Korean peace building and Sino–US relations: an “Ad-hoc” concert of interests?

Hideya Kurata

Department of International Relations, Center for Global Security National Defense Academy, Yokosuka, Japan

ABSTRACT

The Korean Peninsula is perceived by both the United States (US) and China as the region where they could cooperate despite other disputed problems. The Four-Party Talks were proposed amid a crisis in the Taiwan Strait in 1996, and the Six-Party Talks were convened during the controversies over the subsequent Iraq War in early 2000s. The author argues whether this “Ad-hoc Concert” still survives as an analytic framework for examining Sino–US relations on the Korean Peninsula, notwithstanding the new dimension of collective security as a result of Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea)’s nuclear issues with respect to the United Nation Security Council (UNSC). This paper first examines the Chinese initiatives in the nuclear crisis in 2016–17; it makes an assessment of the developments of the triangulated US–China–DPRK relationship after Chairman Kim Jongun referred to the “denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” in early 2018. In the successive Summit meetings that Kim Jongun held with the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea)’s President Moon Jaein, and US President Donald Trump, the declaration to end the Korean War dominated those in the triangulated relations. This paper also reviews the controversies related to that declaration and their implication for Sino–US relations. Those implications will provide the basis for an analysis of Sino–US relations on the Korean Peninsula following a speech delivered by US Vice-President Mike Pence in October 2018 that was widely seen as a declaration of a “new cold war” between the US and China.

1. Introduction: an “Ad-hoc concert” under challenge

In retrospect, there seems to be no uniformed guiding principle in China’s diplomacies toward the neighboring regions (zhoubian waijiao), resembling a patchwork of respective security policies tailored to the independent security background of the respective surrounding region. Under the “New Model of Major-Country Relations between China and the United States (U.S.)”, Xi Jinping advocated during his Vice-Presidency, China’s military power and economic influence have significantly grown over the last decade, most prominently in the South China Sea and among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states. Indeed, Xi attempted to reshape the basis of its great power relations and...
consolidate China’s own sphere of influence while also limiting the risk of direct military confrontation with the US. It has produced what Glenn H. Snyder described as a “stability-instability paradox”: efforts to decrease the probability of great power conflict increases the probability of minor or indirect conflicts. However, and in contrast to China’s enhanced regional influence, Beijing’s diplomatic efforts and increased economic clout so far have failed to provide it with any greater political and strategic leverage over the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea) despite the huge level of assistance it has provided to Pyongyang and their shared goal of dismantling East Asia’s network of the US security alliances.

China’s capacity to directly shape security arrangements on the Korean Peninsula since the Korean War, moreover, has lacked both a direct military presence and at times any formal involvement in North Korea’s attempts to negotiate a peace deal directly with the US. Following the People’s Volunteer Army’s withdrawal from the Peninsula in late 1950s, China later lost its institutional foothold in the Korean peace process when it withdrew its representative to the Military Armistice Commission in 1994 in support of the DPRK’s plan to exclude the Republic of Korea (ROK, South Korea) from its efforts to conclude a peace treaty with the US replacing the 1953 Military Armistice Agreement (MAA). Pyongyang’s “New Peace Arrangement” proposal pushed aside the 1992 “Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-aggression, Exchanges and Cooperation between North and South” (the “Basic Agreement”) that pledged an inter-Korean peace agreement, demonstrating Pyongyang’s intent to sideline the ROK and China from peace negotiations with the US. An inter-Korean peace agreement, in the DPRK’s view, would give China an equal footing in its negotiations on the Korean peace process with the US and lead to Washington and Beijing’s de-facto joint management of peace-building on the Korean Peninsula.

China, disadvantaged by not only by Pyongyang’s efforts to deal directly with Washington but also the presence of the US forces in the ROK, supported the Four-Party Talks proposed by Washington and Seoul in early 1996, which aimed to build an inter-Korean peace regime in defiance of the DPRK’s “New Peace Arrangement” plans. Then, following the collapse the US–North Korea Agreed Framework on ending the DPRK’s nuclear weapons program, China chaired the Six-Party Talks which also included the ROK, Japan, and Russia. The international consensus now was that a regional response based on an inter-Korean peace regime was essential to the denuclearization process. Consequently, China’s influence in the successive multilateral talks grew, most notably in the Six-Party Talks chaired by China, where only issues pertaining to the two Koreas were tabled and also decoupled from other bilateral tensions between the US and China: The earlier Four-Party Talks, for example, also had proceeded despite the then heightened tensions in the Taiwan Strait while the Six-Party Talks were convened during strong Chinese opposition to the Iraq War.

Thus, by the early 2000s China–US relations had reached a point where both were willing to set aside their differences on other issues, including human rights, in what had become an ad-hoc framework of cooperation for peace; a framework that had slowly evolved out of Beijing and Washington’s engagement in the multilateral talks.1

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1Snyder, Deterrence and Defense, 23; and Takahashi, “Kakuheiki wo Meguru Shomondai to Nihon no Anzenhosho”.
2Kurata, “The International Context of North Korea’s Proposal,” 259–61.
3Kurata, “A Conceptual Analysis of the Six Party Talks,” 14–15.
4Kurata, “Obama Seiken no Taikitchesosen Seisaku”; see also, Wang, Chaohe Wenti yu Zhongguo Jiese; and Wang, “Chaohe Wenti: Zhongmei Liangguo de Liyi Junheng yu Zhanlüe Boyi”.
For China’s leaders, their key priority has been to shape the Peninsula’s future not only in ways that will realize their broader strategic ambitions in the region, but also minimize the risk of direct military confrontation with the US as China continues to pursue those ambitions. Speaking in the US in 2013, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi highlighted Beijing’s ongoing preoccupation with the potential for war with the US by noting that of the 15 cases involving emerging great powers since the 15th century, confrontation and war between the emerging and established great powers occurred in 11 of them. Wang then went on to imply the Six-Party Talks as an example of how China and the US could avoid falling into conflict via the so-called “Thucydides’ Trap”.

Since Donald J. Trump’s election as US president in November 2016, Sino–US relations have been undergoing a transformation with the US taking a much harder line on trade and China’s South China Sea claims in particular. In an effort to reduce tensions with the US over these issues, China has refrained from mentioning its “New Model of Major Country Relations” in policy statements and speeches and also avoided reference to its Nine-Dash-Line (Jiuduanxian) justification for its widely disputed territorial claims in the South China Sea. However, as this paper argues, the Sino–US “Ad-hoc concert of interests” on the Korean Peninsula remains a valid framework for understanding both China’s policy toward the Korean Peninsula and the conditions Beijing requires for its ad-hoc policy approach to continue. This paper first explains Chinese policy during the 2016–17 nuclear crisis and the summit talks that followed in early 2018 involving Kim Jongun, ROK President Moon Jaein, and US President Donald Trump. It then examines how and why Sino–US cooperation on the Korean Peninsula has continued despite the deterioration in the broader bilateral relationship signaled by US Vice-President Pence’s October 2018 warning of a looming Cold War between China and the US.

2. The overshadowing of regional proposals: UN sanctions

2.1. Wang Yi’s proposals: UN sanctions extended to Civilian sectors

China continues to face a dilemma over its responsibility to promote nuclear non-proliferation as both a Nuclear Weapon State of the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Permanent-Five (P-5) member on the one hand versus its own strategic interest in continuing to participate in the Korean peace process while avoiding any destabilization of the DPRK and also, therefore, any weakening of Pyongyang’s role as a foil against US power in North East Asia on the other. Following China’s support of UNSC Resolution 1718 (S/RES/1718), introduced after the DPRK’s first nuclear test in October 2006, economic sanctions levied against the DPRK were confined to banning the export of items relating to the development of nuclear weapons. However, this move was seen by some as an indication of China’s increased willingness to take a harder line on the issue of North Korea’s nuclear programme. In an effort to further deter North Korea from conducting additional nuclear tests, the US government has proposed that sanctions be lifted in return for a declaration from North Korea renouncing its nuclear programmes, a move which has been met with skepticism by both South Korea and China.

