



**China-Korea Relations:  
Prospects for a Strategic Partnership? \***

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Upon her arrival in Beijing on Sept. 2 for a summit with Xi Jinping on the occasion of newly established ceremonies marking the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of World War II in Asia, Park Geun-hye said “I hope that the hardships the two countries went through in the last century will be a valued foundation of the friendship between the two countries, as well as the basis for closer bilateral cooperation to solve many challenges we face.” Meanwhile, Xi declared that China and South Korea are “good friends and strong promoters of regional and world peace” and that “looking at history, our two peoples’ struggle has been very similar in our quest to liberate our people.” Fine rhetoric, but it sounds more like the lines used for decades to describe China’s relationship with the other Korea, now conveniently transposed from Pyongyang to Seoul. One can’t help but wonder how leaders in Pyongyang feel about such language, which seems to have airbrushed North Korea out of the picture. Moreover, can Park’s and Xi’s airbrushing of their respective historical memories be the basis for a further convergence of interests?

Although Workers’ Party of Korea Secretary Choe Ryong Hae represented Pyongyang at the war commemoration ceremonies and military parade in Beijing, replacing Kim Jong Un with Park on the rostrum and the absence of direct leadership exchanges between China and North Korea indicates Pyongyang’s continued political isolation. Likewise, nominal head of state Kim Yong Nam “exchanged greetings” with President Xi at Moscow’s own WWII commemorations on May 9 according to the DPRK state media, but both Beijing and Pyongyang downplayed the exchange. DPRK missile tests on May 9 and June 14 demonstrated Kim Jong Un’s growing nuclear drive and his dismissal of Chinese calls for regional stability. At ASEAN meetings on August 5-6 in Kuala Lumpur, PRC and ROK Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Yun Byung-se joined regional partners in opposing North Korean actions. Later, an artillery exchange between the two Koreas on Aug. 20 threatened to escalate tensions on the peninsula and underscored the ongoing deadlock in regional diplomacy. North Korea bristled at Chinese statements calling on the two Koreas to “exercise restraint.”

In fact, China and South Korea are conducting vibrant exchanges, while China’s interactions with North Korea are nowhere to be seen. Six months after Presidents Xi and Park declared the end of substantive talks, Commerce Ministers Gao Hucheng and Yoo Sang-jick signed the China-ROK Free Trade Agreement (FTA) in Seoul on June 1. Gao also met President Park and Foreign Minister Yun. China-South Korean political and military interactions indicate efforts to

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upgrade their partnership beyond trade. Top legislator Zhang Dejiang made a three-day visit to South Korea on June 10-12, meeting President Park, National Assembly Speaker Chung Ui-hwa, and ruling Saenuri Party leader Kim Moo-sung. On the military side, PRC Defense Minister Chang Wanquan met ROK Army Chief of Staff Kim Yo-hwan in Beijing on May 12, while ROK counterpart Han Min-koo met PLA Vice Chief of Staff Sun Jianguo at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore later that month. PLA Navy Commander Adm. Wu Shengli met ROK Navy Chief of Staff Adm. Chung Ho-seop in Beijing on June 11. Despite agreements on bilateral security cooperation, however, such exchanges did not produce any pledges on how to address immediate security threats from North Korea. South Korea's military ties with the US emerged as a clear point of friction ahead of meetings between regional defense chiefs in May.

### **North Korea tests more missiles**

North Korea's submarine-launched ballistic missile test on May 9 deflated hopes for "unconditional exploratory talks" with the DPRK – a suggestion raised by ROK nuclear envoy Hwang Joon-kook in separate meetings with US and Chinese counterparts days earlier. PRC envoy Wu Dawei met Hwang again in Beijing on May 28, and Japanese and US counterparts on May 26 and May 29. Pyongyang's test-firing of three short-range missiles on June 14 coincided with the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 2000 inter-Korean summit as well as President Park's planned state visit to Washington, subsequently postponed in the wake of the Korean MERS crisis.

At a July 28 press conference in Beijing, DPRK Ambassador Ji Jae Ryong declared North Korea's distinct status as a nuclear weapon-state and rejected talks aimed to freeze or dismantle its program. While Ji declined to elaborate on Pyongyang's coordination with China, US Special Representative for Korea Policy Sung Kim affirmed China's agreement on adding pressure on Pyongyang in line with the consensus reached at US-ROK-Japan talks on May 27. China also joined regional leaders in opposing Pyongyang's nuclear developments at ASEAN-led meetings on August 5-6 in Kuala Lumpur, attended by all foreign ministers of the Six-Party Talks member states, including the DPRK's Ri Su Yong. But while ASEAN+3 members explicitly referenced North Korea's recent launches, the ARF Chairman's Statement did not meet South Korean expectations for a direct condemnation of North Korea's nuclear and missile development.

