

China in the North Korean Nuclear Quagmire: Rethinking Chinese Influence on North Korea

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In this article, we argue that Chinese influence on the North Korean nuclear quagmire has become more limited while U.S. influence has grown larger than that of China. Since Kim Jong Il saw his country's nuclear program as the ultimate guarantee of his regime's survival, he was not susceptible to dissuasion by the Chinese, who he distrusted. Repeated Chinese warnings and diplomatic pressure failed to dissuade North Korea from conducting missile and nuclear tests. U.S. coercion, on the other hand, could directly threaten Kim Jong Il's political survival, while U.S. appeasement would ease his insecurity. Thus Pyongyang did not listen to Chinese warnings but manipulated China's mediation to perform what might be described as nuclear brinkmanship to attract the attention of the United States. China had no choice but to attempt active mediation in order to maintain regional stability and consolidate its own geopolitical interests.

KEYWORDS: China; North Korea; foreign policy; nuclear; Kim Jong Il.

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North Korea's nuclear test put China into an excruciatingly difficult position, because it showed that Beijing's behind-the-scenes influence on Pyongyang was limited, causing the Chinese "stakeholder"¹ to lose face internationally.² The nuclear test also presented China with the strategic problem of deciding how it could achieve its pragmatic foreign policy goal of avoiding unnecessary conflict with the United States, while at the same time maintaining the regional status quo and pursuing its own economic interests.³ The test also influenced China's policy toward South Korea, because without strong ties with Seoul, China would have little leverage in shaping a unified Korea and undercutting a potential threat from a U.S.-South Korean alliance.⁴

The test ignited a debate about the strength of China's influence on Pyongyang because China failed to prevent the test taking place despite repeated warnings and frequent contacts. The debate focused on who had the stronger influence: China or the United States. While China failed

¹When Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) visited the White House in April 2006, George W. Bush requested that China become a stakeholder in a co-partnership for maintaining regional stability.

²Avery Goldstein, "Across the Yalu: China's Interests and the Korean Peninsula in a Changing World," in *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, ed. Alastair Iain Johnston and Robert S. Ross (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2006), 140; and Michael Horowitz, "Who's Behind That Curtain? Unveiling Potential Leverage over Pyongyang," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (Winter 2004-2005): 41-42.

³For details of China's global and regional foreign policy goals, see Goldstein, "Across the Yalu," 132-36; David Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula: Playing for the Long Term," *The Washington Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (2003): 44-45; Andrew Scobell, "China and North Korea: The Limits of Influence," *Current History* 102, no. 665 (September 2003): 274-78; Quansheng Zhao, "Moving Toward a Co-Management Approach: China's Policy Toward North Korea and Taiwan," *Asian Perspective* 30, no. 1 (2006): 39-78; Mel Gurtov, "Common Security in North Korea: Quest for a New Paradigm in Inter-Korean Relations," *Asian Survey* 42, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 397-418; Ming Liu, "China and the North Korean Crisis: Facing Test and Transition," *Pacific Affairs* 76, no. 3 (Fall 2003): 347-73; Eric A. McVadon, "China's Goal and Strategies for the Korean Peninsula," in *Planning for a Peaceful Korea*, ed. Henry D. Sokolski (Carlisle Barracks, Penn.: Strategic Studies Institute, U.S. Army War College, 2001), 131-214; Samuel S. Kim, "China's New Role in the Nuclear Confrontation," *Asian Perspective* 28, no. 4 (2004): 147-84; and Robert G. Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy Since the Cold War* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), 37-38.

⁴Shambaugh, "China and the Korean Peninsula," 49.

to prevent North Korea's provocation, it was the United States that exerted timely influence. It was Washington's dispatch of F-117 stealth bombers to South Korea that elicited North Korea's return to the negotiation table.

Here, we argue that Chinese influence on the North Korean nuclear quagmire has become more limited while U.S. influence has grown larger than that of the Chinese. Since Kim Jong Il saw the nuclear program as the ultimate guarantee of his regime's survival, he was not susceptible to dissuasion by the Chinese, who he distrusted. U.S. coercion, on the other hand, could directly threaten Kim Jong Il's political survival, while U.S. appeasement would ease his insecurity. North Korea deliberately planned to take the extreme route to escalate tension with the United States within a manageable margin, avoiding the outbreak of a full-scale war. It did not listen to Chinese warnings but manipulated China's mediation to perform what might be described as nuclear brinkmanship to attract the attention of the United States. China had no choice but to attempt active mediation in order to maintain regional stability and consolidate its own geopolitical interests. In what follows, we discuss the strategic and perceptual viewpoints of China and North Korea vis-à-vis the United States. Then, we move to delineate China's limited influence on North Korea during the nuclear crisis, from Pyongyang's failure to acknowledge the nuclear test. In lieu of a conclusion, we assess the feasibility of North Korea's future diplomatic maneuvers between Washington and Beijing.

China and North Korea in the Nuclear Quagmire

Influencing other countries requires having enough power, which is usually defined as the ability to compel others to do something they would not do otherwise. First, there is a distinction between "behavioral power" and "resource power," and the former can be categorized into hard and soft power. Hard power is the ability to influence others through the actual exercise of military capability or by means of a threat and/or the promise of a reward. Soft power is the ability to influence others through attrac-

tion, rather than coercion.⁵

It is more difficult to compel others to undo or stop something they are deeply involved in than to force them to do something new. It would be far more difficult to get others to undo a thing they value a great deal. To get others to stop doing something that is illegal or detrimental to regional stability requires a list of hard and soft alternatives that constitutes a sanction. A country would choose a hard option to influence others if their policy conflicts with its vital interests while a soft option would be chosen in other cases of less serious conflict.

The effects of power depend on the policies that power aims to influence. When power is wielded to influence others to do something they would not otherwise do, it affects others' strategic cost-benefit calculations, particularly with respect to national security. Most countries categorize national interests into three tiers: state survival, core national interests, and substantial interests. Threats to the top-tier interests directly affect state survival, while threats to the second-tier interests are imminent threats to national interests but not to the nation's survival. Threats to the third-tier interests may affect substantial interests, but do not directly threaten core national interests.⁶ Power may be less influential when it aims to influence a certain policy for defending state survival. In any country, policies defending state survival are prioritized over policies regarding second- and third-tier interests.

