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# Security Challenges on the Korean Peninsula

### Introduction

North Korea poses the most serious security challenges for South Korea and Japan that they have faced in many decades as well as formidable challenges for the United States, and it is prompting China and Russia to reassess security concerns in a changing regional framework. The chapters in Part 2 cover these challenges from the separate perspectives of four front-line states. After the North's aggressiveness in 2010 and the interlude in 2011 as Kim Jong-il exercised more restraint in return for much increased assistance from China and in the process of positioning his son, Kim Jong-un, to step into his shoes, the countries most concerned are preparing for security issues again to rise to the forefront. Their views on how to manage security on the peninsula offer a snapshot of a region gearing for an uncertain transition.

The first chapter by Andrew Scobell evaluates China's view of the security situation on the peninsula. He discusses a shift in strategy from balancing to going so far as to bandwagon with North Korea. This is explained both in terms of fears of domestic instability and concerns about U.S. intentions. Scobell contrasts China's silence over North Korean belligerence with its vitriolic condemnation of the naval exercises planned for the Yellow Sea by the United States and South Korea in 2010. Recently, China's strong support for the transition to Kim Jongun, including added food and energy assistance, suggests that it is positioning itself as the powerbroker bent both on stabilizing the North and steering further negotiations. While reliance on China may for a time deter North Korea from brazen acts such as a new nuclear test or another attack on South Korea, it will not dissuade other neighboring states from strategizing about how they may best deal with coming security challenges. In March 2012 the North tested China's patience with its decision to launch a satellite, breaking the "Leap Day" agreement and drawing a rebuke even from China with no early evidence that this would change China's calculus in favor of "stability."

The following chapter by Taeho Kim turns to the view from South Korea at a time when North Korea's rhetoric remains inflammatory and security concerns have only slightly subsided from the peak of alarm in late 2010. Kim starts with uncertain political outcomes in this "super year" of 2012, which ends with South Korea picking a new president. He points to the difficulty of reviving North-South relations before the presidential election, with a victorious progressive likely not only to resume a policy of engaging the North on favorable terms for it but also to find a new balance favorable to relations with China at a cost to relations with the United States. Along with diplomacy, South Korea is changing is military readiness, forging a multi-task, high-tech force and tightening military cooperation with the United States. Given the security environment, the defense strategy is likely to endure after the elections.

Whereas Taeho Kim discusses the complexity of rebalancing Sino-U.S. ties in the shadow of North Korea, Stephen Blank argues that Russia is so consumed with opposition to the United States that it is bandwagoning with China. The wider

lens of global competition shapes its thinking on North Korea. Blaming Lee Myungbak's harder line to the North and U.S. policies for the North's adventurism and anxious to avoid both war and marginalization, Russia relegates non-proliferation to a priority much lower than countering supposed U.S. threats. It even accepts North Korea as a partner, which perpetuates the regional stalemate at a cost to Russia's interests too. If, as in March 2012, Russia bemoans the North's belligerent moves that threaten its desired multilateral negotiations, this falls far short of rebalancing in Northeast Asia.

The final chapter by Narushige Michishita details non-nuclear measures that Japan is taking to boost its military readiness even as its diplomacy is not so active. Differentiating three types of military scenarios that could result from North Korean aggression, he identifies three pillars of Japan's military response: ballistic missile defense, civil defense, and nuclear deterrence courtesy of the United States. If North Korea should launch missiles to coerce Japan into submission, Michishita describes Japan's options. If it should threaten to attack in order to deter Japan and the United States from coming to the assistance of South Korea, he considers how Japan might respond. Finally, an all-out attack on Japan is discussed as the stimulus for defense measures. Michishita also notes diplomatic moves that Japan has taken to resume bilateral negotiations with North Korea. The impression he leaves is one of urgency without any ready solutions to Japan's dangerous situation. In March 2012 Japanese warned that if the missile used for the North's planned satellite launch were to head for a landing on Japanese soil it would be prepared to shoot it down.

The four papers contrast China's relative calm in supporting North Korea and Russia's greater sense of urgency that leads it to give qualified support in contrast to turmoil in South Korean politics, which might produce the only significant shift in handling the crisis, and alarm in Japan without any promising choices. Although the United States is not discussed in a separate chapter, the views of it in all four of the neighbors of North Korea are an important part of the security calculus. Policies to manage the North Korean threat should start with clear awareness of these views.

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# The View from China

ANDREW SCOBELL

Tt has become conventional wisdom in recent years to characterize the PRC as  $oldsymbol{1}$  an "assertive" power. Since 2008, many commentators and analysts insist that China has become forceful and activist on a wide range of foreign policy issues.1 While Beijing appears to have become more proactive on many issues especially with regards to the United States, where Korea is concerned China has tended to be surprisingly quite passive and reactive. Although China has been modestly proactive toward the Korean peninsula at times during the past twenty years (i.e. early 1990s and early 2000s), this has not been evident of late. What explains the dramatic contrast between Chinese forthrightness toward the United States and recent reticence on Korea?

This paper contends that China's Korea policy since 2008—if not earlier—can be explained by a buffer strategy whereby Beijing has established and is maintaining a protective cordon of territories and bodies of water all around its periphery. The goal is to create Chinese spheres of influence or at least to deny/restrict access to other great powers. In recent years building this buffer has been undertaken quite assertively and vocally for China's maritime territories but in a more restrained and quiet manner in the case of Korea. China's strategy on the Korea peninsula is best explained as part of a larger effort to counterbalance a significant perceived threat from the United States combined with moves to bandwagon with North Korea. This paper first briefly analyzes the drivers of Chinese foreign policy generally and then focuses on policy toward Korea since 2010, explaining why policy has concentrated on the DPRK, while exploring China's relations with the ROK as well as the United States and other great powers of the region such as Japan and Russia.