Ahead of talks with Wu Dawei in late May, Hwang called for China's "constructive role" in an indication of Seoul's expectations for a more aggressive response from Beijing. President Park at her meeting with Zhang Dejiang in Seoul on June 11 also pushed for Chinese cooperation on DPRK denuclearization. But Pyongyang's leadership purges under Kim Jong Un have further raised concerns over the stability of Kim's regime, an issue that remains a primary constraint preventing China from exerting greater pressure. The PRC State Council warned against "instability and uncertainty" on the Korean Peninsula in its defense policy paper on May 26, released days after the DPRK Defense Commission's claimed to have made advances in developing weapons technology.

Beijing's limited response to Pyongyang's human rights violations is another challenge to international coordination on North Korea at the UN, where DPRK diplomats interrupted a meeting last April with statements criticizing defectors. China's *Global Times* featured an interview with Lu Chao of Liaoning Academy of Social Sciences challenging the credibility of

reports on Defense Minister Hyon Yong Chol's execution, supported by survey results showing that more than half of respondents did not believe the news of the execution.

### **THAAD, South China Sea emerge as obstacles to closer China-ROK security ties**

Deepening China-South Korea political and military exchanges ahead of WWII and Korean War commemorations this year mark apparent progress in consolidating strategic aspects of the China-South Korean relationship. Following Zhang Dejiang's June visit to South Korea, National Assembly Vice Speaker Jeong Kab-yoon attended talks hosted by the National People's Congress in Beijing and met Zhang on July 7 to discuss ways to enhance parliamentary cooperation. China's top political advisor Yu Zhengsheng, chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), and ruling Saenuri Party lawmaker Won Yoo-chun made joint pledges in Beijing on Aug. 20 to expand exchanges between the CPPCC and National Assembly. China and South Korea also launched a new "Track 1.5" dialogue on July 6-7 in Zhuhai, led by Vice Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao and ROK counterpart Hong-kyun, who also met Executive Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui in Beijing on July 8.

On the military side, ROK Defense Minister Han Min-koo and PLA Vice Chief of Staff Sun Jianguo in May pledged efforts to open a hotline between defense ministers, and proposed joint anti-piracy drills. Navy chiefs Wu Shengli and Chung Ho-seop on June 13 also called for expanding pragmatic cooperation. As part of the Navy's training missions, an ROK stealth destroyer made its first port call in Shanghai on Aug. 28, where President Park participated in ceremonies on Sept. 4 to mark the preservation of offices that housed Korea's provisional government during Japan's colonial rule. Security ties with China, however, emerged as a subject of domestic controversy in South Korea following the indictment of an ROK Navy lieutenant commander on July 10 for leaking military intelligence to Chinese agents.

Development of China-South Korea security exchanges remains hampered by the absence of agreements on addressing immediate threats from North Korea. This was a priority issue on ROK Defense Minister Han's agenda in Singapore, where he held talks with US, Japanese, and Chinese counterparts. At his meeting with Minister Han on May 31, PLA Vice Chief of Staff Sun Jianguo reasserted China's concerns over the potential placement of the US Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system in Korea. Frictions over THAAD resurfaced earlier that month after reported references to the system by US officials including Secretary of State John Kerry during his visit to South Korea. In an interview with *Phoenix TV* on May 12, ROK Ambassador to China Kim Jang-soo identified North Korea's nuclear and missile advancements as the primary driver of the current THAAD debate, arguing that North Korea's military buildup also undermines Chinese security interests. But while US lawmakers have more explicitly responded to Chinese concerns by calling for more active cooperation on North Korea, THAAD remains a sensitive issue among South Korean counterparts.

South Korea's position on the South China Sea was another point of tension in the defense talks in Singapore, ahead of which Chinese Ambassador to the United States Cui Tiankai warned against "anti-China" alliances amid mounting frictions with the US. Seoul's low-profile approach to the South China Sea issue has led to what is perceived as US pressure on the ROK to

take a more active stance, as demonstrated by Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Russel's call for Seoul to "speak out" against Chinese behavior in the South China Sea in June ahead of the anticipated Obama-Park summit. South Korean public debate on the South China Sea, however, reveals mixed attitudes on how South Korea should position itself on this issue amidst conflicting pressures between China and the United States.

