Risk Management: China’s Responses to the Potential Scenarios of the Korea Peninsula Unification*

Meirong QIU

Tongji University

Abstract:
The prospect of Korea Peninsula’s Unification is hotly discussed and debated in international academic circle, and so is China’s relationship with North Korea. The paper focuses on the potential scenarios of Korea Peninsula Unification and China’s possible response to the situation involved with its core national interests. Specifically, the paper researches on the possible contexts under which the Korean Peninsula gets unified, and China’s policy variations, alternatives, and military choice to the unification scenarios. Considering the complicated twists between South Korea and North Korea, the subtle changes taking place between China and the DPRK, and America’s pivot strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, it is meaningful to explore the potential patterns of the unification and the possible response from China. The more prepared for the worse, the better China can protect its national interests meanwhile maintaining the regional peace and security.

Key words: Risk management, Unification of Korean Peninsula, China’s intervention

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Sino-North Korean relationship could be characterized as “the special bonds,” though there currently is a little mutual distrust. Chinese assistance to and security protection for North Korea is a traditional action, possibly at any cost, even in a situation of contingency in North Korea, based on the geopolitical consideration, stability of the peninsula, and core interests of development and rising power morality. At the same time, China’s relationship with the North Korea is also experiencing subtle shifts, and the situation in the Korean Peninsula is becoming more and more complicated. Therefore, the paper tries to explore the potential scenarios of the Korean Peninsula unification and China’s possible measurements to manage the risks released from the unification to protect its national interests while maintaining the regional peace and security.

1. THE VIETNAM MODEL OF UNIFICATION: CHINA’S MILITARY INTERVENTION

The Vietnam model of Korean Peninsula Unification means the unification occurs in the manner of the DPRK’s sudden collapse caused by unilaterally invading of South Korea and the US, i.e., military conflict or war. It is not likely the US/ROK will wage a war against the DPRK. It is said that the US and China have an informal agreement that neither will intervene North Korea.1 But it is highly possible that some incidents or conflicts will happen in the Korean Peninsula especially that accompanied with covert invasion of the North by US/ROK. The case is not groundless rumor, which US/ROK have been preparing for several decades. A remarkable measure of the preparation is the joint military exercise.

Joint US/ROK military exercises have been a feature of the peninsula for decades. It is usually forgotten what an anomalous situation obtains. After all, the last Chinese forces left the North in the late 1950s, and there have been no substantial Soviet forces there since the aftermath of the Japanese surrender. The true intent behind the US troops stationed in the South Korea is to control this particular strategic location and prevent or contain China from challenging America’s predominance in Asia. In theory, Military exercises are a major instrument of geopolitics, as well as a political means. One of the interesting aspects of military exercise as a political instrument is that their real target is often not stated, and is sometimes denied. Sometimes, the joint military exercise was obviously aimed to China, although its stated purpose was to “Deter North Korea”. China also used military exercises to make a statement. Another function of joint military exercise which is closely related with the first one, is that such kind of “war-games” have a major political function in the exercise of US hegemony, which also can be used as statements of power or threat, and this has been marked since the Cheonan Incident of 2010.

1 “US, China Agreed Not to Send Troops to NK”, Korea Times, 15 August, 2009.
Joint US/ROK military exercises direct towards several emergent situations, including the collapse of the ‘contingency’ of DPRK. US/ROK particularly carry through the “invasion preparation” exercise, formerly known as Ulchi Focus. It is a mixture of computer gameplaying and actual, physical movement of troops and material, involving about 50,000 ROK troops and 10,000 American ones. Such exercises were being ‘toned down’ so they were not so provocative. According to an American official, “In the upcoming war games, troops from the Combined Forces Command (CFC) will end their counterattacks in Gaeseong, before reaching Pyongyang. Previously, CFC troops often advanced into Pyongyang or Yalu River in their simulated training exercise.” In addition, the military exercise also simulates how to control nuclear weapons in case of the US entering the North Korea. The Americans were represented by the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit, which, is training to seize nuclear and other assets in the event of an invasion of North Korea.

