among the parties and pledged to take action via “coordinated steps to implement the aforementioned consensus” at a future date.¹¹² However, the two subsequent expansions on the agreement did little to prompt action on these promises. Once again, the Six-Party Talks came to exemplify the difficulties in negotiating across apparently insurmountable disparities between the regional actors’ common objective of a non-nuclear North Korea and their different ideas of how to proceed towards this common goal, since each actor’s respective policies on North Korea were inevitably shaped by their own unique national and geopolitical interests.¹¹³ Beijing’s and Washington’s actions in the Six-Party Talks were also guided by their

111. Tae-Hwan Kwak, “The Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula through the Six-Party Talks,” in Tae-Hwan Kwak et al., *Rethinking Asia and International Relations: North Korea and Security Cooperation in Northeast Asia* (New York: Routledge, 2014): 9.

112. U.S. Department of State, “Joint Statement of the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks,” 19 Sept. 2005.

113. Snyder, “Instability in North Korea,” 23.

inherently conflicting respective national interests in acquiring a position of global leadership and maintaining hegemony.¹¹⁴ The parties generally maintained their positions throughout and never committed to any official statements beyond vague agreed points, and this uncooperativeness was among the reasons for the failure of the Six Party Talks to produce results and place limitation on North Korea's nuclear weapons program.¹¹⁵

Effects on Continued Cooperation

However, despite the apparent lack of surface-level success, the Six-Party Talks have indeed provided the needed impetus for increased US-China collaboration. Following the failure of the Six-Party Talks and North Korea's withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty in 2003, the United Nations Security Council was prompted to implement economic sanctions targeting North Korea's nuclear program in 2006 with Resolution 1695, the first such sanctions regime to successfully pass with the absence of a Chinese veto.¹¹⁶ This cooperation represented a compromise on behalf of all parties despite different end goals and viewpoints, a feat that has not since been repeated to the same extent amid more static diplomatic efforts towards North Korea.

Improved coordination outside of the dialogue forums also helped the US and China reach this moment of significant policy collaboration: during the Six Party Talks, there was a notable increase in direct phone communication between US President Bush and Chinese

114. Vivek Pinto, "Nuclear North Korea: Politics of Six-Way Talks," *Economic and Political Weekly* 42, no. 9 (2007): 741.

115. Tae-Hwan Kwak, "North Korea's Second Nuclear Crisis and Northeast Asian Security," in *North Korea's Second Nuclear Crisis and Northeast Asian Security*, ed. Tae-Hwan Kwak and Seung-Ho Joo (New York: Routledge, 2007): 28.

116. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1695, "Democratic People's Republic of Korea Sanctions," July 15, 2006.

President Hu to discuss responses to North Korea.¹¹⁷ Both sides also began to send emissaries for direct bilateral consultations with the other nation's leadership more frequently, with the Chinese in particular utilizing "shuttle diplomacy" throughout the early crisis months of 2003 to send envoys from its Foreign Ministry back and forth between Beijing, Pyongyang, and Washington, where they advocated for dialogue and worked to establish a mutually-agreeable platform for the parties to meet in talks that year.¹¹⁸ The two governments' respective foreign affairs organs also went to new lengths to communicate at a lower level: the Chinese foreign minister and US Secretary of State held an unprecedented 13 meetings and 32 phone conversations about North Korea during the 6PT period from October 2002 to February 2007, in addition to frequent consultative meetings between the heads of the US and Chinese delegations to the Talks.¹¹⁹ These factors proved crucial in the ability of China and the US to coordinate effectively during the 6PT.

The US negotiation team in attendance at the Six-Party Talks indicated that its members perceived a boost to US-China relations as a whole from the positive engagement and collaboration efforts during the talks, despite the Talks' nominal failure with only one agreement, two subsequent statements, and no tangible policy changes produced.¹²⁰ These improvements in communication and willingness to compromise contributed significantly to the success of US-China cooperation, both in the immediate context of the Six-Party Talks along with observable long-term increases in more intensive bilateral engagement over the 2004-2008

117. Glaser and Wang, "The North Korean Nuclear Crisis," 112.

118. Kyung-Ae Park, "North Korea in 2003: Pendulum Swing Between Crisis and Diplomacy," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 1 (2004): 142.

119. Glaser and Wang, "China-U.S. Partnership," 176.

120. *Ibid.*, 116.

period.¹²¹ Collaborating in a dialogue setting allowed both sides to test and adjust policies in relation to the other party, as the US eventually did during the 6PT talks by softening on an original policy of no unilateral engagement with North Korea that until then had stalled negotiations. The dialogue on security issues also provided a channel of contact to improve communication and gain information about the other sides' preferences and objectives that can then inform future cooperative efforts, a factor often touted as the key to trust-building between national leaders and policymakers even beyond the 6PT.¹²² Although the lack of trust between the parties was noted by observers as a key reason for the failure of the 6PT to produce more concrete action than just the three official statements published over the forum's four years of activity, this very engagement on the North Korean nuclear issue by virtue of participating in the 6PT itself was nonetheless an important step towards facilitating a security environment more conducive to deepening the US-China cooperation spiral set into motion on the Korean Peninsula. In accordance with the trust-cooperation linkage prescribed by this model, therefore, the 6PT was thus an important step towards beginning to build the essential trust that the US and China still lack.

For these reasons, the 6PT was in fact a valuable experience for both the US and China in improving the likelihood of successful cooperation in future rounds of engagement on North Korea, as well as making this very engagement more likely to occur.¹²³ Therefore, the fact that the 6PT was the first instance of visible US-China cooperation to engage North Korea and attempt to persuade it to denuclearize was the main significance of the Talks. While the 6PT

121. Jean-Marc F. Blanchard, "US-China Relations Under Bush and Obama: Fill in the Blanks or It's the Structure, Stupid?" *Issues and Studies* 49, no. 3 (2013): 48.

122. Glaser and Wang, "The North Korean Nuclear Crisis," 121.

123. Kwak, "North Korea's Second Nuclear Crisis," 36.

talks were inherently valuable in attempting security cooperation for the first time, the longstanding impact of this multilateral engagement was establishing a basis for strategic interactions with the potential to instill a greater level of trust in both parties, due ability of such formal engagement to foster a higher degree of mutual understanding of each party's intentions, interests, and concerns for the Korean Peninsula. This level of heightened cooperation while addressing a crisis in the North Korean case thus helped lay the groundwork for future US-China engagement efforts on the issue, including bilateral nonproliferation talks in February 2016 and meetings between the American and Chinese presidents Barack Obama and Xi Jinping on the sidelines of conferences such as the 2016 Nuclear Security Summit on March 31, 2016.