#### CHINA'S FOREIGN POLICY DRIVERS

Why has China been meek as a mouse where Korea is concerned but loud as a lion on U.S. policy in recent years? The answer lies in Beijing's deep domestic insecurity, its "buffer strategy," and Korea's prime location. First of all, Beijing is inward focused and fearful of instability within the country.<sup>2</sup> The ruling CCP is insecure. Anything that appears remotely to pose a challenge to its rule is deemed dangerous and provokes a brutal response, including to individual dissidents such as Nobel Peace Prize winner Liu Xiaobo and the artist Ai Weiwei. The twin pillars of regime legitimacy are economic prosperity and national pride, and CCP leaders believe they must deliver on them if they are to be seen as the rightful rulers of China and remain in power. This translates into Herculean efforts by Beijing to keep China's economy growing by all available means and a CCP that seizes every opportunity to portray itself as the champion of a strong and respected great power.

To be secure and strong at home, the CCP believes China must be increasingly active and engaged abroad. Logic might suggest an insecure CCP would closely restrict or even shut off China from the outside world and turn its focus exclusively inward—adopting an autarkic policy along the lines pursued by Mao Zedong. But this has not happened; on the contrary, China has become more activist around the world to an extent that is unprecedented in history.<sup>3</sup>

While China is globally more active, its 21st century focus is upon its own neighborhood: the Asia-Pacific. The countries on its periphery are especially important because they are immediately adjacent and hence pose the greatest potential threat to stability within China. Surprisingly, Beijing did not have an explicit Asia policy until the end of the Cold War. As Steven Levine astutely observed back in 1984, the PRC was "a regional power without a regional policy." <sup>4</sup> This is not to say that China ignored its neighborhood or was not engaged with its neighbors, but rather, that China tended to perceive Asia within the larger context of superpower relations—under the rubric of the strategic triangle.

Over the past twenty years, since the collapse of the Soviet Union and confronting a different geostrategic landscape, China has adopted a buffer strategy or what it calls a "good neighbor" policy. China has sought to build good relations with all its neighbors by resolving territorial disputes, demilitarizing border regions, enhancing diplomatic ties, and expanding economic relations. Beijing's goal has been to create a Chinese sphere of influence adjacent to its borders and deny or at least limit the actions and influence of outside powers.

Overall, China has been quite successful at implementing its buffer strategy with better results in some locations than others. Beijing was most successful in Central Asia and most challenged in Northeast Asia. Taiwan and Korea have been the two perennial flashpoints in the latter region. Of the two, Korea has provided the most persistent headache of the 21st century for China. Despite the fact that North Korea has been post-1949 China's most enduring buffer, it has proved costly and high maintenance, and it has required repeated reinvestment.

The first wave of trouble came in the early 1950s and considerable Chinese blood and treasure was required to maintain the DPRK as a buffer state. The Korean War armistice of 1953 provided reassurance that the Yalu River was secure although units of the Chinese armed forces remained in North Korea until 1958. The second wave of trouble, raising questions as to the durability of the buffer zone, emerged in the 1990s with the demise of the Soviet Union. A worrisome double crisis emerged on the peninsula: a systemic economic one triggered by the end of Soviet aid and a security one whereby the United States reacted to the rise of a nuclear North Korea.

Chinese efforts to build a belt of territory (landlocked and maritime) around its periphery of stable, pro-China states has proved particularly time consuming where the DPRK is concerned. Not only have attempts to keep North Korea stable economically proved to be a constant struggle, but denying or limiting the intervention of outside powers has also been an ongoing challenge. The PRC continues to provide the DPRK with aid in the form of food and fuel. In addition, it has encouraged Chinese businesses to invest in and conduct trade with North Korea, notably in extractive industries but in other fields as well.<sup>5</sup> What Beijing fears is turmoil inside the buffer.

## COUNTERBALANCING WASHINGTON, BANDWAGONING WITH PYONGYANG

The result of Beijing's acute insecurity, its buffer strategy, and extra sensitivity over the Korean peninsula has two important impacts on China's Korea policy. First, it means that the PRC's DPRK policy is as much about Beijing's views of Washington as it is about Beijing's perceptions of Pyongyang. The involvement of the United States raises the stakes for and threat to China. The United States poses an even bigger threat to China than North Korea—militarily and otherwise—going far beyond the geographical bounds of the Korean peninsula or Northeast China. The stakes are also higher for Beijing—not just the danger of instability or war on China's doorstep but the specter of a wider conflict involving the United States and possibly other countries. Hence, a volatile situation in Korea is much more alarming to Beijing than a cursory analysis would suggest. While the United States is more problematic than North Korea in many ways, nevertheless, Beijing perceives Washington as more malleable than Pyongyang.<sup>6</sup>

Second, it means that severe inertia afflicts China's policy toward the DPRK. This is because Beijing deems the situation to be extremely delicate with policy alterations likely to be severely destabilizing. North Korea's geographic location on China's doorstep presents a serious proximate potential threat to China's political and economic heartland. Moreover, the United States is directly involved as the ally of the ROK with a military presence on the peninsula and a long-time staunch critic of Pyongyang's nuclear and missile programs. China prefers to keep the buffer zone between the Yalu River and the Demilitarized Zone free of interference by outside powers, especially the United States.

