



# ICAS BULLETIN

## Institute for China-America Studies

### A Survey of Scholarship on U.S.-China Relations

*Twice a month, the ICAS Bulletin updates a global audience on American perspectives regarding the world's most important bilateral relationship. Research papers, journal articles, and other prominent work published in the U.S. are listed here alongside information about events at U.S.-based institutions.*

#### Commentary:

#### Why There Are No Military Solutions for North Korea

*By Geoff Wilson*



## In the News

### **Pentagon Report Cites China Military Buildup Around the World**

Associated Press

*The New York Times*, June 6, 2017

According to a report by the Pentagon, China will be building its second overseas military base in Pakistan. The Pentagon views China's actions in Pakistan and its other military base in Djibouti as part of military expansionism which "reflect and amplify China's growing influence." Other analysts offer a more charitable view of the bases, saying it is part of China's growth as a more responsible actor in international security. The Chinese Foreign Ministry called the Pentagon's report "irresponsible" and "in disregard of facts."

### **Jerry Brown in China With a Climate Message to the World: Don't Follow America's Lead**

Jessica Meyers

*The Los Angeles Times*, June 7, 2017

California Governor Jerry Brown attended the Under 2 Coalition summit in China in a visit that has garnered substantial attention given the Trump administration's decision to withdraw from the Paris agreement. Brown made clear that there would be a divergence of state and federal level climate policies in the U.S., with California agreeing to adhere to environmental standards exceeding those stipulated in the Paris agreement.

### **Panama Switches Diplomatic Recognition from Taiwan to China**

Louise Watt and Juan Zamorano

*The Washington Post*, June 13, 2017

In a potential sign of waning American influence, Panama declared it would adhere to the One China Policy and switched diplomatic recognition from Taiwan to China because it was "the correct path for [Panama]." In Taiwan, officials including President Tsai Ing-wen denounced the move as a betrayal and vowed to maintain the island's sovereignty and international presence.

### **U.S. Asks China to Crack Down on Shadowy Firms that Trade with North Korea**

Jay Solomon and Jeremy Page

*The Wall Street Journal*, June 13, 2017

The Trump administration has asked China to act against several Chinese companies and individuals that trade with North Korea. Although much of Pyongyang's foreign trade, which is

conducted mainly through China, is legal, several Chinese companies are exporting products that can potentially be used for both civilian and military purposes. C4ADS, a Washington nonpartisan research group, identified several Chinese entities of concern, stating that “a very small number of key executives control a disproportionate share of the trade,” implying that North Korea relies heavily on a select few entities to finance its missile program.

### **U.S., China Strike Deal on Beef Exports**

Vicki Needham

*The Hill*, June 13, 2017

U.S. and Chinese officials declared that they reached an agreement allowing the U.S. to restart beef imports to China after a nearly 14-year ban, which was put in place over concerns of mad cow disease. House Agriculture Committee Chairman Michael Conaway (R-Texas) hailed the move as “an area of great opportunity for the U.S. beef industry.” In recent years China has become one of the largest importers of beef in the world.

### **U.S. Weighs Restricting Chinese Investment in Artificial Intelligence**

Phil Stewart

*Reuters*, June 14, 2017

An unreleased Pentagon report reveals American concern with China’s increased investment in fields such as artificial intelligence and machine learning that can be used to develop China’s military capabilities. Some analysts say that the technologies are so new that they are not well regulated by the current monitoring system. Defense Secretary Jim Mattis called the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States “outdated” and said the rules “need to be updated to deal with today’s situation.” But industry experts have expressed concern about heightening scrutiny of Chinese investment in Silicon Valley, saying stronger regulations may not serve their intended purpose and may cause China retaliate in kind.

## **Articles and Analysis**

### **Will China Fill the Vacuum Left by America?**

Banya

*The Economist*, June 8, 2017

Pundits have been quick to predict that the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris climate deal will cause China to emerge as a global leader, particularly in the fight against climate change. However, many obstacles before China is ready to fill the void left by an absence of U.S.

leadership. China's lack of government transparency and accountability will almost certainly make it reluctant to assume a leadership role that would expose it to greater levels of international criticism. As for economic leadership, Europe is frustrated with both China's closed markets and its unwillingness to engage in trade multilaterally. Given these challenges, and the consequences they have on China's domestic image, China will be reluctant to assume the mantle of leadership.