From the Chinese Viewpoint

China has been known to wield more influence over North Korea than any other country. Such leverage may essentially come from its asymmetrical trade with the country. China-North Korean trade increased by 16.2 percent (US\$1.97 billion) in 2007 and accounted for about 67 percent of Pyongyang's total external trade. China supplies 80 percent of the state's consumer goods and 87 percent of its crude oil.

⁵Joseph S. Nye, Jr., "Redefining the National Interest," *Foreign Affairs* 78, no. 4 (July/August 1999): 24-25.

⁶*Ibid.*, 26.

However, this economic relationship does not mean that China can influence North Korea in all ways. Its influence has proven limited, for example, in the realm of arranging a direct bilateral meeting between Pyongyang and Washington.⁷ China's previous status as Pyongyang's traditional patron has been eroded as it has repositioned itself from being a self-reliant, revolutionary communist country to a "tacit conservative partner" of the Western capitalist community⁸ and a "stakeholder" in the Northeast Asian region. In addition, generational turnover in both countries seems to have converted the blood-sealed alliance into a relationship more typical of adjacent nations.⁹ Now, the elites in the two countries no longer share an ideological bond, combat experiences in the struggle against Japan and in the Korean War against the United States, or professional backgrounds and specializations.¹⁰

Although China perceived North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities as more "bark than bite,"¹¹ the second North Korean nuclear crisis was an unwelcome development that threatened to destabilize the region and provide excuses for U.S. military involvement. To China, North Korea has turned out to be a "troublesome stepchild" rather than a "lips-and-teeth partner."¹² In that standoff, therefore, China emerged as an active mediator and conflict manager, departing from its conservative and risk-averse stance during the first nuclear crisis in the 1990s. In the first crisis, Chinese influence over North Korea was exerted indirectly, through "suggestions or encouragement from behind the scenes instead of through blunt and direct admonishments in public view."¹²

⁷Liu, "China and the North Korean Crisis," 361.

⁸See Preface in Lowell Dittmer and Samuel S. Kim, eds., *China's Quest for National Identity* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993); and Yongho Kim, "Forty Years of the Sino-North Korean Alliance: Beijing's Declining Credibility and Pyongyang's Bandwagoning with Washington," *Issues & Studies* 37, no. 2 (March/April 2001): 147-76.

⁹Horowitz, "Who's Behind That Curtain?" 35.

¹⁰Wu Xinbo, "The Promise and Limitations of a Sino-U.S. Partnership," *The Washington Quarterly* 27, no. 4 (Autumn 2004): 118; and John S. Park, "Inside Multilateralism: The Six-Party Talks," *ibid.* 28, no. 4 (Autumn 2005): 83.

¹¹Scobell, "China and North Korea," 276-77; and Timothy L. Savage, "China's Policy toward North Korea," *International Journal of World Peace* 20, no. 3 (September 2003): 33.

¹²For details, see Kim, "China's New Role in the Nuclear Confrontation," 151; Scobell,

The nuclear crisis occurred at a time when China was becoming increasingly concerned about forward U.S. military deployment on the Sino-Afghan border after September 11th. North Korea's tests provided legitimate excuses for more intense U.S. military involvement in its eastern strategic stronghold (*bingjia bizheng*, 兵家必爭).¹³ The basic problem is that China fears a North Korean implosion more than a North Korean nuclear weapon, because the former would generate chaos, conflict, refugees, and most important, a unified Korea allied with the United States on China's border.¹⁴

China shielded Pyongyang against U.S. military sanctions and provided economic assistance, including oil supplies. In some cases, China drove Washington into a corner with only a yes-or-no option: either accept a war of words with Pyongyang or be blamed for the failure of the six-party talks.¹⁵ At the same time, China exerted influence on Pyongyang, trying to prevent it from crossing the so-called red line. China shut off an oil pipeline to pressure North Korea to return to the six-party talks and supported an International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) resolution that referred the nuclear issue to the UN Security Council. In 2005, the Chinese arrested Yang Bin (楊斌), the chief executive of North Korea's Sinuiju

"China and North Korea," 275, 277; Evan S. Medeiros and M. Taylor Fravel, "China's New Diplomacy," *Foreign Affairs* 82, no. 6 (November/December 2003): 33; Horowitz, "Who's Behind That Curtain?" 22; David Kerr, "The Sino-Russian Partnership and U.S. Policy toward North Korea: From Hegemony to Concert in Northeast Asia," *International Studies Quarterly* 49, no. 3 (September 2005): 426; Samuel S. Kim, "China's Conflict-Management Approach to the Nuclear Standoff on the Korean Peninsula," *Asian Perspective* 30, no. 1 (2006): 27; and Anne Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," *The Washington Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 36.

¹³Mikhail Margelov, "Russian-Chinese Relations: At Their Peak?" *International Affairs* 49, no. 6 (December 2003): 79; Sunghan Kim, "Mi-Chung Chongsanghoctam Pyong'ga Mit Mi-Chung Kwan'gye Chonmang" (Sino-American summit and prospects for Sino-American relations), *Chuyo Kukchemunche Punsok* (International Issues & Prospects), no. 2006-15 (Seoul: Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, 2006), 1; U.S. Department of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: The Military Power of the People's Republic of China 2005*; Justin Bernier, "China's Strategic Proxies," *Orbis* 47, no. 4 (Fall 2003): 632; and Zhao, "Moving Toward a Co-Management Approach," 42.

¹⁴Doug Bandow, "Enlisting China to Stop a Nuclear North Korea," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 17, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 76.

¹⁵Kim, "China's Conflict-Management Approach," 31.

Special Administrative Region (SAR, 新義州特別行政區長官), on charges of money laundering and counterfeiting and froze Pyongyang's account at the Banco Delta Asia in Macao. At the UN Security Council meeting, China's draft resolution (which eventually became resolution UNSC 1695) served a dual purpose: it condemned Pyongyang's July 2006 missile test but ruled out the possibility of military sanctions by not invoking Chapter 7 of the UN Charter, which stipulates such sanctions.