Perhaps most alarming of all for Beijing is that Pyongyang has proved to be a 'hegemon magnet'—attracting the attention of Washington to a sensitive location on China's periphery. The magnet both repels and attracts. The former force has tended to predominate where the United States is concerned. Through provocations, including the development of a nuclear program, missile launches, nuclear tests, and other periodic provocations Pyongyang has predictably drawn the ire of Washington. What Beijing worries about is a tough U.S. response that will dangerously escalate tensions. In 1994, and then again in late 2002 and early 2003, China feared that the United States was preparing to launch a military strike against North Korea. Chinese leaders scrambled to avert this outcome.

Pyongyang's power of attraction is also of concern. While Beijing desires a North Korea on cordial terms with other states these relationships can become too cozy and challenge China's sphere of influence. Over the course of the past decade or so North Korea at various times has courted Russia, Japan, and, of course, the United States. Moscow continues to have some influence in Pyongyang, and the possibility remains of renewed talks with Tokyo. Much of this attention is undesirable from Beijing's perspective.

One significant outcome of the second Korean nuclear crisis for China was the establishment of a multilateral forum for discussion of the North Korean nuclear

program with Beijing in the driver's seat. The Six-Party Talks offered Beijing a kind of management mechanism whereby it could rope in, however loosely, Pyongyang, Washington, Tokyo, Moscow, and Seoul together around a six-sided table for on-again off-again talks.

Conventionally, international relations theorists conceive of bandwagoning as a maneuver performed by a weaker state to move closer to a stronger power. I turn the concept on its head by describing China as bandwagoning with North Korea. This conception underscores the disproportionate amount of influence the DPRK shrimp exerts on the PRC whale, and to suggest that in many ways it is not Beijing that alters Pyongyang's behavior but, rather, Pyongyang that constrains the behavior of Beijing. In terms of China's economic priorities and the outward orientation of its diplomacy, Beijing would seem to have more and more in common with Seoul. Moreover, South Korea's economic power, cultural vibrancy, and political dynamism contrasted starkly with North Korea's poverty, anachronistic socialist realism, and Stalinist atrophy. The logical conclusion for Beijing was that Pyongyang represented Korea's failed past while Seoul symbolized the exciting promise of the peninsula's future. In many ways, China was receptive in principle to the idea of Korean unification and assumed it would occur under South Korean auspices. 7 But abandonment of North Korea proved unthinkable. Indeed, by the mid-2000s, China seemed to have decided that its truculent neighbor could not be permitted to fail. Since then, it has made concerted efforts to prop up the Pyongyang regime economically (with aid and investment), politically (tacitly supporting hereditary succession), and diplomatically (refusing to criticize the North publicly for its intransigence or transgressions).

### GREAT DEBATES, LITTLE IMPACT, BIG WORRY

Since the mid-2000s, a lively debate has emerged in China over North Korea policy. Various schools of thought have been identified among foreign policy analysts.8 These opinion groups may be divided into three schools of thought. The first opinion grouping is the "Dump the DPRK" school. This viewpoint is not so much a distinct school of thought as it is a gut reaction to the frustrations of dealing with North Korea. Indeed, this feeling appears to be widespread within China but tends to be voiced in public only by academics because it is officially highly controversial and far too risky to be a viable policy option.<sup>9</sup>

This position springs from two perspectives. First, there is a sense—especially among those with liberal inclinations—of revulsion or distaste for a regime that is seen as morally reprehensible or at least untrustworthy and backward. Some analysts believe that by being so closely associated with a regime like this China is doing serious harm to its reputation as a responsible forward-looking great power.<sup>10</sup> Second, there is a realist perspective that views a continued alliance or partnership with North Korea as being fundamentally at odds with China's national interests. While Pyongyang may have been an asset to Beijing in the past, North Korea has become detrimental to Chinese national security in the 21st century. The events of the past decade cause some analysts to question the value and utility of China's longstanding quasi-alliance relationship with North Korea. 11

The second grouping is the "Push Pyongyang" school. This opinion grouping is where many whose initial reaction is to "dump the DPRK" gravitate upon reflection. Pushing North Korea to adopt Chinese-style economic reforms and moderate its security policy is less extreme and more closely parallels what Beijing has been articulating as official PRC policy toward Pyongyang. After all, it reflects genuine Chinese desires for continued social order and economic prosperity within China and peace and stability beyond its borders. Beijing has tried for more than a decade to persuade North Korea's leaders that they should emulate China's example and adopt market-oriented reforms. But Chinese analysts recognize that this is unlikely to happen, especially if Pyongyang discerns no significant improvement in its security situation. China's post-Mao reforms were made possible by Beijing's assessment that its strategic environment had improved as a result of dramatic rapprochement with the superpower (the United States) heretofore considered its most dangerous adversary. This experience leads Chinese analysts to argue that a North Korean "reform and opening" initiative must be preceded by a significant breakthrough in its relations with Pyongyang's most threatening adversary. These analysts tend to assume that the onus for this "opening" lies with the more powerful adversary the United States. 12 Without significant reassurance from Washington that it harbors no aggressive intentions, Chinese analysts believe that Pyongyang will not embrace Chinese-style reforms. Whatever happens, many adherents of this school recognize that a sea change in North Korea is probably not imminent and will not happen suddenly; however, they remain hopeful that this change may occur incrementally, and persistent Chinese efforts may eventually pay off. 13