### **How the China-North Korea Equation is Changing**

Lexington

*The Economist*, June 8, 2017

Although China and the U.S. share the vision of a nuclear-free Korean peninsula, they have radically different priorities. For years Americans have been concerned that North Korea could launch a devastating artillery strike on Seoul, causing massive urban destruction. China is worried that a chaotic collapse of the Kim regime will send millions of refugees into northeastern China, while Korean reunification may place a pro-Western Korea on its border. However, the status quo is changing. North Korea appears to be on the verge of fielding ICBMs that could target the continental U.S.. If the North Korean crisis is not resolved before that time comes, the Trump administration has indicated that the U.S. would consider acting unilaterally to halt the North Korean missile threat.

### **China Copycat Tech Image is Fading and That Should Worry U.S. Tech Giants**

Arjun Kharpal

*CNBC*, June 13, 2017

China's image as a copycat in technology may no longer hold water. Las Vegas' annual Consumer Electronics Show held a sister event in Shanghai, which put on display both China's advances in technology and its more technology savvy consumers. While U.S. media was abuzz when Apple integrated payment options in iMessage, this is technology is old news in China, with over 450 million users of Alipay.

## **Events, Videos and Discussions**

### **China's Vision for a New Eurasian Order**

Nadège Rolland, Daniel Markey, Ely Ratner and Ashley Tellis

*Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, June 12, 2017

The panelists discuss National Bureau of Asian Research senior fellow Nadege Rolland's new

book *China's Eurasian Century? Political and Strategic Implications for the Belt and Road*. Through a study of mainly official Chinese communities, she finds that more than just an economic initiative, Belt and Road reflects China's desire to model the Eurasian region according to a Sinocentric worldview. Ultimately, Rolland recommends Western powers to stay engaged in Eurasia to protect their interests and warns participation in Belt and Road may have negative consequences for poorer Eurasian countries.

### **20th Anniversary of Hong Kong's Handover: Reflections and Expectations**

Kurt Tong, Walter Dias, James Keith, Clement Leung and Ann Rutledge

CSIS, June 13, 2017

This panel examines Hong Kong's current economic standing, how successful the handover from the United Kingdom to China was, and the status of "One Country, Two Systems" in Hong Kong. While Ambassador Tong notes that analysts should be wary of Beijing's increased hand in the politics of Hong Kong, he reminds us that "Hong Kong is still very much a success story and Hong Kong still enjoys a high degree of autonomy."

## **ICAS Book Review**

### **The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom**

By John Pomfret

Henry Holt and Co., November 29, 2016

*The Beautiful Country and the Middle Kingdom* systematically reviews the history of U.S.-China relations from 1776 to the present. Previously working as a journalist in China, Pomfret has experienced the ups and downs of the bilateral relationship in person. He embedded his personal observations into this book, noting the unevenness of the U.S.-China relationship. Americans have typically formed a special attitude towards China, which they regard as the "sister country" in Asia. Americans often perceive themselves as set apart different from other Westerners in terms of their attitude and intentions towards China. The Chinese do not fully reciprocate as often they place Americans in the same category of the invaders from Britain, Japan and Russia. The contrasting understandings have complicated the bilateral relationship, and Pomfret suggests that if the U.S.-China relationship is to improve in the future, the two countries need to further engage.



## Commentary

### Why There Are No Military Solutions for North Korea

By Geoff Wilson

Any attempt to curtail North Korea's nuclear weapons program through military force would be an unmitigated disaster.

"A conflict in North Korea ... would be probably the worst kind of fighting in most people's lifetimes," Secretary of Defense James Mattis [told](#) *CBS News*. "The bottom line is it would be a catastrophic war if this turns into a combat if we're not able to resolve this situation through diplomatic means."

Despite this, the Trump administration continues to peddle the myth that a military strike could remove the threat posed by a nuclear North Korea.