As far as Chinese influence on the North Korean nuclear issue is concerned, the use of hard power to influence Pyongyang is not plausible as long as China perceives a foreign attack on its mainland from the northeast as a remote possibility.¹⁶ Unless the United States threatens to trigger another war on the peninsula and North Korea transfers nuclear materials to terrorists, there is no case for a Chinese military intervention as stipulated in the Sino-North Korean alliance. China, for its part, would mediate between Washington and Pyongyang to prevent the extreme case of a U.S. military attack. Right before the nuclear test in October 2006, some media organizations in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and Japan carried unconfirmed reports that China had handed over a draft treaty that did not allow for military assistance, even in the case of an armed conflict.¹⁷ China benefits from good relations with the United States and South Korea while at the same time maintaining an enduring security commitment to North Korea.

From the North Korean Viewpoint

Pyongyang gives higher priority to the political survival of Kim Jong Il than it does to the survival of the North Korean state. Different countries prioritize different combinations of values, which generate divergent perspectives on security. Quite often, their sense of insecurity arises from internal rather than external sources of threat.¹⁸ External threats that do not

¹⁶Goldstein, "Across the Yalu," 133; and Robert S. Ross, "Comparative Deterrence: The Taiwan Strait and the Korean Peninsula," in Johnston and Ross, *New Directions in the Study of China's Foreign Policy*, 29, 37.

¹⁷*Hankook Ilbo* (Korea Daily), October 9, 2006, 3.

¹⁸Brian L. Job, "The Insecurity Dilemma: National, Regime, and State Securities in the Third

constitute an immediate military invasion may still be regarded as security threats when they are likely to trigger domestic challenges to the ruling regime.¹⁹ As a result, elites ensure their own security at the expense of the security of others,²⁰ even that of the state. If a regime lacks sufficient legitimacy and public support to survive a war, it may require a defense with an assured destruction capability—in the case of North Korea that is nuclear weapons.²¹

It is highly probable that the Kim regime is moving toward another succession. Kim Jong Il's rise to power in North Korea started in 1972 when he was appointed director of the propaganda bureau of the ruling Korean Workers' Party (KWP).²² The 65-year-old leader, who survived political struggle as his father's designated successor for several decades and witnessed the fall of Nicolae Ceausescu, Slobodan Milosevic, and Saddam Hussein, may be aware that the key to his regime's survival is to give top priority to his own political survival. In this sense, a nuclear weapon, military-first politics, and a non-aggression pact with Washington are all policies that would achieve this. Other major interests, such as overcoming economic difficulties, including energy and food shortages, are therefore secondary priorities.

Kim Jong Il's relations with China have not flowed smoothly, as China has touched on Pyongyang's most sensitive and highly prioritized issue: Kim's own political status.²³ Unlike the Warsaw Pact, that provided external support for Ceausescu and Erich Honecker, North Korea's close relationship with China has not supported Kim Jong Il. When Kim's status as heir

World," in *The Insecurity Dilemma: National Security of Third World States*, ed. Brian L. Job (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1992), 12-15.

¹⁹ Amitav Acharya, "Regionalism and Regime Security in the Third World: Comparing the Origins of the ASEAN and the GCC," in Job, *The Insecurity Dilemma*, 161.

²⁰ Job, "The Insecurity Dilemma," 18.

²¹ Ross, "Comparative Deterrence," 15.

²² Lee Jong Suk, *Hyondae Pukhaneui Ihae* (Understanding modern North Korea) (Seoul: Yoksa Pipyongsa, 1995), 291.

²³ For details of Kim's relations with China, see Kim, "Forty Years of Sino-North Korean Alliance."

to the leadership was made public at the Sixth Congress of the KWP in October 1980, pro-Chinese media referred to a feudal culture and the "patriarchal" tradition of appointing one's own successor, criticizing North Korea for being mired in a kind of Stalinist dark age.²⁴ In fall 1981, Kim Jong Il's status as the successor gained China's tacit approval, however, when Hu Yaobang (胡耀邦) proposed a toast to his energetic accomplishments during a banquet held in Hu's honor in Pyongyang.²⁵

Kim was unhappy with China's market-oriented reform, and China was unhappy with Kim's criticisms of that reform. The father-to-son succession reached its peak when Kim was nominated as supreme commander of the North Korean Army in 1991 and as chairman of the National Defense Commission in 1993. For Kim, who took control of the military and the party's ideological indoctrination program, Chinese market-oriented reform was difficult to reconcile with the North's dominant ideological tenets. He was also critical when the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) failed to develop a workable and internally consistent ideology to dovetail with its capitalist reform program while justifying state control.²⁶

In articles written in the early 1990s, Kim Jong Il expressed his discontent with developments in China by implicitly accusing Chinese leaders of being "opportunists" and "betrayers of socialism."²⁷ Most defiant was an article published in March 1993 in which Kim called the Chinese leaders "corruptionists and betrayers in the upper class of the communist and labor movement who have committed immoral acts that betray the faith of party

²⁴Thomas P. Bernstein and Andrew J. Nathan, "The Soviet Union, China, and Korea," in *The U.S.-South Korean Alliance: Evolving Patterns in Security Relations*, ed. Gerald L. Curtis and Sung-joo Han (New York: Lexington Books, 1981), 89-127; and *Zhengming* (争鸣, Contending) (Hong Kong), no. 37 (November 1, 1980), in *FBIS-PRC* (November 21, 1980): U1.

²⁵*New York Times*, September 16, 1981.

²⁶Xiaoying Wang, "The Post-Communist Personality: The Spectre of China's Capitalist Market Reforms," *The China Journal*, no. 47 (January 2002): 11.