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5Toward a New Model of Major-Country Relations between China and the U.S. Although Wang Yi did not explicitly refer to the “Thucydides’ Trap” that Graham Allison argued throughout the speech, the historical lesson that he cited is thought to be ascribed to the following articles available at that time; Allison, “Thucydides’s Trap Has Been Sprung in the Pacific”; Allison, “Obama and Xi Must Think Broadly to Avoid a Classic Trap”. For a detailed analysis of Wang Yi’s speech, see, Kurata, “Xi Jinping’s ‘New Model of Major-Power Relations’ and South Korea”. Regarding Allison’s collective work exploring the theme of “Thucydides’s Trap”, see, Allison, Destined for War.

6Hudson Institute, “Vice President Mike Pence’s Remarks on the Administration’s Policy Towards China”. Hereafter, all quotations from Pence’s Speech are derived from this website.
ballistic missiles and Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in addition to military munitions and luxury goods. Despite Article 41 of UN Chapter VII (non-military measures) allowing member states to interrupt economic relations and sever diplomatic relations, UNSC resolutions to counter the DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic missile developments did not include civilian goods due to China’s opposition.

However, the DPRK’s alleged hydrogen bomb test in January 2016 and subsequent presumed derived version of the “Taepodong-2” missile test the following month led to the P-5’s imposition of harsher sanctions. UNSC Resolution 2270 (S/RES/2270), which imposed sanctions affecting the DPRK’s civilian population, was adopted with China’s vote in response to the tests. These sanctions included prohibitions on the import and procurement of coal, iron, and iron ore. Beijing had to maneuver its support for the sanctions in a way that still gave it sufficient scope for bilateral engagement with the DPRK while retaining its responsibilities as one of the P-5.7

Against this backdrop, Wang Yi proposed the “Parallel Tracks (Shuanggui Bingxing)” entailing the simultaneous promotion of denuclearization and the building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula through a resumption of the Six-Party Talks.8 Wang carefully avoided any mention of a US-DPRK peace treaty as the main pillar of peace on the Peninsula, emphasizing instead that China’s proposal would address the DPRK’s “reasonable security concerns” while achieving the international community’s primary goal: the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.9 Assuming that the DPRK’s “reasonable security concerns” were rooted in the MAA, Wang’s proposal was tantamount to declaring China’s intention to participate in developing a peace regime as a de-facto signatory to the Agreement.

Besides the “Parallel Tracks” plan, Wang Yi made another proposal called “Double Suspensions (Shuangzanting)” whereby the DPRK would suspend “nuclear activities” while the US would suspend large-scale military exercises as interim measures for supporting the “Parallel Tracks” initiative. This additional proposal followed the DPRK’s test of its intermediate ballistic missile, the Pukguksong-2, in February 2017. While the “Parallel Tracks” involved all the MAA parties including China, the “Double Suspensions” proposed measures to be adopted only by the US and the DPRK. Wang’s proposals, however, were overshadowed by the collective security dynamics at the UNSC that led to strengthened economic sanctions against the DPRK following its successive nuclear and ballistic missile tests in 2017.

2.2. Vicious correlations: UN sanctions and Sino-DPRK tensions

Under the Trump administration’s new approach to the US relations with China, both trade and the DPRK dominated the US and Chinese agendas. At the summit talks held in Margo-a-Largo, Florida in early April 2017, President Trump spoke of exerting the “maximum pressure” on the DPRK and urged President Xi to impose additional economic sanctions. Trump also tweeted that a trade deal with the US would be better for China if it solved the North Korean problem10 by strengthening UNSC sanctions

7 Regarding the UNSC resolutions adopted against the DPRK’s nuclear and ballistic missile tests in 2016–17, see, Kurata, “Kita-chosen ‘Hikakuka’ to Chugoku no Chikiteki Kan-yo no Mosaku.”
8 Zhong-ao Waizhang Juxing Waijiao yu Zhanlüe Duihua”, Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), February 18, 2016.
9 Renda Jizhehui: Zhongguo Waizhang Chanshi Daguo Waijiao Linian”, Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), March 9, 2016.
10 Landler, “Trump Says China Will Get Better Trade Deal”.

and helping ensure their effective implementation. However, despite China’s admittedly cautious and reluctant cooperation, the trade dispute showed no signs of being settled.

Indeed, the “100 day action plan” to rebalance Sino–US trade relations announced at the Margo-a-Largo Summit failed to reduce trade tension and the first US–China Comprehensive Economic Dialogue in late July 2017 after the due of the plan also did not make any progress. China, nevertheless, voted in favor of UNSC Resolution 2356 (S/RES/2356), to extend the sanctions to include the prohibition of North Korean overseas travel and an asset freeze in response to the “Intermediate-long Ballistic Missile” Hwasung-12 test-fire on May 14, 2017. It is, however, difficult to explain China’s cooperation in strengthening UNSC economic sanctions with the ongoing China–US stalemate on bilateral trade, particularly in light of the additional tensions that emerged over Taiwan at this time. The Trump administration announced a US $1.4 billion arms sale to Taiwan at the end of June 2017, provoking strong criticism from Beijing. On the collective security front, China nevertheless voted in favor of UNSC Resolution 2371 (S/RES/2371) in early August 2017 to strengthen economic sanctions on the sale of lead and lead ore after the DPRK’s test of the Intermediate Ballistic Missile (ICBM) Hwasung-14.

Moreover, in response to the DPRK’s sixth nuclear test on September 3, 2017, China supported UNSC Resolution 2375 (S/RES/2375)’s prohibition of member states supplying, selling, or transferring to the DPRK refined petroleum products exceeding 2 million barrels per year and also crude oil in excess of the amount member states had supplied, sold or transferred in the previous 12 months. After the second US–China Summit Talks, held in Beijing early November 2017, an agreement was reached to continue to “fully and strictly” implement the UNSC resolution.\(^\text{11}\) China then endorsed UNSC Resolution 2397 (S/RES/2397) that further tightened restrictions on supply, sale, or transfer of crude oil and repatriation all North Korean nationals earning income no later than 24 months against the DPRK’s proclamation of its nuclear power status after the Hwasung-15 ICBM test in late November 2017.\(^\text{12}\) Despite Chinese support for stronger sanctions on Pyongyang, the US continued to strengthen its security ties with Taiwan. The National Defense Authorization Act was legislated in November 2017 and signed by President Trump the following month, enabling Taiwan’s military personnel to participate in US military exercises.\(^\text{13}\)

The White House then released the National Security Strategy (NSS) in December 2017, setting out an altered US stance on its great power relations. Both China and Russia were portrayed in the document as challenging American power, influence, and interests, and attempting to erode American security and prosperity. The NSS also stated that major power competition had compelled the US to “rethink” its policies of the past two decades, especially in relation to “engagement” with China.\(^\text{14}\)

Whilst Sino–US cooperation on the DPRK proceeded in relative isolation from trade and Taiwan issues, Sino–DPRK relations correlated with Sino–US cooperation in the UNSC. When the UNSC sanctions were defined in the military and luxury goods

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\(^{11}\)“Remarks by President Trump and President Xi of China in Joint Press Statement, Beijing, China, November 9, 2017”, https://china.usembassy-china.org.cn/selected-quotes-press-statement-president-trump-joint-press-conference-president-xi/ (accessed on November 20 2018).

\(^{12}\)“Joseonminjujuuiinmingonghwagug Jeongbuseongmyeong: Saehyeong Daelyuggantandoroketeu Siheombalsa Seongong”, Minju Joseon, November 30, 2017.

\(^{13}\)National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2018, 406.