One of component of the exercise is to invade the North, other two respectively training for the massive reinforcement of US military in Korea, and for the securing of the ‘rear area’ of South Korea. Besides, joint military exercise also can wear down the DPRK military, which is driven to go on a higher level of alert just in case the exercise marks the beginning of the real thing. Besides the public military emergencies, US/ROK have developed a large number of secret plans to shape the orientation of the Korean Peninsula. The plans, OPLAN 5026, PLAN 5027, OPLAN 5030, and OPLAN 5029, ranging from conceptual to invade the North Korea. OPLAN 5026 has been described as constituting “surgical” air strikes against nuclear, government, and military targets in North Korea. OPLAN 5027 is, in effect, the American mirror image of the ‘retaliation’ that the North Koreans have threatened, though it goes much further. It is billed as a counteroffensive that would require some North Korean action to trigger it. OPLAN 5030 is different in that it is pro-active and does not require a specific North Korean action.

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2 The emergent situations includes (1) Genuine accidental incident. In a heavily armed part of the world this is always a possibility. (2) Pretext. It means to use the pretext so that both North and South Korea can justify their own operation, to be a respond to an invasion. (3) Preemptive strike. In theory, both North and South have an imperative to take such action to gain some advantage when face with perceived imminent attack. In practice, considering the disparity of power, it is more plausible for the North to make a pre-emptive strike. If the leadership in Pyongyang believes an invasion is imminent, they might reasonably calculate that pre-emptive action would be advantageous. (4) Overreaction to symbolic gesture. The DPRK often use symbolic gestures as a negotiating tool, or to convey a message of defiance when threatened. At the upper end of the scale, there have been attempted satellite launches, long-range missile tests, and nuclear tests. But the symbolism continues down the scale. (5) Maverick action. There is perhaps always the danger that unauthorized action by junior officers against the wishes and strategies of higher command, or by the military independent of the political leadership, can precipitate war. (6) Situational probability: the role of the Northern Limit Line seems have been preserved as a venue where clashes are likely to occur. (7) the idea of a collapse of the DPRK has become a centerpiece of Lee Myung-bak’s strategy.


move as a prerequisite. It seems to have two functions: one is attrition, the depletion of North Korea military resources through feints; and the other is to provoke a North Korean reaction which could then trigger 5027. OPLAN 5029 was predicted on a North Korean invasion, or some action outside the borders of the DPRK. It relates to events within the DPRK, which would not, in the normal course of international relations, be construed as a reason for invasion. It seems that much of the planning for OPLAN 5029 relies on OPLAN 5027. However, OPLAN 5029 also incorporates offensive actions that could not be rehearsed in the usual military exercises, which were portrayed as essentially counteroffensive.

For US, it is desirable to unify the Korean Peninsula under the control of South Korea and put US’s national interests on high priorities, if such unification is unavoidable. But it is unacceptable for China that the unification would occur in the manner of the DPRK’s sudden collapse caused by unilateral invading of the South Korea and the US, i.e., military conflict or war, without confirming or protecting China’s core national interests in the area.

The critical national interests that China is afraid of being endangered, include the disappearance of a vital strategic buffer zone without a definite borderline and a friendly neighbor on China’s border, the disorder of the peninsula and thousands of refugees entering into China, and even worse scenario of a military conflicting peninsula. From the traditional geopolitical perspective, as well as the socialist regime angles, North Korea plays an importance role of the buffer zone for China respectively. The Korean peninsula is surprisingly important to China because of its geopolitical location. The Korea war, which broke out in 1950, ended America’s post-Second World War demobilization and provided the impetus for the remilitarization of its society and economy. The US now accounts for half of the world’s military expenditure. Moreover, the Korea War also opened the salvo of the Cold War, despite of the collapse of the Soviet Union, which continues today in a different form. Besides, it is also the War that brought China into military conflict with the U.S for the first time in its history. China lost its valuable chance of reunifying with Taiwan because of American military intervention.