²⁷Kim Jong Il, "Sasangsaupul Apseunun kôsûn Sahowchuii Uiupsuhaengui Pilsuchôk Yôguida" (Prioritizing tasks regarding people's thought is indispensable necessity in the pursuit of socialist duty), *Rodong Sinmun* (Workers' Daily), June 21, 1995, 1; and Kim Jong Il, "Hyôkmyôngkwa Kônsôlesô Juchesôngkwa Minchoksongul Kôsuhalte taehayo" (In defense of *Juche* and nationalism in revolution and construction), *ibid.*, June 21, 1997, 2.

members and the people."²⁸

China reciprocated by delaying its endorsement of Kim Jong Il as the leader of North Korea after Kim Il Sung's death in 1994. Condolence messages from Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平), Jiang Zemin (江澤民), Li Peng (李鵬), and Qiao Shi (喬石) were officially addressed to the Central Committee and the Central Military Commission of the KWP, and the cabinet of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), not to Kim Jong Il personally. In contrast, messages from other countries were officially addressed to Kim Jong Il.²⁹

It was only after North Korea's special envoy and vice foreign minister, Song Ho Kyong, visited Beijing two months later that China addressed an official message to Kim, thereby acknowledging him as the de facto head of North Korea. The official party newspaper, *Rodong Sinmun* (Workers' Daily), did not print details of Song's visit to China,³⁰ After his return to Pyongyang, however, it carried photographs of Kim Il Sung with Mao Zedong (毛澤東), Zhou Enlai (周恩來), and Deng Xiaoping.³¹ It was on September 9, 1994, that Jiang Zemin sent an official message to Kim on the anniversary of the North Korean regime.³² A *Renmin ribao* (人民日報, People's Daily) editorial on the same day contained the phrase, "The Central Committee of the KWP with Kim Jong Il at its top," thereby indicating China's endorsement of Kim as the leader of North Korea.³³

In summary, China challenged North Korea's primary interest from the moment Kim Jong Il's status as heir apparent became official in 1980. When Kim the elder died, China appeared reluctant to approve his son's status as successor. Kim, for his part, was critical of China's market-

²⁸Kim Jong Il, "Sahoechuui Taehan Hoebangul Hoyongdoilsu Upda" (Slander against socialism cannot be allowed), *Rodong Sinmun*, March 4, 1993, 1-2.

²⁹*Rodong Sinmun*, July 10, 1994, 1; July 11, 1994, 3; July 12, 1994, 4; and July 13, 1994, 3-4.

³⁰*Ibid.*, August 31, 1994, 4; and September 4, 1994, 4.

³¹*Ibid.*, August 11, 1994, 2.

³²*Ibid.*, September 9, 1994, 1.

³³*Renmin ribao* (People's Daily), September 9, 1994, 1.

oriented reform. Kim therefore has good reason to perceive China's mediation in the nuclear crisis as another attempt to thwart him.

North Korea's Acknowledgment of the Highly Enriched Uranium Program and the Six-Party Talks

It was on October 4, 2005, the day of the arrest by China of Yang Bin, the chief executive of North Korea's Sinuiju SAR, that Kang Sok Ju, Pyongyang's first vice minister for foreign affairs, acknowledged that North Korea was about to acquire nuclear weapons and more powerful devices for preserving its autonomy and ensuring its survival. North Korea's initial response to U.S. allegations of a clandestine nuclear program had been total denial. On October 3, when James Kelly, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific affairs, reportedly raised the issue in Pyongyang, Kim Kye Gwan, Kelly's counterpart, was reportedly embarrassed and irritated. He denied the existence of such a program and characterized the charge as a U.S. fabrication.³⁴ Then at 16:45 the following day, Kang Sok Ju admitted the existence of the nuclear program.

The acknowledgment can be interpreted as an expression of Pyongyang's displeasure at the arrest of Yang Bin. It could also be a sign that North Korea might engage in nuclear blackmail against China in the future.³⁵ Yang's arrest was the result of Pyongyang turning a "deaf ear"³⁶ to repeated advice from China to move the SAR near to the demilitarized zone. China conveyed this message to the North Koreans as early as 1998, and Jiang Zemin repeated it to Kim Jong Il in January 2001 during their summit. China worried that the SAR would turn into a center of illegal

³⁴Associated Press, October 19, 2002; Joongang Ilbo (Central Daily News), *The Second Nuclear Crisis: The Untold Story* (Seoul: Joongang Ilbo Unification Research Institute, 2005), 7; and *Rodong Sinmun*, October 25, 2002.

³⁵Scobell, "China and North Korea," 275.

³⁶Liu, "China and the North Korean Crisis," 371.

money-laundering, gambling, and other tax evasion activities, and expressed its displeasure at Pyongyang's unilateral appointment of Yang Bin without giving prior notice to Beijing.³⁷

In Pyongyang's eyes, Yang's arrest might be perceived as a form of diplomatic pressure. Kim had visited China in May 2000 and again in January 2001, thus signaling his willingness to follow the Chinese method of economic reform.³⁸ However, Yang's pledge of a visa-free zone in the SAR revealed Pyongyang's intention of competing with China's northeast provinces by developing Sinuiju into a new commercial center. In addition, the arrest could have been a warning to Pyongyang not to pursue autonomous policies toward Russia and Japan. The visits to North Korea of President Vladimir Putin of Russia in August 2005 and Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi of Japan in September that year could be perceived as diplomatic defiance of Chinese patronage. It was during Koizumi's visit that Kim Jong Il apologized for the abduction of Japanese citizens.³⁹

Deeming it unlikely that Washington would take military action and in defiance of warnings from China not to provoke the United States, North Korea chose to do just that. Washington's delayed announcement of the North Korean acknowledgment of its nuclear program and the launching of the invasion of Iraq were signs that there would be no imminent attack on North Korea. This was confirmed by the statements of President George W. Bush and his secretary of state, Colin Powell.⁴⁰ In December 2002, as

³⁷Ibid.; Kim Hong-kyu and Choi Myong-hae, "Yang Bin Sakonkwa Pukhan-Chungkuk Kwankye" (The Yang Bin incident and Sino-North Korean relations), *Korean Political Science Review* 39, no. 1 (2005): 329-31; and Jin Se-keun, "What's China Up to in Sinuiju?" *JoongAng Ilbo*, October 5, 2002.

³⁸*New York Times*, January 18, 2001, A6; Chosun Central Broadcasting, January 28, 2001; and *Rodong Sinmun*, January 21, 2001, 1.

³⁹Seung Ham Yang, Woosang Kim, and Yongho Kim, "Russo-North Korean Relations in the 2000s: Moscow's Continuing Search for Regional Influence," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 6 (November/December 2004): 794-814.

