

# Sino-American Rapprochement and China's Dilemma in Dealing with the Korean Peninsula Issue (1971-1976)

Zhihua Shen and Yangzi Lin

When it comes to China's policy toward the Korean Peninsula after the Sino-American rapprochement, deep studies remain absent from the historiography. Although discussed in some articles, it is not done so in detail. This article utilizes archival research in primarily American archives, supplemented by Chinese historical sources, to draw the following conclusions. During the Sino-American rapprochement in the 1970s, China and America reached a certain consensus on the Korean Peninsula issue. The outcome led China to a dilemma, as it had to balance cooperation with America to ensure peace and stability in Northeast Asia while maintaining its alliance with North Korea to prevent Soviet infiltration. While the Sino-North Korean alliance continued, China's influence over North Korea significantly diminished.

**Keywords** Sino-American relations, Sino-North Korean relations, Korean Peninsula issue, Détente Period, international situation

## Introduction

Zhou Enlai once predicted that the publication of the Sino-American Shanghai Communiqué in 1972 would “shake the world,” while US National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger (2011, 255, 270) referred to the Sino-American rapprochement as a “diplomatic revolution.” Like the relations between the US and the Soviet Union, and those of China and the Soviet Union, Sino-American relations during the Cold War were among the most crucial bilateral relationships influencing international dynamics. The thaw in Sino-American relations, like a gentle breeze, induced the complex and diversified processes of the Korean Peninsula issue and marked the beginning of a relaxation period in the Cold War in Asia. The influences caused by the shifts in Sino-America relations have aroused extensive attention from researchers (Hong 2001, 2004; Tadashi 2007; Li

2010). Meanwhile, after the rapprochement, questions remain about how China's stance and policies toward the Korean Peninsula changed, how China balanced its relations with the US and North Korea, and how the consequences influenced the resolution of the Korean issue, among other questions, are yet to be conducted in depth.

Using American historical archives as the primary avenue of archival research, complemented by historical data from China, this article explores the above issues and makes the following conclusions. First, four consensuses were reached on Korean issues during US-China talks, 1971-1976. Among these consensuses, the two nations agreed that leading North and South Korea to discuss the unification issue by peaceful negotiation was the point. Consequently, it can be concluded that China and the US shared the same basic stances and fundamental interests regarding the Korean Peninsula issue. Second, China and the US agreed they should cooperate in dealing with maintaining and controlling their own alliances, and they should both make efforts to play a main role in resolving the Korean issue within the framework of the United Nations (UN). However, to ensure its quasi-alliance with the US while maintaining traditional Sino-North Korean relations, China had to lobby between Washington, DC, and Pyongyang, and yet it failed to fundamentally solve the Korean issue. Also, after rapprochement between China and the US, China and North Korea began to diverge on diplomatic policies. Furthermore, with domestic problems coupled with Mao Zedong's old age, China's influence over North Korea significantly diminished, and it finally lost interest in resolving the Korean issue.

## Historical Background of China's Involvement in the Korean Peninsula Issue

After the signing of the Korean Armistice Agreement, tensions on the Korean Peninsula did not subside. As the front line of the Cold War confrontation between the two blocs, the continuous power struggle between China, the Soviet Union, North Korea, and the US-South Korea triangular alliances persisted. However, the deterioration of Sino-Soviet relations in the late 1960s and the thaw in Sino-American relations in the early 1970s silently altered this confrontational structure of the two blocs in Northeast Asia. Especially from July 1971 to February 1972, frequent high-level contact and candid dialogue between China and the US led to consistent and closely aligned positions on bilateral relations and major international issues. Henry Kissinger referred to the new relationship established between China and the US as a "quasi-alliance" or a "tacit alliance," believing that China had firmly accepted this "tacit ally" relationship (Kissinger 1994, 728-9; 2011, 275-6; Keefer and Nickles 2007, 207-9). This alliance was primarily based on the strategic foundation of jointly containing and confronting the Soviet threat

(Li 2008). Still, it also manifested in other aspects of international relations, such as European affairs, the Middle East, South Asia, and the Vietnam issue (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 23-48; Phillips and Keefer 2006b, 147). Certainly, the situation on the Korean Peninsula was a matter of concern for both China and the US, but particularly for China.

In the early 1960s, with full support from China, Kim Il-sung consolidated comprehensive authoritarian rule over North Korea, declaring the early completion of the first Five-Year Plan, two years before schedule (Shen 2018). As the economy recovered and internal power struggles within the party were resolved, Kim began contemplating the issue of Peninsula unification. On October 5, 1966, at the Party Representatives' Congress, Kim Il-sung (1984, 360-74) stated, "The reunification of the fatherland is the greatest national task for our people, an urgent issue that cannot be delayed." He emphasized that the success of the North Korean revolution depended significantly on the strengthening of revolutionary forces in South Korea. North Korea would "fully support the revolutionary struggle of the people in South Korea" (ibid., 360-74). Concerning the initiation and support for the "southern revolution," Kim Il-sung initially considered adopting a strategy similar to that of North Vietnam with its armed attacks and guerrilla infiltration into the South. Consequently, the situation on the Korean Peninsula intensified in the second half of 1966 (Gatz and Patterson 2000, 209-10). The number of military incidents between North and South Korea surged from 50 in 1966 to 566 in 1967, reaching 761 in 1968, and within the first two months of 1969, 91 incidents occurred (*East Asia Daily News Agency* 1971, 316; Ostermann and Person 2011, 179-80). Some significant events of this surge included the sinking of a South Korean navy patrol boat in January 1967, a North Korean special forces unit infiltrating South Korea in January 1968 and attempting to attack the presidential residence Cheong Wa Dae (also known as the "Blue House"), and just a few days later, the seizure of the US reconnaissance ship (the S.S. Pueblo) by the North Korean navy and air force. In April 1969, a US reconnaissance plane (an EC-121) flying over the Sea of Japan was shot down by North Korea, resulting in the death of all thirty-one crew members (Lerner 2004, 2010; Schaefer 2004; Radchenko 2005; Liang 2014). During this period, North Korean diplomats repeatedly informed their Eastern European counterparts that the North Korean people were fully prepared war, that revolutionary forces in the South were on the rise, and that any foolish actions by the US would be swiftly met with destruction, leading to the complete liberation of South Korea (Schaefer 2003).

North Korea's adventurous actions failed to achieve any gains, however, as all infiltrators from the North were either killed or captured. According to US and South Korean military estimates, the number of North Korean agents captured in South Korea reached 1,245 in 1968, alone (Jenerette 1988, 39). Furthermore, North Korea's military provocations significantly increased US

military aid to South Korea. According to data from the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) (CIA National Foreign Assessment Center 1978, 6), North Korea's defense expenditures in the late 1960s accounted for fifteen to twenty percent of the national gross domestic product, while South Korea's corresponding figure was only four percent. Faced with pressure from North Korea, US military aid to South Korea reached \$292 million in 1968, nearly double South Korea's defense spending in 1967 (\$183 million) (Gatz and Patterson 2000, 415-6; US Congress 2010, 511). North Korea's military actions also strengthened US military deterrence in the region. After the EC-121 incident on April 15, 1969, a US taskforce appeared in the Sea of Japan on April 20 comprising twenty-four warships, including four aircraft carriers, and was moving toward North Korea (Schaefer 2004, 26-27). On April 26, US President Nixon issued a National Security Study Memorandum, requesting the Department of Defense to submit a "comprehensive military contingency plan" within two weeks and instructing the National Security Council to prepare a series of political and military options (Lee 2006, 67). The US response unnerved the Soviet Union, and Moscow reacted by both sending a letter to Washington requesting that the US government demonstrate wisdom and restraint and asking North Korea to issue strict orders prohibiting any actions against US aircraft in international waters (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History [RGANI], f. 3, o. 72, d. 254, li. 85; f. 5, o. 72, d. 255, li. 66-68). China also did not support North Korea's provocative actions against the US, according to a memorandum Kissinger sent to Nixon at the time (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 29). Pyongyang realized that neither China nor the Soviet Union wanted to get involved in such a confrontation (Ostermann and Person 2011, 133-40), and as the US intelligence report analyzed, North Korea's military threat "not only did not weaken the South Korean regime but instead helped strengthen support for Park Chung-hee and acceptance of his strong rule" (Lawler, Mahan, and Keefer 2009, 206).

