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## **China's Xi Jinping Should Propose a Deal on North Korea to Donald Trump**

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North Korea continues to embarrass its nominal friend and ally, the People's Republic of China. The North's Kim Jong-un apparently ordered a hit on his half-brother, Kim Jong-nam, who was murdered at the Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia airport. For years the latter had lived primarily in Macau, under Chinese protection.

The killing followed the test of a middle-range missile the week before. And two nuclear tests last year. It seems only a matter of time before the Democratic People's Republic of Korea again pokes the Chinese dragon in the eye.

At a reception in Pyongyang earlier this year, China's ambassador spoke of "the blood alliance and friendship" between the two states. But the PRC is not happy: it later announced a ban on North Korean coal exports, in compliance the latest UN sanctions resolution.

However, Beijing continues to underwrite its small ally despite growing discomfort with the North's behavior. The younger Kim appears committed to the sort of economic reform long urged by Beijing but rejected by his father and grandfather, who founded the regime in 1948. Nevertheless, Kim is no less determined to create a sizable nuclear arsenal against Beijing's wishes.

China maintains the status quo because it fears the collapse of the DPRK and chaos on the peninsula. Chinese officials also oppose reunification that would yield a united Korea allied with America and place U.S. troops on China's border.

In turn, Washington officials long have indicated their dissatisfaction with the PRC's toleration of North Korean misbehavior. At his confirmation hearing Secretary of State Rex Tillerson talked about his determination to "compel" Beijing to follow America's line. That won't happen, but perhaps the Trump administration would be willing to seriously negotiate in search of the sort of "deal" that the president constantly talks about making with various countries.

With China's and America's presidents set to meet, China should make the first move. It should indicate that it doesn't plan on committing geopolitical suicide on Washington's order. But if the U.S. is willing to share the burden of confronting the DPRK, Beijing would be willing to cooperate—at a price.

First, the PRC should tell the Trump administration to prepare a generous offer for the North—peace treaty, end of sanctions, diplomatic ties—if the DPRK comes in from the cold, so to speak. The offer should be attractive enough to make rejection unacceptable in China's view.

Second, Beijing should indicate that it expects assistance if North Korea collapses and creates a geopolitical mess, including mass refugee flows and factional combat. Third, the PRC should warn that it requires U.S. and South Korean acquiescence if China sees a need to intervene militarily to stabilize its neighbor. Fourth, the Xi government should insist that the U.S. agree to neutralization of the peninsula and pledge to remove all military forces on reunification.

Finally, as my Cato Institute colleague Ted Galen Carpenter recently suggested, China could suggest specific concessions involving Taiwan and/or territorial disputes in the South and East China Seas. Possible proposals include adherence to the traditional one China formulation, pressure on Tokyo to negotiate over the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands, and/or agreement to forswear multilateral naval patrols.

All this might seem to be a high price for Washington to pay, but as President Donald Trump surely understands, the leaders of every nation, including the PRC, have an obligation to get a good deal for their people. If Washington views a North Korean deal as essential, perhaps the only way to limit the North's nuclear ambitions, then the Trump administration should be prepared to pay.

Unfortunately, American policymakers seem uncomprehending about why Beijing acts the way it does. They act as if the PRC is simply being difficult because it wants to be difficult, and not to defend important, even vital interests. Thus, it doesn't occur to Washington to acknowledge the legitimacy of China's fears about the North's survival and address Beijing's concerns.

The poor state of bilateral relations is another reason for the PRC to make the first move. Given the chaos evident in the Trump administration and depleted staff at the State Department and other international agencies, no new initiative can be expected from the U.S. in the near term. Rather than allow disagreements to fester and misunderstandings to multiply, the Xi government should indicate that it is willing to deal. But it should communicate that it expects negotiations to be serious, designed to result in mutual benefit. Washington cannot expect to dictate to the rising nationalist power across the Pacific.

Although President Trump's reaction is hard to predict, the offer would test how serious his administration is about enlisting China in a redoubled campaign to end the DPRK's nuclear program. And concessions are well worth making to gain the PRC's assistance.

For instance, it is only fair for other nations, particularly the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, to share the costs if they are going to share the benefits from ending the North Korean nuclear program and perhaps even political system. Eliminating the North Korean threat and opening up new economic vistas would offer enormous gain.

Moreover, the Republic of Korea is well able to defend itself from Pyongyang and doesn't need to be garrisoned by the U.S. If the North disappeared, there would be even less justification for maintaining America's presence. A promise to withdraw actually would benefit the overextended U.S. as well.

North Korea is unpredictable and dangerous, no more inclined to cooperate with China than the U.S. The apparent assassination of Kim Jong-nam at Pyongyang's direction shows how little influence Beijing currently has in the DPRK.

If the North is to be constrained, it will require far greater pressure than the PRC so far has been willing to apply. And winning China's assistance will require far greater concessions than Washington so far has been willing to offer. The Trump administration appears unlikely to break this deadlock. The Xi government should make the first move.

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