⁴⁰*Washington Post*, October 19, 2002, A01. The Foreign Ministry memo released on October 25 confirmed Kang's statement. See Korean Central News Agency (KCNA), October 25, 2002; *Washington Post*, December 30, 2002, A01; and *New York Times*, December 29, 2002, A1 and January 15, 2003, A1. For details on low probability of U.S. military sanction on North Korea, see Yongho Kim and Myung Chul Kim, "North Korea's Risk-taking vis-à-vis the U.S. Coercion in the Nuclear Quagmire," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 19, no. 4 (2007): 56-57.

a warning to Pyongyang not to withdraw from the Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), China had supported the IAEA resolution that referred the North Korean nuclear issue to the UN Security Council. The Chinese stance contrasted to that of Russia, which abstained, as indeed China had done itself in 1993. This implied that China would withdraw its support from Pyongyang if it crossed the red line.⁴¹ Soon after, on February 18, 2003, the Chinese deputy foreign minister, Wang Yi (王毅), met North Korea's foreign minister, Paek Nam Sun, and then the Chinese shut off an oil pipeline between the two countries. At the meeting, Wang Yi allegedly warned Pyongyang to moderate its provocative behavior and not to cross the red line.⁴²

In 2003, a MiG fighter crossed the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the West Sea for the first time in twenty years, while in February that year North Korea fired a surface-to-surface missile in the East Sea on the morning of Colin Powell's visit to Seoul, and Pyongyang announced the restarting of the 5-MW reactor at Yongbyon. On March 2, North Korean MiG fighters shadowed a U.S. RC-135S reconnaissance plane at a distance of fifteen meters over international waters.⁴³ North Korea's agreement to three-party consultations with Washington and Beijing on March 31 came after the United States dispatched F-117 stealth bombers to South Korea on March 19, 2003. On March 8, just a week after the shadowing of the U.S. reconnaissance plane, Vice Premier Qian Qichen (錢其琛) of China had met with Kim Jong Il at his wartime fortress retreat at Samjiyon, near the Sino-North Korean border.⁴⁴

⁴¹Howard French, "N. Korean Reaction on Iraq Is Subdued So Far," *New York Times*, April 2, 2003, A6.

⁴²Scobell, "China and North Korea," 278; and Savage, "China's Policy toward North Korea," 31.

⁴³*New York Times*, December 13, 2002, A1; February 24, 2003, A16; and March 4, 2003, A1; *Rodong Sinmun*, December 14, 2002, 4, and February 6, 2003, 4; *Chosun Ilbo* (Chosun Daily News), March 8, 2003, 2; and *Washington Post*, March 4, 2003, A1.

⁴⁴*Huanqiu shibao* (環球時報, The Global Times), April 21, 2003, 1; Liu, "China and the North Korean Crisis," 360; Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," 39; and Joonggang Ilbo, *The Second North Korean Nuclear Crisis*, 25.

Accepting Chinese mediation and agreeing to hold three-party consultations could have been an effort by North Korea to avoid becoming a second Iraq. North Korea again submitted to Chinese mediation when it agreed to participate in the six-party talks on July 31, 2003. Pyongyang expressed concern over the deployment of U.S. F-117 stealth bombers in South Korea, the US\$11 billion plan for enhancing the combat capability of U.S. forces in that country, and the relocation of U.S. bases out of the range of North Korean artillery.⁴⁵ China had already sent Dai Bingguo (戴秉國), a vice foreign minister, to Pyongyang and Washington and shielded North Korea by voting with Russia against a proposed UN Security Council resolution on July 4.

The Six-Party Talks

When the first round of the talks went poorly, China mediated again. Hu Jintao himself warned in August 2003 that China might not be able to continue its aid to Pyongyang if the North refused to halt its weapons of mass destruction (WMD) program, compelling Pyongyang to comply with the six-party talks.⁴⁶ Wu Bangguo (吳邦國), chairman of China's National People's Congress, visited Pyongyang and Washington in late October, and in early November, Dai Bingguo met the foreign minister of South Korea, Yoon Young-kwan, to set an agenda for the second round of the six-party talks. Wang Yi visited Pyongyang in early December. Then, China conveyed a draft statement for the talks to James Kelly through Fu Ying (傅瑩), a senior Chinese diplomat. Wang Yi visited Seoul and Tokyo in mid-February 2004, right before the talks. Finally, Hu Jintao elicited Kim Jong Il's commitment to end the nuclear standoff peacefully through dialogue when they met in Beijing in April.⁴⁷

It is notable that North Korea returned to the third round of the six-party talks after Washington sent F-117 stealth bombers to South Korea.

⁴⁵ *Rodong Simmun*, May 11, 2003, 6; and July 2, 2003, 3.

⁴⁶ Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," 40-41, 43.

⁴⁷ *Korea Herald*, November 4, 2003, 3; November 10, 2003, 2; December 1, 2003, 3; December 7, 2003, 3; and April 23, 2004, 3.

The second (February 25-28, 2004) and the third round of the talks (June 23-26, 2004) ended in stalemate, with North Korea calling for an "action for action" code and Washington demanding complete, verifiable, and irreversible dismantlement (CVID). During the second round of the talks, Kim Kye Gwan, vice foreign minister and Pyongyang's chief nuclear negotiator, made it clear that North Korea would not abandon its nuclear program as long as the United States maintained a hostile policy toward Pyongyang.⁴⁸ Only after the stealth squadron had arrived in South Korea on June 29, 2004 did *Rodong Sinmun* release Kim Kye Gwan's statement that North Korea would not produce, export, or test a nuclear bomb.⁴⁹

Declaration of Possession of Nuclear Weapons and the Fourth Round of the Six-Party Talks, 2005

While North Korea consistently argued that the U.S. call for CVID signified Washington's intention not to continue the talks, a series of incidents prompted North Korea to announce its possession of nuclear weapons. While the North Korean Human Rights Act of 2004 and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's "outposts of tyranny" statement on January 18, 2005, agitated North Korea, the transfer of U.S. troops from South Korea to Iraq again indicated that no military attack on North Korea was imminent.⁵⁰

For its part, China had also annoyed North Korea on various occasions. In April 2004, Kim Jong Il reportedly elicited an unfavorable response from Hu Jintao when Kim requested that the Sinuiju SAR project be recommenced. China put pressure on Pyongyang by reportedly confirming that North Korea intended to conduct uranium enrichment for

⁴⁸ *Yonhap News*, February 28, 2004.