In this situation, North Korea had to shift its unification strategy from guerrilla warfare to psychological warfare for a "peaceful unification." On June 3 and 22, 1970, North Korea proposed signing a non-aggression treaty through exchanges and negotiations between the North and South that called for adopting a federal system as a transition phase until achieving national unification. However, this treaty was contingent on the withdrawal of US forces from the Korean Peninsula, the annulment of all UN resolutions on the Korean issue, and the dissolution of the UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (*Rodong Sinmun* June 3, 1970, 3; June 23, 3, 4). In a speech on August 15, South Korean President Park Chung-hee outlined a vision for achieving national unification. The proposed approach was to negotiate within the framework of the UN, provided that North Korea immediately ceased all military provocations, publicly announced the abandonment of its policies to communize the entire Korean Peninsula through force, and renounces violent revolutionary means to

overthrow South Korea (*Dong-A Ilbo* August 15, 1970, "Korea," 1, 3). On August 22, North Korea's Foreign Minister sent a letter to the UN General Assembly First Committee, conveying a memorandum from the North Korean government dated June 22, 1970, stating that North Korea had no intention of resolving the unification issue through force but insisted that the establishment of a unified central government should occur through a North-South general election, with no foreign interference, after the withdrawal of foreign forces. North Korea opposed "elections under United Nations supervision" but considered convening an international conference of relevant countries to achieve a peaceful resolution of the Korean issue (UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA] 1970, 202). Although both sides proposed peaceful unification, their stances were divergent, making it difficult to reconcile. On November 18, Kim Il-sung explicitly stated during a meeting with the Bulgarian ambassador that North Korea would not negotiate with the Park Chung-hee government, that the prerequisite for abandoning the use of force to resolve the Korean issue was the victory of the New Democratic Party candidate, Kim Dae-jung, in the upcoming election, and that the "revolutionization of the masses in South Korea is a major task" (Ostermann and Person 2011, 129-32). On April 12, 1971, North Korea formally presented an eight-point proposal for peaceful unification, with the basic content and demands remaining unchanged. The UN Commission for the Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea considered that, despite some actions taken by both sides, "no genuinely meaningful progress has been made on the Korean unification issue" (UN DESA 1971, 162). Clearly, without external impetus, it was challenging to initiate peace talks between North and South Korea, let alone achieve peaceful unification.

### The Consensus Reached by China and the US on the Korean Peninsula Issue

Just as talks between North and South Korea stalled, relations between China and the US began to thaw, with both sides frankly stating their own positions and points of view on the Korean Peninsula issue. The basis of China-US cooperation in addressing the Korean Peninsula issue laid in the consistency of their security interests. The fundamental condition was mutual understanding, as Nixon expressed in his undated letter to Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai after visiting China in 1972, stating, "Our common views on the world situation are increasing," and "mutual understanding has been reached in many areas," with "many common principles" established (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 227-8). Through repeated communication and negotiations, China and the US reached the following four consensus points regarding the Korean Peninsula issue.

*Seeking and Maintaining Long-Term Stability and Peace on the Korean Peninsula*

The initial consensus between China and the US was to seek and maintain long-term stability and peace on the Korean Peninsula. This served both China's demand for security in the East Asian region and aligned with the principles of Nixon's foreign policy. According to Kissinger, the divergence in Sino-American views on the Korean issue seemed to stem from ideology and specific circumstances rather than a complete conflict of goals between the US and China. Both sides wanted to avoid hostile actions on the Korean Peninsula, clarify their shared goals through negotiations, aim for stability, prevent war, and reduce the risk of expansion by other major powers. Both China and the US believed that the final reunification of the Korean Peninsula should be achieved peacefully, although the specific methods and steps were subject to further negotiation (Digital National Security Archive [DNSA], China and the US, CH00391; Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 545-7). Kissinger also believed that remarks by Vice Chairman of the Central Military Commission, Ye Jianying, "may be the best summary of China's attitude"—that China and the US, though separated by thousands of miles, can live together peacefully and "can become a stabilizing force for world peace" (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 11-12). In his reply to Nixon, Zhou Enlai also pointed out, "The gradual normalization of relations between China and the United States in accordance with the principles of the Shanghai Communiqué not only serves the interests of the peoples of China and the United States but also helps ease the tense situation in Asia and the world" (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 1000-1001). Clearly, easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula was a shared and fundamental stance and policy for both China and the US. It is in this sense that Nixon believed that "China-US relations can become an important link for world peace" and represented the "real key to world peace" (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 247-52).

*Acknowledging the Legitimate Existence of both North and South Korea with Equal Political Status*

Since the establishment of the two countries on the Korean Peninsula, both sides have claimed to be the only legitimate government of the Korean nation, which has been a major obstacle to eliminating the long-standing tensions in the region. Since the reconciliation between China and the US was based on mutual recognition of each other's legitimacy, it was essential for China and the US to recognize and encourage both North and South Korea to also recognize each other's legitimacy and political status. This legitimacy was regarded to be crucial for advancing peace talks and maintaining peace and stability on the Peninsula. During the talks between China and the US, Kissinger stated that the US recognized the existence of both Koreas as a fact, and Zhou Enlai emphasized China's interest in the equal legal status of the two Koreas. Kissinger proposed that talks on the Peninsula should take place on an equal basis, stating that "neither

side has the right to unify the entire country,” to which Zhou Enlai agreed, asserting that “only the entire Korean people have the right to unify their country” (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 545-7; 2006b, Doc. 44). Zhou Enlai also suggested that the UN should admit North Korea because the existing UN framework for resolving the Korean issue could not continue to exist. Kissinger stated that the US could accept such a goal, even though it could not be immediately realized. The two sides reached a consensus on two issues: (1) the dissolution of the Korean Committee, which was represented only by South Korea, and (2) the unconditional inclusion of North Korea in UN debates on the Korean issue (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 545-7; 2006b, Doc. 44). As a result, both China and the US changed their policies toward Korean reunification, shifting from actively supporting unification led by their respective allies to promoting political reconciliation between North and South. This undoubtedly laid the foundation and international conditions for a peaceful resolution of the Korean issue (Kim 1986a, 185; Kim 1987, 106-7).

#### *Safeguarding the Interests of North Korea and South Korea While Constraining Their Respective Allies*

The reconciliation between China and the US naturally involved the issue of how to manage their relationships with their respective allies. Both sides expressed similar views during the negotiations and mutually recognized the need to maintain the interests of their allies while constraining their actions. The clearest indication that China and the US would continue to fulfill their obligations to their respective allies was the way they articulated their positions on the Korean Peninsula issue in the Shanghai Communiqué. In that document, China expressed strong support for North Korea's eight-point proposal for peaceful reunification and for the call for the dissolution of the Korean Committee, while the US declared its intention to maintain close ties with South Korea and support its efforts to ease tensions on the Korean Peninsula and strengthen connections (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 812-6). Kissinger (1979, 782) understood and appreciated Zhou Enlai's “original and creative” proposal, believing that such clarification of differences “would reassure allies and friends because their interests were protected.” After the secret talks between Zhou Enlai and Kissinger, both sides announced Nixon's upcoming public visit to China. To appease North and South Korea, China and the US respectively briefed and explained the situation to their allies, making similar assurances—Zhou Enlai assured North Korea that China's original position had not changed and would not be traded for principles, while Kissinger assured South Korea that the US did not intend to make deals for China's so-called goodwill at the expense of friends (Wang 1999, 39-40; Lawler, Mahan, and Keefer 2009, 282-3). At the same time, both sides committed to restraining their respective allies. During the talks, Zhou Enlai proposed that both China and the US should influence their allies to prevent



them from taking adventurous military actions (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 547). In a conversation on July 11, 1971, Kissinger assured that the South would not attack the North but expressed concerns about the North attacking the South. Zhou Enlai responded, "If such a situation occurs, they should be prepared to pay a great cost" (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 449-50; 2006b, Doc. 44). Nixon also pointed out, during talks in February 1972, that the Koreans are emotionally driven, and both the US and China should exert influence to ensure that these emotions do not turn the Korean Peninsula into a battleground for a conflict between China and the US (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 732-3). The two sides even reached an understanding to limit the amount of military aid to their respective allies (*ibid.*, 989-90). This commitment remained in effect until the end of 1975. This commitment remained in effect until the end of 1975, at which time Deng Xiaoping stated that China was not worried about the North attacking the South, and President Ford made assurances that the US would not tolerate any military actions in the region (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 901-2). Thus, while both China and the US wanted to maintain their relationships with their allies, their guiding principle was to not jeopardize the overall peace and stability of the Korean Peninsula.

*The Temporary Presence of US Forces in South Korea as a Crucial Factor in Stabilizing the Peninsula*

The presence or withdrawal of US forces stationed in South Korea was a focal point of contention in Sino-American negotiations regarding the Korean Peninsula issue, and both sides attached great importance to this matter. The total number of US troops stationed in South Korea was sixty-four thousand, and in March 1970, the US decided to withdraw twenty thousand troops (the Seventh Infantry Division) while simultaneously increasing military aid to South Korea. The purpose of the US adopting this policy was not to leave the Peninsula but to stay in Korea through a "long-term feasible manner" (Lawler, Mahan, and Keefer 2009, 142-50). Due to strong opposition in both the South Korea and US Congresses, the Nixon administration's plans for further withdrawal were put on hold after the Seventh Division left Korea on April 1, 1970 (Lee 2006, 69-70; Kim 2010, 152-3).