### **New PRC ambassador meets DPRK officials, but not Kim Jong Un**

Since taking office in Pyongyang in March, PRC Ambassador Li Jinjun has met a number of DPRK officials including Minister of Foreign Trade Ri Ryong Nam on April 23, Public Health Minister Kang Ha Guk on April 29, Vice Foreign Minister Ri Gil Song on May 4, and Vice President of the Presidium of the Supreme People's Assembly Yang Hyong Sop on May 6. While these exchanges have facilitated joint affirmations of the traditional alliance, they have also focused on promoting new commercial opportunities through China's \$40 billion "One Belt, One Road" project. Xi's Silk Road project, however, appears to have limited prospects in the northeast, and the strain in political ties with Pyongyang places further constraints on North Korea's participation. Diplomatic relations suffered an additional setback in June after Chinese guards shot dead a suspected North Korean defector near Nanping, where a DPRK Army deserter's fatal shooting of four Chinese last December led Beijing to issue a formal complaint.

Moreover, despite the formal welcome of a new Chinese ambassador to Pyongyang among Cabinet-level government officials, the absence of public opportunities to call on Kim Jong Un is evidence of the deep freeze in leadership ties between the two countries. There were no reported meetings between Chinese officials and DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong when he traveled to Beijing in June on the way to Africa. Xi Jinping's tour of northeast China in late July drove speculation over efforts to promote cross-border ties with North Korea, but the visit ultimately was focused largely on reviving the domestic economy. The 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the end of the Korean War in August provided an opportunity for joint recognition of the Chinese People's Volunteers (CPV). In a sign that some construed as a possible signal of warming between the two sides, Kim Jong Un extended his respects to the CPV in a speech at the fourth National Conference of War Veterans in Pyongyang on July 25, while PRC Ambassador Li Jinjun visited a cemetery of Chinese soldiers in Kaesong on Aug. 1.

In a June 30 interview with *Yonhap*, Yang Xiyu of the China Institute of International Studies stressed Pyongyang's nuclear policy as the primary source of fraying China-DPRK ties under Kim Jong Un, who has failed to offer any public pledges on denuclearization since taking power four years ago. After talks between Foreign Ministers Wang Yi and Yun Byung-se in Kuala Lumpur on Aug. 6, ROK officials also reported increased frustration among Chinese counterparts over Pyongyang's behavior. Yet, despite expressions of disappointment from Chinese officials and academics, the South Korean media continues to highlight contradictions in China's own behavior toward its North Korean ally in the name of Chinese security interests.

### **China-ROK trade and investment prospects under the FTA and AIIB**

The China-ROK FTA was signed on June 1 after three years of negotiations. In Seoul, Commerce Ministers Gao and Yoo also discussed other regional trade deals including the

Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and the trilateral FTA with Japan. China's biggest bilateral FTA in terms of trade volume, the China-ROK FTA is expected to raise Chinese GDP by 0.3 percent according to PRC Vice Trade Minister Wang Shouwen. For South Korea, the trade deal is projected to produce a 0.96 percent gain in real GDP and 53,800 new jobs within 10 years after implementation. According to the ROK trade ministry, the FTA will raise annual bilateral trade to more than \$300 billion, a 39.5 percent increase from levels at the start of FTA negotiations in 2012. China and South Korea have pledged to eliminate tariffs on more than 90 percent of imports within 20 years of the FTA implementation, which is yet to be approved by their parliaments. During Commerce Minister Gao's and top legislator Zhang Dejiang's separate visits to Seoul in June, President Park called for joint efforts to push forward the domestic ratification process.

But China's slowing economy has meant a decline in ROK exports to China this year, down 8.8 percent in January-August compared to the same period last year. Moreover, China's economic slowdown is the major factor influencing downward projections in South Korean GDP growth targets for 2015 from around 3 percent to around 2 percent. While South Korea's total overseas direct investment (ODI) grew by 12.1 percent in January-June, investment flows to China declined by 32.1 percent. South Korea engaged in a week of promotional activities in May to boost trade and investment, including a meeting in Seoul between Korean firms and PRC officials and business representatives. A particular trend of concern is the slowdown in South Korean IT exports to China, which grew by 1.4 percent last year compared to 15.8 percent in 2013 according to KITA, reductions attributed partly to China's increased reliance on domestic goods and technologies. South Korea is moving to draw Chinese investment in IT sectors through such efforts as a KOTRA-hosted investment seminar in Shenzhen in August, and an agreement signed between Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon and Chinese IT company iSoftStone in Beijing to invest \$8.58 million in South Korean startups.

