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“UNDER A FALSE PRETENSE: THE CHINESE-NORTH KOREAN RELATIONSHIP”

By MIDN 3/C Saville

After another round of talks concluded last week in Vietnam, it seems that we are still far from peace, freedom, and denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula. After these talks, the notion that China is the key to understanding and controlling the Hermit Kingdom has again come to the fore.\(^1\) However, the idea that China is the missing link when it comes to solving the Korean Crisis ignores the political, historical, and practical divides in the Chinese-North Korean relationship.

The notion that China is the driving force, or supporter, of North Korea’s actions, stems largely from the Korean War in which China contributed more than a million volunteers and millions of dollars of military assistance.\(^2\) Despite this show of obvious military support, China was largely duped into the Korean War by Kim Il Sung who, alongside Joseph Stalin, presented the war as a fait accompli to Chinese Premier Mao Zedong. This dishonesty has only provided a modern context for a centuries-old feud between a suzerain (China) and its vassal (Korea). China’s ancient status as the middle kingdom continues to shape the relationship with North Korea today as they create founding myths that ignore the contribution of China and strike China from many official histories of global and North Korean affairs. Finally, China while a supporter of the North Korean state as an idea, is aware that supporting North Korea on a modern global stage is unpopular and largely contrary to their own interests. This has only become more obvious as China does less and less to prop up the foundering regime.\(^3\)

In addition to understanding the Chinese-North Korean relationship, it is critical to understand the Korean regime’s perspective. The Kim dynasty continues to struggle under mounting internal and international pressure to reform.\(^4\) They also face loyal opposition in the form of the other parties in the Supreme People's Assembly (The North Korean legislative body). The Kim regime also fears external powers including China attempting to destroy them similar to

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United States actions in Iraq, Libya, and Kosovo. The fear of oblivion continues to drive the regime into deeper isolation, stauncher policy positions, and to develop nuclear weapons.\(^5\)

While the distant past and unfounded fears may seem a foolish base of national policy even in a relatively small state like North Korea, these ideas do far more to shape their outlook than nearly any other factor, especially China.

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“February 2019 FEX”

By MIDN 2/C Gilson

On Saturday February 23rd, all of the Marine Options went on our first of two Field Exercises (FEX) of the semester. Although it had to be cut short due to weather, it was a very challenging FEX with immense training value. After waking up at 0300, we met the NROTC battalions of University of Maryland and University of Maryland Baltimore County, as well as Fairfax Virginia’s OCC program around 0630 at Marine Corps Base Quantico.

We quickly moved into our first evolution of the day: a nine-mile hike with a 55lb load -75lbs for the first class- in our packs. The hike took a total of three hours, with short, ten-minute breaks every 50 minutes. It was cold, rainy, muddy, and very hilly- but most of the Midshipman were able to push themselves through the entire way. This hike challenged everyone’s mental toughness, endurance, and overall resolve for being there. After a short brief and a change of clothes, we set out for our Small Unit Leadership Evaluation(SULE).

This exercise was designed to mimic the SULE test at Officer Candidate School. In each SULE, the squad leader (a second class midshipman) lead three fire teams (3-4 midshipman each) through a series of simulated missions. After receiving a quick brief on their scenario, they were tasked with giving a five-paragraph operation order and coming up with a plan. They then lead their squad through the scenario and were evaluated on their leadership abilities and decision-making skills. Each squad did four separate SULEs, and then it was time to pack up and go home.

Although it was a shorter FEX than we have had in the past, it was very tough and helped each future candidate to prepare themselves adequately for Officer Candidate School. After putting away all of the gear and a quick shower, we all met up for a meal- laughing and talking about the challenging, yet motivating, day we had.