China had previously viewed the presence of US troops in South Korea as a threat to its security. This concern, however, naturally diminished with the Sino-American reconciliation and adjustments to China's security strategy. Yet, for North Korea to agree to a peaceful resolution of the Peninsula dispute, one of its prerequisites was the complete withdrawal of US forces, and China initially supported this condition. Before Kissinger's secret visit to China, Zhou Enlai listed the withdrawal of US troops as one of the issues that should be addressed in the preparatory talks between China and the US (Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi 2013, 385). In the secret negotiations with Kissinger, Zhou



Enlai sharply raised the issue of troop withdrawal, questioning the purpose for the US maintaining troops in South Korea. However, Zhou Enlai also raised another concern for China—namely, whether Japanese military forces would fill the military power vacuum left after the US withdrawal (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 391, 403). The CIA noted Zhou Enlai's contradictory mindset, believing that China was not as concerned as its ally, North Korea, about the rapid withdrawal of US troops (General CIA Records 1972). In the second round of talks during Nixon's October 1971 visit to China, Kissinger responded to Zhou Enlai's previous questions. The US would maintain a small-scale military force in South Korea with the aim of "making the maximum effort to prevent actions by the South Korean military crossing the current military demarcation line" and "reducing the expansion of other countries in the region," which Zhou Enlai readily accepted (Phillips and Keefer 2006b, Doc. 44). Any demands from the Chinese side exhibited a "restrained attitude," according to Kissinger, who regarded this as a "positive factor" in these talks. Although the principle was repeatedly emphasized that foreign troops should withdraw, no specific deadline was stipulated, and the withdrawal process was recognized as "gradual." Zhou Enlai also believed that the reunification issue of North and South Korea could be left to the future and agreed that China and the US could exchange views before a complete resolution of the Korean issue (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 526, 559-70). It is precisely because China accepted the US position that, during the discussion of the Shanghai Communiqué, the Chinese side removed wording from the first draft that stated, "US forces stationed in South Korea must completely withdraw from South Korea" (Phillips and Keefer 2006b, Doc. 56).

It is evident that, for China, the aforementioned consensus was primarily based on considerations of its own security. For North Korea, however, aside from China's commitments to uphold the interests of its allies, these outcomes were not what Pyongyang wished to see, particularly regarding the issue of US troop withdrawal, which contradicted North Korea's fundamental position. China had to establish a new ally relationship with the US to ensure the overall security and stability of Northeast Asia, while simultaneously maintaining the interests of its old ally, North Korea, to prevent any potential intervention by the Soviet Union. This inevitably led to conflicts and dilemmas in the actual handling of the Korean Peninsula issue.

## China's Dilemma in Dealing with the Korean Peninsula Issue

In 1971, China restored its lawful rights in the UN and hoped that the Korean Peninsula issue could be resolved by cooperating with the US within the framework of the UN. Since the establishment of the Republic of Korea (South Korea) and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (North Korea) in 1948,

the Korean issue has been a significant political matter discussed within the UN. South Korea, established under the supervision of the UN Temporary Commission on Korea, naturally possessed an advantage of legitimacy. The outbreak of the Korean War further strengthened the role and influence of the UN in dealing with Korean affairs. In July 1950, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to protect South Korea and established the UN Command. In October, the UN General Assembly set up the Korean Reconstruction Agency, representing the UN in handling the establishment of a unified, independent, and democratic government for the entire Korean Peninsula. After the Korean Armistice, the 1954 Geneva Conference failed to get a peace treaty signed, leading to the re-submission of the Korean issue to the UN General Assembly. Until 1970, the General Assembly almost annually discussed the Korean Peninsula issue based on reports from the Korean Committee, which consistently supported South Korea's claims and excluded North Korea from UN discussions. The UN thus essentially served as a stage exclusively for South Korea, even though it was not a UN member state (Kang 2011, 306; Yang 1981, 5; Michishita 2010, 82).

North Korea, not being a UN member state, could not participate in UN General Assembly discussions, its fundamental stance was naturally against discussing the Korean Peninsula issue within the UN framework. Regarding the UN's annual routine discussions, North Korea demanded the dissolution of the Korean Committee and the UN Command, the withdrawal of US and other foreign troops from the Korean Peninsula, and an end to the UN General Assembly's discussions on the Korean issue. The Soviet Union consistently acted as North Korea's main spokesperson in the UN, and as more Third World countries joined the UN in the 1960s, the advantage held by the US and Western countries in controlling the discourse on the Korean issue gradually diminished (Yang 1981, 7). In October 1970, during the UN General Assembly's twenty-fifth session, the voting results of the First Committee (which deals with disarmament and international security) showed a significant shift, in which the resolution in favor of North Korea was only narrowly defeated (fifty-four against, forty in favor, and twenty-five abstentions) (UN DESA 1970, 203-4). This outcome undoubtedly impressed North Korea. In July 1971, Zhou Enlai informed Pyongyang of the secret contacts between China and the US, assuring the protection of North Korea's interests. This further boosted Kim Il-sung's confidence. On September 12, 1971, the North Korean government publicly issued a statement, strongly demanding that the upcoming twenty-sixth session of the UN General Assembly must include two items related to the Korean issue in the agenda: the withdrawal of US forces from South Korea and the dissolution of the Korean Committee. These were deemed "important prerequisites" for achieving the "peaceful reunification" of Korea (*People's Daily* September 14, 1971, E). Obviously, Kim Il-sung hoped that Sino-American contact could influence the UN to adopt resolutions favorable to North Korea and enhance its international status. *The*

*People's Daily* (known as *Renmin Ribao* in Chinese) immediately published an editorial expressing strong support for these demands to be added to the General Assembly agenda (*People's Daily* September 15, 1971, A). Kim Il-sung's hopes, however, would soon be dashed.

On September 23, 1971, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution (based on a UK proposal) to postpone the consideration of the Korean issue to the subsequent session (twenty-seventh), thus incorporating it into the agenda for the following year. Given that the inter-Korean Red Cross talks had already begun in August, the resolution was an effort to avoid unfavorable and unhealthy influences on the atmosphere of the talks. The Assembly voted to postpone the consideration of the Korean issue to the next session (UN DESA 1971, 163). In this situation, the role of China-US negotiations in resolving the Korean issue became even more prominent. On October 22, during the second round of China-US talks, Kissinger proposed that the US cancel the Korean Committee and withdraw some US troops from South Korea. If tensions in the Far East eased further, the US would maintain a very small military presence in South Korea (Phillips and Keefer 2006b, Doc. 44). Shortly after Kissinger left China, Kim Il-sung secretly visited Beijing in early November and met with Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai (Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi 1997, 493). The specific details of this meeting are not known, but Kim Il-sung's speeches upon his return home, especially in his address to party cadres on December 2, repeated his previous remarks about the "visit of a loser," (Kim 1986a, 416-8) in regard to the upcoming Nixon visit to China. He also specifically pointed out, "There is no reason to be oversensitive or blame China." The Communist Party of China, he insisted, will never "abandon the revolution or do anything against the interests of socialist countries" (ibid., 416-8). Obviously, the information conveyed by Chinese leaders gave Kim Il-sung a sense of reassurance (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 652). Because of this understanding, North Korea's attitude toward inter-Korean talks also changed. On January 10, 1972, when asked by a reporter for *Yomiuri Shimbun* (a Japanese newspaper) about signing a peace agreement with South Korea, Kim Il-sung did not insist on the withdrawal of US forces as a prerequisite (Kim 1986b, 37-39). This change was likely intentional rather than an oversight (Hong 2001, 37).

At the same time, Kim Il-sung also became more confident in compelling the withdrawal of US forces. On February 25, when North Korean Foreign Minister Ho Dam met with Soviet General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, he detailed North Korea's policy— accelerate negotiations with the South, sign a peace agreement, and then use a peaceful offensive to force the UN to dissolve the Korean Committee and withdraw US troops from the Korean Peninsula. North Korea anticipated a "major turning point" at the twenty-seventh session of the UN General Assembly and strongly urged the Soviet Union to push for a comprehensive resolution in the Assembly to the issue of peaceful reunification

(RGANI, f. 80, o. 1, d. 668, li. 39-55). Under North Korea's initiative, on July 4, 1972, the North and South issued a Joint Declaration, announcing three principles for national reunification, and pledging to achieve great national unity through peaceful means beyond ideological and institutional differences without foreign interference (Schaefer 2010, 11; *People's Daily* July 5, 1972, E). However, what Kim Il-sung did not anticipate was that China and the US had different plans for dealing with the Korean issue at this UN session. As mentioned earlier, during Nixon's visit to China, China and the US had reached a consensus that the withdrawal of US forces was not an immediate priority. The Shanghai Communiqué did not mention the withdrawal of troops. As for the Korean Committee, at the insistence of China, the US considered dissolving it at the twenty-seventh or twenty-eighth session of the UN General Assembly (Hebei Provincial Archives 1972, 198-9). The situation, however, quickly changed. In a meeting on June 22, 1972, Zhou Enlai agreed that the issue of the withdrawal of US forces could be temporarily set aside, but that the twenty-seventh session of the UN General Assembly should resolve the issue of dissolving the Korean Committee. The US believed that as inter-Korean talks were still ongoing, open and intense debate at the UN should be avoided. Kissinger suggested that UN discussions on the issue be postponed for another year, or at least until after the US elections later that year. Zhou Enlai jokingly remarked that if that happened, Qiao Guanhua, head of the Chinese delegation, would again "shoot blanks" at the UN (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 987-90). Kissinger understood that China's stance had changed, and it was now necessary to show support for North Korea on the surface (Phillips and Keefer 2006b, Doc. 147).