Despite what officials have hailed as tangible benefits from the FTA, South Korean experts still caution against intensified competition with Chinese companies as China shifts to higher value-added industries. Korean tech leaders Samsung and LG have already lost ground in their respective global market shares to Chinese rivals such as Lenovo, Huawei, and Xiaomi as Beijing more aggressively pursues its "going out" strategy of ODI, which is projected to surpass China's inward FDI this year. While China's FTA with South Korea is its first with separate chapters on electronic trade, finance, and communications according to ROK trade officials, the overall benefits of the agreement may be overstated given the relatively narrow scope and slow pace of liberalization compared to other free trade deals.

The China-ROK trade deal follows South Korea's joining of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the charter of which was signed in Beijing on June 29. South Korea became the AIIB's fifth-largest shareholder, securing a 3.81 percent stake with a contribution of \$750 million of paid-in capital over the next 5 years. But South Korea's participation remains constrained by transparency concerns and the geopolitical implications of China's de facto veto power. South Korea's entry into the AIIB has also raised pressures to join the TPP, the conclusion of which Daniel Russel in May identified as Washington's most important policy goal in the region this year. But while Chinese media coverage of the AIIB has largely focused on the decisions to join by US allies and the apparent marginalization of the US in Asian

economic matters, South Korea is taking steps to support the AIIB's coordination with existing regional partners. President Park met Asia Development Bank (ADB) President Nakao Takehiko in Seoul in May, and called for the ADB's cooperation with South Korea and the AIIB. Finance Minister Choi Kyung-hwan and British counterpart George Osborne in June also agreed to cooperate on AIIB transparency as both countries seek to emerge as RMB trading hubs.

### **MERS interrupts China-South Korean exchange**

The Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS) pandemic hit the China-South Korean tourism industry this summer after a South Korean man traveling to Guangdong via Hong Kong in late May was confirmed as the first case in China. PRC health authorities issued a high alert while South Korea's major airlines cut their flights to and from China in June. Although the mainland did not follow Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan in issuing travel warnings, Chinese media in June reported on trip cancellations by up to 100,000 Chinese tourists intending to travel to South Korea. ROK tourism officials have announced plans to spend 30 billion won on campaigns to recover the industry, particularly targeting Chinese, who account for 54.7 percent of all foreigners in South Korea according to government data in July. In this effort, Hotel Shilla CEO Lee Boo-jin reached out to Chinese Foreign Ministry officials and executives of state-run travel firms in meetings in Beijing on June 30.

Despite the drop in tourism during the MERS crisis, China-South Korean cultural exchanges are driving developments in other emerging sectors including e-commerce and entertainment industries. A survey released in May ranked South Korea as the second most popular overseas source for Chinese online shopping after the United States. Alibaba Group head Jack Ma met ROK Finance Minister Choi Kyung-hwan in Seoul on May 18 to launch an e-shopping platform in South Korea that will promote access to the Chinese market. The Busan International Film Festival in June also initiated a joint project with China's biggest online video-streaming service Youku, while TV show "Super Idol," a joint production by South Korea's MBC Music and China's TV Zone, premiered in South Korea and China in July. As part of an agreement between Presidents Xi and Park in July last year on people-to-people exchanges, a delegation of 100 South Korean young leaders led by the Korea Foundation chief visited Beijing and Qingdao on Aug. 17-21 for meetings with Chinese officials and other counterparts.

Finally, the deepening Sino-South Korean trade relationship is also reflected at the local level. Trade Minister Yoon Sang-jick and Sichuan Gov. Wei Hong signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on economic and trade cooperation on May 21, South Korea's third such agreement with Chinese provinces after Guangdong and Shanxi. The latest agreement is seen as part of Seoul's measures to boost exports and tap into China's inland regional markets in light of Xi's Silk Road initiative. ROK Ambassador to China Kim Jang-soo also met Hebei party chief Zhou Benshun on the sidelines of an investment fair on May 18 to seek local government support in reducing red tape and strengthening infrastructure for South Korean investment.