3.3 Case Study 2: United Nations Security Council Resolution 2270 Sanctions, 2016

Circumstances and Outcome

The US-China impasse over North Korea in the post-Cold War era has played out most prominently in the United Nations, the central international institution for multilateral dispute resolutions and legal retribution. The increased North Korean nuclear activity in 2016 and the anomaly of the United Nations successfully passing two punitive sanctions regimes highlight the importance of the UN Security Council as an indispensable existing forum for US-China engagement and cooperation on North Korea. These sanctions are significant because the US and China are both among the "Permanent 5" (P-5) Security Council members, who all have veto power over Security Council resolutions and can effectively block international action against North Korea attempted through Security Council resolutions. The Security Council is the only international body with the authority to enact multilateral sanctions regimes or otherwise use coercive force against countries; therefore, the P-5 members must all agree upon a resolution for

any attempts at coercing North Korea by passing binding international measures to be given the force of law and international legitimacy. China has historically used its veto to consistently shield North Korea from UN censure, with several notable exceptions to be further detailed in subsequent sections. This time, however, China has acquiesced to support the international community's increasingly tough sanctions regimes, which holds significant implications for both US-China cooperation on North Korea and the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis overall.

The UN Sanctions implemented by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2270 (UNSC Resolution 2270 or Resolution 2270), passed in March 2016 in the aftermath of North Korea's claimed test detonation of a hydrogen bomb in January 2016, were notable in that they were the strictest and most comprehensive sanctions regime to date. China's actions in support of these sanctions were unusual because China allowed the resolution to pass the Security Council without using its P-5 veto power as per usual on matters regarding North Korea. The resolution was originally viewed as a major concession from China, prompting speculation of changing Chinese attitudes towards North Korea. However, shortly afterwards, the sanctions faced criticism for containing loopholes that allowed China to continue flaunting international limitations and conducting trade with North Korea, even in goods considered off-limits under the sanctions such as raw minerals, coal and fuel.¹²⁴ These sanctions, too, therefore represent the common sticking point in US-China cooperation on North Korea: US accusations of China "cheating" in regulatory attempts and shielding its ally from international punishment.

The accusations and differences reveal a different Chinese conceptual view, demonstrating that even cooperation can have its problems. Chinese diplomatic officials' subsequent statements at press conferences indicate that China still emphasize the ineffectiveness

124. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2270, "Democratic People's Republic of Korea Sanctions," March 2, 2016.

of sanctions alone as a coercion-based approach to North Korea, specifically reaffirming China's continued preference for engagement over coercion and reiterates its commitment to multilateral forums on North Korea including resumption of the Six-Party Talks.^{125 126} This rhetoric is consistent with China's other calls to resume the 6PT and its UN voting record against sanctions on the grounds that they were ineffective, which were explained by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a press conference after the signing of Resolution 2270. These statements reveal the ways in which the Chinese interpreted the acts of cooperation and where they saw current value or potential engagement opportunities in the initiatives, which in turn offers insight into how US-China collaboration on North Korea can best be fostered on the grounds of mutual interest.¹²⁷

Effects on Continued Cooperation

The UNSC Resolution 2270 sanctions have prompted additional rounds of US-China collaboration, most recently with the Security Council approving extensions of the sanctions from March 2016 by passing Resolution 2321 on November 30 of that year.¹²⁸ These supplemental measures were designed to close several loopholes with exports under the previous sanctions regime and required the approval of the US and China to come into effect, demonstrating an enduring commitment to bilateral cooperation on North Korea supported by previous instances of cooperation. Despite the typical mixed messages and spotty sanctions enforcement on China's side, there is nonetheless a large symbolic value to the US-China

125. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Hua Chunying's Regular Press Conference on March 21," 21 March 2017.

126. Ibid., "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference on February 22," 22 Feb. 2017.

127. Ibid., "Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets the Press," 8 March 2016.

128. United Nations Security Council, Resolution 2323, "Democratic People's Republic of Korea Sanctions," November 30, 2016.

agreement on these sanctions. China's willingness to stand with the international community against the DPRK is a positive shift that signals China's opposition to a nuclear North Korea even if it is not willing to forego its own benefits from skirting sanctions or compromise its security priorities on stability above all else. To build on the communication developed during the formation of UNSC Resolution 2270 and coordinate the intensified sanctions obligations incurred by both parties, the US and China subsequently interacted in meetings between their Korean Peninsula specialist officials, bilateral arms control meetings, phone calls between the Chinese Foreign Minister and US Secretary of State, and multiple special Strategic Security Dialogue sessions from March through July 2016.¹²⁹ All of these arrangements provided further opportunities for enhancing cooperation on North Korea past the initial sanctions, thus improving the sanctions' effectiveness and fostering the foundations for a stronger working partnership on Korean Peninsula affairs.

The US and China's collaborative efforts towards the Korean Peninsula security crisis at the international and bilateral levels thus proved successful in building a stronger rapport for communication between the two great powers, setting the stage for possible future engagement on other national security arenas in East Asia. While such security cooperation in the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral forums with low enforcement capabilities against powerful institutional actors like China tends to be fairly shallow and low-commitment or unnecessary to enforce due to unilateral incentives driving compliance,¹³⁰ China's willingness to participate in security cooperation initiatives with the US does align with both its recognition of

129. Bonnie Glaser and Alexandra Viers, "US-China Relations: Friction and Cooperation Advance Simultaneously," *Comparative Connections: A Triannual E-Journal on East Asian Bilateral Relations* (2016): 34-37.

130. George W. Downs, David M. Rocke, and Peter N. Barsoom. "Is the Good News About Compliance Good News About Cooperation?" *International Organization* 50, no. 3 (1996): 380.

the importance of joint US-China engagement on North Korea and its broader pattern of increasingly participating in such cooperation. These types of engagement now will pay invaluable dividends in the future by facilitating trust-building and policy coordination to help bridge the political gaps between the US and China, in turn enabling more efficient joint responses to crises on the Korean Peninsula or other areas of mutual interest.

3.4 Chapter Conclusions

The US and China's previous bilateral engagement on North Korea is among the most extensive histories of cooperation for any security-based issue since the countries' restoration of diplomatic relations in 1979. The fundamental significance of the North Korean nuclear security crisis to the interests and foreign policy goals of each is also particularly high, making cooperation all the more necessary. In further investigating specific conditions for and outcomes of previous attempts at policy coordination towards North Korea, this chapter determines that the outcome of such cooperation attempts throughout the post-Cold War decades have had significant effects on both nation's foreign policies towards North Korea and each other. An analysis of bilateral meeting records, government statements, and independent reports shows that mutual engagement on the Korean Peninsula issue through dialogue forums like the Six-Party Talks or joint policy adoption like UNSC Resolution 2270 does lead to further bilateral cooperation in a variety of formats and levels. As a result, the communication and trust-building effects of the original occurrence are multiplied. This phenomenon thus indicates a higher likelihood of a positive perpetuation of the cooperation spiral towards increased security cooperation between the parties and increased trust-building through such cooperation that in turn begets even further and deeper cooperation, a dynamic that is indeed observed in US-China

strategic interactions on the Korean Peninsula and parallel security issue areas as detailed in the following chapter.