On July 19, 1972, China's UN representative, Huang Hua, wrote a letter to the UN Secretary-General, expressing the Chinese delegation's support for including the thirteen-nation resolution on the Korean issue as an urgent matter on the agenda of the twenty-seventh UN General Assembly (*People's Daily* July 22, 1972, E) and that China had decided to join the sponsors of this proposal. Huang also requested that this letter be circulated as a document of the General Assembly. Washington immediately responded, stating that its "ultimate goal at this session of the United Nations General Assembly is to avoid adding new tensions to its relations with China and the Soviet Union" while also "supporting efforts by both North and South to ease tensions and strengthen communication" (DNSA, United States and the Two Koreas, 1969-2000, KO00130). Therefore, on July 26, Kissinger expressed to Huang Hua in New York that the US hoped the UN General Assembly would not discuss the Korean issue in 1972 to prevent a direct conflict between China and the US at the UN. Kissinger considered the talks between US and China to be a result of the easing of Sino-American relations and proposed that if debates on Korea could be avoided at the UN, the US would use its influence to effectively dissolve the Korean Committee. Huang Hua stated that he would report this to the Chinese government (Phillips and Keefer 2006a,

1032-5). In fact, China's stance in support of the proposal of the thirteen nations was not merely a gesture but also aimed at contending with the Soviet Union for influence in North Korea. On July 31, the North Korean government issued a statement strongly demanding the inclusion of the thirteen-nation resolution in the agenda of the UN General Assembly that year, and the Chinese government immediately expressed strong support (*People's Daily* August 1, 1972, E; August 2, 1972, A). China also assured North Korea that there would be no conflict with the Soviet Union at the UN when discussing the Korean issue (RGANI, f. 5, o. 64, d. 424, li. 64-66). On August 4, Huang Hua initiated a meeting with Kissinger and requested that the US to change its strategy of postponing discussions on the Korean issue at the UN. Kissinger, citing the upcoming US presidential elections in November, once again avoided the issue and expressed a desire for China and the US to not confront each other at the UN on this matter within the year. Kissinger pledged that if debates on the Korean issue could be postponed, the US would facilitate the dissolution of the Korean Committee before the following year's UN debate (DNSA, Kissinger Transcripts, KT00538, 1-2; Phillips and Keefer 2006b, Doc. 148).

China had to consider the requests of the US and was also concerned about the potential damage to the just-thawed Sino-American relations. Therefore, it had to reverse its efforts and work on North Korea. From August 22 to 25, Kim Il-sung made another secret visit to China. During the conversation, Zhou Enlai did not discuss specific issues but repeatedly explained that engaging in high-level diplomacy with the US was for the benefit of the people. He emphasized that China's dealings with the US were principled but required necessary flexibility. To reassure North Korea, Zhou Enlai suggested that the resolutions passed by the UN had little effect and were just "empty talk" (Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi 1997, 545-6; Hebei Provincial Archives 1972, 53-64). It seems Zhou Enlai was providing a preventive measure for Kim Il-sung, that while the prospects for the current UN General Assembly to discuss the Korean issue were not optimistic, China would not harm North Korea's interests. On September 19, Huang Hua was instructed to inform the US, that "China understands the complexity of the Korean issue and understands the special situation the US is in this year. China has no intention of making the US feel embarrassed." Therefore, the Chinese government agreed to schedule the UN discussion after the US elections in November. However, at this point, Kissinger proposed again that the US hoped to postpone the discussion of the entire Korean issue until the following year (Phillips and Keefer 2006a, 1075). In response, China took a passive attitude. Although Huang Hua stated in his speech at the General Committee meeting that he "firmly opposes any erroneous proposal to delay the discussion of the Korean issue," after the General Committee and the UN General Assembly passed resolutions to postpone the discussion of the Korean issue until 1973, Chinese representatives did not raise objections and protests

but only expressed “regret” (*People’s Daily* September 22, 1972, E; September 25, 1972, E; October 5, 1972, A; UN DESA, 1973, 151). North Korea was very disappointed with this result. On October 4, Soviet Ambassador to North Korea, N. G. Sudarikov, was instructed to visit North Korean Deputy Foreign Minister, Pak Seong-cheol, and stirred up saying that China was indifferent to the UN vote on the Korean issue. Pak Seong-cheol responded indifferently, saying, “We do not have our representative at the United Nations. Despite the active stance of the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, they still did not succeed in changing the outcome” (RGANI, f. 5, o. 64, d. 424, li. 55-57). He was clearly dissatisfied with China (Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 19).

In early 1973, China and the US began communication about how to address the Korean issue at the twenty-eighth UN General Assembly. During talks on February 18 and 19, Kissinger mentioned that the US would advise South Korea to dissolve the Korean Committee, estimating it could be achieved in the second half of the year. Zhou Enlai expressed approval, stating that if the US adhered to this commitment, China would “try to avoid sharpening the issue.” On the issue of US troop withdrawal, both sides reached a consensus—the withdrawal would be gradual, and Japanese forces would not be allowed to enter the Peninsula. Zhou Enlai also mentioned that North Korea had preliminarily understood this point (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 169-74, 219). In early April, North Korea proposed a five-point plan aimed at eliminating the military confrontation between North and South, calling for the withdrawal of all foreign troops and the signing of a peace agreement. China immediately expressed its support (*People’s Daily* April 11, 1973, D). The US subsequently proposed a two-step dissolution of the Korean Committee in the latter half of the year, hoping to avoid debate at the UN, while China requested a detailed explanation (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 243, 260). On June 14, Kissinger handed a memorandum to Huang Zhen, the head of the Chinese liaison office in the US, and a few days later explained that the US plan was to dissolve the Korean Committee during this year’s UN session and terminate the activities of the UN Command before the next session (*ibid.*, 271, 274-5). On July 6, Kissinger urged China again to clarify its stance, stating that he did not care about China’s public statements but wanted to address practical issues. Huang Zhen replied, stating they were still awaiting instructions from Beijing (*ibid.*, 295).

At this point, two factors influenced communication between China and the US. On the one hand, the North-South Korean talks collapsed, and US policy changed (Brazinsky 2011, 246-7; Xie 2022). On July 18, 1973, Kissinger informed the Department of State and the Department of Defense that the president approved the guiding policy for the Korean Peninsula to ensure South Korea’s security. The precondition for dissolving the Korean Committee was not to deny the legality of its previous activities, and the condition for terminating the UN Command was not to weaken South Korea’s security, thus “acting with caution”



(Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 35; DNSA, United States and the Two Koreas, 1969-2000, KO00152). On July 27, Nixon issued instructions to strengthen military aid to South Korea (Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 36). On August 7, the US established principles for dealing with the Korean issue at the UN: agree to the simultaneous entry of North and South Korea into the UN; agree to dissolve the Korean Committee but defer discussion at the General Assembly; temporarily pause expressions of a desire to terminate the UN Command (DNSA, United States and the Two Koreas, 1969-2000, KO00157; Ostermann and Person 2011, 246-7). On the other hand, according to CIA observations, North Korea was dissatisfied and disappointed with China's performance at the UN and sought to improve relations with the Soviet Union. China had to avoid serious confrontation with the US on the Korean issue while consolidating its relationship with North Korea (General CIA Records 1973). Moscow seized the moment to strengthen its alliance with North Korea, and on August 13, Brezhnev wrote to Kim Il-sung, highly praising North Korea's peaceful reunification proposals and strongly supporting its position that "the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Korea is the most important prerequisite for the country's progress towards reunification" (RGANI, f. 80, o. 1, d. 669, li. 68-70). China was indeed in a difficult position.