⁴⁹ *Rodong Sinmun*, June 29, 2004, 4.

⁵⁰ See <http://usembassy.state.gov/ircseoul/wwwh5320.html>; <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?bicode=060000&biid=2004093054488>; <http://www.royce.house.gov/News/DocumentSingle.aspx?DocumentID=19692>; <http://www.govtrack.us/congress/bill.xpd?bill=h108-4011>; Park, "Inside Multilateralism," 78; *Chosun Ilbo*, July 31, 2004, 1 and October 5, 2004, 3; *Donga Ilbo*, October 7, 2004, 3; *Rodong Sinmun*, February 11, 2005, 2, and April 26, 2005, 4.

the first time in October 2004. It had previously supported Pyongyang's denial of the existence of an enrichment program. In November, Chinese border security in Dandong City, Liaoning Province (遼寧省丹東市), confiscated a large amount of heroin produced in North Korea.⁵¹

After the third round of talks ended without any agreement, China intervened to bring Pyongyang back to the table but failed to prevent Pyongyang's announcement of its possession of nuclear weapons. On October 7, 2004, Hu Jintao sent Ambassador Ning Fukui (寧賦魁) to discuss how to get Pyongyang to return to the talks after he elicited Washington's consent to continue the negotiations during a phone conversation with President George W. Bush. In addition, on October 18, Kim Yong Nam, president of North Korea's Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly, admitted during a visit to Beijing that the six-party talks would be the best channel for resolving the nuclear standoff.⁵²

China was seemingly not informed about Pyongyang's impending nuclear weapons announcement, given that an anonymous senior Chinese official remained optimistic only ten days beforehand.⁵³ The February 10, 2005, communiqué declared that "we have already taken the resolute action of pulling out of the NPT and have manufactured nuclear weapons for self-defense to cope with the Bush administration's ever more undisguised policy to isolate and stifle the DPRK."⁵⁴ It stressed that the United States' attempt to topple the North Korean regime compelled the latter to take measures to bolster its nuclear arsenal.

China acted immediately and vigorously in the knowledge that North Korea's possession of a nuclear bomb would destabilize the region, provide excuses for more intense U.S. military involvement, and result in the strengthening of U.S.-Japan security cooperation. In an unusual move,

⁵¹ *Tokyo Shimbun*, November 7, 2004; *Hankyoreh Sinmun*, November 8, 2004, 2; *Hankook Ilbo*, September 21, 2004, 5; Kyodo News Agency, October 4, 2004; *Korea Herald*, October 5, 2004, 14; and *Donga Ilbo*, December 4, 2004, 8.

⁵² Wu, "What China Whispers to North Korea," 39.

⁵³ *Donga Ilbo*, February 13, 2005, 4.

⁵⁴ *Rodong Sinmun*, February 11, 2005, 2; February 12, 2005, 5; February 13, 2005, 5; and KCNA, February 10, 2005.

Chinese dissatisfaction with Pyongyang was expressed openly in the Chinese media. Right after the announcement, the Chinese foreign minister, Li Zhaoxing (李肇星), told Condoleezza Rice that "China (would) stay in touch with all relevant parties and strive to make the situation develop in a positive direction so that the six-party talks could be resumed as soon as possible."⁵⁵ China sent Wang Jiarui (王家瑞), head of the CCP's International Liaison Department, to Pyongyang in late February 2005 with a personal message from Hu Jintao. Wang reportedly told Kim Jong Il that it was in both China's and North Korea's vital interests to resolve the issue reasonably through negotiation. Wang's remarks were seen as a thinly veiled warning to Pyongyang. After the meeting with Wang, Kim mentioned that Pyongyang was still committed to the six-party talks. In early March, China sent Vice Foreign Minister Wu Dawei (武大偉) to Seoul, where he met with Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon in an effort to expedite bilateral efforts to get Pyongyang back to the table. On March 23, Premier Pak Bong Ju of North Korea visited Beijing where he held talks with Hu Jintao, who also urged Pyongyang to return to the talks. In April, Kang Sok Ju and Kim Kye Gwan visited Beijing and held talks with Wu Dawei, Wang Jiarui, and Li Zhaoxing.⁵⁶

Again, it was the United States, not China, which exerted timely influence by using the carrot and the stick simultaneously. President Bush's use of "Mr." in front of Kim Jong Il's name on May 31, 2005, and the dispatch of U.S. stealth bombers along with 250 troops to South Korea which was completed on June 7, 2005, brought North Korea back to the negotiating table. When the first group of stealth bombers arrived in South Korea, the *New York Times* labeled this deployment as "pressure on North Korea."⁵⁷ Just fifteen days after the deployment of stealth bombers to South Korea was completed, Kim Jong Il disclosed Pyongyang's intention

⁵⁵*Korea Herald*, February 15, 2005, 2.

⁵⁶*Korea Herald*, February 26, 2005, 2, February 28, 2005, 1; and March 3, 2005, 2; *Chosun Ilbo*, April 5, 2005, 2; *Hankook Ilbo*, March 24, 2005, 5; April 4, 2005, 1; and April 5, 2005, 2.

⁵⁷*New York Times*, May 30, 2005 from http://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/30/politics/30diplo.html?_r=1&scp=1&sq=stealth%20&%20north%20korea&st=cse&oref=slogin.

to return to the talks to the visiting South Korean unification minister Chung Dong-young.⁵⁸

North Korea again accepted Chinese mediation. During the fourth round of the talks, Wu Dawei, China's chief negotiator, put forward a draft that ruled out all nuclear facilities in North Korea, including a civilian nuclear program, and in return pledged to lift economic bans and normalize relations. On August 3, Li Zhaoxing consulted Condoleezza Rice regarding the draft, and the head of the U.S. delegation, Christopher Hill, told reporters that all that was left was for China to persuade Pyongyang.⁵⁹ On September 19, 2005, North Korea committed to abandoning "all nuclear weapons and existing nuclear programs and returning, at an early date, to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons and to IAEA safeguards."⁶⁰ The Bush administration later praised China for pushing Pyongyang to rejoin the talks and agreed to the September 19 joint statement.⁶¹ In November, Hu Jintao provided a long-term US\$2 billion aid package during his first visit to North Korea as Chinese president. In return, Kim Jong Il gave his word on North Korea's adherence to denuclearization.⁶² This was eleven months before the nuclear test.