Chapter 4

Beyond Pyongyang: Prospects for Further US-China Security Cooperation

As demonstrated by preeminent US-China diplomatic engagement on the Korean Peninsula nuclear security issue over the past two decades – namely the Six-Party Talks and multilateral UN sanctions regimes – successful instances of “primary” cooperation do have the capability to foster the mutual trust needed to enable and promote continued “secondary” security cooperation towards North Korea. While these two case studies primarily elucidate the formal and informal US-China cooperation efforts begun in tandem with or in the immediate wake of these events, the positive cooperation spiral also extends to shaping a broader pattern of increasing security cooperation over time. This holds true even in the absence of major crises in North Korea’s nuclear development or purpose-specific multilateral institutions in response, notably contributing to an overall pattern of positive growth in US-China consultation on security affairs of mutual interest.¹³¹ Many policy analysts and high-profile government representatives involved in talks with North Korea, including former US 6PT Delegation Head Christopher Hill, have interpreted such developments as a corresponding boost to US-China relations as a whole.¹³²

In addition to indicating cooperation trends on the North Korean issue, the extent to which these patterns of US-China collaboration on North Korea can promote cooperative efforts on other security issues as well has significant implications for international security. Despite the current tension in US-China relations due to the Obama Administration’s “Asia Pivot” foreign

131. Finkelstein, “US-China Security Cooperation,” 17.

132. Glaser and Wang, “China-US Partnership?” 168.

policy strategy being perceived by China as a thinly veiled attempt to contain its rise, the general trend of the past two decades has been increasing US-China collaboration on security issues. This chapter will examine more broadly the role of US-China security cooperation towards North Korea in fostering (1) further sustained engagement on North Korea through alternate independently-initiated mechanisms, and (2) parallel engagement on three other security issues of regional and international concern to the US and China with the greatest discernible linkage to being influenced by US-China strategic cooperation on North Korea: Taiwan, military-to-military relations, and counterterrorism.

4.1 Continuing Cooperation on North Korea

Formal Mechanisms: The US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue

The momentum from collaboration on North Korea was likely instrumental in leading to the establishment of the new primary institutional forum for bilateral security dialogue between the two Pacific powers: the annual US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue (SED), a meeting between the top American and Chinese foreign policy and economic officials to discuss issues of mutual concern. Established jointly in 2009 to replace its predecessor organization, the Senior Dialogue and Strategic Economic Dialogues from 2006 under the Bush administration, the US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue has featured North Korean as a key agenda item for every year of its existence. A total of five meetings of the Senior Dialogue and Strategic Economic Dialogues were convened between 2006-2008, corresponding to an urgent need to enhance US-China communication capacities during the Six-Party Talks, while the new SED has convened annually for soon-to-be eight years. Building on the Bush administration's institutional design, which emphasized a functional focus on economic issues of mutual interest, the jointly

approved adjustments during the Obama Administration expanded the dialogues to cover a wider variety of strategic and security sectors.¹³³ The establishment of both sets of high-level consultative channels are indicative of an overall positive trend of US-China engagement and a greater consciousness of the mutual interest in increasing US-China security cooperation.¹³⁴

The Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis has played an increasingly prominent role in the SED discussions. It even “became a dominant issue during the dialogue” as early as the SED’s second annual conference in May 2010, which fell shortly after North Korea again raised tensions in East Asia by attacking and sinking the South Korean warship *Cheonan* on March 26, 2010.¹³⁵ These efforts for bilateral communication about North Korea and other security issues outside of existing forums or required communications show great initiative and desire to cooperate further from both parties, along with a level of recognition for the urgency of such efforts. The SED forum has sometimes proven instrumental in directly instigating security cooperation across a variety of issues: In 2011, the SED operated 48 new and continuing cooperation mechanisms, including breakout sessions on people-to-people exchanges, peacekeeping, climate change, and related topics.¹³⁶ However, on more entrenched and high-risk security issues like North Korea, both the US and China have little overlap in their agendas and priority issues for negotiations in these forums, causing the SED to often encounter difficulty translating noncommittal affirmations of common interests into concrete actions. This was the case for the second SED meeting for May 2010, where China and the US actively engaged in

133. Tang Seng Chye, “Changing Global Landscape and Enhanced US Engagement with Asia – Challenges and Emerging Trends,” *Asia-Pacific Review* 19, no. 1 (2012): 109.

134. Finkelstein, “US-China Security Cooperation,” 14.

135. Zhiqun Zhu and Courtney Fu Rong, “US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue 2010,” *East Asian Policy* 2, no. 3 (2010): 74.

136. Glaser and Viers, “Friction and Cooperation Advance,” 43.

discussion on North Korea's military provocations and reaffirmed their commitment to preserving peace on the Korean Peninsula. However, the two ultimately did not sign any agreement to this effect.¹³⁷ This outcome indicates that, in the absence of strategic trust that can allow for more meaningful policy coordination or deeper commitments on the issue, increasing attempts to deepen security cooperation between the US and China are still hindered by concerns on both sides about the goals and intentions of the other, as exacerbated by the security dilemma context of the two nations' power rivalry in East Asia. Thus, the SED forum may in some regards appear yet another arena for the US and China to retain opposing viewpoints on North Korea, but in fact the engagement opportunities provided by such a mechanism prove valuable unto themselves in improving communication to reduce the risk of strategic miscalculations on North Korea from either side.

Additional Dialogue Mechanisms

Besides promoting US-China security cooperation through the most prominent such forum, the Strategic & Economic Dialogues, the two nations have additionally set up many alternate mechanisms both formal and informal over the past decade. Although the SED talks are considered the primary platform for discussing North Korea as an issue area within its explicit jurisdiction, the US and China have altogether established almost 100 bilateral dialogue mechanisms – including more than 60 regular government-to-government dialogues between corresponding US and Chinese agencies¹³⁸ – that they increasingly rely on as channels to foster

137. Zhu and Fu Rong, "US-China Strategic and Economic Dialogue 2010," 70.

138. Lieberthal and Wang, "Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust," vi.

transparent communication, solve problems, and promote cooperation.¹³⁹ Among these are the US-China Asia-Pacific Consultations, a security dialogue focused on Asia regional issues that also featured North Korea on the agenda¹⁴⁰ for at least two annual sessions out of its five-year existence since May 2011.¹⁴¹ ¹⁴² The Asia-Pacific Consultations also serve as an opportunity to discuss objectives for rounds of US-China dialogue scheduled later in the year through the SED as well as the Strategic Security Dialogue and Consultation on People-to-People Exchange.¹⁴³

Furthermore, US-China policy coordination efforts towards North Korea have been facilitated by a pattern of increasing direct communication between American and Chinese government officials.¹⁴⁴ Some of this engagement comes as part of relatively frequent consultations on a selection of key regional issues, as with bilateral visits of the US Secretary of State to meet with top Chinese officials and discuss US debt negotiations and ASEAN Regional Forum affairs as well as the Korean Peninsula nuclear issue.¹⁴⁵ Other collaboration efforts were aimed specifically at addressing or responding to events involving North Korea. Such initiatives can involve meetings between the US and China Special Representatives for Korean Peninsula Affairs and DPRK Policy, the most recent such meeting taking place on February 24th, 2012 to

139. Bonnie S. Glaser, "US-China Relations: Managing differences remains an urgent challenge," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2014): 76.