### **China and South Korea seek to revive DPRK commerce**

China-DPRK trade has continued to decline despite the introduction of limited market reforms in North Korea since 2014 as reported in a US congressional report in late July. According to the

Korea Development Institute (KDI), North Korea's trade with China fell by 12.5 percent in January-May, more than twice the rate of decline in the same period last year. Such figures suggest a continued downward trend in bilateral trade after a 2.76 percent decline to \$6.36 billion in 2014 overall, the first annual decline since 2009 according to KITA. As North Korea's biggest supplier of crude oil, China has also made no official crude oil shipments to the North since 2014. The PRC Foreign Ministry on June 18, however, indicated China's willingness to provide aid in response to what the DPRK state media reported as the North's worst drought in 100 years. PRC Ambassador Li Jinjun pledged China's agricultural cooperation in this effort during a visit to a jointly managed crop field. In talks between Li and Health Minister Kang Ha Guk in April, China further proposed to dispatch a medical team to North Korea this year to support the upgrading of healthcare services.

Given waning business prospects with North Korea, both China and South Korea are engaging in parallel efforts to revive cross-border commercial ties. While Ambassador Li Jinjun sought to boost investor confidence in the North in a May 13 meeting with Chinese businessmen in North Korea, South Korea's Chamber of Commerce in China has also invited Chinese businessmen to its investor fair at the Kaesong Industrial Complex in late October, aimed to promote Kaesong-produced goods to the Chinese market under the China-ROK FTA. Among South Korea's trade pacts, the FTA with China will bring the greatest benefits to Kaesong, where 310 products will enjoy preferential tariffs once the FTA enters into force. KDI in June further proposed the creation of a South Korean small and medium enterprise (SME) industrial park in Chinese border cities like Hunchun, which offers tax incentives to foreign investors and a supply of high-quality North Korean factory workers who are paid less than Chinese but more than twice their counterparts in Kaesong. The expansion in North Korean labor compounds on the Chinese side of the border has drawn recent attention amid DPRK efforts to boost hard currency earnings. Recent steps to boost trade with North Korea, however, appear to challenge the implementation of international sanctions as well as South Korea's own restrictions on cross-border exchange since the 2010 *Cheonan* sinking.

In addition to the China-ROK FTA, the AIIB has provided a renewed push for reviving the North Korean economy under Xi's and Park's respective Silk Road and Eurasia initiatives, which was also a subject of conversation between the two during Park's September visit to Beijing. On the sidelines of the signing of the AIIB charter in June in Beijing, ROK Finance Minister Choi Kyun-hwan pledged to support North Korea's infrastructure development through the initiative. But for the second time since 2003, North Korean opposition in June thwarted Seoul's efforts to join the Organization for Cooperation between Railways, a prerequisite for building a trans-Asian railway to Europe by linking to the trans-Siberian railway. President Park made her latest call for North Korean reform at an opening ceremony for the restoration of South Korea's section of the inter-Korean railroad on Aug. 5. As part of China's effort to strengthen regional infrastructure linkages, China on Aug. 5 also opened a land-to ocean route linking Heilongjiang Province with South Korea via a Russian port in Primorsky Krai.

### **The 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of World War II and prospects for trilateral cooperation with Japan**

Following the first trilateral meeting in three years between PRC, ROK, and Japanese foreign ministers in March, Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se and Secretary-General of the Trilateral

Cooperation Secretariat Iwatani Shigeo on Aug. 13 pledged to push for the resumption of the state leaders' summit. The September Park-Xi summit provided these plans with a further push as both sides agreed to aim for a resumption of a trilateral leaders' meeting among China, Japan, and South Korea in Seoul by late October or early November. The three parties held a meeting of finance ministers and central bank heads on the sidelines of ASEAN+3 talks in Azerbaijan on May 3, adopted an action plan for environmental cooperation for 2015-2019 in Shanghai last April, and held consultations on counter-terrorism on May 15 in Beijing. President Park in a May 13 meeting with Japanese business representatives voiced support for a trilateral FTA with China, for which the seventh and eighth round of negotiations were held in South Korea and China in May and July.

Although both China and South Korea expressed dissatisfaction with Abe's Aug. 14 statement commemorating the end of WWII, both are moving toward restoration of high-level dialogue with Japan despite these differences. Zhang Dejiang's June visit to South Korea focused on efforts to issue the first joint statement from the two parliaments marking the end of WWII, as agreed between Zhang and National Assembly Speaker Chung Eui-hwa in Beijing in December. During meetings between Rep. Na Kyung-won, chairwoman of the National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee, and PRC counterpart Fu Ying and Foreign Ministry officials in Beijing on May 27, China also extended its support for South Korea's opposition to Tokyo's bid to gain UNESCO World Heritage status for 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial sites. Beijing has stepped up its efforts to counter Japan's role in commemorations of WWII this year, as demonstrated by Ambassador Li Jinjun's Aug. 28 article in North Korea's *Korea Today* praising the Chinese and Korean fight against Japanese aggression.