Missile and Nuclear Test, 2006

It was on July 5, 2006 that North Korea launched seven missiles. This was about seven months after China froze US\$24 million in North Korea's account at Banco Delta Asia (BDA) in Macao after Washington named the bank as a primary money-laundering concern in accordance with article 331 of the Patriot Act. In addition, China arrested Kang Sang Ch'un, the number two in the KWP organizational guidance bureau, who was allegedly involved in managing Kim Jong Il's personal accounts when Kim was

⁵⁸*Hankook Ilbo*, June 18, 2005, 1.

⁵⁹*Korea Herald*, August 5, 2005, 4.

⁶⁰KCNA, September 19, 2005.

⁶¹*New York Times*, November 20, 2005, 1.

⁶²*Korea Herald*, November 2, 2005, 3.



visiting China.⁶³ Pyongyang had allegedly produced more than US\$45 million in counterfeit U.S. currency.⁶⁴

During a press conference with visiting Australian prime minister, John Howard, a week before the missile test, Premier Wen Jiabao (温家宝) of China expressed concern over the impending test and called for Pyongyang to exercise restraint; he suggested that the test would heighten regional tension.⁶⁵ Wen Jiabao expressed his view of the relationship between North Korea and the United States when he mentioned that the six-party talks had stalled due to the conflict between Pyongyang's right to test missiles and the U.S. description of the missile test as a violation of the six-party talks.⁶⁶ President Bush reportedly asked for China's help in dissuading Pyongyang from testing missiles, while diplomatic observers spread unconfirmed reports of Chinese behind-the-scenes influence on Pyongyang.⁶⁷ On June 23, John Bolton, the U.S. ambassador to the United Nations, emphasized the Chinese role in deterring North Korea from conducting a missile test, and this view was echoed by Ban Ki-moon, the South Korean foreign minister, the following day.⁶⁸ Li Zhaoxing, China's foreign minister, hinted that China had tried to dissuade Pyongyang when he told Ban Ki-moon on June 27 that China had conveyed its concern over the missile test to the relevant countries.⁶⁹ Li reportedly told Paik Nam Sun, the North Korean foreign minister, during his Beijing visit that a missile test should be avoided.⁷⁰ Wu Dawei, China's deputy foreign minister, reportedly conveyed China's concern to Choe Jin Su, Pyongyang's ambassador to Beijing, on June 29.⁷¹

⁶³Yoon Dok Min, "Mi-Chung Jobkunkwa Pukhan Muncheui Kukche Chongch'il" (Sino-American approach and international politics of North Korean affairs), *Chuyo Kukchemunche Punsok*, 2006 (Summer): 7.

⁶⁴*Korea Times*, December 5, 2005, 2.

⁶⁵*Donga Ilbo*, June 28, 2006, 1.

⁶⁶*Hankyoreh Sinmun*, June 23, 2006, 4.

⁶⁷*New York Times*, June 17, 2006, A18.

⁶⁸*Hankyoreh Sinmun*, June 26, 2006, 6.

⁶⁹http://english.people.com.cn/200606/27/eng20060627_277871.html.

⁷⁰*Segye Ilbo*, June 6, 2006, 5.

⁷¹*Dong-a Ilbo*, June 30, 2006, 8.

All these measures failed to dissuade Pyongyang from conducting the missile test. China's official response came ten hours after the test. A Chinese Foreign Ministry memo written on July 5 stressed regional stability and a cooled-down approach for all relevant countries.⁷² Wang Guangya (王光亚), China's ambassador to the United Nations, said on the same day, "I think that for bad behavior, no one is going to protect them."⁷³ He had warned on July 4 that the test would have a very serious outcome for Pyongyang. Christopher Hill disclosed that North Korea did not provide *a priori* information on the missile test to any participant of the six-party talks when he flew to Seoul from Beijing, where he had met with State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan (唐家璇), Li Zhaoxing, and Wu Dawei.⁷⁴ Tang Jiaxuan also confirmed that China had no *a priori* notice of the test on July 8 when he met members of the Japanese Jiminto Party at the Japanese Diet.⁷⁵

Kim Jong Il did not meet Vice Premier Hui Liangyu (回良玉) and Wu Dawei, who were in Pyongyang immediately after the test for the forty-fifth anniversary of the Sino-North Korean treaty.⁷⁶ The missile test might have been perceived by China in a number of different ways, including as "a total embarrassment," as "undue pressure to defend North Korea at all cost," "an open challenge to the Chinese leadership," or "loss of face."⁷⁷

Nevertheless, U.S. officials urged China to pressure Pyongyang. Undersecretary of State Nicholas Burns called for China to influence Pyongyang by exerting "some pressure."⁷⁸ Christopher Hill, the U.S. special envoy for North Korea's nuclear program, said, "We need China

⁷² *New York Times*, July 6, 2006, A10; July 7, 2006, A12; July 8, 2006, A5; and July 12, 2006, A11.

⁷³ *Kyonghyang Sinmun*, October 9, 2006, 2; and *Dong-a Ilbo*, October 9, 2006, 5.

⁷⁴ *Kookmin Ilbo*, July 10, 2006, 5.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ *Korea Herald*, July 11, 2006, 1.

⁷⁷ Eric Teo Chu Chew, "The North Korean Missile and Nuclear Crises: China's Historic and Strategic Stakes on the Korean Peninsula," *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 18, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 34-35.