Without receiving China's response, on August 22, the US government sent a note to the Chinese government, expressing support for the Korean Committee's request to dissolve itself at the upcoming twenty-eighth UN session and assuring China that the debate on the Korean issue would not intensify tensions. The US added that it was prepared to discuss the methods for resolving the UN Command issue after the upcoming session (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 319). On September 10, China and twenty other countries submitted a resolution to the UN on the Korean issue, calling for the dissolution of the Korean Committee and the UN Command, and the withdrawal of all foreign troops from South Korea. It was evidently meant to draw attention away from North Korea, as highlighted by reporting in the *People's Daily* (September 12, 1973, E), which emphasized China's position as the proposing country. On September 20, the Korean Committee submitted a report to the UN on its self-dissolution. On September 21, the General Assembly adopted a recommendation by the General Committee to merge the above two resolutions into the agenda of the current twenty-eighth session (UN DESA 1973, 152). As a result, China and the US had to engage in immediate consultations. In talks on September 26, Kissinger stated that the US did not oppose the termination of the UN Command, but that doing so would significantly impact the Korean armistice. He suggested jointly devising a transitional solution, before dissolving the UN Command, that involves an alternative legal mechanism that will uphold the armistice on the Korea Peninsula without the presence of the UN. With this objective in mind, Kissinger hoped China would show some restraint and delay the resolution



until the next year (DNSA, Kissinger Transcripts, KT00814; Keefer and Nickles 2007, 321-2). On October 11, Kissinger received a report that Huang Hua had informed the US that China agreed to let the Korean Committee quietly dissolve during the current UN session (Kissinger Office Files, Box 100, "Briefing Memorandum Winston Lord to Kissinger," October 11, 1973). On October 21 and 22, Zhou Enlai visited Shenyang to discuss strategic issues with Kim Il-sung in the UN struggle (Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi 1997, 629). In early November, according to the agreed-upon strategy between China and North Korea, Huang Hua told the US representative to the UN, John Scali, that to avoid confrontation between China and the US, China advocated that both sides' proposals not be put to a vote. Instead, the General Assembly should adopt a "unanimous opinion" agreed upon by both sides. Subsequently, China and the US reached an agreement through negotiations on the wording of the "unanimous opinion" (Wang 1999, 42-43). On November 11, Zhou Enlai told Kissinger during his visit to China that, without changing the "compromise solution" already reached by China and the US, he hoped to postpone the discussion of the First Committee to provide further explanations and persuasion for North Korea and other proposing countries, thus avoiding the Soviet Union causing trouble during the General Assembly. Kissinger readily accepted this and expressed willingness to cooperate with China's efforts (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 354-7, 448). The next day, at Zhou Enlai's request, Kissinger informed the US of the next steps to be taken; namely, cooperating with China to find a legal solution to the Korean armistice issue before the next UN General Assembly (*ibid.*, 370-1).

The result of the handling of the Korean issue at twenty-eighth session of UN General Assembly perfectly reflected the compromise solution between China and the US. On November 21, after deliberations with the proposing countries, the chairman of the First Committee announced the decision that the resolutions on the Korean issue would not be put to a vote at the Assembly. The First Committee expressed the hope that North and South Korea would continue dialogue to expedite the country's autonomy and reunification and immediately dissolve the UN Commission for Unification and Rehabilitation of Korea (UN DESA 1973, 157; *People's Daily* November 23, 1973, E). The US highly praised China's role in achieving this result. A Department of State memo pointed out that China's proposed compromise solution did not mention the future of the UN forces and their presence in South Korea, which was "extremely advantageous for South Korea," and they were "very surprised" by China's "willingness and ability" to persuade North Korea (Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 55). The National Security Council also believed that the Korean Committee had come to a natural end, and that "China played an important role" (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 477). Dissatisfaction, however, came from North Korea. On January 29, 1974, Kim Il-sung sharply pointed out in response to a journalist's question that "using begging methods with imperialists is absolutely impossible to achieve peace; only

through stubborn struggle against imperialism can we strive for peace” (*Rodong Sinmun* April 5, 1974, A). According to the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, in a conversation in May 1974, Kim Il-sung accused China of not opposing the US military presence in South Korea and not wanting to see the reunification of the Korean Peninsula (Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, D-0019-14, 4-8). Only Kissinger, who was directly involved in the negotiations, could understand the difficulties China faced on the Korean issue. In talks with Park Chung-hee, Kissinger repeatedly pointed out that China both agreed with the US policy toward the Korean Peninsula and had to protect North Korea’s interests. When persuading North Korea to accept the compromise solution, the Chinese faced significant challenges, and the Soviets were likely an important constraining factor. Furthermore, China’s handling of the Korean issue during the UN General Assembly was also greatly influenced by the Taiwan factor (Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 49).

It is crucial to note that the November 1973 talks between China and the US and the results of the handling of the Korean issue at the UN caused an earthquake in China’s domestic politics. Zhou Enlai played the most important and prominent role in the thawing of China-US relations, inevitably arousing suspicions of being too dominant within the Party. The relationship between Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai was already unique—it could not be severed, yet others did not entirely trust it. Jiang Qing (fourth wife of Mao Zedong and leader of the radical political alliance known as the Gang of Four) and her associates had always seen Zhou Enlai as a threat to them, restraining Mao Zedong at every turn. After the China-US talks reached the ears of the Central Committee of the Communist Party, Mao Zedong became very dissatisfied and instructed the convening of a “Helping Zhou Conference” (*Bang Zhou huiyi*) of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee, in which one of the key points was to criticize Zhou Enlai for “losing power and humiliating the country” and engaging in “surrenderism” (*Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi* 1997, 634; Shi 2006, 46-56). In the following months, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs began to clear the spreading poison of Zhou Enlai’s diplomatic line. Huang Zhen, the director of the Liaison Office in the US, was recommended by Zhou Enlai (who had also proposed Huang Zhen be the Minister of Foreign Affairs), so the Liaison Office became a hard-hit area in this political earthquake, and Huang Zhen’s work was consequently made difficult with him often receiving blame (Lin 1991, 237-41; Song 2023, 253-4). China’s domestic political issues became an important factor directly affecting the process of China-US cooperation in handling the Korean issue and even the normalization of China-US relations.

On March 29, 1974, Kissinger, as the newly appointed Secretary of State, signed the National Security Decision Memorandum 251. The memorandum proposed replacing the UN Command with the US-ROK Combined Forces Command, allowing representatives from North and South Korea to become the

main members of the Military Armistice Commission. Both sides tacitly agreed to the presence of US troops in South Korea in the short term, in exchange for a commitment to withdraw them once the security situation stabilized (Coleman, Goldman, and Nickles 2010, Doc. 253; Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 71). Implementation of this policy clearly required the consent of North Korea, especially with active support from China. On April 9, the National Security Council's memorandum on terminating the UN Command pointed out the importance of direct US-China involvement in the ongoing execution of the armistice agreement. Both sides were expected to support and limit their respective allies on the Peninsula. Despite acknowledging China's reduced influence over North Korea, the memorandum suggested that Chinese leaders be consulted for an all-encompassing plan to resolve the issue of the UN Command (Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 73). On April 12, another memorandum to Kissinger noted the instability of China's domestic political situation and its recent more assertive tone in foreign policy. The uncertainty about China's role in the UN Command issue was acknowledged, but hope was maintained (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 476-98). China's previous cooperative stance, however, seemed to have vanished.

On April 14, Kissinger visited China again and held talks with Vice Premier Deng Xiaoping, who had succeeded Zhou Enlai. Kissinger discussed the withdrawal of troops and the issue of the UN Command, hoping for an exchange of views with the Chinese side. Deng Xiaoping coldly responded that this matter could be discussed with Ambassador Huang Zhen (*ibid.*, 497-8). At this time, however, Huang Zhen was under significant political pressure and lacked the authority to negotiate. On June 13, the US Liaison Office presented the US proposal directly to China—replace the UN Commander with a US-ROK military commander, sign a non-aggression treaty between North and South Korea, and accept the continued presence of US troops in South Korea as a transitional measure (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 506; Kissinger Office Files, Box 96, "Memorandum of Conversation and Attached Proposal," June 13, 1974). On June 24 and July 15, Kissinger inquired about China's opinion, and Huang Zhen's response was that they had not yet received instructions from Beijing (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 506-7, 512). On July 26, Huang Zhen voluntarily informed the US that China had communicated with North Korea multiple times and hoped for a friendly solution at the UN on the Korean issue (Records of Policy Planning Staff, Director's Files [Winston Lord], 1969-1977 [hereafter RPPS, Director's Files], Box 376, Kissinger to USLO Peking, July 27, 1974). On July 26, Huang Zhen voluntarily informed the US that China had communicated with North Korea multiple times and that he hoped for a friendly solution of the Korean issue at the UN. Huang Zhen's desire for a peaceful solution at the UN, however, was not realized. On July 31, China rejected the US proposal through the Liaison Office (RPPS, Director's Files, Box 376, Lord to Secretary, August 1, 1974). The US

seemed to understand China's predicament and decided to modify its proposal, engaging in further communication with China (RPPS, Director's Files, Box 376, Lord to Secretary August 15, 1974). However, on August 16, before the US could respond, China and thirty-one other countries submitted a letter to the UN Secretary-General, requesting the inclusion of the agenda item "withdrawal of all foreign troops stationed in South Korea" in the provisional agenda of the twenty-ninth session of the General Assembly (UN DESA 1974, 173; *People's Daily* August 19, 1974, E). Kissinger did not give up hope and advocated further modification of the US proposal to avoid an intense confrontation at the General Assembly (RPPS, Director's Files, Box 376, Kissinger to Habib, August 19, 1974). On August 28, the US submitted the revised proposal to China, and the Chinese diplomat receiving the document agreed to forward it but also reiterated China's earlier position in which it rejected the US proposal (RPPS, Director's Files, Box 376, Kissinger to Habib August 29, 1974; Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 90). Afterward, there was no further contact between China and the US on this issue.