\(^{14}\)National Security Strategy of the United States of America, 2–3.
sectors were incorporated within UNSC economic sanctions, the DPRK refrained from criticizing China. However, China’s endorsement of economic sanctions impacting civilian sectors did elicit criticism from the DPRK. Rodong Sinmun carried an article referring to UNSC Resolution 2270, criticizing “the country that had the valuable friendly relations accomplished by blood” thus implying China.\footnote{“Joseongukjejeongchimunjeyeonguso Nonpyeongwon, Bulgongjeongghan Segyejeongchichilseoreul Byeonhyeokagi Wihan Jeonguiui Bulgireul Jipyeoollija”, Rodong Sinmun, April 2, 2016.} Although Renmin Ribao deliberately ignored the DPRK’s criticism, it explicitly condemned the DPRK’s destabilization of the entire region\footnote{For the vicious exchanges of the criticism between China and The DPRK in 2016–17, see, Kurata, “Kita-chosen ‘Hikakuka’ to Chugoku no Chiikiteki Kan-yo no Mosaku,” 70–74.} after the DPRK criticized China’s cooperation with the US drafting UNSC Resolution 2356 to counter “Hwasung-12” test-fire.

3. Resurgence of regional proposals: the realigned dynamics of the US–China–DPRK relations

3.1. Limited scope for China’s engagement: successive Sino–DPRK summit talks

Since March 2018, Sino–US cooperation has served as one of the factors compelling Kim Jongun to discuss the “denuclearization” of the Korean Peninsula, thereby realigning the dynamics of the triangulated US–China–DPRK relationship during 2016–17. Economic sanctions could be eased if the DPRK took substantial measures for denuclearization. The DPRK expected Beijing’s support in the UNSC. For China, improved relations with the DPRK would increase the scope of its engagement in the Korean peace process neutralizing the DPRK’s efforts to seal a US–DPRK bilateral peace treaty. These realigned dynamics would also further heighten the ROK’s assertiveness as an intermediary between the US and the DPRK and facilitate inter-Korean Summit Talks as well as regional proposals for a peace process, as per Wang Yi’s proposals, both of which had been overshadowed by the UNSC in 2016–17.

The first major change surfaced within the Sino–DPRK relationship when Kim Jongun visited Beijing to meet with Xi Jinping in late March 2018. Renmin Ribao reported that Kim had stated the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula could be achieved if the US responded to the DPRK’s efforts with goodwill, created an atmosphere of peace and stability, and took progressive and synchronous measures for the realization of peace. These statements implied Kim’s intention to push for an asymmetrical deal between “denuclearization” and peace-building on the Korean Peninsula. Xi’s response was that China would continue to play a constructive role and work with all parties toward the thaw of the situation on the peninsula,\footnote{“Xi Jinping tong Jin Zhengen Juxing Huitan”, Renmin Ribao, March 29, 2018. No Kim Jongun’s remarks on denuclearization were reported in the DPRK’s organs.} indicating that China would engage in the Korean peace process. Wang Yi, meanwhile, lauded his “Parallel Tracks” and “Double Suspensions” proposals for a negotiated solution to the Korean impasse.\footnote{“Wang Yi zai Shisan jie Quanguo Renda Yici Huiyi Juxing de Jizhehuishag: Jiu Zhongguo Waijiao Zhengce he Duiwai Guanxi Da Zhongwai Jizhe Wen”, Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), March 9, 2018.} However, Rodong Sinmun’s coverage of the Sino–DPRK Summit Talks omitted Xi’s remarks about his strong intention to remain engaged in the Korean peace process.

The question here is whether the DPRK accepted China’s engagement in the Korean peace process or whether it continued to see China’s role as a collateral one aside from Pyongyang’s
efforts to still deal directly with Washington. The Panmunjeom Declaration, released at the conclusion of the Third North–South Summit Talks held between Chairman Kim Jongun and President Moon Jaein in April 2018, stipulated that both Koreas agreed to actively pursue trilateral meetings involving the two Koreas and the US, or quadrilateral meetings involving the two Koreas, the US and China with a view to declaring an end to the Korean War, turning the armistice into a peace treaty (Article 3, Item 3). Kim appeared to be continuing his father’s 2007 “October 4th Declaration” framework for a Korean peace deal by specifying both the participants in peace negotiations and the kinds of interim measures to be used to develop a peace agreement. The realigned dynamics of triangulated US–China–DPRK relations thus did not appear to have increased the DPRK’s acceptance of greater Chinese engagement in the Korean peace process.  

Although Xi Jinping and Kim Jongun held a second round of summit talks at Dalian in early May 2018, it cannot be assumed that the talks resulted in Kim’s acceptance of China’s involvement in the Korean peace process despite the realigned dynamics in the US–China–DPRK relations. Renmin Ribao reported that Kim Jongun had stated the relevant sides would take phased and synchronous measures in a responsible manner so as to comprehensively advance the political settlement of the Korean Peninsula issue, and eventually achieve denuclearization and lasting peace on the Peninsula. Rodong Sinmun, omitting Xi’s remarks related to the Korean peace process, reported that the two leaders had an “in-depth exchange of views on how to tackle the crucial issues of mutual concern.” Despite Xi’s use of “lips and teeth” to describe Beijing and Pyongyang’s relationship as a close friendship consolidated by blood, the DPRK’s perception of China as a collateral participant remained unchanged despite the success of the Sino–DPRK Summit Talks in Dalian.

### 3.2. A downgraded deal for nuclear surrender and the peace process: the US–DPRK summit talks

The US–DPRK summit talks occurred through clandestine arrangements made by Mike R. Pompeo on his first secret visit to Pyongyang in April 2018 when he was the Director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and the second visit the following month with Kim Jongun and Kim Yongchol, the Vice-Chairman of the Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party after he assumed the State Secretary. The talks were focused on two specific issues. The first related to the nonproliferation dimension of the DPRK’s nuclear disarmament. At the Third Plenary Meeting of the Seventh Central Committee of the Korean Workers’ Party in April 2018, Kim Jongun declared the destruction of the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri, destroyed in the following month. Nonetheless, as this site had already served its purpose, the US and its allies did not consider its destruction as evidence of the DPRK’s denuclearization. Given Kim’s commitment to “complete” denuclearization in the Panmunjoem

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19Korean Culture and Information Service, *The Journey toward Peace*, 13. The “October 4th Declaration” stipulated, “the North and the South shared the understanding about the need to put an end to the existing armistice mechanism and build a lasting peace mechanism and agreed to cooperate with each other in the efforts to push forward the issue of arranging meeting of the heads of state of the three or four parties directly concerned on the Korean Peninsula and declaring an end to the Korean War.” Regarding the interpretation of “three or four parties,” see, Kurata, “Beichu ‘Taikokukan no Kyoko’ to Shiteno Chosen-hanto Rokusha-kaidan”, 173–174.

20See, Kurata, “Kita-chosen ‘Hikakuka’ to Chugoku no Chiikiteki Kan-yo no Mosaku”, 76–78.

21At the Plenary Meeting, Kim Jongun also stated to cease firing ICBMs and Intermediate-long missiles. For the further analyses of his remarks at the Plenary Meeting, see, Kurata, “Synchronizing Two Asymmetrical Deals”, 38–39.
Declaration, moreover, it was legitimate to expect that the DPRK would first submit its nuclear inventory. The second issue entailed creating regional arrangements in which the Korean peace process would be an integral part.