### **Conclusion: regional diplomacy at the crossroads**

Park Geun-hye's participation in China's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of the end of WWII in September affirmed Seoul's ties with China as a key FTA partner and AIIB founding member, while enabling Seoul to go on the offensive to win Beijing's acceptance of a Seoul-led reunification of the Korean Peninsula. But the escalation of inter-Korean tensions in late August also revealed the dilemmas underlying Seoul's regional diplomacy –and the apparent absence of either options or influence in Beijing's policies toward Pyongyang – that continue to undermine coordination on North Korea and other security challenges. Park's visit to China has also reignited questions among some observers about South Korea's regional orientation and long-term commitment to its alliance with the US – something Seoul managed to avoid with the postponement of Park's state visit to Washington last June. Regional commemorations of WWII have also sharpened domestic debates in South Korea over Seoul's adjustments to the postwar security order.

China-Japan tensions, troubled South Korea-Japan relations, and the consolidation of the US-Japan alliance after Abe's April visit to Washington, have intensified South Korean media debates over competing “pressures” from China and the US to influence Seoul's policy decisions. In line with South Korean debates, a *China Daily* editorial on Aug. 18 by a Chinese Academy of Social Sciences analyst stressed the significance of Park's visit to Beijing for undermining not just security threats from Pyongyang but also Tokyo's regional diplomacy. Both ROK and US officials, however, have clearly rejected claims of South Korea's “zero-sum



game” between China and the US; the State Department issued public statements refuting the idea that Washington sees improved China-South Korea ties as threatening the US-ROK alliance. However, China’s public campaign to pressure South Korea not to join THAAD and Beijing’s efforts to lure President Park to Beijing as a headliner for China’s military parade are indications that China may perceive South Korea as a “weak link” among US security partners that will eventually rely on Beijing more than Washington for its needs. South Korea has made clear for now that its ability to engage China lies firmly on the foundations provided by a strong US-ROK security alliance; however, it is reasonable to expect that Beijing will continuously test Seoul’s allegiances on issues large and small.

## **Chronology of China-Korea Relations May – August 2015**

**May 2, 2015:** Chinese state media confirms resumption of cross-border train tours to DPRK.

**May 3, 2015:** PRC, ROK, and Japanese finance ministers and central bank heads meet on the sidelines of ASEAN+3 talks in Baku, Azerbaijan.

**May 4, 2015:** PRC Ambassador to the DPRK Li Jinjun meets Vice Foreign Minister Ri Gil Song in Pyongyang.

**May 6, 2015:** PRC and ROK nuclear envoys Wu Dawei and Hwang Joon-kook meet in Beijing.

**May 6, 2015:** PRC Ambassador to DPRK Li Jinjun meets Yang Hyong Sop, vice president of North Korea’s Presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly.

**May 9, 2015:** PRC state media reports plans to launch train tours from Dandong to Pyongyang from May 26.

**May 11, 2015:** PRC Foreign Ministry calls for restraint after North Korea announces a successful submarine-launched ballistic missile test.

**May 12-13, 2015:** Seventh round of China-Japan-ROK FTA talks are held in South Korea.

**May 12, 2015:** PRC Defense Minister Chang Wanquan and ROK Army Chief of Staff Gen. Kim Yo-hwan meet in Beijing.

**May 12, 2015:** ROK Ambassador to China Kim Jang-soo in an interview with Hong Kong’s *Phoenix TV* dismisses China’s concern over Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD).

**May 13, 2015:** PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson denies having any information on the execution of DPRK Defense Minister Hyong Yong Chol.

**May 13, 2015:** South Korea’s Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries announces plans to modernize Pyeongtaek port to accommodate Chinese tourism.

**May 15, 2015:** China-Japan-ROK consultation on counter-terrorism is held in Beijing.

**May 18, 2015:** ROK Finance Minister Choi Kyung-hwan and Alibaba Group head Jack Ma attend a launching ceremony for Alibaba's shopping platform in South Korea.

**May 18, 2015:** ROK Ambassador to China Kim Jang-soo meets Hebei Province party chief Zhou Benshun on the sidelines of an investment fair in China.

**May 21, 2015:** South Korea's Foreign Ministry calls for effective Chinese measures against illegal fishing near the inter-Korean sea border.