140. Glaser and Viers, "Friction and Cooperation Advance," 47.

141. Glaser, "US-China Relations: Managing differences," 78.

142. Bonnie S. Glaser and Brittany Billingsley, "Xi Visit Steadies Ties; Dissident Creates Tension," *Comparative Connections* (2012): 33.

143. *Ibid.*, 34.

144. Zhao, "Co-Management Approach," 79.

145. Glaser and Viers, "Friction and Cooperation Advance," 37.

coincide with the US-North Korea Leap Day talks in Beijing.¹⁴⁶ In the event of crises on the Korean Peninsula, Washington and Beijing have shown an increasing willingness to arrange consultations between their highest foreign policy and national security positions since the March 2016 North Korean nuclear test. Although the culminating outcome of the US and China's efforts was to pass UN Resolution 2270 and implement a stricter sanctions regime against North Korea, Chinese foreign Minister Wang Yi met with US Secretary of State John Kerry and National Security Advisor Susan Rice in a week of private meetings beforehand to discuss the circumstances and agree on sanction terms, which eased suspicions and misgivings successfully enough to avoid a Chinese veto.¹⁴⁷ Although the Chinese Foreign Ministry maintained its longstanding position that negotiations should be the ideal approach towards North Korea and that sanctions remain an incomplete solution, the parties were nonetheless successful in utilizing informal channels to at least temporarily align US-China security policy on North Korea, gauge each party's incentives and interests, and take tangible steps on the issue. Given the trust-building, information availability, and crisis management benefits of this direct engagement, such bilateral communication is an essential component of developing more consistent US-China security cooperation towards North Korea, even if implemented at a smaller scale through leader-to-leader phone calls¹⁴⁸ or informal meetings at the side of international summits and conferences.¹⁴⁹

146. Glaser and Billingsley, "Xi Visit Steadies Ties," 35.

147. Glaser and Viers, "Friction and Cooperation Advance," 38.

148. Glaser and Billingsley, "Xi Visit Steadies Ties," 39.

149. *Ibid.*, 44.

4.2 Expanding Cooperation on Mutual Security Issues

Taiwan

The North Korean nuclear crisis is also interconnected with other regional security disputes, such as that of Taiwan.¹⁵⁰ China considers Taiwan a renegade Chinese territory that it seeks to eventually reunite with the Mainland, while Taiwan hopes to edge towards independence or preserve the tentative status quo of de facto self-rule. Taiwan represents the other major East Asian issue with the potential to become a flashpoint for US-China conflict due to opposing US and Chinese interests and commitments, mandating a special degree of caution in managing bilateral interactions on the matter. Chinese international relations scholar Shen Dingli notes that “from China’s strategic perspective, Taiwan and North Korea are intrinsically linked” because China’s disproportionate influence over North Korea relative to the US gives it a bargaining chip that it can utilize for leverage as a guarantee against unfavorable US actions in Taiwan.¹⁵¹ From this perspective, regardless of whether said linkage is intended by the Chinese or simply perceived by the US,¹⁵² China would be able to threaten to loosen its influence or weaken its engagement with Pyongyang to purposefully lose ground on the North Korean issue if the US moved to assist Taipei in any way that undermined Chinese security interests.¹⁵³

China would arguably be willing to prioritize the Taiwan issue at the expense of North Korean denuclearization efforts because, unlike the Korean Peninsula, Taiwan is significant not

150. Ching-Chang Chen, “Unwitting Bedfellows: Taiwan and the North Korea Problem.” In Utpal Vyas, Ching-Chang Chen, and Denny Roy (Ed.), *The North Korea Crisis and Regional Responses* (Honolulu, HI: East-West Center, 2015): 146.

151. Kwak, “North Korea’s Second Nuclear Crisis,” 106-107.

152. Chen, “Taiwan and the North Korea Problem,” 156.

153. Zhu Feng and Nathan Beauchamp-Mustafaga, “North Korea’s Security Implications for China,” in Carla P. Freeman (Ed), *China and North Korea: Strategic and Policy Perspectives from a Changing China* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015): 51.

merely as a question of security to China but as a question of national identity and historical legitimacy. However, this linked paradigm could also be exploited by the US against China in strategic competition, which could involve the US moving closer to Taiwan in an attempt to urge Beijing to take stronger action against North Korea if it wants to see a lesser degree of American influence over Taiwan.¹⁵⁴ Beyond diplomatic bargaining, the Taiwan and North Korea issues are also interrelated militarily due to the presence of US Armed Forces in Korea (USFK). The USFK's primary obligation is to deter and defend against any possible armed contingencies on the Korean Peninsula, making the US Pacific presence "held hostage" to a degree by Pyongyang in the sense that it cannot as readily and easily commit to involvement in the Taiwan Strait as it otherwise could.¹⁵⁵ Thus, to the Chinese, the risk calculus of assessing potential US military responses to hostilities or assertive actions on Taiwan hinges on North Korea's threat status and how much involvement is required of the US on the Korean Peninsula.

US-China cooperation on North Korea is already shown to involve a Taiwan dimension that fits with the pattern of positive engagement breeding further cooperation as predicted by the spiral model for security cooperation. Glaser and Wang note the importance of these interlinked considerations during a period of strengthened pro-independence sentiment in Taiwan during the early 2000s: after US President Bush promised in December 2003 to oppose Taiwanese President Chen Shui-bian's efforts to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait with talk of independence, the higher degree of trust from the Chinese in response "likely made it easier for [Chinese President] Hu to strengthen cooperation with the United States on North Korea,"¹⁵⁶ and

154. Justin R. Giovannetone, "Chain Reactions: Linking the Conflicts on the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan Strait," *American Diplomacy* (2006): 1.

155. Jaewoo Choo, "China's Defense Against Post-Unification Korea-US Alliance: Not at Yalu but Taiwan Strait," *East Asia* 33, no. 3 (2016): 199.

156. Glaser and Wang, "China-U.S. Partnership," 173.

was reported to have resulted in China increasing pressure on North Korea in negotiations for the Six-Party Talks.¹⁵⁷ Thus, in accordance with the spiral model for cooperation, strategic concessions on one side prompted reciprocal concessions from the other, demonstrating the type of exchange that can over prolonged periods of many such interactions produce mutually reinforcing dimensions of trust through cooperation and cooperation through trust.¹⁵⁸ Zhao also observes that China's desire to gain Washington's support on the Taiwan issue has given sufficient incentive for cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue such that Beijing has "moved from being a passive player to being an active one to demonstrate its cooperative goodwill to Washington," a pattern corroborated by China's increasing participation in UN sanctions regimes against North Korea in recent years compared to its previous habit of vetoing such resolutions.¹⁵⁹ In these ways, the potential for the North Korean nuclear security dilemma and the Taiwan Strait crisis to be viewed as two fronts of a larger US-China geopolitical rivalry¹⁶⁰ necessitates consideration of both actors' concerns regarding Taiwan may shape their actions and considerations towards North Korea.

Military-to-Military cooperation

Another area of mutual US-China security cooperation with the potential to influence their collaboration on North Korea is the growing connections between the American and Chinese defense-military establishments. This area of cooperation does not have a strong historical precedent for the US and China: although there was a brief period in the 1980s where

157. Feng and Beauchamp-Mustafaga, "North Korea's Security Implications," 51.

158. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 11.

