

North Korea – China relations after Kim Jong II

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North Korean leader Kim Jong-II's death on 17 December, officially announced last Monday (19 December) attracted worldwide attention. Asian stock markets fell sharply, the leaders of South Korea and Japan cancelled public activities to discuss measures, Japan established a crisis management team while South Korean troops went into a state of emergency, and major world leaders have issued a statement on their position in the shortest possible time. The world has basically slipped into "mortal politics" today, Kim Jong-II's death led to the rare scene where one man's death has had global consequences.

Kim Jong-II's death caused world attention for two reasons. First, the DPRK's international strategic position, is the world's most popular spots to be involved in, with the direct interest of, China, the United States, Russia and Japan at stake; second, Kim Jong II was a dictator who solely wielded operating power over North Korea for decades, both internal and foreign matters were decided by him, so it is natural that there is concern about the situation in North Korea after his death, and how under the rule of the new leaders of the "hermit state" would affect the country's relations with other countries in the future.

Although South Korea and Japan had taken emergency response measures, including alerting the military guard to prevent incidents, I hold steadfast in my belief that, because of the death of Kim Jong II, the Korean peninsula may enter a period of relative calm, mainly due to the leadership of North Korea's new leader. Third generation heir Kim Jong-un will probably need several years to consolidate power and during this period there may exist several centers of power within high-levels in the North Korea regime, and will not be able to stand against external provocation (of course this does not rule out the possibility of unexpected external events which could lead to process of North Korean internal consolidation). To countries deeply involved on the Korean Peninsula affairs like China, Japan, the United States and Russia as well as other countries, the next few years will be a waiting period and a testing period. Needless to say, the major powers are in the assessment of current situation after Kim Jong-II, how to interact with and affect North Korea's new leadership and to form a strategic goal to benefit from its relations with the DPRK.

The DPRK's foreign relations strategy will remain unchanged.

For China, Northeast Asia is now the core of their national interests and international strategy. Under this area of China's strategy is to try to maintain the fragile balance of interaction between the countries of the region. In Northeast Asia "stakeholders", including North Korea, Korea, and Japan, and have an interest in Russia and the United States, are ambitious and full of combat effectiveness and nationalist sentiment. World War II and the Korean War caused Northeast Asia to be in the situation they are in and a heavy price will have to be paid to change the status quo. For the sake of its own interests, China has to prevent any country from attempting to change the status quo, whether the country is the United States or North Korea.

Will Kim Jong-Il's death and the succession of Kim Jong-un fundamentally affect the implementation of the strategic goal of China? China's biggest worry in this regard is that the new North Korean leadership will have better ties with the United States, Japan and South Korea, but form a more hostile regime in the northeast border of China. Even if things are not so bad, if the new leadership cannot consolidate power, then the situation on the peninsula will become uncertain and China will struggle with the adverse situation.

What can be said for sure is that no matter how the internal situation in North Korea turns out to be, there will not be any substantial changes in its external relations strategy in North Korea for the foreseeable future. If North Korea does, it would mean that it would give up on nuclear weapons, have significant openness on both the political and economic fronts as well as protection of human rights. In the long term, this will be the future of North Korea; it is the only way the North Korean people can truly benefit and eliminate the problem to bring peace to the region.

However, even after Kim Jong-Il, the North Korean regime has no incentive to do so. The Kim regime maintained its rule for many years by fabricated lies and fear and brainwashing its people, this was particularly so during Kim Jong-Il's time. To the US, Japan and South Korea and the exercise of political and economic liberalization, were denied by the general policies of Kim Jong-Il and Kim Il-Sung. However, Kim's son Kim Jong-UN ruling legitimacy from his father, either emotionally or in the safeguard his father's rule. Even if Kim Jong-Il lost, as long as North Korea's rulers still comes from within the ruling, it still does not make a fresh start on foreign policy.

China should guide the implementation of reform and the opening up of North Korea.

In addition, regardless of North Korea's development of internal politics, it will not change the country's close political and economic relations with China. Both from a historical point of view and from the geographical point of view, no country can help to North Korea as much as China can, If North Korea and China become enemies then North Korea will not be able to get any external support. In this sense, China does not have to worry about a post Kim Jong-Il North Korea not having solidarity with China.

The strong need for China's support for North Korea under the third generation Kim may just show the opposite. Media reports said Kim promised to enable the people of North Korea within three years, "drink the broth", showing his desire for economic development. The best way for North Korea leadership to develop its economy without causing a risk of political collapse, is to learn from China, in a gradual pace of reform and opening up, growth and truly improve the lives of its people.

The stark realism of considering issues in the context of international relations, to maintain the core elements of existing structural balance in East Asia is to maintain a division of ROK-DPRK situation, including the ideological confrontation of the two countries. In the divided Korean peninsula, a repressive, closed, always put on a militaristic posture of North Korea makes it a natural enemy of the United States. North Korea could become a counterweight to United States' global strategy, as well as a buffer between China and the United States. As long as the United States can feel facing the threat of North Korea, it must seek China's cooperation, which naturally means an exchange of conditions.

However, such an approach would require China's unconditional support for the family dictatorship of North Korea, at the cost of the Korean people's well-being and basic human

rights. Such an extreme foreign policy in the long term would be akin to shooting your own foot, because the Korean people won't put up with such terrible totalitarian rule, would one day overthrow the tyranny, and because of China's long-term support for Kim, attracts the hostility of the Korean people and will probably hurt China's geostrategic interests.

From the perspective of China, both from the universal human rights to China's national interest is to improve the lives of the Korean people in terms of, China should actively guide North Korea's new leadership in improving people's livelihood under conditions of a market-oriented reform, and be more politically open, gradually expanding the Korean people's freedom and human rights. If China can lead to the external forces of North Korea's political and economic direction, making North Korea a prosperous and friendly neighboring country, in Northeast Asia to produce a "win-win" situation.

To achieve this goal China needs to more or less change its long-standing claim in its "non-interference in internal affairs" principles, while continuing to (or increasing) aid North Korea at the same time, in all its aspects, to inculcate ideas of reform and opening up in North Korea at all levels, and cultivation of sympathy and support of reform and opening up in the North Korean cadre forces. A quite good reference in sight in this regard, is the relationship between United States and Korea.