Secretary of State Rex Tillerson [said in March](#) that "all options are on the table," and that if the North Koreans "elevate the threat of their weapons program to a level that we believe requires action," the option of a preventive military strike would be considered.

National Security Advisor H.R. McMaster [told](#) Fox News that North Korea's pursuit of a nuclear armed ICBM is "an open defiance of the international community." He added that this "means being prepared for military operations [against North Korea] if necessary."

The scope of proposed military options range from limited offshore missile strikes (like those made against Syria earlier this year) to a full-on decapitating blow to the Kim regime.

The problem is that any sort of military action, regardless of its scope or intent, could rapidly escalate into a full-blown regional war with no off ramp or way to step back from the brink.

### What Would a Military Strike Accomplish?

First and foremost, it is unlikely that any sort of military action could actually eliminate North Korea's nuclear program.

Since the public debut of their nuclear weapons program in 2006, North Korea's nuclear infrastructure has become increasingly sophisticated. With the possibility of a preventive attack

by the United States, such as the one carried out against Iraq in 2003, looming over their heads; the regime spread out its arsenal, nuclear facilities and launch platforms across the country.

[According](#) to Sig Hecker, emeritus director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory and senior fellow at Stanford University, “there is no conceivable way the United States could destroy all North Korean nuclear weapons. It is not possible to know where they all are. Even if a few could be located, it would be difficult to destroy them without causing them to detonate and create a mushroom cloud over the Korean peninsula.”

Furthermore, North Korea is [estimated](#) to have enough fissile material to produce one nuclear bomb every six to seven weeks, and “it is even less likely that the United States could locate and demolish all of the North’s nuclear materials,” says Hecker. That presents a massive nuclear materials security challenge, should the DPRK decide to start smuggling materials out of the country or turn them over to terrorists following a U.S. attack.

Any military strike aimed at the North Korean nuclear weapons program would likely miss key elements of it. If you cannot guarantee taking all of the DPRK’s nuclear capability off the board, why risk getting into a shooting war in the first place?

### **A Question of Response**

The outcome of any U.S. military action in North Korea hinges upon how the regime would respond once provoked. The possibilities have prevented at least three U.S. administrations from pursuing military options.

As former North Korean foreign minister Pak Seong Cheol [once put it](#), “If the enemy fires on us in [the DMZ] with machine guns we respond with machine guns; when he uses artillery, we also use artillery... When the Americans understand that there is a weak enemy before them they will start a war right away. If, however, they see that there is a strong partner before them, this delays the beginning of a war.”

North Korea views its nuclear weapons as the ultimate guarantor of regime survival. In 2016, state media [announced](#) that “the Saddam Hussein regime in Iraq and the Gaddafi regime in Libya could not escape the fate of destruction after being deprived of their foundations for nuclear development and giving up nuclear programs of their own accord.”

It is highly likely that even a limited strike focused on degrading North Korea’s nuclear program could be seen as the opening salvo in a larger attack aimed at toppling their regime.

With that in mind, we have to assume that the North Koreans would quickly and violently respond to any sort of U.S. military action against them.

But what exactly would that response look like?

## Escalation

We have already seen what a full-scale war with North Korea looks like. From 1950-1953, the world trembled as the Korean peninsula tore itself apart, eventually dragging the United States, Soviet Union, China and the UN into open conflict with each other. That war [cost the lives](#) of 2.7 million Koreans, 33,000 Americans and some 800,000 Chinese.

Today the DPRK ranks [23rd](#) worldwide in terms of conventional military power. Although qualitatively inferior to the militaries of the U.S. and its allies, the North's vaunted million man army, along with some 3,500 aging main battle tanks and over 21,000 artillery pieces is incredibly lethal.

[Thousands](#) of North Korean artillery guns are pre-targeted at Seoul, a sprawling capital city of some 25 million people. That is about as far away from the DMZ as Baltimore is from Washington D.C.. Shells fired from those batteries can reach Seoul in about 45 seconds. The casualties and damage produced by an artillery barrage of this size on the world's fourth largest city would be unimaginable. [According](#) to Victor Cha, Director for Asian Affairs in President Bush's National Security Council, many of those guns are in hardened bunkers that could not be taken out "without using tactical nuclear weapons." With Seoul right down the road, that is not a realistic option.