159. Quansheng Zhao, "Moving Toward a Co-Management Approach: China's Policy Toward North Korea and Taiwan," *Asian Perspective* 30, no. 1 (2006): 79.

160. Lim, "US-China Conflict," 126.

the Reagan Administration reclassified China under the US Foreign Military Sales program to make it eligible for defense technology transfers and military training, these short-lived security cooperation attempts were terminated by the US in June 1989 in response to the Tiananmen Square incident.¹⁶¹ However, in the 21st Century security environment and alongside rejuvenating US-China ties, the potential for bilateral defense security collaboration is once again on the rise, especially in maritime affairs and non-traditional security issues. Despite the escalating tensions between China and the US in the South China Sea, global maritime commons outside of nationally contested areas are a neutral ground for engagement and could provide an arena to engage in trust-building joint exercises on issues of mutual US-China interest with a maritime component, including arms and narcotics trafficking, piracy, illegal immigration, and fishing regulation.¹⁶²

Furthermore, the US and China already recognize the need for such collaboration and do engage in cooperation in civil maritime security affairs between the US Coast Guard and its counterparts in China. A US Coast Guard Liaison to the US Embassy in Beijing reported that since 2005, “the civil maritime relationship has expanded in every front, with bilateral and multilateral efforts in port security, search and rescue, fisheries law enforcement and other areas.”¹⁶³ Continuing the trend of strengthening and building on these existing lines of cooperation and communication between the US and Chinese defense and military institutions offers significant potential benefits in terms of enhancing the nations’ capacity to coordinate on other mutual security issues as well. These forums for engagement can provide a platform for the

161. Finkelstein, “US-China Security Cooperation,” 7.

162. *Ibid.*, 32.

163. *Ibid.*, 9, 33.

US and China to conduct dialogue and share important strategic information about their intentions, capabilities, and preferences on bilateral concerns such as North Korea,¹⁶⁴ which would be in both parties' interests and is supported by this pattern of increasing bilateral security engagement. Finally, since the military-to-military cooperation in security-related capacities is an inherently sensitive matter under security dilemma conditions, it is one of the first areas in which collaboration is reduced during times of tension and one of the last areas to restore the full extent of cooperation after such incidents.¹⁶⁵ As a result, the capacity of US-China security cooperation to continue expanding in this area past its current extent is a positive indicator of the value of such cooperation as an indicator of at least incrementally increasing trust in the US-China relationship as a result of the trust-cooperation paradigm set into motion by previously described bilateral engagement on security issues in the Korean Peninsula and beyond.

Counterterrorism

In particular, efforts to increase US-China cooperation on security issues increased following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, regardless of the initially anti-China rhetoric of the Bush administration.¹⁶⁶ As part of its search to build an international counterterrorism coalition and address an increasingly hostile North Korea that Bush famously deemed part of an "Axis of Evil" in a speech following 9/11, the US turned to China to increase its strategic cooperation and include it in the US "War on Terror" efforts. During this period, the US did indeed engage China on terrorism-related issues and related security concerns to a greater degree than it had previously through a "two-way flow of senior leaders...as well as extensive consultations and

164. Kevin Pollpeter, "US-China Security Management: Assessing the Military-to-Military Relationship," RAND Corporation (2004): 85.

165. Lampton, "A New Type of Major-Power Relationship," 61.

166. Pollack, "China and the United States Post-9/11," 619.

interactions between officials overseeing global trade, export control, nonproliferation, the Korean Peninsula, and the War on Terror.”¹⁶⁷ This counterterrorism mandate, however, corresponded with increased suppression of Uighur ethnic minority rights by Chinese authorities in Xinjiang Province, drawing criticism from international observers that Beijing has used the cooperation as political cover for pursuing its own domestic security interests in preserving internal stability and eliminating perceived extremist threats along its western border.¹⁶⁸

The US sought to link these counterterrorism cooperation efforts to the Korean Peninsula issue explicitly: at the initial visit between President Bush and former Chinese President Jiang Zemin following the 9/11 attacks, Bush and the US administration made additional calls for greater Sino-American collaboration in areas of overlapping interest, specifically including promotion of stability on the Korean Peninsula alongside opposition to terrorism.¹⁶⁹ Besides just the US’s expectations of reciprocal security collaboration from Beijing, China also faced greater international pressure to take a stance on North Korea more consistent with its own stakes and interests in the issue as a result of the high-visibility US-China cooperation in the war on terror, which meant advocacy for a stricter Chinese North Korea policy more befitting a “responsible stakeholder” in the global system.¹⁷⁰ In response, Chinese diplomatic efforts to address the DPRK’s nuclear weapon development and continued missile testing through bilateral China-DPRK channels reportedly increased in subsequent years, with some of North Korea’s self-imposed restrictions on missile testing in the early 2000s “likely a partial result of Chinese

167. *Ibid.*, 625.

168. *Ibid.*, 626.

169. *Ibid.*, 617-618.

170. Byun and Snyder, “China’s Approach to North Korea and Northeast Asian Security Cooperation,” 156.

intervention.”¹⁷¹ These efforts in nonproliferation and arms control also reflect a growing effort on the part of the Chinese to join the US in encouraging and building nonproliferation regimes in Asia, which again was notably present in the Sino-US Joint Statement on South Asia in 1998 that addressed nuclear testing and weaponization issues following the nuclear tests by Pakistan and India that same year.¹⁷² These increasing attempts between the US and China to jointly address nonproliferation, counterterrorism, and other transnational strategic threats in diplomatic and military-to-military capacities are therefore indicative of the converging interests of both parties around common security issues and provide a valuable foundation of trust and engagement upon which to increase similar security cooperation towards North Korea.¹⁷³

The fact that the US explicitly sought to include China in a multilateral coalition on security matters thus stands as a positive indicator of a trend towards greater trust and willingness to facilitate further joint engagement on security issues within the context of US-China relations. However, this particular type of cooperation within the counterterrorism coalition as an international regime does not appear to reflect a particularly deep or institutionalized level of US-China cooperation; since China had unilateral incentives to voluntarily cooperate with the US in the War on Terror as an opportunity to gain political cover to pursue its own agenda of strategic repression, it was not likely to defect from this cooperative engagement anyway, regardless of whether or not it actually prioritized cooperating with the US.¹⁷⁴ Nonetheless, the US and China’s willingness to at least engage in strategic coordination

171. Evan S. Medeiros, “Rebuilding Bilateral Consensus: Assessing US-China Arms Control and Nonproliferation Achievements,” *The Nonproliferation Review* 8, no. 1 (2001): 132.

172. *Ibid.*, 133.

173. Banning Garrett and Jonathan Adams, “US-China Cooperation on The Problem of Failing States and Transnational Threats,” *United States Institute of Peace Special Report*, (2004): 1.

