



A Chinese soldier passes by a poster of the late Chairman Mao Zedong and North Korea's founding father, Kim Il Sung

Why China Will Not Solve the North Korea Problem

BY AUSTIN RAMZY

Chinese President Xi Jinping's words sounded welcoming to a world weary of daily threats and provocations from North Korea. "No one should be allowed to throw the region or even the whole world into chaos for selfish gains," Xi said on April 7 at the Boao Forum on the Chinese island of Hainan.

The new Chinese leader didn't name North Korea, but given the isolated totalitarian regime's aggressive efforts to stir up a little chaos—the latest threat coming in the form of a planned ballistic missile test on April 10—it seemed a likely target of his comments. Did this mean China was finally fed up with North Korea, an ally it had supported for more than half a century? A nuclear-armed North Korea with an untested, 30-year-old Kim Jong Un at the helm is undoubtedly a headache for Beijing. It makes Northeast Asia that much more unstable, helps justify the American pivot to the region and gives further cause for Japan to revise its pacifist constitution. But China

has always shown that it is more concerned about the dangers of a North Korean implosion, which could lead to an unchecked flow of starving refugees crossing the Yalu River into China and a unified, U.S.-aligned Korean Peninsula. For all its frustration with Pyongyang, Beijing is unlikely to push the regime to the brink.

So it came as little surprise that two days after Xi's speech, the overseas edition of the *People's Daily*, the Chinese Communist Party's mouthpiece, ran a front-page editorial identifying just who China's leader was calling out. "Some countries spend billions but still can't fix the problem, can't think of a way to exit and trigger their own fiscal and financial crises," the paper wrote, in a clear reference to the U.S. It proceeded to scold the West for "fanning the flames" of unrest in the Middle East and North Africa and "outside nations or those who wish to interfere with China's peaceful development" for stirring up problems in the East and South China seas. As for North Korea, it dismissed the situation in a sentence, saying merely that the involved parties "should not seek the worst possible outcome." The point was clear: China isn't about to break with its only treaty ally, no matter how much the rest of the world might want it to.

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