On September 21, 1974, based on the recommendation of the General Committee, the UN General Assembly decided to include these two opposing draft resolutions in its agenda (UN DESA 1974, 173). During the assembly, Qiao Guanhua, the head of the Chinese delegation, sharply criticized and rebutted the US proposal in the general debate (*People's Daily* October 3, 1974, A). In private discussions, Kissinger expressed a desire for US-China cooperation, but Qiao Guanhua responded coldly, stating that China's opinions mainly reflected North Korea's stance, and that China did not expect to gain anything from its cooperation with the US (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 534-6). Kissinger felt that Qiao Guanhua had taken an "extremely confrontational" stance (Kissinger 2011, 292, 317). Perhaps in approval of this attitude, Qiao Guanhua was promoted to Foreign Minister in November. From November 25 to 30, Kissinger visited China for the seventh time, engaging in eight talks over three days, during which the Korean issue was not mentioned (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 562-645). Kissinger later mentioned deliberately avoiding the Korean issue because the US was already aware of the UN voting results (DNSA, China and the US, CH00342). Deng Xiaoping might have intentionally avoided discussing Korea because there was simply nothing more to say on the issue. On December 9, the First Committee passed a resolution that referred the issue of dissolving the UN Command to the Security Council for consideration. On December 17, the General Assembly voted to adopt the resolution of the First Committee (sixty-one in favor, forty-three against, and thirty-two abstentions) (*People's Daily* December 12, 1974, E; UN DESA 1974, 178; Ostermann and Person 2011, Doc. 104). This meant that the issue was effectively rejected.

Caught between the US-North Korea and the Soviet-North Korea dynamics, China found it challenging to make further progress on the Korean issue. Coupled with domestic political factors, China gradually lost interest in

discussing the Korean issue. On May 9, 1975, when discussing the withdrawal of US troops with Kissinger, Huang Zhen passionately stated, "I don't intend to talk about the Korean issue here," and "[W]e aren't entitled to discuss this issue on behalf of the Korean people" (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 666-70). Huang Zhen's statements indicate China's awkward position on the Korean issue and provides a rationale for the diplomats' evasive attitudes. Nevertheless, China did not want to damage its relations with the US, and it still agreed with the basic idea that the presence of US troops was a stabilizing factor for security in the region. In a meeting on September 28, 1975, Kissinger emphasized finding a way in the UN debate to avoid exacerbating tensions between the two sides. Qiao Guanhua casually replied that it was not a big problem. Kissinger mentioned the difficulties of a hasty US withdrawal from the Peninsula, which did not align with China's interests, and emphasized that maintaining the armistice arrangement required finding an alternative legal solution. Qiao Guanhua replied that if the problem could be solved this year, everyone would be happy, but if that did not happen, it was not terrible (*ibid.*, 749-50). It appeared that China had effectively abandoned active participation in resolving the Korean issue within the UN framework and tacitly accepted the US position. As a result, the thirtieth session of the General Assembly passed two conflicting resolutions: one supporting North Korea's proposal to disband the UN Command and withdraw all foreign troops from South Korea, and another that supported South Korea's proposal to continue North-South talks and dissolve the UN Command after making alternative arrangements to maintain the armistice agreement (UN DESA 1975, 201; Person 2011, Doc. 180). At this point, the model for resolving the Korean issue within the UN framework had reached an impasse. Both North and South Korea, as well as other relevant parties, had already sensed this stalling of efforts to resolve the issue within the UN. Before the 1976 General Assembly convened, both sides withdrew their proposals, and the thirty-first session did not discuss the Korean issue (UN DESA 1976, 207; *People's Daily* September 24, 1976, F). Since then, the UN has not discussed the Korean issue.

The bilateral talks between North and South failed, and the UN framework had collapsed. Thus, to solve the Korean issue, alternative paths had to be explored. As early as 1972, after the UN postponed discussing the Korean issue, Kim Il-sung had new considerations. Perhaps stimulated by the January 1973 Paris Agreement between the US and Vietnam, North Korean Foreign Minister, Ho Dam, visited China on February 9 and requested that China explore the possibility of contact between North Korea and the US (Wang 1999, 41). While awaiting China's response, the North Korean Embassy in China took the initiative to call the US Liaison Office in Beijing on August 21, 1973, hoping to meet with the head of the US delegation. In the following days, the North Korean embassy called every day, inquiring whether the Liaison Office had received instructions from Washington, and reiterated that the head of the North Korean Embassy was

ready to meet with anyone, anywhere, at any time (RPPS, Director's Files, Box 328, Bruce to Kissinger, August 21, 23, 1973). Kissinger advocated having a secret meeting first to see what North Korea would say, but unless China was prepared to contact South Korea, further meetings with North Korea were discouraged. Park Chung-hee agreed to this, emphasizing the need for confidentiality (RPPS, Director's Files, Box 328, Bruce to Kissinger, August 24, 1973). On August 27, Alfred Jenkins, Deputy Director of the US Liaison Office, met with Li Jae-pil, the acting head of the North Korean delegation, for the first time at the Liaison Office. The discussions focused on how the North Korean Observer to the UN would go to New York and did not involve any substantive topics. Li Jae-pil, however, mentioned that the meeting was of significant importance and he hoped for more visits in the future. David Bruce, Director of the US Liaison Office, believed that this was North Korea's attempt to test "further, more substantive contacts," and once confirmed, "Pyongyang might consider Beijing as a convenient and secure place for direct dealings with the US" (RPPS, Director's Files, Box 328, Bruce to Kissinger, August 23, 1973). On September 26, Kissinger briefed Huang Hua on the situation and asked China to contact South Korea, so that the US could continue contact with North Korea, promising to facilitate Chinese-South Korean contact. Huang Hua responded that South Korea had proposed a plan for both North and South Korea to join the UN, implying the perpetuation of the division of Korea. Unless South Korea abandoned this suggestion, China would not contact South Korea (Kissinger Office Files, Box 95, "Memorandum of Conversation," September 26, 1973; DNSA, Kissinger Transcripts, KT00814). Contact between the US and North Korea was thus paused.

The results of the 1973 UN vote disappointed Kim Il-sung, prompting him to once again to seek direct negotiations with the US. On March 25, 1974, the Supreme People's Assembly of North Korea passed a letter to the US Congress, proposing a peace agreement between North Korea and the US. Washington refused to accept the letter (Person 2011, Doc. 70; Keefer and Nickles 2007, 476-9). Although, the US government did not reject private secret contacts with North Korea. In two separate conversations with the President of Egypt (April 30, 1974) and the Advisor to the President of Romania (August 26, 1974), Kissinger expressed that the US was willing to engage in secret talks with North Korea through a third party (DNSA, Kissinger Transcripts, KT01125, KT01310). The conditions for the US, however, remained that China and South Korea must engage simultaneously, and China showed no interest (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 534-6). By August 1975, North Korea, through Romania, again conveyed a message to the US, expressing hope to restart secret talks (Person 2011, Doc. 164). On September 28, Qiao Guanhua also suggested that the US engage in direct negotiations with North Korea. Kissinger, however, insisted that negotiations must involve South Korea (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 750). Considering that China refused to have direct contact with South Korea and that North Korea



understood that the US would not allow the exclusion of South Korea entirely, the US considered “directly convening a broader international conference” to discuss ways to resolve the Korean issue. This included the possibility of immediately convening a four-party conference with China, the US, North Korea, and South Korea, if China agreed, or even agreeing to another round of secret talks between the US and North Korea (Person 2011, Doc. 176).