The third grouping of Chinese analysts belongs to the "Bolster the Buffer" school. This opinion grouping believes that Pyongyang is located at the gateway to China's heartland and, as such, has tremendous geostrategic worth. North Korea is a valuable buffer client state because it keeps South Korea and its superpower patron, the United States, at arm's length. Although a serious headache, Pyongyang is nevertheless an ally of longstanding in a critical region. China has no other staunch friends in Northeast Asia. Indeed, of the four remaining actors, three have enduring alliances with the United States and the fourth, while loosely aligned with China, is deemed unreliable. Other than North Korea, China's best relationship is with Russia. While bilateral ties are amicable and tensions are low, the relationship is aptly described as an "axis of convenience."14 Of the three other actors, two seem firmly in the U.S. camp, and, as of 2012, appear deeply suspicious or skeptical of Beijing. Tokyo and Seoul both have formal bilateral defense treaties and U.S. forces stationed on their territory. A third, Taipei, while not considered the capital of a separate state by Beijing, has Washington as its superpower backer and arms supplier. Moreover, Taiwan remains unwilling to subordinate itself to China's authority.

In essence, adherents of this school of thought remain mired in Cold War-era thinking and continue to harbor a deep-seated distrust of the United States. Repeated Chinese protestations that the United States should discard its "cold war mentality," "zero sum" calculations and "hegemony" say as much if not more

about an entrenched way of thinking in Beijing as they do about the existence of such a mindset in Washington. 15 Three Northeast Asian actors (Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan) are considered allies of a superpower that Chinese analysts tend to perceive in adversarial terms and a fourth (Russia), although sharing much of China's worldview, is a largely unreliable partner for Beijing. In this context, the DPRK takes on greater significance because it is simultaneously considered a traditional PRC ally and a sworn enemy of the United States.

These schools of thought produce a hybrid narrative along the following lines: "We Chinese can barely tolerate those loathsome North Koreans (and would gladly dump them); nevertheless, we go through the motions of pushing for reform in North Korea (but do not anticipate results, at least in the near future); in the meantime, fearful of destabilizing change, we have built a buffer state (even though we disdain alliances)."

However, in the final analysis these different schools may not really matter much. First of all, while the differences of opinion appear real, they are held by people one step removed from the decision makers themselves. Second, the decision makers are in fundamental agreement that the highest priority is maintaining the status quo with the result being policy inertia (as noted above). China is most fearful of the prospect of chaos on the Korean peninsula. Near term fears about upheaval in North Korea trump Beijing's concerns about a nuclear armed Pyongyang and the possibility of a unified Korea under Seoul's auspices. China has more influence on North Korea than any other country. But this influence is "potential" in the sense that Beijing is extremely unlikely to activate it. This is because China fears that applying pressure to North Korea will either result in Pyongyang distancing itself from Beijing (and hence China will have no influence) or, Chinese pressure tactics will backfire and only make matters worse.<sup>16</sup>

The bottom line is that although China's leaders are not necessarily unreceptive to new thinking on Korea, they remain largely preoccupied with maintaining stability (internal and external) and focused on promoting their country's great power status. North Korea threatens to besmirch China's prestige, and many in China want their country to be viewed as a responsible power and a force for good in the world. But, North Korea is not akin to Sudan in Beijing's eyes. After all, it is not a far off Third World state. Rather, it is a Darfur on the doorstep—a humanitarian disaster which is the subject of enormous international attention with a repressive, distasteful dictatorship made all the more complicated because North Korea is a hyper-militarized state armed with ballistic missiles and weapons of mass destruction. Instability immediately across the Yalu directly threatens domestic stability in China's heartland if only because of the specter of many hundreds of thousands of refugees flooding into Manchuria. So Beijing is ultrasensitive to any hint of turmoil on the Korean peninsula.

Since the late 1980s, Beijing has been engaged in a delicate tightrope act, preserving good relations with Pyongyang while working to establish and maintain good ties with Seoul with considerable success at least up until the mid-2000s. China sent athletes to compete in the 1988 Seoul Olympics and

normalized relations with South Korea in 1992. Moreover, Beijing supported both Pyongyang and Seoul for membership in the United Nations with both Koreas admitted to the world body in 1991. 17 On the one hand, it tried to coax Kim Jong-il to adopt Chinese-style economic reforms, while on the other, its trade with South Korea grew dramatically. The tightrope act survived the first Korean nuclear crisis in 1994 and the onset of the second crisis in 2002-2003. Although the DPRK weathered both crises intact, they took their toll on China. Tensions fluctuated between Pyongyang and Washington and relations between Beijing and Seoul cooled noticeably. Attempting to address these tensions, China stepped out of its comfort zone, leading Beijing to establish the Six-Party Talks in 2003 and engage in rare public criticisms of Pyongyang at the United Nations.

A series of North Korean provocations—nuclear tests and missile launches culminated in the torpedoing of the Cheonan and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island. By 2010 it had become clear that the tightrope act was over and China was bandwagoning with North Korea. Beijing was ever more mired in Pyongyang's swamp as the PRC did everything it could possibly think of to stabilize the DPRK economically and security-wise.

#### CHINA'S 2010 KOREA CRISIS AND AFTERMATH

China's tightrope act ended in 2010 as North Korea unleashed yet another provocation with the sinking of the Cheonan. Beijing initially appeared to view the tragedy as a minor irritant as it launched an initiative to restart the dormant Six-Party Talks, welcoming in early May Kim Jong-il on yet another unofficial visit to China. Aside from being one more attempt to convince the North Korean leader about the merits of Chinese-style economic reform, the visit signaled that Beijing was making a serious effort to restart the multilateral talks. When, on May 20, 2010, an international team of investigators issued a report that concluded the explosion was caused by a North Korean torpedo, the episode went from mere irritant to major impediment. Pyongyang vehemently denied any involvement and the situation threatened to derail completely Beijing's initiative to restart the Six-Party Talks.