China’s concerns over the limited scope of its engagement in the process became apparent during the Sino–DPRK Summit Talks held in Beijing and Dalian in early 2018. China was also concerned that the trilateral arrangement called for by the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit’s Panmunjeom Declaration, which sought to create a framework for ending the Korean War, could be further underlined by a bilateral declaration developed by the US and the DPRK. Published immediately before the Summit Talks, Huanqiu Shibao’s editorial acknowledged China’s concerns and asserted that China had a legitimate reason to engage in the Korean peace process.22

In the US–DPRK Joint Statement following his meeting with President Trump on June 12, 2018, Kim Jongun then reaffirmed “his firm and unwavering commitment to complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula” (Article 3).23 However, Trump was unable to compel him to submit the DPRK’s nuclear inventory. According to the White House press statement, Kim stated, after the Joint Statement was signed, that he was “destroying a major missile engine testing site,” believed to be at Tongchang-ri.24 Thus, as with the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri, Kim Jongun was again attempting to create a declaration ending the Korean War by offering little in the way of concessions. Though efforts to hammer out an expected deal entailing submission of the DPRK’s nuclear inventory and a declaration to end the Korean War failed, both leaders remained committed to the US–DPRK cooperation to build a lasting and stable peace regime on the Korean Peninsula (Article 2).

The failure to stipulate a declaration to end, or intention to end, the Korean War in the Statement must have come as a relief to China. Given that such a declaration was assumed to be an interim measure to peace agreements and that the DPRK remained reluctant to involve China, a US–DPRK bilateral declaration to end the War would only have further inclined the DPRK towards focusing on negotiations with the US. Presumably China’s intention was reflected in the absence of a declaratory item referring to ending the Korean War in the Statement. China would have been further encouraged by Trump’s remarks at the press conference on the suspension of the US–ROK “Ulchi Freedom Guardian” joint military exercise in the summer of 2018, which were intended to correspond with Pyongyang’s destruction of “a major missile engine testing site”.

As Wang Yi observed, one outcome of the US–DPRK Summit Talks was “something China had long called for,”25 recalling the “Double Suspensions” that envisioned the

22“Chaoxian Bandaow Zhongzhan Xuanyan Zenme Qian? Xiaoguo Zuizhongyao”, Huanqiu Shibao, June 5, 2018.
23“Joint Statement of President Donald J. Trump of the United States of America and Chairman Kim Jong Un of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea at the Singapore Summit, Issued on June 12 2018” , https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/joint-statement-president-donald-j-trump-united-states-america-chairman-kim-jong-un-democratic-peoples-republic-korea-singapore-summit/ (accessed on June 20 2018); “Jomigvangyeui Saeyeoksareul Gaecheokan Segijeok Mannam Ryeoksasang Cheot Jomisunwesangbonngwa Hoedam Jinhaeng: Uridanggwa Gukga Gundaeui Choegoryeongdoja Gimjeongeundongjikkeseo Mihapjunggukdaetongnyeongsang Waongdongseongmyungchaetaek”, Rodong Sinmun, June 13, 2018. Hereafter the quotations from the US–DPRK Joint Statement owe to the website and the document.
24“Press Briefings, Press Conference by President Trump, Foreign Policy, Issued on June 12, 2018, Capella Hotel, Singapore, 4:15 P.M. SGT”, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/press-conference-president-trump/ (accessed on June 20 2018). Quotations from President Trump’s press conference are extracted from this web-site.
25“Wang Yi: Xiwang Chaomei Lingdaoren Huiwu wei Shixian Bandao Wuhehua Jianli Bandao Heping Jizhi Maichu Shizhixing Bufa, 2018–06-12”, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjzb_673089/zyhd_673091/t1567989.shtml (accessed on June 20, 2018). Wang’s remarks evaluating the US–DPRK Summit Talks were taken from this website.
suspension of nuclear and missile tests by the DPRK, and that of large-scale military exercises by the US. Moreover, advocacy of the “Double Suspensions” was interim measures to the “Parallel Tracks,” along with consideration a declaration to end the Korean War as an interim measure for peace agreements would assuredly have prompted Wang’s reiteration of China’s engagement in the timely release of a declaration to end the Korean War. China’s strong commitment to remaining engaged in events on the Peninsula was made clear in Wang’s remarks on the US–DPRK Summit Talks: “China will . . . continue to play a constructive role in bringing peace to the Peninsula”. China’s attempts to engage in the Korean peace process also affected the UNSC. Hoping to further increase opportunities for its engagement, China put forward the view that destruction of the two sites would merit some economic relief. As early as late June 2018, China in tandem with Russia reportedly delivered a draft for the UNSC Presidential statement calling for sanction relief. However, the other UNSC member states, including the US, purportedly rejected it.26 Nonetheless, disagreement over weakening economic sanctions on the DPRK in the UNSC did not constrain bilateral cooperation on the Korean peace process at the regional level. Pompeo visited Beijing in June 2018 and held talks with Xi Jinping to extend the will to share the US hope for how the denuclearization of and peace on the Peninsula can be achieved.27 Responding to Pompeo, Xi stated that China would continue to play an active and constructive role, working with relevant parties including the US.28 Pompeo’s remarks on collaborating with China were in contrast to the prevailing US–China tensions in the Taiwan Strait. As a likely counter to the “Taiwan Travel Act” signed by President Trump in March 2018,29 Beijing established diplomatic relations with Dominica on May 1, and subsequently with Burkina Faso on May 24.30 The Sino–US cooperation on the Korean Peninsula, it appeared, was continuing to develop on an ad-hoc basis. However, unlike the earlier “Ad-hoc concert” of interests aimed at building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula, two bilateral pathways for developing the peace regime now had been forged through inter-Korean and US–DPRK negotiations with no indication that the US would opt for multilateral talks under the Trump administration.

4. Declaratory measures for peace agreement: scope for China’s engagement

4.1. Interim measures: declaring the end of the Korean war

Against the backdrop of the failure to include a declaration to end the Korean War in the US–DPRK Joint Statement, the DPRK changed tactics. Immediately after Pompeo’s third visit to Pyongyang in July 2018, the DPRK’s Foreign Ministry’s Spokesman

26See, Kurata, “Kita-chosen ‘Hikakuka’ to Chugoku no Chil kiteki Kan-yo no Mosaku”, 87.
27“Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Chinese President Xi Jinping Opening Remarks”, https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/06/283226.htm (accessed on July 2, 2018).
28“Xi Jinping Huijian Meiguo Guowuqing Pengpeiao”, Renmin Ribao, June 15, 2018.
29“President Donald J. Trump Signs H.R. 294, H.R. 452, H.R. 535, H.R. 3656, and S. 831 into Law, Issued on March 16, 2018”, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-signs-h-r-294-h-r-452-h-r-535-h-r-3656-s-831-law/ (accessed on April 15 2018).
30It was the first time since January 1998 during Le Dengehui’s presidency that Taiwan was forced to sever diplomatic relations with two nations within one month, see, Danyue Diushi 2 Bangjiaoguo, Wo Waijiao Qingshi Juti Pinggu ji Mianlin Zhongda Waijiao Wei ji Wo Zhengfu Buzai Renrang zhi Yining Celue’ Zhanuan Baogao”, 1. After severing diplomatic relations with Burkina Faso, Taiwan only maintained relations with the Kingdom of Eswatini (former Swaziland) in Africa.
announced that Pompeo had merely come up with a unilateral and “gangster-like” demand for denuclearization and criticized his lack of reference to a peace deal. The spokesman also stated that an early declaration to end the Korean War constituted a first step in defusing tension and establishing lasting peace on the Korean Peninsula, thus implying the DPRK prioritized a declaration to end the Korean War with the US over one with the ROK.  

The ROK’s position was that a peace agreement should be concluded by the two Koreas but did not directly cover ending US–DPRK hostilities or preclude a US–DPRK peace treaty. The DPRK’s criticisms fueled controversies in the ROK over a declaration to end the Korean War, giving rise to arguments that President Moon should make a peace declaration during the upcoming Summit Talks in Pyongyang lest the inter-Korean relations should be overshadowed by the US–DPRK relations. The DPRK’s criticisms fueled disagreement in the ROK over the effects of a US-DPRK declaration to end the Korean War, giving rise to arguments that President Moon should make a peace declaration during the upcoming Summit Talks in Pyongyang to prevent inter-Korean relations being overshadowed by the US–DPRK relationship. This controversy also raised questions about how a peace declaration between the North and South could work given the continuing legacies of the Korean War, the MAA and the United Nations Command (UNC), and US–ROK security arrangements. President Moon could not push for institutional arrangements that necessitated the end of the MAA, or the dismantling of the UNC. Moreover, a declaration ending the Korean War in the absence of substantial measures by the DPRK to give up its nuclear weapons also would inevitably meet with opposition from conservative camps in the ROK and the US. 