However, at this point, China had grown weary of the Korean issue. In a meeting on October 22, Kissinger proposed that the US was ready to discuss the Korean issue at any meeting, with the inclusion of South Korea. Deng Xiaoping evaded the proposal, only stating that the US had channels to communicate with North Korea. Qiao Guanhua was more direct, saying that the issue of dissolving the UN Command was a matter for the US and North Korea to discuss (Keefer and Nickles 2007, 804-6). During the meeting with President Ford on December 4, Deng Xiaoping explicitly stated that China had no military forces in Korea and would not participate in international conferences discussing the Korean issue (*ibid.*, 901-2). The thirtieth session of the General Assembly passed two entirely opposing resolutions, indicating that there was no hope of resolving the Korean issue within the framework of the UN. On March 11, 1976, the North Korean Foreign Ministry sent a note directly to the US Department of State, once again urging direct negotiations with the US to sign a peace agreement (Person 2011, Doc. 205). On July 22, Kissinger made a speech, stating that the US refused to hold separate talks with North Korea to discuss peace and security issues on the Peninsula. He again called for the immediate convening of a four-party conference at the request of the US president (Central Foreign Policy Files, STATE1976181897, “Secretary’s July 22 Speech: Korea Section”). On July 25, an editorial published in the *Hong Kong Wen Wei Po* expressed China’s position, at least according to the US perception, that China rejected participation in a four-party talk (Central Foreign Policy Files, 1976HONGGK08712, “PRC Media on Korea and the Secretary’s Speech”). On September 30, Kissinger spoke at the General Assembly, presenting a new proposal—preliminary talks between North and South Korea, with the US and China participating in subsequent meetings based on the results. Qiao Guanhua did not respond to this and left for China that evening. China refused to contact South Korea and was unwilling to participate in four-party talks, not only due to its own concerns (over the “two Chinas” issue) but also in support of North Korea’s position (opposing the “two Koreas”). Regardless, without China’s communication and mediation, the path to resolving the Korean issue outside the UN framework was blocked.

## Conclusion

In the process of achieving reconciliation between China and the US, the



resolution of the Korean Peninsula issue did indeed advance a step forward with China's involvement. China played a crucial role in stabilizing the situation on the Korean Peninsula, facilitating the progress of North-South talks, elevating North Korea's international status, and gaining recognition of its legitimate status. However, it is essential to note that both the US, especially figures like Kissinger, and North Korea, particularly Kim Il-sung, had placed excessively high expectations on China. The handling of the Korean Peninsula issue and the process of Korean national reunification came to a halt in the mid-1970s. One significant reason is that, from a diplomatic strategic perspective, China had reconciled with its former enemy, while North Korea still considered the US to be its primary adversary. China needed to collaborate with the US against the Soviet Union, while North Korea had to align with the Soviet Union against the US. China viewed the presence of US forces on the Korean Peninsula as a stabilizing factor, whereas North Korea considered the withdrawal of US forces a prerequisite for resolving the Korean issue. China aimed for gradual and sequential stability on the Korean Peninsula, while North Korea lacked patience and was eager for the rapid reunification of its homeland. Cracks in the external policies and strategies between the China-North Korea alliance had quietly emerged. On the other hand, the alliance established by Mao Zedong and Kim Il-sung had a broad and profound foundation, reflected in various aspects such as ideology, diplomatic strategy, economic ties, geopolitical considerations, and personal relationships between leaders. The relaxation of China-US relations led to a shakeup in the special relationship between China and North Korea, but Mao Zedong's fundamental ideology remained unchanged. The elements constituting the alliance's foundation continued to exist, and were, in some respects, even strengthened. If the contradictions and disagreements between China and North Korea threatened the survival of the alliance, the consistency of interests would drive both sides to adjust their policies, striving to conceal and bridge the rifts to maintain the alliance relationship. This contradictory phenomenon in China-North Korea relations led to a gradual decrease in China's influence over North Korea, directly impacting the evolution of the Korean Peninsula situation in the 1970s and beyond.

Deep cooperation between China and the US undoubtedly constituted the most crucial external condition for resolving the Korean issue and maintaining peace and stability on the Peninsula. Without this fundamental guarantee, the Korean Peninsula would always be a powder keg capable of triggering international crises. However, achieving peaceful reunification of Korea is the most fundamental approach to resolving the Northeast Asian crisis. To accomplish this, the core issue is for North and South Korea to reach a political compromise and establish an autonomous, peaceful, and democratic unified country. The dissolution of the UN Commission on Korea acknowledged the legitimacy of both North and South Korea, and the temporary presence of US

forces served as a crucial factor in ensuring peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula. In this situation, stability means maintaining the current status quo, which is the division of the Korean Peninsula. If the North and South cannot reach a political compromise through negotiations, and the international community does not permit the Peninsula to experience crises and wars again, then the issue of Korean reunification can only be shelved, and division will become a permanent state.

## Acknowledgements

This article was supported by the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and the National Research Foundation of Korea (NRF-2021S1A5A2A03063022).

## References

- Brazinsky, Gregg. 2011. "Korea's Great Divergence: North and South Korea between 1972 and 1987." In *The Cold War in East Asia 1945-1991*, ed. Tsuyoshi Hasegawa, 241-64. Woodrow Wilson Center Press, Stanford University Press.
- Central Foreign Policy Files, 1973-1979, Record Group 59, Department of State Records, National Archives. <https://aad.archives.gov/aad/index.jsp> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- CIA National Foreign Assessment Center. 1978. "Korea: The Economic Race between the North and the South." Research paper, ER 78-10008, January. Library of Congress, Washington, DC. <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31210023572553&seq=3> (accessed September 23, 2024).
- Coleman, Bradley Lynn, David Goldman, and David Nickles, eds. 2010. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-12, Documents on East and Southeast Asia, 1973-1976*. Washington, DC: Department of State, US Government Printing Office. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve12> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- Diplomatic Archives of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea. D-0019-14: 4-8. DNSA (Digital National Security Archive). n.d. China and the US.
- DNSA (Digital National Security Archive). n.d. Kissinger Transcripts, KT00538.
- DNSA (Digital National Security Archive). n.d. United States and the Two Koreas, 1969-2000.
- Dong-A Ilbo*. Dong-A Ilbo News Database. [https://www.donga.com/pdf/archive/archive\\_dongadb\\_help.html](https://www.donga.com/pdf/archive/archive_dongadb_help.html) (accessed October 23, 2024).
- East Asia Daily News Agency*, ed. 1971. "Basic Data Collection on Security and Unification Issues." Seoul: East Asia Daily News Agency, The Security and Unification Issues Investigation and Research Association.
- Gatz, Karen, and David Patterson, eds. 2000. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-1968, Volume XXIX, Part 1, Korea*. Washington, DC: Department of State, US

- Government Printing Office. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1964-68v29p1> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- General CIA Records. 1972. "China and the Lesser Dragons." Intelligence Memorandum, CIA-RDP85T00875R001100140013-7, July 24. Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, National Archives. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001100140013-7.pdf> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- General CIA Records. 1973. "North Korean Relations with Peking and Moscow: Development during the Past Year." Memorandum for Lawrence S. Eagleburger, September 28. CIA-RDP85T00875R001100160072-0. Freedom of Information Act Electronic Reading Room, National Archives. <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP85T00875R001100160072-0.pdf> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- Hebei Provincial Archives. 1972. "Zhou Enlai jiangjie Zhong-Mei lianhegongbao" [Summary of Zhou Enlai Explaining the Joint Communique of the People's Republic of China and the United States]. 1057-8-44.
- Hong, Seok-ryul. 2001. "The Détente in the Early 1970s in Northeast Asia and Korean Unification: A Case Study of the Secret Negotiations on the Korean Issue between the US and China." *History and Reality* 42: 207-41.
- Hong, Seok-ryul. 2004. "North American Relations in the Early 1970s: In Relation to Inter-Korean Dialogue and Improvement of US-China Relations." *International Political Studies* 44 (2): 29-54. doi: 10.14731/kjir.2004.06.44.2.29.
- Jenerette, Vandon E. 1988. "The Forgotten DMZ." *Military Review* 68 (5): 32-43.
- Kang, Sung-Hack. 2011. *Korea's Foreign Policy Dilemmas: Defining State Security and the Goal of National Unification*. Kent, UK: Global Oriental. doi: 10.1163/9789004212831.
- Keefer, Edward, and David Nickles, eds. 2007. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVIII, China, 1973-1976*. Washington, DC: Department of State, US Government Printing Office. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v18> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- Kim, Hak-chun. 2010. *The Domestic Politics of Korean Unification: Debates on the North in the South, 1948-2008*. Seoul: Jimoondang.
- Kim, Il-Sung. 1984. *Kim Il-Sung Works, 20: November 1965-December 1966*. Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Kim, Il-Sung. 1986a. *Kim Il-Sung Works, 26: January-December 1971*. Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Kim, Il-Sung. 1986b. *Kim Il-Sung Works, 27: January-December 1972*. Pyongyang: Foreign Languages Publishing House.
- Kim, Young Jeh. 1987. *Toward a Unified Korea: History and Alternatives*. Seoul: Research Center for Peace and Unification of Korea.
- Kissinger, Henry. 1979. *White House Years*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company.
- Kissinger, Henry. 1994. *Diplomacy*. New York: Simon and Schuster.
- Kissinger, Henry. 2011. *On China*. New York: Penguin Press.
- Kissinger Office Files, n.d. Nixon Presidential Materials, National Security Council Files, National Archives.
- Lawler, Daniel, Erin Mahan, and Edward Keefer, eds. 2009. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XIX, Part 1, Korea, 1969-1972*. Washington, DC: Department of State, US Government Printing Office. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v19p1> (accessed October 23, 2024).