⁷⁸ Associated Press, "U.S. Urges China: Pressure North Korea," <http://edition.cnn.com/2006/WORLD/asiapcf/07/09/us.nkorea.ap/index.html>; and *New York Times*, July 9, 2006, A6.

to be very, very firm with their neighbors and frankly with their long-term allies, the North Koreans, on what is acceptable behavior and what is not."⁷⁹ John Bolton complained that "countries that have leverage over North Korea ... bear the responsibility for trying to use that to bring the North Koreans back into compliance."⁸⁰

China's mediation continued in a low-key manner. While Hui Liangyu and Wu Dawei met Pyongyang's leaders to persuade them to return to negotiation, Foreign Minister Li Zhaoxing telephoned the foreign ministers of the other Security Council member states to dissuade them from taking any "rash actions."⁸¹ At the United Nations, Ambassador Wang Guangya transmitted a Chinese draft that was militarily nonbinding, because it dropped the description of the missile test as a "threat to international peace and security." That was the description on the draft submitted by Japan, which China described as an "overreaction." China implied that it would veto any resolution that mentioned Chapter 7 of the UN Charter. Christopher Hill admitted that China was "as baffled as we are," and expected that Chinese mediation would generate a diplomatic solution. Furthermore, he said, "we're kind of giving the ball to the Chinese for the time being and let's see if they can make a goal with that." With the optimistic expectation that the six-party talks would resume, Li Zhaoxing indirectly expressed China's reservations about five-party talks that excluded North Korea when he met Ban Ki-moon in Kuala Lumpur on July 26, 2006.⁸¹ Thus, UNSC Resolution 1695 was passed without invoking Article 7, which would have involved a military option. China criticized Australia and Japan for imposing sanctions on Pyongyang in September that year.⁸²

When North Korea announced its plan for a nuclear test, China called for negotiation and dialogue for peaceful resolution of the issue while

⁷⁹*Financial Times*, July 7, 2006, 1; <http://edition.cnn.com/TRANSCRIPTS/0607/05/ywt.01.html>; and *New York Times*, July 6, 2006, A10.

⁸⁰*Wall Street Journal*, July 7, 2006, A4, http://www.usunnewyork.usmission.gov/06_147.htm.

⁸¹*Washington Times*, July 14, 2006, A12; *Korea Herald*, July 11, 2006, 1-2; July 12, 2006, 1; July 13, 2006, 1; July 17, 2006, 1; and July 27, 2006, 1.

⁸²<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/09/19/AR2006091900171.html>.

noting that it had been consistent in arguing for a nuclear-free Korea and the promotion of regional stability through the six-party talks. Liu Jianchao (劉建超), the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson, called on Pyongyang to maintain calm and self-restraint with regard to the nuclear test, while asking the relevant countries to restrain from actions that would heighten tension.⁸³ Just ten days before the test, Wu Dawei in Seoul commented that China had no information on the reported move by North Korea to conduct a nuclear test.⁸⁴

Then, Pyongyang administered another slap on the face. On October 9, 2006, North Korea announced that it had successfully conducted an underground nuclear test, "a historic event as it greatly encouraged and pleased the Korean People's Army (KPA) and people" that wished to have a powerful, self-reliant defense capability. A Chinese Foreign Ministry memo written on October 9 criticized North Korea for conducting the test in a very selfish way.⁸⁵

Twenty-two days after the test, on October 31, 2006, North Korea accepted Chinese mediation and formally announced its return to the six-party talks. State Councilor Tang Jiaxuan had been sent to Pyongyang as a special envoy immediately after the test, and, unlike what happened after the missile test, he was received by Kim Jong Il and was reportedly able to convey a very strong warning not to conduct a second test and also to encourage North Korea to return to the six-party talks. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry, North Korea's return to the talks came after chief negotiators from Beijing, Washington, and Pyongyang had gathered together in Beijing.⁸⁶

⁸³ *New York Times*, October 4, 2006, A6.

⁸⁴ KCNA, October 9, 2006; and *Korea Herald*, September 30, 2006, 2.

⁸⁵ *Kyonghyang Sinmun*, October 10, 2006, 7.

⁸⁶ *Korea Times*, October 20, 2006, 2; and *New York Times*, November 1, 2006, A1.

Concluding Remarks

North Korea returned to the six-party talks in February 2007 after the United States dispatched F-117 bombers to South Korea the month before for the annual joint military exercise with South Korea. At the talks, Kim Kye Gwan, North Korea's chief negotiator, called strongly for the withdrawal of the stealth bombers. On February 13, the talks generated a denuclearization agreement. The change from a hawkish to a dovish stance by the Bush administration elicited some signs of cooperation from North Korea. Whether North Korea will completely abandon its nuclear activities remains to be seen, although Pyongyang has demonstrated its sincerity by the spectacular act of blowing up its nuclear cooling tower.

In retrospect, China's influence was limited because it was aimed at changing a policy designed to achieve Pyongyang's top priority: Kim Jong Il's political survival. Repeated Chinese warnings and diplomatic pressure failed to dissuade North Korea from conducting missile and nuclear tests because Pyongyang could not afford to give up its core interests. On the contrary, the United States appeared to exert a larger influence because it had the capability to effectively coerce Kim Jong Il and at the same time the capacity to relieve his insecurity and lift the most serious threat to his survival.

The next administration in Washington will very likely abandon time-consuming pulling and hauling with North Korea and instead pursue a dovish policy. In 2000, the United States and North Korea exchanged high-level visits by Madeleine Albright, the U.S. secretary of state, and Cho Myong Rok, Kim Jong Il's most trusted general. The peaceful mood between Washington and Pyongyang was turned into stalemate due to the hawkish ABC (all but Bill Clinton) policy of the Bush administration. It was during the last stage of Bush's second term that the administration reversed its hawkish stance and began to mention normalizing relations with Pyongyang. If Washington provides a guarantee for Kim Jong Il's political survival, as it did for Muammar Qaddafi of Libya, Kim will not hesitate to abandon the production of further nuclear weapons and to normalize relations with the United States. Then, time will flow back to

December 2000.

Better relations with the United States would provide Pyongyang with useful diplomatic leverage between Washington and Beijing, similar to that which it enjoyed between Beijing and Moscow during the Cold War period. Limited Chinese influence and a larger degree of leverage held by the United States, which this study has reviewed so far, would present a far more intriguing picture of Chinese-North Korean relations.

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