Caught between the need to accelerate the Korean peace process and pressure to avoid making a peace declaration, the Moon administration attempted to loosen the conditions for the declaratory measures prior to his upcoming Summit Talks with Kim Jongun. President Moon revealed that talks were underway on the timing and format of a declaration to end the Korean War by the end of 2018 and that the US forces in Korea were “an entirely different issue” and “not a subject for discussion” in the negotiation for denuclearization. Furthermore, Moon Chungin, the special Presidential advisor for Unification and Foreign and Security affairs stated that any such declaration would not be an “irreversible victory” for Pyongyang, adding that the UNC and Military Demarcation Line would remain intact. He further noted that while the DPRK could demand withdrawal of the US Forces in the process of adopting the declaration, neither the US nor the ROK would accept it. A declaration to end the Korean War, in the ROK’s terms, would serve only as confirmation of both Korea’s political will to end the Korean War.

31 Foreign Ministry Spokesman on DPRK-US High-level Talks, “Korean Central News Agency, July 7 2018”, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-k.htm (accessed on July 10, 2018); see also, “KCNA Commentary: Declaration of Termination of War Is First Process for Peace”, Korean Central News Agency, July 24, 2018, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-k.htm (accessed on July 30, 2018).
32 Choon, “S’pore Can Continue to Help in Bid to Denuclearize Korea, Moon”.
33 Uri Friedman, “Inside the Dispute Derailing Nuclear Talks with North Korea: An Adviser to South Korea’s President Describes the Plan to End the Korean War – And Why the Proposal Has Now Become a Sticking Point in Negotiations, August 29 2018”, https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2018/08/north-korea-war-declaration/568603/ (accessed on September 15 2018). Moon Chongin’s arguments on the declaration to end the Korean War in summer 2018 are ascribed to this web-site.
As indicated in a letter by Kim Yong-chol delivered to Pompeo reportedly asserting that the US was still not ready to meet the DPRK’s expectations in terms of taking a step forward to sign a peace treaty, the DPRK’s touted claim for the declaration ending the Korean War with the US also forces China to be a collateral participant. Moon Chungin also expressed the hope that China would participate in the declaration as one of the *de-facto* signatories to the MAA, thereby deviating from the Panmunjom Declaration. China thus must have been encouraged by Moon Chungin’s remarks, and even more so by the DPRK’s accelerated overtures to end the War to be followed by a peace treaty with the US.

China has publicly stated its willingness to participate in framing a declaration to end the Korean War. Wang Yi, participating in the China–ASEAN Foreign Ministers’ Meeting (10 + 1) in Singapore in early August stressed the need for “relevant parties to sit down . . . [and] go through the necessary legal procedures.” Zhang Yesui, the Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Party Committee Secretary also communicated China’s willingness to engage in such a declaration to the three-party foreign and trade committee delegation of the ROK National Assembly during its visit to Beijing in mid-August 2018.

### 4.2. The Pyongyang joint declaration: more games but no peace

The DPRK’s demand for a bilateral declaration with the US to end the Korean War is not opposed by the ROK so long as it also leads to an inter-Korean declaration of peace. However, although the DPRK engaged the ROK at the summit talks as earlier agreed in the Panmunjom Declaration, Pyongyang was at the same time attempting to drive a wedge between the US and the ROK by warning the ROK not to consult with the US. Concerned that the DPRK’s was seeking a bilateral peace agreement with the US, President Moon announced he would visit Pyongyang in September to take an “audacious step” that would advance efforts to frame a declaration to end the Korean War as well as the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The Pyongyang Joint Declaration released by President Moon and Chairman Kim Jongun on September 19, 2018, in the middle of Moon’s three-day visit to the DPRK capital, highlighted the need to focus on what was missing rather than what was included in it. Despite the shared aspiration to declare an end to the Korean War,

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34Will Ripley and Euan McKirdy, "North Korea Warns Pompeo Denuclearization Talks are ‘at Stake,’ Sources Say, August 28", [https://edition.cnn.com/2018/08/28/asia/north-korea-pompeo-kim-yong-chol-letter-intl/index.html](https://edition.cnn.com/2018/08/28/asia/north-korea-pompeo-kim-yong-chol-letter-intl/index.html) (accessed on September 15, 2018). Asahi Shimbun, August 29, 2018; Sankei Shimbun, August 29, 2018.

35Taekboem, "Jongjeonseoneonbalpyoga Seonchajeok Gongjeongida", *Rodong Sinmun*, August 9, 2018.

36"Wang Yi: Fabiao Bandao Zhongzhan Xuanyan Fuhe Shidai Jinbu Chaolii", *Huanqiu Shibao*, August 3, 2018. At the 4th Eastern Economic Forum held in Vladivostok in mid-September Xi Jinping reportedly accepted a declaration ending the War in the trilateral setting; the US and both Koreas (see, *Tong-a Ilbo*, September 13, 2018). However, his remarks were not available in the mainland China. It indicated Xi’s purported remarks derailed the frame for the Korean peace process that Chinese government hitherto claimed. See, Lee, "The Shift of Security Environment in Northeast Asia,” 3.

37*Joong-ang Ilbo*, August 18–19, 2018.

38Sim-Cholyeong, "Panmunjeonseoneonhaeng-Pyeonggwawwa Bonyeong, Tongiri itda", *Rodong Sinmun*, August 21, 2018; Jo Namjin, "Bungnamgwangyereul Garomangneungeoseun Migugui Apgireul Mangneungeosida", *Rodong Sinmun*, September 4, 2018.

39See, "Je-73-junyeon Gwangbokjeol Gyeongchuksa", [https://www1.president.go.kr/articles/4022](https://www1.president.go.kr/articles/4022) (accessed on August 19, 2018). Moon Chungin went so far as stating that the inter-Korean relations should not be byproducts of the US–DPRK relations (see, *Joseon Ilbo*, September 6, 2018).
the Pyongyang Joint Declaration failed to directly call for one. Moreover, the measures Kim promised in the Declaration were not aligned with the conditions set by the ROK for declaring an end to the War. President Moon was attempting to shield himself from the US criticism that the inter-Korean talks risked rewarding Kim despite his lack of concessions. As mentioned in the President Trump’s press statement at the US–DPRK Summit Talks, Kim Jongun promised to pursue denuclearization in the Pyongyang Joint Declaration and permanently “shut down” the Tongchang-ri engine test ground and rocket launch pad with the “participation” of experts from related countries (Article 5, Item 1).\(^\text{40}\) As in the case of the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri, Kim Jongun was yet again offering only very limited concessions in exchange for improved relations and a possible peace treaty with the US.