- Lee, Chae-jin. 2006. *A Troubled Peace: US Policy and the Two Koreas*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Lerner, Mitchell. 2004. "A Dangerous Miscalculation: New Evidence from Communist-Bloc Archives about North Korea and the Crises of 1968." *Journal of Cold War Studies* 6 (1): 3-21.
- Lerner, Mitchell. 2010. "'Mostly Propaganda in Nature': Kim Il Sung, the Juche Ideology, and the Second Korean War." North Korea International Documentation Project, Working Paper Series, no. 3, December. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Li, Danhui. 2008. "Dakai Zhong Mei guanxi jincheng zhong de Zhou Enlai: laizi Nikesong wajiao dang'an de xin zhengju" [That Zhou Enlai Who Resumed Sino-American Relations: New Evidence from the Nixon Archives]. *Lengzhan guoji shi yanjiu* [Studies of Cold War International History] 6: 141-200.
- Li, Dongjun. 2010. *Wei shixian de heping: Mei Zhong hejie yu Chaoxian wenti de yanbian* [Unfulfilled Peace: The Sino-American Rapprochement and the Evolution of the North-Korean Issue]. Tokyo: Hosei University Press.
- Liang, Zhi. 2014. *Lengzhan yu qingbao: Meiguo Puweibuluo hao weiji juecishi* [The Cold War and the Intelligence: The History of the Decision-Making during the Crisis of the USS Pueblo]. Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe.
- Lin, Zhu. 1991. *Dashi furen huiyilu: Xiongyali, Yin'ni, Fa'guo, Meiguo* [Madame Ambassador's Memoir: Hungaria, Indonesia, France, and America]. Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe.
- Michishita, Narushige. 2010. *North Korea's Military-Diplomatic Campaigns, 1966-2008*. London: Routledge.
- Ostermann, Christian F., and James Person, eds. 2011. *Rise and Fall of Détente on the Korean Peninsula, 1970-1974*. Washington DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- People's Daily (Renmin Ribao)*. People's Daily Picture and Text Database. <http://data.people.com.cn> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- Person, James, ed. 2011. *After Détente: The Korean Peninsula, 1973-1976*. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Phillips, Steven, and Edward Keefer, eds. 2006a. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume XVII, China, 1969-1972*. Washington, DC: Department of State, US Government Printing Office. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76v17> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- Phillips, Steven, and Edward Keefer, eds. 2006b. *Foreign Relations of the United States, 1969-1976, Volume E-13, Documents on China, 1969-1972*. Washington, DC: Department of State, US Government Printing Office. <https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve13> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- Radchenko, Sergey S. 2005. "The Soviet Union and the North Korean Seizure of the USS Pueblo: Evidence from Russian Archives." Cold War International History Project, Working Paper Series, no. 47. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- RGANI (Russian State Archive of Contemporary History). Moscow, Russia. <http://www.rusarchives.ru/federal/rgani/> (accessed October 23, 2024).
- Rodong Sinmun*. April 5, 1970, Pyongyang, DPRK.

- Rodong Sinmun*. July 3, 1970, Pyongyang, DPRK.
- Rodong Sinmun*. July 23, 1970, Pyongyang, DPRK.
- RPPS (Records of Policy Planning Staff), Director's Files (Winston Lord), 1969-1977, Record Group 59, Department of State Records, National Archives.
- Schaefer, Bernd. 2003. "Weathering the Sino-Soviet Conflict: The GDR and North Korea, 1949-1989." *Cold War International History Project Bulletin* (14/15): 25-38.
- Schaefer, Bernd. 2004. "North Korean 'Adventurism' and China's Long Shadow, 1966-1972." Cold War International History Project, Working Paper Series, no. 44. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Schaefer, Bernd. 2010. "Overconfidence Shattered: North Korean Unification Policy, 1971-1975." North Korea International Documentation Project, Working Paper Series, no. 2, December. Washington, DC: Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars.
- Shen, Zhihua. 2018. *Zuihou de 'tianchao': Mao Zedong, Jin Richeng, yu Zhong-Chao guanxi* [The Last "Heavenly Kingdom": Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung, and Sino-North Korean Relations]. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.
- Shi, Yun. 2006. "1973 nian Jixin'ge fangHua yu bangZhou huiyi fengbo" [Nixon's Visit to China in 1973 and the Incident of the "Helping Zhou Conference"]. *Ershiyi shiji* (Twenty-First Century): 46-56.
- Song, Yimin. 2023. "Wangshi zayi: fuqin, danwei, hefang" [Miscellanies from the Past: Father, Work Unit, and the Uncertain Future Path]. Unpublished manuscript.
- Tadashi, Kimiya. 2007. "The Dynamics of the Korea Cold War: A Consideration of the Impacts of the US-China Rapprochement Early in the 1970s." Presented at the International Workshop on the Cold War and the Korean Peninsula: The Domestic Politics and Foreign Relations of North and South Korea, Beijing University, May.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 1970. *Yearbook of the United Nations*. Vol. 24. New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations. doi: 10.18356/229ead91-en.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 1971. *Yearbook of the United Nations*. Vol. 25. New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations. doi: 10.18356/6e898540-en.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 1972. *Yearbook of the United Nations*. Vol. 26. New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations. doi: 10.18356/71a5ee4c-en.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 1973. *Yearbook of the United Nations*. Vol. 27. New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations. doi: 10.18356/705233ec-en.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 1974. *Yearbook of the United Nations*. Vol. 28. New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations. doi: 10.18356/229ead91-en.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 1975. *Yearbook of the United Nations*. Vol. 29. New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations. doi: 10.18356/19b06765-en.
- UN DESA (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs). 1976. *Yearbook of the United Nations*. Vol. 30. New York: Office of Public Information, United Nations. doi: 10.18356/5ea96825-en.
- United States Congress. 2010. Executive Sessions of the Senate Foreign Relations

- Committee (Historical Series), Vol. XX, Ninetieth Congress, Second Session, 1968. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office.
- Wang, Taiping, ed. 1999. *Zhonghua renmin gongheguo waijiao shi* [The History of Foreign Diplomacy of the People's Republic of China]. Vol. 3. Beijing: Shijie zhishi chubanshe.
- Xie, Dingyuan. 2022. "Chaoxian bandao nanbei huitan yanjiu (1971-1988)" [A Study of the North-South Talks in the Korean Peninsula (1971-1988)]. PhD diss., East China Normal University.
- Yang, Sung Chul. 1981. "The United Nations on the Korean Question Since 1974." *Korea Journal* 21 (10): 4-10.
- Zhonggong Zhongyang wenxian yanjiu shi (CPC Central Historical Documents Research Office), ed. 2013. *Mao Zedong nianpu, 1949-1976* [The Annotated Chronology of Mao Zedong, 1949-1976]. Vol. 6. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe.
- Zhongguo gongyang wenxian yanjiu shi (CPC Central Historical Documents Research Office), ed. 1997. *Zhou Enlai nianpu (1949-1976)* [The Annotated Chronology of Zhou Enlai (1949-1976)]. Vol. 2. Beijing: Zhongyang wenxian chubanshe.

---

**Zhuhua Shen** is Distinguished Professor of the Department of History for Life at East China Normal University. He also serves as the Director of the Center for Cold War International History Studies, Senior Fellow at the Cold War International History Project (Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars) and Taihe Institute. He is the author of *Economic Vortex: The Beginning of the Cold War Reinterpreted* (Kaiming Shudian, 2022), *The Last "Heavenly Dynasty": Mao Zedong, Kim Il-Sung and Sino-DPRK Relations, 1945-1976* (Chinese University of Hong Kong Press, 2017). Email: shenzhuhua0420@vip.163.com

**Yangzi Lin** is a PhD candidate at East China Normal University. He previously majored in Korean Language and Literature and holds a master's degree in Chinese-Korean Interpretation. He now focuses on South Korea-Taiwan relations during the Cold War. He is the author of *Allies in Trouble: The Direction of Sino-North Korean Relations amid the US-China Rapprochement, 1971-1976* (East China Normal University, 2024). Email: lyz91810@163.com

Submitted: March 18, 2024; Revised: August 23, 2024; Accepted: August 26, 2024