Strategic Environment for Kim Jong-Un’s Visit to China: Three Emphases

 The NAPSNet Policy Forum provides expert analysis of contemporary peace and security issues in Northeast Asia. As always, we invite your responses to this report and hope you will take the opportunity to participate in discussion of the analysis.

Recommended Citation

Roger Cavazos, "Strategic Environment for Kim Jong-Un’s Visit to China: Three Emphases", NAPSNet Policy Forum, August 08, 2013, https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-polic--forum/strategic-environment-for-kim-jon-uns-visit-to-china-three-emphases/

by Roger Cavazos

August 08, 2013

I. Introduction

Roger Cavazos writes that any visit Kim Jong-un will make to China will have a broader bi-lateral component and a lesser Six Party Component. "China always looks for activities that address multiple concerns simultaneously. Three possible emphases that push multiple goals include: some kind of trade agreement, people to people exchanges and broaching the subject of a comprehensive security settlement."

Roger Cavazos is a Nautilus Institute Associate and retired US military intelligence officer.

The views expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Nautilus Institute. Readers should note that Nautilus seeks a diversity of views and opinions on significant topics in order to identify common ground.

II. Policy Forum by Roger Cavazos

Strategic Environment for Kim Jon-Un's Visit to China: Three Emphases. 战略环境：三推

Li Yuanchao, China's Vice President, visit to North Korea likely signified relations between the allies are recovering, but they are still far from the halcyon days of yore. It is conceivable that as Li Yuanchao delivered Xi jinping's personal message, part of the message included some basic outlines of what kind of strategic environment best supports a future Kim Jong-un visit to Beijing. It may have also addressed a few proposed deliverables or areas to emphasize. In that spirit and in a desire to spark a broader conversation, here are three possible fields to emphasize during any Kim Jong-un visit to China.

FEAR OF FLYING

Kim Jong-un needs to travel abroad. He's been happy, or at least willing, to send high-level delegations abroad, but Kim himself has not travelled since assuming his new role. The Young Marshal's first international visit almost certainly has to be to Beijing. Going anywhere else for a first visit would strain an already "normal" relationship and almost certainly upset North Korea's ally, largest trading partner and greatest guarantor of North Korean security other than the Korean People's Army. He realistically cannot travel to Russia, Vietnam, Cuba, Iran, et cetera without first going to Beijing.

The longer he doesn't go to China, the fewer friends and the fewer possible economic partners North Korea will be able to make. The more North Korea is stuck in an economic holding pattern, the greater the economic distance between North and South and the more expensive any possible unification becomes which only reinforces the status quo and paradoxically increases North Korea's incentive to compete with South Korea in military strength since there is no hope of equaling South Korea's economic or soft power in the short term.

Some focused on Kim Jong-il's famous fear of flying, but the practical consequence was he was never quite able to build the same kinds of relationships that South Korean Presidents so ably developed when South Korea's strategic environment changed for the better.

THREE EMPHASES 三推

Any Kim Jong-un visit will have a broader bi-lateral (China and North Korea) component and a lesser Six Party Component. China always looks for activities that address multiple concerns simultaneously. Three possible emphases that push multiple goals include: some kind of trade agreement, people to people exchanges and broaching the subject of a comprehensive security settlement.

China, and the world, would be delighted to discover that Kim Jong-un has consolidated his regime to the point that he is willing to experiment with economic reform. China's own experience has shown that it is possible to push economic reform while deferring political reform until the time is right. A burgeoning North Korean economy supports China's development plans for Northeast China namely Liaoning, Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces. China's Communist Party has staked much on their ability to deliver increased living standards.

Quality of life is not only dictated by economic trade. Both China and Korea possess attractive cultures that are more or less popular abroad. The Hallyu (韩流 or Korean Wave) phenomenon and Confucius Institutes are two very visible manifestations of the best of both cultures. China and North Korea have several exchanges, but nothing approaching those levels. Kim Jong-un's visit

provides an opportunity to open the bridges of people-to-people contacts and institutionalize them in a way to survive or dampen all but the most extreme political swings.

By far, though the biggest impediment to better relations is North Korea's perception of its security environment. A Comprehensive Security Settlement addresses security concerns of the entire region. It will neither be easy nor quick, but it is do-able. Moreover it provides a framework developed collaboratively in the region so it can easily fit under the rubric of "new great power relations" and/or the Six Party Talks.

The six reversible steps in a Comprehensive Security Settlement include:

- Termination of a state of war;
- Creation of a permanent security council to monitor compliance and decide on violations;
- Mutual declaration of no hostile intent;
- Provisions of assistance for nuclear and other energy;
- Termination of sanctions; and
- A Northeast Asia Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone.

Such discussions with North Korea on Kim Jong-un's first official visit to China are certainly within the remit of leaders in both countries. However, the initial discussions will not It will neither be easy nor quick, but it is do-able. Moreover it provides a framework developed collaboratively in the region so it easily fits under the rubric of "new great power relations" as well as the Six Party Talks. The name is less important than having the region conducting strategic dialogue.

III. REFERENCES

[1] M. Halperin, "Promoting Security in Northeast Asia: A New Approach," NAPSNet Policy Forum, October 30, 2012, at: https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/promoting-securit--in-northeast-asia-a-new-approach/#ixzz2XHFoj0em

[2] Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, "Kim Jong Un meets with Vice President Li Yuanchao, 27 July 2013 at: http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/zxxx/t1062374.shtml

[3] Li Yuanchao leads Chinese delegation to call on North Korea [Chinese language]. 25 July 2013 at: http://news.cntv.cn/special/lycfc/index.shtml

---

IV. NAUTILUS INVITES YOUR RESPONSES

The Nautilus Peace and Security Network invites your responses to this report. Please leave a comment below or send your response to: nautilus@nautilus.org. Comments will only be posted if they include the author's name and affiliation.

View this online at: https://nautilus.org/napsnet/napsnet-policy-forum/strategic-environment-fo--kim-jon-uns-visit-to-china-three-emphases/

Nautilus Institute
608 San Miguel Ave., Berkeley, CA 94707-1535 | Phone: (510) 423-0372 | Email: nautilus@nautilus.org