Related to its geopolitical location, there exists another potential strategic border issue, the overlapping territorial claims between China and the Koreans, which was ignited by Gaogouli controversy in July 2004, and spilled into the open over the history of the Gaogouli state that straddled the current border of China and North Korea. Chinese scholars believe the military expeditions sent over 1,300 years ago in the Sui and Tang dynasties to Gaogouli should be included in China’s internal wars of reunification. However, such views were attacked by many in South Korea who think this area was one of the three Korean States that gave rise to a unified country in the seventh century. Some Koreans even protested in front of the Chinese Embassy.7 The controversy and related incident made China afraid that a reunified Korea might

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7 *Asahi shimbun*, December 11, 2004, p. 16.
pose danger based on past control over parts of Northeast China and the presence of an ethnic Korean enclave.

The strategic value for the Korea peninsula also lies in its implication for China’s unification with Taiwan. A divided Korean peninsula consumes American troops stationed in South Korea, and decreases the military pressure from the US to China on Taiwan issue. In fact, since 1950 it has been difficult to separate the Taiwan and North Korean issues from Sino-U.S. relations. The U.S. decision to defend Taiwan against China arose in the context of the Korean War, and the Chinese decision to intervene in the war has been attributed to U.S. intervention in Taiwan. Richard Nixon and Zhou Enlai discussed this linkage on Feb.22-23, 1972.\(^8\) It arose again in 2003 when Taiwan’s Chen Shui-bian pressed for formal marks of independence and Chinese leadership sought US pressure to contain him.\(^9\)

The last but not least important strategic value that Korean peninsula possessed to China is the potential impact on the stability and prosperity of the Northeast Area of China. In the event of disorder of the Korean Peninsula, huge amount of refugees will flood into China, particularly into the Northeast area of China. “If the international community did not react in a timely manner as the internal order in North Korea deteriorated rapidly, China would seek to take the initiative in restoring stability.”\(^10\)

Based on the abovementioned factors, many people in China emotionally support China’s intervention when the unification process arises from the unilateral invasion by US/ROK, who has never relaxed their military preparation, and accompanying the collapse of the North Korea and the chaos on the Korean peninsula. Under this condition, particularly American troops entering into the North Korea, China will intervene militarily and seek to take the initiative in restoring stability,\(^11\) because the unilaterally entering into the territory of North Korea will severely threaten Chinese core interests above-mentioned. China is not inclined to lose the Korean buffer and make its border vulnerable. A strong, united Korea could raise the territorial issue with China and look for support to check the rising regional power. The worse and the more frightening possibility is the US troops advance to the Yalu River in alliance with a united Korea.

However, a second Sino-American war carries with it far more danger than the first. China is now much stronger militarily than it was in 1950, and while it is still weaker than the US, the balance has shifted in its direction. Then there are the economic implications. In 1950 China

was a minor economy, and with foreign economic engagement it had was primarily with the Soviet Union. Now it is a major economy with deep connections to the United States, to both Koreas, to Japan and the world at large. Furthermore, the potential scenarios of a unified Korea, an American ally, with American troops, and nuclear weapons sitting on China’s border, is not what China can permit. If China’s vital interests were ignored and the Chinese economy was faltering by the unification, China would respond to such unification radically by moving troops in to shore up the North Korea, a traditional ally.

2. FEDERAL STYLE OF UNIFICATION: CHINA’S CAUTION (CAUTIOUS) RESPONSE

If Unification means a kind of integration, or put it in another way, unification is the consequence of the warming relations between the North and the South, accompanied by accelerated commercial and other activities, China will respond deliberately.