Admittedly, Kim Jongun at least expressed his willingness to continue additional steps toward denuclearization, including the permanent destruction of the Nyongbyon nuclear facility if the US took corresponding actions (Article 5, Item 2, emphasis added). The Pyongyang Joint Declaration, however, failed to disclose any details about what “corresponding actions” the DPRK expected from the US. On his return from Pyongyang, President Moon stated that Kim was prepared to take additional denuclearization measures in response to the US initiatives to create a “new DPRK–US relationship” by ending hostilities and ensuring the DPRK’s security. President Moon also hastened to add that a declaration ending the Korean War would be only a political statement and that the existing armistice system would be maintained; a “concept” shared by Kim.\(^\text{41}\)

President Moon also expressed his willingness to propose a declaration to end the Korean War when he meets President Trump in the UN General Assembly in late September in the hope that it would facilitate the DPRK’s destruction of the Nyongbyon and other nuclear facilities.\(^\text{42}\) Echoing the DPRK’s hopes for a declaration ending the war,\(^\text{43}\) the ROK’s Foreign Minister Kang Kyungwha suggested the US take corresponding actions, including a declaration to end the War in exchange for the verified dismantlement of the nuclear facility at the Nyongbyon and also postponing the submission by Pyongyang of its nuclear inventory.\(^\text{44}\) This, however, amounted to a downgrading of the deal offered by the US at the US–DPRK Summit Talks to the additional measures for denuclearization undertaken by the DPRK. It fueled criticism by the conservative camp in the ROK that such hasty proposals derailed the US nonproliferation requirements claiming the DPRK to submit its nuclear inventory as the first step towards denuclearization and allowed the DPRK room to continue its clandestine nuclear development programs at other sites.\(^\text{45}\)

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\(^{40}\)“9-wol Pyeongyang Gongdong Seoneon”, Rodong Sinmun, September 20, 2018.

\(^{41}\)Q&A Session on the 2018 Inter-Korean Summit Pyongyang Following the Report to the Nation by President Moon Jaein, September 23 2018”, http://www.english1.president.go.kr/BriefingSpeeches/Speeches/72 (accessed on September 29, 2018); see also, “Yeongguk BBC bangsong Inteobyu, 2018–10–12”, https://www1.president.go.kr/articles/4511 (accessed on October 20, 2018).

\(^{42}\)“Yeonnae Jongjeonseoneon Mokpyo. Teureompeu Daetongnyeonggwa Dasi Nonui, 2018–09-20”, http://www.korea summit.kr/Newsroom/News/339 (accessed on September 29, 2018).

\(^{43}\)“Joseonminjujuuinmingonghwaguk Daepyodan Danjang Yuenchonghoe Je-73-chae Hoeuiesseo Yeonseol”, Minju Joseon, October 1, 2018; see also, “War End Is Not Just Gift: KCNA Commentary, October 2 2018”, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-k.htm (accessed on October 9, 2018); Jo Namjin, “Seuseuro Je Apgire Jangaereul Joseonghaneun Jagadangchageseo Beoseonaya Handa”, Rodong Sinmun, October 4, 2018.

\(^{44}\)Hudson, “South Korean Reveals Plan to Break Stalemate”.

\(^{45}\)Joseon Ilbo, October 5, 2018.
The dilemma facing Seoul was that if the DPRK supported the US–DPRK declaration to end the Korean War over one negotiated bilaterally with Pyongyang, would the former declaration apply equally in inter-Korean relations? Sanction relief would be one of the measures available to the ROK to establish inter-Korean relations as the main pillar of a Korean peace regime. During his state visit to France, President Moon request that France, as one of the P-5, assist in the DPRK’s denuclearization effectively amounted to asking for sanction relief on the basis of little more than Kim’s promise he would denuclearize the Peninsula. Kang Kyungwha similarly suggested easing the economic sanctions that the ROK had imposed following the corvette Chonan’s sinking in 2010.

The ROK’s dilemma also held implications for China’s interests. Should a declaration to end the Korean War be realized between the US and DPRK, it might further marginalize China in the Korean peace process. At the UNSC in late September 2018, Wang Yi argued that “all stakeholders” were obligated to play their part while acknowledging the US and the DPRK were the “main players” in breaking the stalemate. Wang Yi also reiterated the need to consider invoking the provision in the UNSC resolutions that stipulated to modify the sanction measures in the light of compliance by the DPRK.

In contrast to the US nonproliferation approach, both China and the ROK emphasized regional approach. Both also regarded the “shut-down” of the engine test ground and rocket launch pad at Tongchang-ri as grounds for moving forward in the Korean peace process and both remained concerned that a US–DPRK declaration to end the Korean War could develop into a US–DPRK bilateral peace treaty excluding them. So as the DPRK continued its focus on a US–DPRK bilateral declaration to end the war, China needed to continue to ensure it remained engaged in all talks concerning a possible peace deal.

5. Korea under declared “Sino-US cold war”: “cooperation” in criticism

5.1. Korea’s denuclearization set aside: Pence speech

Amid the ongoing controversy over how to negotiate an end to the Korean War, US Vice-President Pence’s October 2018 speech, delivered at the Hudson Institute in Washington DC, marked a significant shift in the US–China relations. After affirming the importance of the US–China cooperation in resolving the Korean Peninsula crisis, Pence then criticized China on a number of issues ranging from political interference in the domestic affairs of states, trade, the South China Sea, human rights, and cyberspace.

46“Moon Jae-in Daetongnyeong, Risyareu Perang Hawonuijiang Myeondam mit Gukinmanchan, 2018–10-15”, https://www1.president.go.kr/articles/4537 (accessed on October 21, 2018).
47S/PV.September 27, 8363, 2018, 5. Quotations from Wang Yi’s remarks at this meeting owe to this document.
48Yang Ning/Zhang Feiran, “Huanqiu Redian: Chaoxian Bandao Heshi Yinglai Zhongzhan?” Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), October 16, 2018.
49Wang, J. S., “Chaoxian Bandao Heping Jizhi Goujian yu Zhong-han Hezuo de Yiyi,” Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), October 16, 2018.
50Wang, J. S., “Chaoxian Bandao Heping Jizhi Goujian yu Zhong-han Hezuo de Yiyi,” 28–29; Li Dunqiu, “Niannei Fabu Chaoxian Bandao ‘Zhongzhan Xuanyan’ Zhide Qidai”, http://news.cyol.com/yuanchuang/2018-10/16/content_17690029.htm (accessed on November 2, 2018).
His criticisms also included Beijing’s actions towards Taiwan, notably its establishment of renewed diplomatic relations with several Latin American countries earlier that year at Taiwan’s expense. Following Dominica in May, Beijing established diplomatic relations with El Salvador on August 21, 2018. The US responded by announcing on September 7 the recall of its ambassadors from the three nations that included Panama establishing diplomatic relations with Beijing in June 2017 in protest against the undue pressures Washington believed Beijing had exerted on them to switch their diplomatic relations from Taipei to Beijing.51 Pence also proclaimed, “the previous administrations all but ignored China’s actions . . . But those days are over.” Pence’s speech, even though its tough tone was not totally unexpected, provoked strong responses from the China’s Foreign Ministry and Renmin Ribao, which cited China’s right to defend its “One-China” principle and described the US accusations as “unfounded”. These responses, however, also included calls for continued cooperation with the US.52 Pence did not discuss the Korean Peninsula in his speech, despite referring to it in his introductory remarks. Indeed, his lack of criticism of China in relation to the Korean problem indicated that the US was attempting to isolate the Korean issue from other problems in the relationship.

In the course of the disagreements that arose from the Pence speech, Secretary of State Pompeo paid a fourth visit to Beijing on October 8, 2018, en route from Pyongyang, where he met with Kim Jongun. While welcoming Pompeo’s visit, Wang Yi criticized the US for a series of actions that undermined China’s rights and interests, including the Taiwan issue and “groundless accusations” by the US, and requested the US cease these “erroneous practices.” Strikingly, he also stressed the need for these two permanent UNSC members to strengthen their cooperation on the Korean Peninsula. In response, while expressing grave concerns about the actions that China had taken, Pompeo confirmed his willingness to share the progress he had made during his stay in Pyongyang and to “work together” with Wang on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.53 Evoking Pompeo’s visit to Beijing in June after the US–DPRK Summit talks, both recognized the need for continued the US–China cooperation on the Korean Peninsula and the decoupling of the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula from Taiwan and other disputes.

