

Leaked plans highlight China's fear of a new Korean war

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Documents leaked to the Japanese press last week, detailing purported Chinese contingency plans for a collapse of the North Korean regime, highlight the danger of war on the Korean Peninsula due to the aggressive US “pivot to Asia” aimed against China.

According to Kyodo News, the Chinese People’s Liberation Army formulated specific measures towards North Korea after Pyongyang’s third nuclear test in 2013. After this test, as tensions escalated, the United States mounted a major show of force in East Asia, even flying nuclear-capable bombers into South Korea.

The documents deal with a possible attack on North Korea by foreign military forces. Though the plans do not say what foreign powers might attack, the US and its ally, South Korea, are the only two nations hostile to North Korea that keep troops along its borders. If these countries attacked North Korea, Chinese forces would establish a blockade along the China-North Korea border, and to prevent an armed struggle from developing among North Korean refugees in China against the occupation of their country.

“As foreign shows of force are out of our control, a situation could arise whereby our country faces an influx of military units via the border regions,” the documents stated.

“There is concern that this circumstance could allow a foothold of resistance to form among refugees and breakaway soldiers. Under these circumstances, teams must be dispatched to border regions, including ‘reconnaissance groups’ to assess the situation, ‘investigation groups’ to question those who come in [to China], ‘blockade groups’ that prevent the influx of threats, and ‘armed groups’ to defend against hostile powers.”

The Chinese army would set up camps for North Korean refugees attempting to flee the country, with

each camp holding 1,500 people. Other camps would house top figures from the North Korean regime; to prevent their assassination and to stop them from leading elements of the North Korean army that could further destabilize the situation.

While the Western media speculated that China was abandoning its alliance with North Korea, Beijing quickly denied the report. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Hua Chunying stated, “To my knowledge, the relevant report is groundless and with an ulterior motive. We hope the Korean Peninsula will maintain stability and we hope the North Korean people will have a stable and comfortable life.”

Beijing’s denials notwithstanding, the Chinese leadership is well aware that the collapse of the North Korean regime could result in an aggressive US military intervention into North Korea, leading to war with China. The world is only a few steps away from a situation when, as during the 1950–53 Korean War, the US-South Korean invasion of the North led China to intervene militarily on North Korea’s side against Washington. Moreover, unlike in the 1950s, both Washington and Beijing now have nuclear weapons.

According to a December 2012 report to the US Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Chinese officials, when asked by their US counterparts, said they reserved the right to send troops into North Korea. South Korea has also reserved the same right—which it could only exercise in collaboration with US forces in the Korean Peninsula.

Since the sinking of the Cheonan frigate in 2010, which Seoul blamed on Pyongyang, South Korea has adopted a policy of unification through absorption. President Park Geun-hye, who was installed in February 2013, has taken an even more bellicose stance. During her trip to Germany in March, Park

outlined unilateral South Korean plans for the future of the peninsula. North Korea reacted angrily to Park's address, declaring two days later that it would not rule out a new nuclear test.

Amid these growing tensions, Beijing increasingly feels threatened by the US. China is clearly dissatisfied with North Korea's actions, which Washington has seized upon to justify its military buildup in Asia. Last year, German news outlet *Deutsche Welle* published details of other leaked Chinese documents, which outlined plans to oust North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and replace him with his older brother, Kim Jong-nam.

The aggressive parties in this standoff, however, are the US and its allies, whose policies threaten a catastrophic war. The leaked Chinese documents, should they prove genuine, would suggest that the comprador regime in China is desperately seeking an accommodation with Washington at the expense of its North Korean ally.

Beijing is concerned at the prospect of having US and South Korean armies right on its border, should North Korea be conquered by the South. This would not only pose a direct military threat to China, but could unleash territorial disputes and inflame social and ethnic tensions within China itself.

North Korea is closely connected to the depressed economy of Manchuria in north-eastern China. It has significant natural resources—a factor initially that drew the attention of the imperialist powers, prior to the colonization of Korea over 100 years ago. These resources, including gold and rare earths, have been estimated to be worth nearly \$10 trillion.

South Korea has indicated that, in the event of the reunification of Korea, it could claim an area of Manchuria, known as Gando in Korea, which has a large ethnic Korean population. Mount Baekdu, the mythical origin of the Korean people and an important symbol for Korean nationalists, also sits along the border between China and North Korea. In 1962, the two countries agreed to jointly administer the region but South Korea does not recognise the agreement.

South Korean historians argue that under a 1909 agreement, the Japanese, which controlled Korea's foreign affairs at the time, improperly ceded Gando to China. Mongolia has other claims on territory in Manchuria, exacerbating territorial and separatist

claims directed at Beijing by forces in Taiwan, Tibet, and the ethnic-Uighur regions of Xinjiang in western China.



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