China serves as a lifeline and benevolent provider for the North, it would leverage that role to influence Korean Peninsula Unification—an eventuality that Chinese leaders may determine they cannot allow. Through the 1990s, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun respectively resort to Beijing for support in engaging the North. China also welcomes the unification of Korea. History demonstrates that a unified and stable Korea makes China’s Northeast province secure, while a divided Korea leads to threats and war that China cannot easily avoid. If Korea is the crossroads of great powers, the NEA region is unstable. The division of the peninsula is becoming a matter for the two Koreas to resolve if others will support this. Besides, China’s rise provides a favorable external environment for this and for unification. In contrast, Japan fears this natural process, preferring perpetual separation. Russia’s views are more complex, looking to a multilateral framework as positive but also fretting that it would lose international status if a sense of threat from Korea faded without such an outcome. The US, in return, fears the unification’s impact on its strategic interests in South Korea and beyond.\(^\text{12}\) China doubts that other countries have the will to do what is necessary to find a comprehensive approach.

The most favorable version for China to support the reunifying of Korean peninsula is a reunification triangle of the two Koreas and China, in which the US, Japan, and Russia had supporting, but secondary roles. Soul would rely mostly on Beijing to influence Pyongyang, which would regard Beijing as insurance against a takeover by its far wealthier brethren. A gradual process with considerable balance between North and South would stand it in good stead. The Sino-Japanese-South Korean triangle could also gain new vitality through regional reconciliation following crisis resolution. The big prize for China is Japan as a partner in regionalism and a state not solely in the US camp. With the North Korean threat removed, Japan’s sense of alarm can be better addressed by China with improved South Korean ties to

Japan in a triangular context. Finally, with the energy in the lead, the triangle of Russia, China and South Korea can entangle the North in shared projects and become a force for regionalism. China has best positioned itself for the regional organization though Chinese doubt that they would tilt sharply back to the US and accept Japan as an alliance partner when conservatives regain power in Seoul.

The desired goal for China to accept and support reunification is a regional realignment with the South serving as the swing country with an impact on multiple triangle relations. For that purpose, China seeks the Korean peninsula’s gradual reunification as part of: (1) A security arrangement that reduces US hegemony, which is against the will of Japan and the US. (2) A firm territorial understanding that confirms China’s sovereignty over the Yanbian autonomous region in Jilin province; and (3) regional economic integration that affords China maximum openness. China relatively focuses on its current economic situations, identifying itself as a developing country, and fully recognizes its backwardness and the gap with the developed countries, in particular the United States, in national capacity. Therefore, China has taken the pragmatic approach mainly featured in the term, the “hide capacities and bide time” principle.

As to the Unification of Korea peninsula, China desire to a gradual process of reunification. In dealing with South Korea, as far back as 1992 when relations were normalized it had sought and received assurance that the South would not try to isolate the North. There was talk of a new diplomatic logic in China by 2003, accepting the era of the US as the lone superpower and cooperating with it as China proved itself to be a responsible great power and stressed its peaceful rise reassuring to neighboring countries. However, China treats the US as hostile to reunification through reconciliation and determined to keep the south dependent within an alliance triangle rather than a force for multilateralism. To prevent this from succeeding China must produce a compromise combining strategic stabilization and a long-term roadmap for reunification, recognize the dominant position of the United States in international relations, and pay more attention in its foreign policy to keeping stability in the region to avoid economic development be marred by friction in the Peninsula. From this perspective, North Korea has been viewed as a liability, destabilizing regional stability and hurting core strategic interests of China. And some prominent elite, such as Wang Yi, the minister of China’s foreign affairs, seeks to transform the relationship with North Korea into a normal “state-to-state” relationship, suggests the transformation in the process of reformulating China’s foreign policy is under way.