Despite these areas of agreement, major differences over how the DPRK’s denuclearization should occur remained. Whereas Pompeo saw the UNSC economic sanctions as a critical form of leverage on Pyongyang, Wang Yi’s remarks on the US–China collaborative actions were intended to signal Beijing’s differences with Washington on when they should be lifted. Immediately after Pompeo’s visit to Beijing, during a Viceforeign ministers’ meeting between China, Russia and the DPRK in Moscow on October 9, a consensus was reached on the need for the UNSC to begin adjusting the

51 “U.S. Chiefs of Mission to the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Panama Called Back for Consultations, Press Statement, Heather Nauert, Department Spokesperson, Washington, DC, September 7 2018”, https://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2018/09/285792.htm (accessed on October 2 2018).

52 “Waijiaobu Fayanren Hua Chunying jiu Mei Lingdaoren zai she Tai deng Wenti shang Wuduan Zhize Zhongguo Da Jizhe Wen, 2018–10–05”, http://www3.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjb_673085/zzjg_673183/gjs_673893/qjzz_673897/lbyyfzz_673913/fytyh_673921/t1602157.shtml (accessed on November 2 2018); see also, “Jingwei Youlai Liang Qingzhuo: Gei Zhongguo dui Shijie de Gongxian Suansuanzhang”, Renmin Ribao, October 10, 2018.

53 “Remarks with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi before Their Meeting, Remarks Michael R. Pompeo Secretary of State Diaoyutai, Beijing October 8 2018”, https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/10/286493.htm (accessed on October 15, 2018).
sanctions upon the DPRK in response to what they saw as significant, practical steps for denuclearization taken by the DPRK.\textsuperscript{54}

\textbf{5.2. Imbalanced priorities in cooperation: between nonproliferation and regional arrangements}

As described earlier, China’s goal of easing economic sanctions on the DPRK remained coupled to its intention to engage in the Korean peace process. In the US–China Diplomatic and Security Dialogue (DSD) in Washington in early November 2018, Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi, supported the strict enforcement of the relevant UNSC resolutions, renewed China’s commitment to denuclearization and peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula through consultation and negotiation. In his remarks, Yang supported the US–DPRK direct dialogue, expressing his hopes that the two sides would “accommodate each other’s direct legitimate concerns,” and advance both denuclearization and the establishment of “a peace mechanism in tandem” on the Korean Peninsula. In Yang’s view, “a peace mechanism in tandem” did not mean a bilateral peace treaty between the US and the DPRK, thereby echoing Wang Yi’s earlier proposals to enable China’s engagement in the Korean peace process.\textsuperscript{55}

It is also noteworthy that Pompeo rephrased parts of Pence’s speech at the DSD by stating that despite “important differences in the bilateral relationship” between the US and China, their cooperation persisted on final, fully verified denuclearization of the DPRK and a decoupling of the Korean Peninsula from the other issues.\textsuperscript{56} He highlighted the transits of two US 7th Fleet’s across the Taiwan Strait in late October despite Xinhua’s criticism of the US policy on Taiwan.\textsuperscript{57} “Important differences” in Pompeo’s terms evidently included the Taiwan issues.

Washington and Beijing’s willingness to decouple the North Korea problem from other bilateral issues was again tacitly reaffirmed during the APEC/CEO Summit in Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea in mid-November 2018, which failed to yield a joint communique. Rephrasing President Trump’s attacks on China’s trade practices, Pence criticized China for having “tremendous barriers,” “tremendous tariffs” and for forcing “technology transfer and engaging in intellectual property theft and industrial subsidies on an unprecedented scale.” Even during the escalating disputes on the trade issues, Pence, as in his Washington speech, avoided criticizing China over the Korean Peninsula.\textsuperscript{58} Similarly, while China claimed “certain economies just refused to take in the voices of the vast majority and rejected incorporating

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\item Jo-jung-ro 3-jahyeopsang Gongdongbodomun “Korean Central News Agency, October 11 2017”, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-e.htm (accessed on October 15 2018).
\item “Di-er-lun Zhongmei Waijiao Anquan Anquan Duihua zai Huashengdun Juxing”, Renmin Ribao, November 11, 2018; 2018 Report to Congress of the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, One Hundred Fifteenth Congress, Second Session.
\item Press Availability with Secretary of Defense James Mattis, Chinese Politburo Member Yang Jiechi, and Chinese State Councilor and Defense Minister General Wei Fenghe, Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, Ben Franklin Room, Washington, DC, November 9 2018”, https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/11/287279.htm (accessed on December 10, 2018).
\item “7th Fleet Ships Transit Taiwan Strait amid Security, Trade Tensions with China”, Stars and Stripe, October 22, 2018; Xinhuashe Pinglunyuan, Wu wei Taihai Jushi Zhiao Mafan”, Renmin Ribao, October 20, 2018.
\item “Remarks by Vice President Pence at the 2018 APEC CEO Summit, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, Issued on: November 16 2018, 12:25 P.M. PGT”, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-vice-president-pence-2018-apec-ceo-summit-port-moresby-papua-new-guinea/ (accessed on November 29 2018).
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reasonable propositions in the outcome document,” it did not cite or criticize the US policy on the Korean Peninsula.59

Moreover, at the G-20 Summit on Financial Markets and the World Economy held in Buenos Aires, in the hemisphere China expanded its diplomatic area, in November 2018, Trump agreed to postpone raising tariffs to allow further negotiations on China’s mandatory structural adjustments relating to forced technology transfer, intellectual property protection, non-tariff barriers, cyber intrusions and cyber theft, and services and agriculture within the next 90 days.60 Whereas Pompeo criticized China in Brussels, saying China’s economic development did not lead to an embrace of democracy and regional stability, he also stated that great progress had been made with respect to the DPRK and that President Trump, together with President Xi, would strive along with Kim Jongun to see a nuclear-free Korean Peninsula.61 Xi also praised the outcome of the Summit, stating that the US–DPRK talks on the denuclearization and building a peace regime should proceed, adding that the US had applauded China’s “positive actions”.62

China effectively was stressing the need for a peace regime but not necessarily denuclearization accomplished through UNSC economic sanctions. Trump, however, had different expectations, announcing that Xi had agreed to work with him “100 percent on North Korea,”63 which in Washington’s view meant continuing and enforcing UNSC economic sanctions. Furthermore, the DPRK’s ambition of ending the Korean War bilaterally with the US64 heightened US concerns that doing so could undermine the US–ROK security arrangements. The US instead favored an inter–Korean declaration to end the war over the one between the US and the DPRK, provided that it was compatible with the US and ROK security arrangements, a view shared by President Moon. Given that China increasingly accepts the need for an inter–Korean peace agreement as the main pillar of any future peace regime on the Peninsula as indicated in the Xi-Moon Summit Talks in Port Moresby both Presidents agreed to work together to build peace on the Korean Peninsula,65 there still remains room for the US and China also to cooperate on building a peace regime on the Korean Peninsula.