174. Downs, Rocke, and. Barsoom. “Good News About Compliance,” 380.

on this mutual issue does at least correlate to the cooperation spiral trend in terms of a gradually increasing number of security cooperation efforts.¹⁷⁵ As with the aforementioned US-China cooperation on parallel security dimensions such as military-to-military relations, even if no immediate increases in the depth of security cooperation are apparent, this type of strategic coordination is still significant for building mutual trust gradually through positive engagement on a smaller-scale level or on issues of lower strategic value to the US and China's core interests, which can foster cooperation on more valuable issues once deeper trust to allow such voluntary vulnerability through cooperation high-stakes issues has developed.

4.3 Chapter Conclusions

As the examples of interconnectedness between the North Korean nuclear crisis and the Taiwan Straits crisis, military-to-military relations, and counterterrorism cooperation demonstrated throughout Chapter 4 indicate, previous US-China cooperation on the North Korean crisis has had beneficial effects on fostering security cooperation and the conditions for increased trust-building in other dimensions of strategic security importance to the US and China outside of the Korean Peninsula. In addition, these parallel security initiatives have the potential to foster a positive cooperation spiral linking the trust and cooperation in these areas to increasing the trust between the US and China in respectively working towards a coordinated approach to the Korean Peninsula on the basis of this strengthened trust. Therefore, although it is still beneficial that increased US-China engagement as a result of the North Korean issue is spreading "horizontally" to foster continued engagement in other areas more so than "vertically" to constitute repeated and consistent patterns of trust-building and cooperation on North Korea,

175. Goldstein, *Meeting China Halfway*, 211.

the phenomenon poses a challenge to the US and China moving forward in developing their joint approach to North Korea, ultimately reflecting the prevalence of the strategic differences in interest and approach between China and the US that still inhibit deeper cooperation that could lead towards a resolution of the crisis.

Chapter 5

Conclusions and Next Steps: Security Implications in a Changing World

Despite common perceptions of North Korea as an insurmountable roadblock and invariable source of dissent in US-China relations, the preceding four chapters have demonstrated that the post-Cold War evolution of the Korean Peninsula nuclear security crisis has in fact given sufficient impetus for the US and China to engage in more frequent and significant security cooperation than before. The two nations' central roles in the issue, along with their mutual national security interests in bringing about a secure and stable Korean Peninsula, serve to position North Korea as a unique opportunity for breakthrough US-China security cooperation where strategic distrust and competition fueled by a bilateral security dilemma would otherwise hinder such engagement. Notable instances of constructive US-China engagement on North Korea – namely the Six-Party Talks from 2003-2007 and the United Nations Security Council Resolution 2270 sanctions – have indeed prompted further security cooperation on North Korea in their wake, and have also contributed to patterns of closer US-China engagement on other East Asian security issues in recent years. This increased cooperation represents a positive direction for US-China relations overall, ideally helping to foster communication and trust alongside facilitating greater policy coordination efforts to jointly craft a more stable international system.

These findings indicating that the Korean Peninsula can be conducive to US-China cooperation are particularly relevant moving forward in a tense yet evolving East Asian security context, with an increasingly nuclear-capable North Korea against a backdrop of concerned US allies and suspicious or accusatory rhetoric tainting the atmosphere for cooperation between the US and China. North Korea's recent developments and their implications point to the potentially

wide-ranging consequences of a Korean Peninsula nuclear dilemma or similar international security crisis allowed to grow unchecked in the space afforded by US-China distrust, making greater US-China security cooperation as established in this thesis invaluable to global security.

This chapter will seek to briefly situate increasing US-China security cooperation within the current and long-term trajectories for the Korean Peninsula and the US-China bilateral relationship. First, this section will summarize the main findings of this thesis in regard to building US-China strategic trust through security cooperation engagement on North Korea, reviewing the connections between these main takeaways and theories of international relations as well as evidence from key case studies of US-China security cooperation on both North Korea and interrelated security cooperation advances on other parallel issues. The second section will enumerate significant developments in these areas since the beginning of the Trump presidency in the US and assess the particular challenges and opportunities now facing the new administration regarding North Korea and China. The thesis concludes by outlining security experts' predictions for the Korean Peninsula's future and providing policy recommendations for further advancing US-China trust in relation to strategic dimensions of the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis, thus highlighting the role of US-China cooperation in promoting favorable outcomes and mitigating unfavorable externalities. The conclusion section as a whole serves as a final analysis of the net impact of US-China cooperation on North Korea for US-China relations and the implications of such engagement for regional and global stability. In doing so, the thesis reiterates the importance of the dynamics uncovered by addressing the trust-cooperation spiral of US-China relations and North Korea policy to contemporary international relations in East Asia.

5.1 A Brief Summary

The research and findings expounded throughout this thesis demonstrate that US-China engagement or neglect on jointly addressing the North Korean nuclear security issue not only affects the development of the nuclear crisis, but also the progression and future of the US-China bilateral relationship itself. Such joint collaboration on the Korean Peninsula issue is shown to provide the precedent and mechanisms to increase further bilateral cooperation in the context of both the Korean Peninsula and other interrelated mutual security issues, even if such cooperation is insufficient to overcome the shared suspicions and trust deficit that plague US-China relations as the current hegemon and rising power in world politics respectively.

The main point of analysis in drawing these conclusions throughout the thesis is assessing the intersections between security cooperation and strategic trust under a security dilemma dynamic exhibiting tensions between two major powers in the international system. The theoretical context of US-China relations within which the North Korea issue should be understood is characterized by the dynamics enumerated in Chapter 2: the combination of a pervasive US-China security dilemma and a period of possible great power transition has given rise to the notion of a “Thucydides Trap,” where power transition under a security dilemma such as the contemporary US-China situation is argued to lead to conflict. While other factors described by institutionalist and realist theory indicate that a US-China conflict might be less likely than commonly assumed, the mutual recognition of these dangers on the part of the US and China has prompted the parties to initiate low-depth but high-level security cooperation on the North Korean nuclear crisis, an area of notable overlap between US and Chinese strategic objectives.

The impact of this initial cooperation despite the presence of mutual distrust is to set the US-China engagement on North Korea within the context of a spiral model for strategic interactions in international relations, whereby actions towards the other party that demonstrate either tension and suspicion or trust and engagement in turn prompt reciprocal responses in a cyclical pattern of increasing intensity. When actions promoting security cooperation are taken within this spiral, the level of cooperation increases over time and is both facilitated by and formative of a corresponding increase in the level of trust between parties, thus propagating the spiral indefinitely to the benefit of bilateral relations as a whole. Therefore, Chapters 1 and 2 as a whole combine theoretical and practical perspectives of US-China cooperation with key concepts about the intersections between security cooperation and trust, which they then expand upon to contextualize the US-China political impasse surrounding North Korea and provide a critical assessment pointing to likely long-term gains and progress through increasing strategic trust.