In the case of the Korea Peninsula’s Unification, particularly in a gradual integration manner, China would prefer much more cautious policies toward the United States and China’s intervention, taking reactive approaches to the initiatives of the United States. In fact, China has

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become the first big trader partner of South Korea, cherishes its economic development, and reluctant to satisfy North Korea’s brinkmanship and the consequence of the aggressive North Korea behaviors, which sharply increase regional instability and unpredictability, and become also a major hurdle to China’s development strategy. Hence, it must be avoided. After all, current situations are very different from those of the 1950s when China intervened militarily in the Korean War. And the level and depth of China’s interdependence in the world cannot be compared to the period of the 1950s. The consequences of entering into another Korean War would be heavy for China, as well as US.

3. GERMAN PATTERN OF UNIFICATION: CHINA’S MULTILATERAL RESPONSE

German pattern of Unification is highly possible. North Korea is now much weaker than the South, and South Korea also has a much stronger desire for victory, a victory in the sense of a Korea united by a southern absorption of the North, even without Chinese intervention.

The main instruments for the South Korea to unify the Korean Peninsula are economic sanction and military pressure. South Korea cannot go to war without American permission, and has to take into account China’ attitude, which presents the ROK with an important element of how to keep balance between China and US. All this would seem to make the thought of war to unify the Korean peninsula unimaginable. Thus, economic sanction and military pressure become desirable choices for the South Korea to reunify the Korean peninsula. Economic sanctions have several functions. One is subversion and erosion of the will to resist military intervention, or to force the targeted country to change its behavior. Physical and financial sanctions are a part of a wider range of weapons in what could be called “subcritical warfare”—war that stops short of hot war, the use of bombs and troops, but which shares the same objectives. Other functions of the economic sanctions include changing the policy of the target government, and destabilization. The first is openly admitted and discussed, and the second tends to be disguised.

Considering that North Korea’s strength sapped away by sanctions and the loss of its relationship with the Soviet Union and the socialist bloc, the balance of power had swung very much in favor of the South. In fact, the US and the South Korean officials have been quietly discussing a contingency plan for a drastic change in North Korea. Both for the South Korea and US, the short-term emergency response measures include securing the North Korea’s


16 Seok-gu Jeong, “President Lee’s Cheonan Gamble” Hankyoreh, 25 May 2010.
stockpiles of weapons of mass destruction, maintaining public safety, controlling borders, and providing humanitarian aid to displace North Koreans. Over the long term, it is critical to make plans for dealing with an alternative post-Kim Korea and to protect China’s strategic interests in that vital region of the world considering China’s political, economic, and human investment in North Korea and Northeast Asia over the past 65 years.

However, the effects of such economic sanctions are limited. Pyongyang regards sanctions and other warlike measures as showing insincerity—talking peace while waging a war. Instead, Pyongyang was playing tit for tat whenever Washington cooperated and retaliating when Washington reneged, in an effort to end hostile relations, to establish “peaceful coexistence” and normal diplomatic relations with the US.17 It still is.18 ‘Peaceful coexistence’ with the US has overwhelming importance to the DPRK, North Korea cannot achieve real prosperity without the US, which administers the global economy, make-up the security environment for the regime to persist. North Korea desperately needs normal and preferably good relations with the US. Unfortunately, “peaceful coexistence”, is primarily a one-way effort to end the hostility.

For the US, North Korea is a very minor matter. Even if there was an economic transformation in North Korea, its 24 million people would never be a large market for the US. The US can easily live without the DPRK. Besides, there are another two good realpolitik reasons for the US to refuse to negotiate peaceful coexistence with the DPRK. First, it would give a bad example to other small countries trying to preserve or establish independence. Secondly, U.S. needs a state of tension in East Asia to keep control of South Korea and Japan in the alliance against China. This is of huge, if unstated and unacknowledged importance. In the views of American, Korean policy is a subset of China policy.19 Peace in Korea would also make it much more difficult to justify its military presence in the region; or put it in another way, it would make obvious the fact that the military presence is aimed at China. This use of the purported ‘threat’ from north Korea is illustrated by the an authentic American high official, “Over the long-term lay-down of our forces in the Pacific, we are looking at ways to even bolster that, not necessarily in Korea and Japan, but along the Pacific Rim, particularly in Southeast Asia”.20 If North Korea, in Northeast Asia, is the threat, why build up forces particularly in Southeast Asia, other than to contain China?