**May 21, 2015:** China's Foreign Ministry calls for restraint after the DPRK National Defense Commission's claims on advances in nuclear weapons technology.

**May 21, 2015:** Officials and representatives from 61 Chinese firms attend a business meeting with South Korean firms in Seoul.

**May 21, 2015:** South Korea's Trade Minister Yoon Sang-jick and China's Sichuan Province Gov. Wei Hong sign an MOU on economic and trade cooperation.

**May 26, 2015:** South Korea's Cabinet approves the China-ROK FTA.

**May 27, 2015:** Rep. Na Kyung-won, chair of ROK National Assembly Foreign Affairs Committee, meets PRC counterpart Fu Ying and PRC Foreign Ministry officials in Beijing.

**May 28, 2015:** PRC and ROK nuclear envoys Wu Dawei and Hwang Joon-kook meet in Beijing.

**May 28, 2015:** South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy announces that it has recommended punitive tariffs on Chinese steel beam imports.

**May 29, 2015:** A 44-year old South Korean man who traveled to Guangdong via Hong Kong is confirmed to be infected with MERS.

**May 31, 2015:** Adm. Sun Jianguo, vice chief of staff of China's PLA, and ROK Defense Minister Han Min-koo meet on the sidelines of the 14<sup>th</sup> Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore.

**June 1, 2015:** PRC Commerce Minister Gao Hucheng and ROK counterpart Yoon Sang-jick sign the China-ROK FTA in Seoul. Presidents Xi Jinping and Park Geun-hye exchange congratulatory messages.

**June 3, 2015:** Chinese authorities announce that China and Hong Kong have quarantined 88 people including 14 South Koreans who had contact with a Korean MERS patient in China.

**June 4, 2015:** South Korea's government bills on the ratification of FTAs with China, Vietnam, and New Zealand are submitted to the National Assembly.

**June 4, 2015:** US Ambassador to South Korea Mark Lippert at a forum hosted by the Parliamentarians Society of the ROK calls for Chinese cooperation on DPRK denuclearization.

**June 5, 2015:** PRC Embassy in Pyongyang pledges agricultural cooperation with North Korea.

**June 8, 2015:** Chinese fisherman sentenced to one year in prison for illegal fishing in South Korean waters.

**June 9, 2015:** Hong Kong and Macau announce they will issue their second-highest travel warnings to travelers to South Korea in wake of the MERS outbreak.

**June 10, 2015:** South Korea's Financial Services Commission approves China's Anbang Insurance Group Co.'s acquisition of a 63 percent stake in Tonyang Life Insurance.

**June 11, 2015:** Suspected North Korean defector is shot dead by Chinese border guards.

**June 10-12, 2015:** Zhang Dejiang, chairman of the NPC Standing Committee, meets President Park Geun-hye, National Assembly Speaker Chung Ui-hwa, and ruling Saenuri Party leader Kim Moo-sung in South Korea.

**June 11, 2015:** PLA Navy Commander Adm. Wu Shengli and ROK Navy Chief of Staff Adm. Chung Ho-seop meet in Beijing.

**June 12, 2015:** China reports that Kim Jong Un sent his condolences following the June 1 Yangtze cruise ship sinking that killed more than 430 people.

**June 12, 2015:** China's Civil Aviation Administration orders measures against the outbreak of MERS in South Korea.

**June 15, 2015:** PRC Foreign Ministry calls for the easing of tensions a day after North Korea test-fires three short-range missiles into the East Sea.

**June 16, 2015:** PRC Ambassador to Hungary Xiao Qian is appointed as new deputy envoy to the Six-Party Talks.

**June 18, 2015:** China's Foreign Ministry indicates China's willingness to provide food aid to North Korea after the *KCNA* reports North Korea's worst drought in 100 years.

**June 18, 2015:** DPRK Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong arrives in Beijing en route to Africa.

**June 19, 2015:** ROK Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se at a parliamentary session in Seoul pledges to strengthen ties with both China and the United States.

**June 20, 2015:** North Korea launches a charter flight service to Yanji.

**June 22, 2015:** Busan International Film Festival and China's biggest online video service Youku begin a 2015-2017 project to promote emerging Asian directors.

**June 25, 2015:** South Korean man diagnosed with MERS in China is released from the hospital.

**June 29, 2015:** ROK Finance Minister Choi Kyung-hwan attends the signing of the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) charter in Beijing.

**July 2, 2015:** PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson denies information on Kim Jong Un's reported invitation to China's Sept. 3 military parade marking the end of World War II.