Chapters 3 and 4 of the thesis draw upon this framework of analysis for US-China engagement on North Korea and apply the concepts of trust-cooperation linkages and cooperation spirals to instances of bilateral US-China cooperation in relation to the North Korea issue, both on the nuclear crisis itself and in parallel areas of US-China collaboration. As demonstrated by the notable examples of the Six-Party Talks from 2003-2007 and the UNSC Resolution 2270 sanctions in 2016, US-China cooperation is emblematic of strengthening trust through cooperation. These dynamics are also shown to be key instigators for further security cooperation and strategic trust-building in other areas of US-China cooperation on Taiwan, joint military affairs, and global counterterrorism efforts. These findings indicating the value of collaboration on North Korea in US-China strategic interactions as not an opportunity to work towards common goals of denuclearization and regional stability, but also an invaluable chance

to enable security cooperation that helps foster mutually-reinforcing dynamics of trust and cooperation into the future, which will have a positive impact for reducing US-China tensions and improving the bilateral relationship as a whole.

Thus, the thesis suggests a need to slightly recalibrate common interpretations of the role of the North Korean nuclear crisis within US-China relations: instead of focusing only on the persisting trust deficit as an obstacle to deeper-level US-China security cooperation, the gradual role of continuing even shallower, lower-level, and parallel-issue cooperation efforts as with the case studies and trend analyses analyzed in this thesis, should be acknowledged for the ways in which the overall level of strategic in bilateral US-China relations is gradually improving as a result of the increase in this US-China security cooperation on North Korea. Therefore, although a challenging trust deficit does persist in US-China relations, the trust-cooperation spiral on the North Korean nuclear security crisis forms a mutually-reinforcing process of increasing security cooperation that overall does have a positive effect on reducing the suspicions and tensions underlying the relationship and preventing greater mutual understanding, even if such cooperation has been unable so far to significantly counteract the factors perpetuating the US and China's political stalemate on North Korea.

5.2 Recent Developments: New Administration, New Direction?

Transitions between US presidents have often precipitated shifts in US dealings with both China and North Korea, and the nascent administration of President Donald Trump is shaping up to be a similar story. Whereas George W. Bush championed coercive non-engagement and Barack Obama pursued "strategic patience" with North Korea, Trump remains a wild card in terms of prescribing a cohesive ideology or policy approach towards these pressing security

concerns. Trump's seemingly anti-China comments on the campaign trail, including advocating for imposing up to 45% tariffs on imported Chinese goods even at the risk of a US-China trade war,¹⁷⁶ have so far been met with wary yet measured caution from Beijing in apparent acknowledgment of the president's penchant for unpredictability and his administration's relative deficit of diplomatic or policymaking experience.

Furthermore, by taking a phone call from Taiwanese President Tsai Ing-Wen in early December of 2016 – the first between American and Taiwanese leaders since the adoption of the “One China Policy” in 1979 – Trump threatened to significantly shift the status quo consensus in US-China relations upon which current relations and bilateral cooperation on issues like North Korea are made possible.¹⁷⁷ The One China policy is the basis for peaceful US-China-Taiwan relations and stability in the Taiwan Strait, under which the US agrees that Taiwan is part of “one China,” but leaves the term strategically undefined to allow for US engagement with both China and Taiwan.¹⁷⁸ However, the US does not have formal diplomatic relations with Taiwan; by interacting with the Taiwanese leadership in official capacity, Trump's call suggested partial recognition of Taiwanese sovereignty that US officials have meticulously avoided thus far for fear of antagonizing Beijing. The situation risked becoming a political roadblock in US-China relations until Secretary of State Rex Tillerson walked back Trump's comments weeks later by reaffirming US commitment to upholding the policy, an essential foundation for cooperative US-China engagement.¹⁷⁹

176. Winter Nie, “Why America Would Lose a Trade War with China,” *Fortune*, 21 Dec. 2016.

177. Michael Green, “How Bad Was Trump's Taiwan Phone Call?” *Foreign Policy* 23, no. 6, 3 Dec. 2016.

178. Lai, *Power Transition*, 115.

179. John Pomfret, “The Big Problem with a China Meeting? Trump Has no China Policy,” *The Washington Post*, 28 Mar. 2017

Trump's few actions so far on the North Korea issue have been similarly inconsistent, despite the rapid acceleration of North Korea's weapons testing since Trump's inauguration firmly establishing the Korean Peninsula as one of the thorniest and most urgent foreign policy puzzles his administration will be charged with tackling. As if to test the new president's reactions early in his term, North Korea has once again raised its provocations to new heights in 2017 by claiming to possess ICBMs on January 1st, launching a medium-range ballistic missile on February 11th, and firing four more of these missiles consecutively on March 6th, some of which landed within Japan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Sea of Japan. Tracing back to campaign promises, Trump previously stated that he would be willing to meet with the North Korean leadership in person, a potentially huge step towards restarting dialogues or at least reopening a source of direct information about the Kim regime through communication that had been closed to previous US presidents for decades.

However, a bilateral US-North Korea meeting scheduled for late February 2017 was called off by the US following the DPRK's mid-range ballistic missile launch into the Sea of Japan on February 11th, dashing the hopes of engagement advocates and Chinese foreign policy leaders who have long insisted upon dialogue as a more effective US approach than sanctions.¹⁸⁰ While a summit between Trump and Chinese President Xi Jinping from April 6-7, 2017 at Mar-a-Lago in Florida featured the increasing belligerence of North Korea as a top agenda item, the talks failed to produce any constructive discussion or concrete action plans for a US-China joint approach to North Korea despite the unscripted format designed to facilitate a more open exchange of ideas beyond restating foreign policy points.¹⁸¹ Additionally, Trump has utilized

180. Moore, "Chinese 'Duplicity' on the North Korean Issue," 21.

181. Stephan Haggard, "Donald Trump Meets Xi Jinping: What Did We Learn?", *NK News*, 9 April 2017.

social media and verbal platforms to criticize China for its lenience on North Korea and not leveraging the full extent of its supposed influence over the DPRK to pressure it on UN sanctions. Despite Chinese insistence that the nation's influence over North Korea is substantially lower than commonly perceived, this stance of blaming the lagging progress in denuclearization efforts on China is not new on the US side. This indicates that Trump has charted a course towards not only reinforcing existing obstacles separating American and Chinese approaches to cooperation on North Korea, but also creating new ones by undermining the delicate diplomatic basis for this cooperation itself.

5.3 Forward Predictions and Implications: The Future of the Korean Peninsula Security Crisis

With North Korea having demonstrated possession of nuclear devices with ranges including Japan and Korea while also visibly accelerating its technical prowess closer and closer to mobilizing ICBM-mounted warheads capable of striking US territory, the possibility of a fully nuclear North Korea is increasingly realistic. Indeed, it appears as though North Korea scholar David Kang's interpretation of the DPRK's drive for nuclear development as simply a "bargaining chip" intended to be traded away to extract concessions from international negotiation¹⁸² is no longer a plausible possibility: North Korea's nuclear weapons are real and dangerous, and its dictator Kim Jong Un has given ample indication of his refusal to surrender them completely.¹⁸³