20 “Pentagon Sees N. Korea as Rising Threat”, Chosum Ilbo, 28 January 2011.
And another question aroused by South Korea’s aim of reunifying by economic means or absorption of the North is China’s responses. Whatever policy of reunification that the South Korea adopted and has to be supported or permitted by the US, involve the possibilities of China’s position on the absorption of the North Korea. For China, its coral values, which associated with but not limited to the Korean peninsula unification through economic integration, include great power status, nationalism, stability, and economic benefit. Great power concerns mean that the US must not strengthen its position in the region with the possibility of containing China’s rise, while the chance for a multipolar regional security framework should not be missed. Nationalist objectives combine the concern for the legitimacy of socialism with leverage for the return of Taiwan. Another goal is to prevent instability that could spill into Northeast China. Avoiding the high costs of collapse and turning the North into an engine for increased development in Northeast China would prove economically beneficial.21

Another concern that China holds in the issue of Korean Peninsula unification is the distrust towards the South Korea. Chinese distrust is rooted in at least five causes. First, it is wary not only of the continuing alliance between the South and the US but also of the Western orientation of the security elite, and to some extent, the academic and economic elites in the South. Second, ties to North Korea are more important to China’s strategic goals than many academic experts in China concede. China fears the collapse of the North and the reunification under the leadership elected in the South, even as it sees benefit in a communist regime turning to China and raising its profile in peninsula affairs. Third, The sharp differentiation between security and economics and the presence of a preferred partner in the former reduces the South’s priority. Fourth, the problems between China and Japan are far more serious, including Taiwan issue, and South Korea is unlikely to take sides in any trouble linked to security. Finally, China finds it difficult to draw close to South Korea, perhaps acknowledging a clash of values that realists may overlook.

As a great power, China must take much more active steps in placing its interests and policy agendas in the international society. Although fully recognizing the importance of the cooperative relationship with the United States and seeking to avoid direct and all-out confrontation against them, China is also willing to take more risk in disputes and confrontation to gain more space for Chinese national interests of development.22 Sure, there are many in China who warns that North Korea is a strategic liability. However, China also benefits from the rapidly expanding trade and investment activities between China and North Korea along the China border, indicating a process of economic integration underway. The large ethnic Korean population on the Chinese side of the border also provides a fertile soil to nurture this process


of gradual economic integration in the border areas. It is also important to note that China doubt the orientation of a unification Korean peninsula. Even so, these points do not counter the reality of China’s historic claims to the Korean Peninsula and that China views the North Korea as a strategic buffer against a unified, pro-American Korea.

In case of a German pattern of Unification, or in a North Korean contingency, China is likely to favor playing more active roles as a great power in the region in dealing with the issue, as well as in protecting its national interests, although, it hopes to avoid direct military intervention on the Korean peninsula. China will oppose a unilateral intervention in North Korea either by the United States or South Korea but to promote multilateral interventions, such as by the United Nations, if necessary.

4. TENTATIVE EVALUATION

The core element of China’s responses to the Korean Peninsula unification is the trends of Sino-Korean relations. There are various views about the Sino-North Korea relations. One faction suggested abandoning the burden of the North. After all, the Mao Era had ended, China was now integrated into the world community and the North had little in common with it. Harsh judgments of the North as inflexible accompanied suggestions for abrogating the treaty that obliges China to come to its defense. Another faction insisted that China must help the North. In contrast to intellectuals and foreign affairs experts who might have been looking for a wedge to advance reform at home and global agenda, leaders preferred a realist response without moralistic overtones and responsive to party and military veterans unwilling to cast the North aside. The label socialist matters, but even more important the balance of regional power depends on standing by the North. Its collapse would resonate against the deeply imprinted image of how collapse of the Soviet Union had inflicted a powerful blow to socialism. Not only could the new united Korea be distant from China, but also Japan would be emboldened, as would be the United States.

