

Another North Korean Paradox: Divider and Unifier



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Nautilus Peace and Security Weekly Report—Contributor's blog entry for DPRK.

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Isolation threats don't seem to bother North Korea. They are increasingly isolating themselves and yet bringing other countries together in new ways. North Korea is paradoxically a divisive issue and a unifying force.

The U.S. shored up relations with its Pacific allies. The first Marine rotation through Australia arrived about a month ago. In the last month, Secretary Panetta met with his Japanese, Korean, Filipino and Chinese counterparts. The order is important: allies first.

North Korea was clearly a main topic at the U.S.- Korean and U.S.-Japanese meetings. The North Korea threat led the Republic of Korea and U.S. to create new meetings (e.g. Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue) and for the first time, discuss topics such as developing contingency plans in the event of a North Korean nuclear strike and including new topics such as space and cyber. And now Japan and Korea agreed to share limited military intelligence for the first time since Korean liberation from Japan.

If things go badly on the Korean peninsula, U.S. and Chinese forces will likely come into direct contact. Despite military professionals on all sides and the best of intentions, when that many armed forces operate in close proximity and an uncertain environment, there is a high probability something will go wrong.

However, Chinese often say it is politically unpalatable for them to discuss DPRK military contingencies. Zhang Liangui's article offers initial glimmers of China placing Chinese interests first

and not blindly supporting DPRK. It is entirely normal to discuss reacting to a natural disaster in a fictitious country closely resembling North Korea. Much of the military planning, coordination and deconfliction measures are the same whether responding to a natural or manmade disaster.

General Liang Guanglie, the Chinese Minister of Defense is visiting the U.S. with a sizable delegation, including the Commander of the Shenyang Military Region, and the Chief of Staff of the Second Artillery (China's Strategic/Nuclear Rocket Forces - roughly China's Strategic Command). They would be key to finding and safeguarding nuclear weapons. And they're meeting in Washington. To be sure, one of General Liang's main purposes in coming at this time is to make clear the Chinese stance that the South China Sea issue is extremely important to China.

The Strategic and Economic Dialog listed fifty outcomes. Paragraph 17 directly relates to North Korea. Paragraphs 4, 6, 7, 12, 13, 24 and 34 are North Korea related to varying degrees. Even though this is a bi-lateral document, the topical areas are inclusive and foster multi-lateral regimes.

North Korea affects many dimensions of international life--the risk of war, energy insecurity, poverty, the role of civil society in conflict resolution in Northeast Asia, the future of the Chinese Communist Party. Indeed, it simultaneously affects so many vital issues that solutions to the problems posed by North Korea are intricately related. Although the international community is divided on exactly how to address each linkage, North Korea is uniting unlikely partners in new patterns of international interaction to address these issues.

—[Roger Cavazos](#), NAPSNet Contributor

*The **Nautilus Peace and Security Weekly Report** presents articles and full length reports each week in six categories: Austral security, nuclear deterrence, energy security, climate change adaptation, the DPRK, and governance and civil society. Our team of contributors carefully select items that highlight the links between these themes and the three regions in which our offices are found—North America, Northeast Asia, and the Austral-Asia region. Each week, one of our authors also provides a short blog that explores these inter-relationships.*

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