182. Cha and Kang, "The Debate over North Korea," 225.

183. Jonathan D. Pollack, "North Korea's Nuclear Weapons Program to 2015: Three Scenarios," *Asia Policy* 3 (2007): 106.

In light of North Korea's financial and political resilience despite six sets of targeted international sanctions to date, its dogged insistence on enhancing its nuclear capability to pose a credible threat, and its indication of being on the technological cusp of actualizing this objective, North Korea appears well on the way to attaining the nuclear state status it seeks. Although North Korea has completed five nuclear tests and additional missile, rocket, and ICBM tests, its ability to sufficiently miniaturize its nuclear warheads for ranged deployment remains unseen. A feasibly nuclearized Korean Peninsula – even if the DPRK's weapons are not fully operable for medium- or long-range targets – is thus the most likely contingency to play out in the current predicament, regardless of any international efforts short of a miraculous diplomatic about-face to stringent and intensively coordinated multilateral action.¹⁸⁴

However unlikely, it may still be possible to utilize stricter sanctions to prevent North Korea from acquiring the technology for this final step or to persuade it to limit some of its nuclear activities in exchange for concessions like aid and security guarantees. The success of such negotiations, though, would still ultimately depend on the DPRK leadership's intentions and the degree of value it ascribes to its nuclear program, if anything short of absolute essentiality for national preservation and legitimacy. If North Korea is to be prevented from upgrading its symbolic possession of nuclear devices to a finalized operational nuclear deterrent, the US and China will both play integral roles in implementing the designated international approach. Whether coercive or interactive, the tactics must be adopted thoroughly by both the US and China with careful coordination and communication to reduce the risk of strategic miscalculation on either side. With the precedent of initially successful collaboration attempts like the 6PT and UN Sanctions as well as the established prospects of improved security

184. *Ibid.*, 108.

cooperation going forward, US-China coordination thus emerges as a critical component facilitate effective action towards the unique and multifaced challenged posed by North Korea's nuclear program.

As established by the results of the featured case study analyses in this thesis, a rapidly nuclearizing North Korea has generally facilitated greater US-China engagement by creating a greater necessity for bilateral cooperation, which prompts the nations to progress with further security coordination as predicted by the cooperation spiral model. However, it is less feasible to discern the degree to which this cooperation has so far definitively served to improve the conduct or quality of US-China diplomatic relations in practice. This is because the element of security cooperation on North Korea and related issues is difficult if not impossible to isolate from the myriad other domestic and international factors influencing the overall state of US-China relations over a given period of time, making significant analysis to support this conclusion inviable. Therefore, this thesis has avoided making the explicit argument that the North Korea security cooperation issue has led directly to tangible improvements in their bilateral ties that could be pinpointed as specific policies or exchanges. However, in a subtle and indirect manner, the increased bilateral communication and additional opportunities for interaction in diplomatic negotiation forums has afforded the American and Chinese leadership the opportunity to build trust and gain greater familiarity with their counterparts' thinking and policymaking processes. Given that mutual distrust and misunderstanding are key inhibitors preventing the US and China from building deeper collaborative capacities and engaging in cooperative measures on security issues of regional and international concern, these patterns of engagement on North Korea will likely prove valuable in working to gradually facilitate a warming of US-China ties to a certain extent despite not being a directly determinable cause of such developments. The positive

patterns of increasing US-China bilateral and multilateral engagement on the issue in the post-Soviet Union period, therefore, indicate that addressing the crisis will lead to more US-China dialogue and opportunities for deeper cooperation on North Korea and other issue areas in the future.

Although this type of wholesale warming of US-China bilateral ties or even a key breakthrough on mutual national security issues like Taiwan as a result of US-China cooperation on North Korea has yet to happen, such a situation might conceivably emerge amidst the escalation of the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis currently under way. If North Korea is able to develop deliverable ICBM-mounted nuclear weapons, its expanded range – which would likely include Hawaii or the US West Coast – would force the US to considerably alter its strategic calculus regarding North Korea, possibly causing it to value engagement and coercion strategies differently or prioritize different goals for the Korean Peninsula. While this shift in thinking could polarize the US and China's views and preferred strategies for the issue, making security cooperation on North Korea even harder than before, the change could also stand to bring Beijing and Washington closer together, depending in great part upon the nature of the realignment and degree of responsiveness of the other party. By raising the stakes of the US and Chinese responses to a more dangerous nuclear-armed North Korea, this scenario would also heighten the risk of conflict in reaction to misjudged decisions, further incentivizing cooperation.

In consideration of the challenges and opportunities for US-China security cooperation on North Korea outlined in this thesis and their significant interrelatedness with the state of US-China bilateral relations more broadly, the thesis thus arrives at several key factors that could be identified as policy recommendations for addressing the unilateral and bilateral concerns

inhibiting a coordinated US-China approach¹⁸⁵ to North Korea that can successfully advance the crisis towards both parties' desired outcomes of a stabilized and denuclearized Korean Peninsula.

First, the initial stage of implementing this agenda for further US-China strategic cooperation on North Korea would entail resuming multilateral forums such as the Six-Party Talks and expanding the institutional capacity and jurisdiction of key bilateral forums for discussing security concerns in relation to the nuclear crisis. It is fundamentally necessary to first maintain and expand these platforms for engagement if a greater depth of engagement is to occur. Diplomatic coordination would send mutual signals of willingness to interact and exchange views on the North Korean issue, thus providing an opportunity to appease strategic distrust through positive shows of intentions. These dialogue and policy coordination forums would also provide an arena for communication and crisis management to minimize the risk of strategic miscalculations in the face of unexpected crisis contingencies.¹⁸⁶

Second, the US and China should actively pursue cooperation in areas of lesser strategic contention, such as deepening military-to-military discussion and joint exercises as described in Chapter 4 or by deepening the extent of “win-win” economic cooperation by expanding trade and lowering barriers to trade and investment. This would offer a comparatively low-risk area in which to cooperate that produces immediate economic benefits for both and can be used to great effectiveness to spur the trust-building process in the general bilateral relationship. This higher level of strategic trust can then be transferred to fostering security cooperation on the North Korean nuclear issue.

185. Lim, “US-China Conflict: Impact on the Korean Peninsula,” 131.

186. Lieberthal and Wang, “Addressing U.S.-China Strategic Distrust,” 54.

Finally, the US and China should take measures to decrease their strategic hedging against each other in East Asia and instead seek to build an integrated regional security regime of institutions, both financial and political, that engage both the US and China in new institutions that are inclusive of both sides rather than exclusive. Exclusive institutions, such as the China-founded Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank or the formerly proposed US-led Trans-Pacific Partnership trade agreement, serve to heighten the security dilemma conditions and suspicions of foul intent between the two nations, while economic and security institutions specifically for East Asian regional issues featuring the US and China as equal partners would provide additional forums for trust-building and additional arenas in which to cooperate, ideally providing the impetus to develop the same dynamics for the North Korean issue.¹⁸⁷

Ultimately, the US and China adopting a coordinated approach in implementation of these steps will be critical. Since these prospects will become increasingly feasible¹⁸⁸ in the future after further rounds of security cooperation and trust-building through engagement on North Korea as predicted by the prevailing cooperation spiral dynamic, these policy recommendations bode well for building upon and contributing to the patterns of increasing US-China security cooperation and strategic trust in relation to the Korean Peninsula nuclear crisis.

187. Lampton, "A New Type of Major-Power Relationship," 66.

188. Pollack, "China and the United States Post-9/11," 627.

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