China's muted response to the apparent North Korean provocation angered South Korea. Seoul was irate at what it viewed as Beijing's coddling of Pyongyang. China refused to condemn or criticize North Korea publicly, successfully pushing to exclude any mention of Pyongyang in the United Nations Security Council's statement of July 9, 2010, which condemned the sinking of the South Korean naval vessel. Beijing was slow to respond with a message of condolence to Seoul, as one Chinese scholar observed.<sup>18</sup> While Russia accepted South Korea's invitation to come and independently review the evidence (and sent a four-person team to Seoul which arrived on May 21), China demurred. <sup>19</sup> Beijing tried to downplay the incident, and the policy focus was on how to manage the reactions of Washington and Seoul, concerned that they would retaliate militarily. If this happened, China feared it could easily provoke a harsh reaction from North Korea and hostilities could very quickly spiral out of control. Indeed, following the Yeonpyeong Island attack, Beijing feared that war might be imminent. Both the ROK and the DPRK put their armed forces on high alert. China's most senior foreign policy official, Dai Bingguo, made a sudden visit to Seoul on November 27, 2010 on the heels of postponing a PRC-ROK foreign ministerial meeting in protest over U.S.-South Korean exercises in the Yellow Sea.<sup>20</sup>

Beijing was well aware that Pyongyang was in the throes of preparations for leadership succession. In this delicate period an ailing Kim Jong-il made arrangements for his twenty-something son, Kim Jong-un, to assume formally the position of designated successor. Since the younger Kim was lacking in political experience and virtually unknown to most North Koreans, his emergence into the spotlight required careful stage management.

Beijing's response to the escalating crisis was to deflect the focus away from the DPRK and toward China. The decision was less a deliberate and carefully chosen course of action and more of a case of an unhappy coincidence: the fallout from the Cheonan tragedy overlapped with a rise in tensions with the United States over the South China Sea and other issues. In short, China emphasized counterbalancing against the United States while downplaying its bandwagoning with North Korea. After an initial honeymoon period with the Barack Obama administration, tensions rose in late 2009 and early 2010. During Obama's first year in office, Beijing perceived Washington as being deferential to China's "core interests," downgrading its commitment to East Asia, and preparing to concede significant areas to a Chinese sphere of influence. Indeed, during the 2000s, although by no means absent from Asia, the United States had a somewhat lower profile in parts of the region because Washington's attention was so focused on the war on terror with the main battlefields being in Afghanistan and Iraq. Thus, Beijing appeared surprised by the Obama administration's Asian activism in 2010 and perceived a need for vigorous counterbalancing.<sup>21</sup>

In a January 12, 2010 address at the East-West Center in Honolulu, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton underscored the strong and enduring U.S. links to Asia, stating: "So I don't think there is any doubt, if there were when this Administration began, that the United States is back in Asia. But I want to underscore that we are back to stay."22 Beijing appeared to view this as assertive and threatening. It was particularly irate at Clinton's remarks at the ASEAN Regional Forum in Hanoi on July 23, 2010, articulating an abiding U.S. interest in the South China Sea. Beijing interpreted this as part of a forceful U.S. "return to Asia." Whatever the perceptions, the United States had certainly adopted a lower profile in Southeast Asia while it was preoccupied with waging wars elsewhere. China was outraged at what were viewed as overbearing and provocative U.S. military and diplomatic actions.

After Seoul announced that the United States and South Korea would hold a naval exercise in the Yellow Sea in late July, Chinese protests were loud and shrill. Postponed in the aftermath of the Cheonan incident, the exercises (originally scheduled for early June) would include an aircraft carrier, the USS George Washington, and an assortment of other ships and aircraft. According to one Chinese analyst, the extent of Beijing's reaction to the impending drill was

unprecedented.<sup>23</sup> What explains China's vocal, vehement and repeated protests of the July U.S.-ROK naval exercises in the Yellow Sea (which were eventually moved to the Sea of Japan)? And why was this in stark contrast with China's understated and mild mannered response to the sinking of the Cheonan?

The different Chinese approaches to these two events can be explained by the reality that Beijing is far more fearful of agitating Pyongyang than it is of antagonizing Washington. While it is acceptable practice to criticize U.S. policies across the board, public criticisms of North Korea by the Chinese government remain largely off limits. From Beijing's perspective, Washington is more susceptible to modifications of policy than Pyongyang—witness the switching of the location of the July naval exercises from the Yellow Sea to the Sea of Japan announced by a South Korean defense official on July 15 (of course a separate U.S.-ROK exercise was held in the Yellow Sea in August much to China's dismay).

The outrage expressed over the Yellow Sea exercises is best understood as Chinese sensitivity to the world's most powerful armed forces—and ones that are perceived to be adversarial—muscle flexing on China's doorstep. The parameters for permissible targets of Chinese ire are limited and the United States tends to be considered fair game and a large convenient target for an array of Chinese civilian and military officials and commentators who find it hard to sound off on other more controversial topics. But this should not obscure the fact that China has become increasingly sensitive to and assertive about its maritime territorial claims. So in the summer of 2010 Beijing was not only vocal about the anticipated exercise in the Yellow Sea but also in responses to Secretary Clinton's comments about the South China Sea made at the July ASEAN Regional Forum meeting noted earlier.