6. Conclusion: the prospects for a continued “Ad-hoc concert”

One dimension in which the current Sino–US “Ad-hoc Concert” differs from their responses to past nuclear crises on the Peninsula is in the context of collective security. After the alleged “hydrogen bomb” and ballistic missile tests the DPRK conducted in

59“2018 nian 11 yue 20 ri Waijiaobu Fayanren Geng Shuang Zhuchi Lixing Jizhehui”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/wjdt_674879/fyrbt_674889/t1614730.shtml (accessed on December 7, 2018).
60“Statement from the Press Secretary Regarding the President’s Working Dinner with China, December 1 2018”, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/statement-press-secretary-regarding-presidents-working-dinner-china/(accessed on December 9 2018).
61“Restoring the Role of the Nation-State in the Liberal International Order, Remarks, Michael R. Pompeo, Secretary of State, German Marshall Fund, Brussels, Belgium, December 4 2018”, https://www.state.gov/secretary/remarks/2018/12/287770.htm (accessed on January 9, 2019).
62“Xi Jinping tong Meiguo Zongtong Telangpu Juxing Huiwu”, Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), December 3, 2018; see also “Guowu Weiyuan jian Waijiaobuzhang Wang Yi xiang Zhongwa Meiti Jieshao Zhongmei Yuanshou Huiwu Qingkuang”, Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), December 3, 2018.
63“Remarks by President Trump in Press Gaggle Aboard Air Force One, En Route Joint Base Andrews, Saturday, December 1 2018”, https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-press-gaggle-aboard-air-force-one-2/(accessed on December 9 2018).
64“Jomigwangyegaeseongwa Jejaeapbageun Byeonghaengdoelsu Eopda”, KCNA, December 13, 2018, http://www.kcna.co.jp/index-k.htm (accessed on December 20, 2018).
65“Xi Jinping Huijian Wen Zaiyin”, Renmin Ribao (Overseas Edition), November 18, 2018.
January–February 2016, China consented in stages to extend UNSC economic sanctions to the DPRK’s civilian sectors, a move the US had pushed for but China had refrained from. This led to joint Sino–US action that would possibly choke the DPRK’s civilian population, an outcome of great concern to Beijing. In accordance with strengthened sanctions by China and the US against the subsequent nuclear and ballistic missile tests, the DPRK strongly criticized China, and tensions between the two allies grew in 2016–17.

Kim Jongun’s reference to “denuclearization” in early 2018 led to a realignment of the US–China–DPRK relations. The tense nature of Sino–DPRK relations in 2016–17 first realigned to more amicable relations during the Xi and Kim summits, and their bilateral relations set the tone and foundation for the summits Kim Jongun later held with Presidents Moon and Trump. Indeed, the prospected inter-Korean and the US–DPRK Summits had to follow the Sino-DPRK Summits, not vice-versa. However, regardless of the state of Sino–DPRK relations, the mutual criticism in 2016–17, or the successive Xi-Kim Summits in 2018, Wang Yi constantly advanced China’s “Parallel Tracks” and “Double Suspensions” proposals in search of greater scope for China’s engagement in the Korean peace process as a de-facto signatory to the MAA in an effort to hedge against the DPRK’s persistent efforts to secure a bilateral peace treaty with the US. Wang Yi’s proposals also demonstrated China’s intention to maximize its assertiveness by rendering an inter-Korean peace agreement as the main pillar of a peace regime instead of a bilateral peace treaty between the US and the DPRK.

China’s desire to engage in the Korean peace process also resonated with the ROK’s vision of an inter-Korean peace agreement becoming the main pillar of a peace regime. As the DPRK weighed a bilateral peace treaty with the US over an inter-Korean peace agreement, the Moon administration hastened to meet with Kim Jongun in Pyongyang. Although President Moon failed to support declaring an end to the Korean War at that time, he nonetheless called for sanction relief in exchange for Kim Jongun’s commitment to implement the conditions referred in Pyongyang Joint Declaration, including the shut-down of the engine test ground and rocket launch pad at Tongchang-ri in addition to the destruction of the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri in spring. The ROK was supporting China in calling for sanction relief with a view to engaging in the Korean peace process through more amicable relations with the DPRK. Regarding the Korean peace process, China has much more in common with the ROK than with the DPRK. Both China and the ROK envisage an inter-Korean peace agreement as the main pillar of the Korean peace process and both have pushed for sanction relief and sought to advance regional arrangements despite the DPRK minimal concessions to date.

Yet, China’s argument for sanction relief did not prevail at the UNSC due to the US counterargument that the DPRK had failed to meet the nonproliferation requirement for its “complete” denuclearization. The US regarded the strengthened sanctions as necessary for coaxing the DPRK to the negotiation table and maintained that the submission of a “complete” nuclear inventory would remain the prerequisite for reducing sanctions. In contrast to the Sino–US support for strengthening UNSC sanctions in 2016–17, differences such as the US focus on nonproliferation versus China’s strong support for regional arrangements led to a stalemate in 2018. A continuing stalemate might undermine Sino–US concert in the UNSC that had fostered cooperation during the previous years.

Despite their different priorities, it should be noted that both the US and China have reiterated their ongoing commitment to cooperate on the Korean Peninsula, and to keep their joint efforts there decoupled from other bilateral issues, such as Taiwan and
trade. At the onset of 2019, Xi Jinping made a proposal on the 40th anniversary of Chinese mainland’s message to Compatriots in Taiwan by General Ye Jianying to counter the enacted Asia Reassurance Initiative Act pursuant to the Taiwan Relations Act and the Six reassurances in the previous month. Pompeo proclaimed in January 2019 that Chinese had been clear that trade issues and the DPRK’s “denuclearization” were separate issues and had even stated that China had been a good partner in the US efforts to protect the world from the DPRK’s nuclear capability. It is also likely that even heightened Taiwan Strait tensions would not force the two countries to cease cooperating on the “denuclearization” of the Korean Peninsula. Indeed, it is worth recalling that the Four-Party Talks were proposed during the Taiwan missile crisis in 1996 when tensions between the US and China were running very high.

As described at the outset, the DPRK’s proposal for a bilateral peace treaty with the US led to multilateral talks, in which the need was shared between the US and the ROK as well as the China and ROK to contain the DPRK’s nuclear ambitions. In the 2000s, a shared need between the US and China to seek a regional solution vis-à-vis deliberation of the DPRK’s nuclear crisis to the UNSC generated Six-Party talks. However, unlike these “Ad-hoc Concerts” that arose during the previous nuclear crises, the US now preferred bilateral deals with the DPRK and was disinclined toward multilateral talks, which were perceived by the Trump administration as constraining and disrupting the US negotiation efforts, despite China’s and the ROK’s support for them. Though the DPRK remains reluctant and cautious about China’s engagement in the Korean peace process, it is noteworthy that Kim Jongun, in his New Year address 2019, proposed “multilateral negotiations for replacing the current armistice with a peace mechanism in close contact with the signatories to the armistice agreement so as to lay a lasting and substantial peace-keeping foundation.” Bearing in mind the “trilateral” or “quadrilateral” meetings stipulated in the Panmunjom Declaration, Kim Jongun’s proposal renders the US as the only party reluctant to promote a multilateral solution to the Korean peace process.

Admittedly multilateral talks will not necessarily lead to a breakthrough in the current stalemate, they are eventually needed for synchronizing the denuclearization process with the peace process involving the parties concerned with the MAA including China. However, a further factor differentiating this US–China “Ad-hoc Concert” from those associated with previous nuclear crises is that it will further be tested in the likely absence of multilateral talks as far as the US–DPRK Summit talks are expected to make a breakthrough the current impasse on the Korean Peninsula.

**Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

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67S.2736: Asia Reassurance Initiative Act of 2018, 115th Congress (2017–2018), 8.
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69“Sinnyeonsa,” Rodong Sinmun, January 1, 2019.
Notes on contributor

Hideya Kurata is a Professor at the Department of International Relations and Director of the Center for Global Security at the National Defense Academy (NDA), Yokosuka, Kanagawa, Japan. He specializes international security, nuclear non-proliferation and Korean Studies. Before joining the NDA in 2008, he worked at Kyorin University (2001–2008). His numerous publications include, *The U.S.-China Relations: the Structures and the Evolutions*, Nihon Kokusai Mondai Kenkyusyo (IIIA) (co-authored, 2007, in Japanese), “Six-Party Talks and the Establishment of the Peace System at the Korean Peninsula,” *North Korean Studies* (The Institute for North Korean Studies, Dongguk University), Vol. 1(2005) (in Korean). He also co-edited, *Korean Peninsula and International Politics*, Keio University Press, 2005 (in Japanese) and *North Korea’s Security Threats Reexamined*, NDA, 2019 (in English). He learned at Graduate School of Keio University in Tokyo and Yonsei University in Seoul and finished the Doctoral program at Keio University.

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