This scenario doesn't even take into account North Korea's sizable arsenal of chemical weapons. [According](#) to *The Telegraph* "after decades of investment, the country is believed to be able to make most types of chemical weapons, but focus on sulphur mustard, chlorine, phosgene, sarin and VX. Stockpiles are estimated at 2,500-5,000 tons. Chemical toxins can be fired in a wide range of artillery shells, rockets and missiles."

Within minutes of a U.S. strike, the North could unleash a devastating retaliatory strike, all without moving a single man. According to Cha, "an arsenal of 600 chemically armed Scud missiles would be fired on all South Korean airports, train stations and marine ports, making it impossible for civilians to escape." Furthermore, "The North's arsenal of medium-range missiles



could also be fitted with chemical warheads and launched at Japan, delaying the arrival of U.S. reinforcements.”

The real deal breaker, however, is that North Korea now has an estimated arsenal of some [10-20](#) nuclear weapons. Whether or not they can mount one on a missile remains a topic of debate, but we know from the [type and frequency](#) of their tests that they are working on it, and they are progressing at an alarming rate.

Any military engagement with North Korea is virtually guaranteed to cause an unacceptable level of casualties for the U.S and its allies. With tens of thousands, if not millions, of civilians dying in the streets of Seoul, and U.S. and allied military forces at risk, the conflict has escalated to the point of no return. Regional powers, including China and Japan, have been forced to take sides, and the only option for the U.S. and ROK is to remove the Kim regime from power. The second Korean War is now in full swing, and there is no telling where the violence stops.

### **Modern War on the Korean Peninsula**

According to a report on a [war game](#) organized by *The Atlantic* in 2005, “an actual war on the Korean peninsula would almost certainly be the bloodiest America has fought since Vietnam—possibly since World War II. In recent years Pentagon experts have estimated that the first ninety days of such a conflict might produce 300,000 to 500,000 South Korean and American military casualties, along with hundreds of thousands of civilian deaths. The damage to South Korea alone would rock the global economy.”

That was before North Korea had developed nuclear weapons that could vaporize millions in the blink of an eye.

The U.S. would be forced to commit several combat divisions, aircraft carriers and air wings along with at least [500,000](#) additional troops in order to stabilize the peninsula in the event that the North Korean regime collapsed.

“As wars go, this would be the most unforgiving battle conditions that can be imagined—an extremely high density of enemy and allied forces—over 2 million mechanized forces all converging on a total battlespace the equivalent of the distance between Washington, D.C., and Boston,” says Cha. “Soldiers would be fighting with little defense against DPRK artillery, aerial bombardments, and in an urban warfare environment polluted by 5,000 metric tons of DPRK chemical agents.”

## Only One Real Solution

While the United States must maintain its security commitments to its allies and partners in the region, we must also disabuse ourselves of the fantasy that there is a low-stakes military solution to North Korea's nuclear program. The risks are far too great, and the outcomes too unknowable.

Instead, the United States should begin to build a framework for a diplomatic solution to the crisis. We must face the hard truth that a nuclear North Korea is a foregone conclusion. The U.S. should focus on freezing the North's nuclear and missile programs at their current levels, and enforce a strict inspections regime guaranteed by the Chinese and Russians. In return, we should offer North Korea humanitarian aid, the lifting of certain sanctions, and an official U.S. peace treaty.

"I believe it is time to try diplomacy that would actually have a chance to succeed," [says](#) former Secretary of Defense Bill Perry. "The goals would be an agreement with Pyongyang to not export nuclear technology, to conduct no further nuclear testing and to conduct no further ICBM testing. These goals are worth achieving and, if we succeed, could be the basis for a later discussion of a non-nuclear Korean Peninsula. These objectives are far less than we would desire but are based on my belief that we should deal with North Korea as it is, not as we wish it to be."

Living with a nuclear North Korea is a tough pill to swallow, but engaging in a cavalier military misadventure in an attempt to solve the problem would be a catastrophe for the United States and the world.

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