#### NORTH KOREA'S DYNASTIC SUCCESSION

One of the major Korean peninsula news stories of 2011 was the December death of Kim Jong-il. But the succession process was underway since at least the latter part of the 2000s—the twilight years of Kim the father as he prepared to have his son take his place. Beijing recognized that a botched transition could trigger upheaval and perhaps even morph into the twilight of the Pyongyang regime (possibly ending in the complete collapse of the North Korean state). China is sensitive to this and, while not enthusiastic about dynastic succession, it was persuaded that this was the best hope for a turmoil-free transition. Chinese leaders were in no position to veto dynastic succession. Moreover, Hu Jintao and his colleagues have likely concluded that under the circumstances it is a satisfactory arrangement. The plan probably offered the best hope of a smooth power transition in Pyongyang as well as the best prospect for economic reform. Whatever the likelihood of real reform, Pyongyang is heavily dependent on Beijing economically. Hu Jintao reportedly promised more economic assistance to Pyongyang when he met with Kim Jong-il on August 27, 2010 in Jilin Province.<sup>24</sup>

Whether the Dear Leader will be as successful as his father, the Great Leader, was in engineering dynastic succession remains to be seen, but so far the leadership transition appears to be working smoothly. While Kim Jong-il did not necessarily need Beijing's blessing for a hereditary succession, the elder Kim was shrewd enough to keep North Korea's foremost patron informed as well as to suggest strongly to any wavering Pyongyang elites that China supports—or at least did not oppose—the arrangement. His two visits to China in four months were strong indications of urgency to cement succession arrangements—likely due to the fragile state of the Dear Leader's health. It was unprecedented for North Korea's top leader to make two trips to China in one year, and the prime reason for the August trip appears to have been to inform Chinese leaders of the succession arrangements being put in place.

#### CONCLUSION

Beijing is almost certain to stay the course on Korea barring a major crisis. Inevitably, there will be new provocations from North Korea, but China will refrain from harsh criticism or public condemnation. While North Korea threatens domestic and regional stability and China's international reputation, in the near term the current unstable status quo security situation on the peninsula is strongly preferred to the alternative: greater instability—the prospect of Chinese pressure that might push Pyongyang to even more extreme actions and rash provocations. For an extremely risk averse Beijing, the unstable status quo is preferable to the uncertainty of change.

Perhaps no foreign policy issue has posed a greater challenge for China in the 21st century than Korea. North Korea is viewed in the context of a larger challenge counterbalancing against the United States. This means Beijing fears that instability on the peninsula will be exploited—or perhaps even precipitated—by Washington as a way to threaten China. China feels very vulnerable to U.S. collaboration with its allies Japan and South Korea. Instinctively China has turned to bolstering the buffer essentially bandwagoning with North Korea as it did in 1950. However, unlike in the former instance Beijing hopes that military force will not be required and economic power and diplomatic influence will prove adequate.

The DPRK has been a near constant headache for the PRC since the early 1990s. The Pyongyang problem appears to be chronic. While Beijing walked a tightrope between Seoul and Pyongyang for some two decades, ultimately, it decided to bandwagon with North Korea to counterbalance against South Korea and its superpower patron. The decision was ultimately determined by Beijing's vital interests: domestic insecurity and a stable buffer state at the gateway to China's political and economic heartland. Future Pyongyang provocations are unlikely to change Beijing's buffer strategy. To bolster the North Korean buffer China seems prepared to use all of the instruments at its disposal—economic (aid, trade, and investment), political (tacitly supporting hereditary succession), diplomatic (refusing to criticize the North publicly for its intransigence or transgressions), and, if necessary, military (including limited or wholesale intervention to prop up the regime).

In sum, China does not appear likely to adopt a major change of policy where North Korea is concerned unless confronted by a serious crisis. The last time it adopted a major new initiative was in 2003 when it launched the Six-Party Talks under the impetus of grave concern that Washington was prepared to undertake

military action against North Korea. Both now and then, it was preoccupied with leadership transition at home, but today there is no detectable elevated level of alarm in China similar to what there was a decade earlier. A decade ago, the socalled fourth generation spearheaded by Hu Jintao succeeded the third generation led by Jiang Zemin. Today the fifth generation led by heir apparent Xi Jinping is preparing to take over from Hu. Moreover, Beijing is sensitive to a dynastic succession in Pyongyang. At this time, maintaining stability both inside China and on its periphery is the highest priority. The near-term challenge for China is how to get the Six-Party Talks—its primary multilateral management mechanism for the peninsula—restarted. South Korea and the United States seem to be in no mood to come back to the table. Whether or not the talks resume, China is unlikely to apply significant pressure on North Korea to make nuclear concessions or implement systemic economic reform, particularly at this sensitive period of transition. It is possible that Xi Jinping could bring new thinking to Korea policy. However, without significant external impetus new thinking on Korea seems improbable.