The debate about Sino-Korea relations reached a peak in the summer of 2004 when some scholars reassessed the Korean War as doing harm to China’s foreign policy and warned against repeating that mistaken choice and others criticized North Korea’s regime for its human rights and nepotism and for not showing gratitude to China for its economic assistance. It is not a secret that such atmosphere is relatively open in the academic circles. Above all, strategic

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thinking centered on the impact of China’s handling of the crisis on relations with other countries, notably the U.S., and the danger of failure in this diplomacy. However, even as some in China argued that North Korea was a “liability” that should not hold it hostage, the majority continued to see it as a “buffer zone” that must not be let go or even a potential “gangplank” from which China could be attacked. Furthermore, we also see more uncertainties and frictions between China and the North in the near two or three years because the North, under the young Kim Jong-un’s leadership, incessantly provokes intensive atmosphere, ignores China’s non-nuclear demand, and complicates the Sino-North Korea relations. It is conceivable that the frictions will continue in the near future when China’s president Xi sends a signal of no-nuclear weapons to the North through the common declaration made with the visiting American state of Secretary, Kerrey.

Though the trend of Sino-DPRK relationship is subtle, it is sure that China will respond to Korean Peninsula Unification according to the strategic context in this region. The most important thing for China’s policy towards Korean Peninsula is to maintain stability and peace. Besides, it is also desirable for China that Korean Peninsula would unify by peaceful means. Third, in case of regime change, North Korea must not have an anti-Chinese regime. And if possible, a pro-Chinese regime should be induced. Fourth, the escalation into an international military conflict should be avoided, otherwise it would harm China’s development. Fifth, it is possible to manage the risk of the unification through the UN, if the Korean issue cannot be resolved by bilateral negotiations. Sixth, in contingency, China opposed a U.S. intervention in the Korean peninsula, sought bilateral compromise and agreements with South Korea as well as the United States.

Any future unification of Korean Peninsula, is unlikely to change China’s perspective of its traditional role played in the Korea Peninsula, particularly with North Korea. China has reasonable consideration to resist direct or indirect challenges to its preferred status quo without any other safeguard to its critical national interests. A possible corollary of this is that there are those in the “world’s biggest and most experienced military” who think that now is the time to give China a bloody nose and what better place to do it than in Korea. It is also China’s dilemma in the Korean Peninsula situation: how to cope with US resistance to its peaceful rise while keeping Korea situation under its control. This is now compounded by North Korea’s provocation, which may bring things to a crisis. China and the US compete, and cooperate, in many fields of endeavor and many parts of the world. Any of those contact points has the potential to become a scene of confrontation, and worse. In the past, it used to be thought that if there were to be a trigger for a US-China clash, it would be Taiwan. With the improvement of cross-strait relations between Beijing and Taipei in recent years, that prospect has faded, to be replaced by the situation in Korea, as well as in South China Sea and in Diao Yu land. Even if

the two big powers try their best to avoid such crisis, the Korean situation has its own dynamics, which may bring the two countries into conflict. In fact, every year since 2002 the Department of Defense has submitted a report to Congress on the “Military Power of the People’s Republic of China”. It seems likely that there are those in the Pentagon and elsewhere who must consider that, if a war with China is inevitable, then the sooner it takes place the better. Similarly, if war is on its way, it would be sensible to have it in a place of one’s choosing than to leave that to fate, or to the enemy. So, the US is contemplating various strategic wars with China, a common version will be that South Korea and Japan, two well-equipped military concentrate on China whereas the US has other wars it is fighting or needs to be prepared for around the world. Under this condition, a war in Asia resulting from the unification of Korean peninsula remains thinkable.

REFERENCES