**July 6-7, 2015:** PRC Vice Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao and ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Hong-kyun meet in Zhuhai.

**July 7, 2015:** Vice Speaker of the ROK National Assembly Jeong Kab-yoon meets top PRC legislator Zhang Dejiang in Beijing.

**July 8, 2015:** PRC Executive Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui and ROK Deputy Foreign Minister Kim Hong-kyun meet in Beijing.

**July 10, 2015:** A ROK Navy lieutenant commander is indicted for leaking military secrets to an unidentified Chinese national.

**July 21, 2015:** ROK nuclear envoy Hwang Joon-kook meets PRC counterpart Wu Dawei and other officials in China.

**July 22, 2015:** A sea route for postal services between Weihai and Incheon is reopened seven years after it was shut down due to limited demand.

**July 25, 2015:** Kim Jong Un in a speech at the fourth National Conference of War Veterans pays tribute to the Chinese People's Volunteers.

**July 27, 2015:** Kim Jong Un sends a wreath to the cemetery of the Chinese People's Volunteer Army on the occasion of the 62<sup>nd</sup> anniversary of the end of the Korean War.

**July 30-31, 2015:** Korea Trade and Investment Promotion Agency holds an investor fair in Shenyang to promote South Korean food.

**Aug. 1, 2015:** PRC Ambassador to North Korea Li Jinjun visits a cemetery of Chinese soldiers killed in the Korean War in Kaesong.

**Aug. 3, 2015:** ROK Vice Foreign Minister Cho Tae-yong at a Korea University forum calls for historical reconciliation between China, South Korea, and Japan.

**Aug. 4, 2015:** South Korea's Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries signs a deal with a Chinese consortium led by state-run Shanghai Salvage for the recovery of Sewol ferry.

**Aug. 4, 2015:** Chinese IT company iSoftStone signs an agreement with Seoul Mayor Park Won-soon in Beijing to invest \$8.58 million in South Korean startups.

**Aug. 5-6, 2015:** PRC, ROK, and DPRK foreign ministers attend ASEAN-led meetings in Kuala Lumpur. PRC and ROK Ministers Wang Yi and Yun Byung-se hold talks on the sidelines.

**Aug. 5, 2015:** China opens a land-to-ocean route linking Heilongjiang Province with South Korea via a Russian port in Primorsky Krai.

**Aug. 7, 2015:** Chinese authorities acquit 12 of 14 South Koreans detained since December 2014 on drug trafficking charges.

**Aug. 12, 2015:** Shanghai Salvage sends recovery team to Jindo Island for Sewol ferry salvage operations.

**Aug. 13, 2015:** Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se and outgoing Secretary General of the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat Shigeo Iwatani vow to advance China-ROK-Japan cooperation.

**Aug. 17-21, 2015:** Korea Foundation chief leads a 100-member delegation of South Korean young leaders to Beijing and Qingdao.

**Aug. 20, 2015:** Blue House confirms President Park Geun-hye's visit to China on Sep. 3-5 to participate in 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary WWII commemorations.

**Aug. 20, 2015:** Saenuri Party lawmaker Won Yoo-chun leads a delegation to China and meets Yu Zhengsheng, chairman of the National Committee of the CPPCC.

**Aug. 20-23, 2015:** Chinese companies participate in fifth Rason International Trade Exhibition.

**Aug. 21, 2015:** PRC Foreign Ministry calls for restraint after an exchange of artillery fire between the two Koreas.

**Aug. 24-25, 2015:** Former ROK Prime Minister Lee Soo-sung and Chairman of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century ROK-China Exchange Association Kim Han-kyu meet PRC Vice President Li Yuanchao and attend the 15<sup>th</sup> China-ROK Elite Forum in Beijing.

**Aug. 25, 2015:** China's Foreign Ministry confirms that Workers' Party of Korea secretary Choe Ryong Hae will attend China's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary WWII commemorations.

**Aug. 25, 2015:** China's Foreign Ministry expresses support for inter-Korean talks.

**Aug. 28, 2015:** China's Defense Ministry denies rumors of the PLA's troop reinforcement on the China-DPRK border in response to inter-Korean tensions.

**Aug. 28, 2015:** ROK stealth destroyer *Gang Gam Chan* arrives in Shanghai as part of Navy training missions.

**Aug. 28, 2015:** PRC Ambassador to the DPRK Li Jinjun in North Korea's *Korea Today* praises the Chinese and Korean fight against Japan's WWII aggression.