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# The View from Russia

STEPHEN BLANK

t a Russo-Korean summit in August 2011 Kim Jong-il announced his willingness  ${f A}$ to resume the Six-Party Talks without preconditions, i.e. no denuclearization or apologies. He also accepted Moscow's long-standing idea of a trans-Korean gas pipeline from Siberia through the DPRK to the ROK that would give North Korea \$100 million annually once it opened in 2017 while it shipped ten BCM annually to South Korea for thirty years. Kim also agreed to establish a commission to explore the possibility of building this pipeline. Subsequently, the two Koreas have started separate discussions with the Russians about the pipeline. Moscow also joined in joint naval search and rescue operations and is discussing forgiving up to 90% of Pyongyang's debts, if not the whole amount of about \$11 billion. The centurylong dream of a Trans-Siberian and Trans-Korean railway (TSR-TKR) looms in many discussions of future relations.1

To grasp Russia's Korea policies we must go beyond assessing Russia's bilateral policies toward North and South Korea to examine its policies in their regional, if not global, context. This entails realizing that whenever any member of the Six-Party process acts towards another member it generates dynamic consequences among all of the parties, making the talks an N+5 game that is constantly being played in multi-dimensional terms. A purely bilateral explanation is insufficient. Russia's policy must be seen in the context of its overall Northeast Asia policy. Russia views the Korean issue and the Six-Party Talks primarily as a regional security challenge and only secondly as a proliferation issue, while the United States views them primarily within a nonproliferation context. Moreover, the two strands dovetail to foster a Russian policy that ultimately obstructs any progress in dealing with the problems at hand.

This cognitive asymmetry with Washington has consequences for Moscow's policy and broader efforts to resolve this complex agenda. For instance, Irina Mironova writes that,

Thus, the peninsula's main problem consists not in the North Korean nuclear program per se or unification as it is. The problem consists in the virtual absence of relations between the two Koreas and is further exacerbated by the fact that there are not only Korean interests at play but there are also a number of players that pursue their own, quite explicit, interests on the peninsula, including China. The actions of Northeast Asian countries are guided by security considerations. "DPRK became the focus of rivalry between China and the United States which were further compounded by the lack of understanding of what is happening inside North Korea." Tensions are being expressed through two sets of controversies: China-United States and China-South Korea.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, it is all Washington's fault and nonprolfieration is a secondary issue that need not be urgently addressed. Georgy Toloraya similarly attributes the tensions of 2010 to South Korea's post-2008 policies that presumed the DPRK's impending collapse. Allegedly, this policy forced North Korea to employ its most potent policy, escalation and force majeure to torpedo the Cheonan in March 2010 and shell Yeonpyeong Island in November 2010.<sup>3</sup> Blaming the victim poses Korean issues in a regional security context between, first, the two Koreas, and, second, the United States and China with Seoul and Washington to blame. Nuclear proliferation becomes a secondary issue. Therefore Moscow can say that early resumption of the Six-Party Talks is up to the two Koreas and the United States, since Russia and China have successfully prevented the "chronic" conflict there from becoming an armed one.4

This linkage between regional security and strategic agendas features prominently in Russian thinking about security in Europe and Asia. As Jacob Kipp wrote,

For Russia, which inherited the Soviet nuclear arsenal, but has faced a serious change in its international position, the nuclear equation is, in fact, shaped by Russia's status as a regional power in a complex Eurasian security environment, where nuclear issues are not defined exclusively by the US-Russian strategic nuclear equation but by security dynamics involving interactions with Russia's immediate periphery. On the one hand, Russia's security responses have been shaped by a post-Soviet decade of sharp internal political crises, economic transformation, social instability, demographic decline, and the collapse of conventional military power. The impact of these developments has been uneven across Russia, leading to very distinct security environments which have demanded regional responses. The initial focus of security concerns for both the Soviet Union and the Russian Federation was primarily upon European security. This was the primary focus of the US-Soviet strategic competition and the place where its militarization was most evident.<sup>5</sup>

Russian officials have repeatedly confirmed this view. They apparently fear that any regional crisis, regardless of intentions, could become a wider or more protracted war with risks and costs to Russia. On November 17, 2011, Chief of Staff, General Nikolai Makarov, stated that local conflicts are occurring around the former Soviet perimeter and could escalate into all-out war involving nuclear weapons.<sup>6</sup> He echoed his predecessor General Yuri Baluyevsky that while Russia faced no direct threat of aggression, "[given] the existence of nuclear weapons, any localized armed conflict—let alone a regional conflict—could lead the international community to the brink of a global war."7

This wider lens of global competition informs Moscow's approach to all regional crises in areas viewed as strategic to its interests. Nikolai Patrushev, Secretary of Russia's Security Council, recently stated that,

Over the past two decades, 95% of conflicts affecting global and regional security started as domestic ones....Threats and conflicts inside certain countries quickly go the regional and also global level. This is particularly noticeable in the case of North Africa and the Middle East, in particular, in Libya, and now in Syria.8

Moscow thus implicitly believes that the United States and its allies frequently employ coercive tactics if not outright force against objectionable governments, including proliferators like North Korea, to force regime change upon them, and that these policies aggravate difficult issues, generating intractable crises if not prolonged wars (Kosovo, Iraq, Libya, Syria, and North Korea) that negatively affect international security. U.S. policies jeopardize Russian interests because they enlarge the scope of U.S. dominance and, at least, implicitly subject Russian policy to external scrutiny and pressure. Its interests also suffer because these objectionable or rogue states are, not coincidentally, Russia's partners against U.S. power. Therefore, international intervention must be subjected exclusively to the UN Security Council, where Russia has a veto.9

Accordingly, counterbalancing the United States is a fundamental motive of Russian policy. While some of this sentiment derives from the visceral official anti-Americanism of 2000-11, its deeper roots lie in the elite Russian perception that "Russia can reassert itself as a global great power only if it is able to limit American influence." Therefore, Moscow identifies with China on an anti-American and antiliberal program in Asia despite its mounting concern about rising Chinese power and seeks its own line of influence in North Korea, e.g. in the 2011 summit with Kim Jong-il. 10 Russian analysts, if not officials, see South Korea's post-2008 harder line and U.S. policies as being primarily responsible for North Korea's admitted adventurism and suspect Washington of still seeking regime change under the guise of coerced denuclearization. 11 They blame Washington and Seoul as much if not more than Pyongyang for the steady increase in tensions in 2010, which Russian diplomacy has sought to stop, often together with Beijing. 12

#### REGIONAL SECURITY PERSPECTIVE

The 2010 upsurge of tensions near Russia's borders harmed its interests, causing the suspension of the Six-Party Talks, the only venue where Moscow can formally assert itself in the region, and straining relations with both Koreas, the United States, and China.<sup>13</sup> Since a war on the Korean peninsula would be disastrous to Russia raising the possibility of a Sino-American clash on its frontier, potential nuclear strikes with radioactive fallout, state collapse in North Korea with uncertain command and control over nuclear weapons, large refugee flows, and the complete disruption of Northeast Asian investment and technology transfer into the Russian economy, Russians reason that actions generating heightened tensions or outright conflict must be avoided at all costs. 14 Moreover, in the Asia-Pacific region many military contingencies are becoming increasingly possible as China's military threats to Russia grow and the U.S. alliance system has strengthened. The threat of a Korean contingency clearly figures prominently in Russian threat assessments. The Vostok-2010 combined arms exercise, the largest one in Russian history had scenarios against South Korea, a war in North Korea, Japan, and China, and ended with the use of a tactical nuclear weapon against what was clearly a PLA surrogate, but it could also have been deployed against U.S. allies if they intruded into Russian territory. This exercise is part of an ongoing defense buildup throughout the Russian Far East (RFE). In 2009 Russia deployed S-400 surface to air missiles to the RFE against potential spillover from North Korean missile and nuclear tests. 15 In 2011 it deployed S-400s on the Kurile Islands, ostensibly against Japan and the United States, but probably also against China and to hedge against a Korean contingency.<sup>16</sup> Similarly, Russia's new plans for naval construction, especially in the RFE are extensive. All in all thirty-six submarines and forty surface ships are to be added by 2020.<sup>17</sup> These plans betray a reorientation of Russia's naval emphasis to the Asia-Pacific, and to a new emphasis on meeting the challenge posed by China's naval buildup, but they also could figure in a Korean-inspired contingency. 18

A 2010 article in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' journal International Affairs, quoting a Chinese analyst Zhu Feng, starkly underlined the dangers of war in Korea.

Indeed, the situation on the Korean Peninsula, which is in close proximity to our Far Eastern borders, is explosive and fraught with the most unpredictable consequences. Peace is very fragile here. No one can guarantee that it will not collapse as a result of a clash between the two Koreas with the involvement of other countries in the conflict and the use of weapons of mass destruction. "The aggravation of the North Korean nuclear issue is one of the long standing problems leading to new ones. This issue cannot be expected to be settled easily because difficulties have emerged in relations among large East Asian states. The settlement process can subsequently lead to a redistribution of roles of large states on the Asian political field—that is a new regional security problem."19

That restructuring of the Asian political order could easily ensue at Russia's expense given its weakness there, and do so by means over which Russia has little or no influence. While Moscow has long said that it does not fear Korean unification and might actually welcome it, Russia could only do so if it happened peacefully not through war.<sup>20</sup>

These considerations help explain why Deputy Foreign Minister Alexei Borodavkin, Moscow's delegate to the talks, said that the Korean peninsula was on the brink of war in September 2010.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, North Korea agreed with this estimate while South Korea has pledged retaliation for any future Northern provocations.<sup>22</sup> Since then, there have been multiple signs of intensified military hedging by both North and South Korea against the possibility of a renewed conflict. Consequently Russia faces a situation where a major conflict affecting its vital interests might ignite where it had little or no leverage on any of the players and could not prevent it. Since the Cheonan incident and shelling of Yeonpyeong island demonstrated its lack of leverage, not only were its vital interests at considerable risk, it also faced marginalization in the talks and regionally. This marginalization was reflected in the fact that everyone implored China, not Russia, for solutions despite their similar policy posture. Worse yet for Russia this picture of marginalization evidently reflected Asian perceptions. A U.S. Army colonel, who leads officers on tours of Asian think tanks, told a U.S. conference on Korea in 2010 that Chinese, Japanese, South Korean, and Mongolian think tanks unanimously asserted that Russia would soon play no role in East Asian security.<sup>23</sup>

These considerations had to be galling especially as Dmitry Medvedev's presidency has emphasized Asia. Russian officials and analysts have asserted a new coherence, purpose, and vigor in Russia's Asian policy, claiming that Russian foreign policy's center of gravity was shifting to the East.<sup>24</sup> According to Deputy Foreign Minister Grigory Karasin, Medvedev identified three main thrusts of his foreign policy: relations with the West, the CIS, and the Asia-Pacific region (APR).<sup>25</sup> Russian officials acknowledge Asia as the dynamo of the global economy and assert an emerging "polycentric world order" largely composed of rising Asian powers. 26 To play in this new order, Russia must ensure favorable conditions for its modernization, elicit large-scale foreign investment, participate in Asian integration and other processes, and propose a new Asian order free of military blocs (i.e. the U.S. alliance system). <sup>27</sup>Consequently, it vigorously pursues summitry, high-level diplomatic meetings and speeches, energy, and arms sales, its main currencies of power in East Asia. As it has done since Brezhnev, it "proceed(s) from the assumption that one of the most important prerequisites and components of the denuclearization process is the formation of regional common security institutions which would be based on the principle of equal security to all parties."28

Moscow's Korean initiative was an effort, often joined by China, to bring everyone back to the Six-Party Talks, but it also reflected an independent quest for leverage vis-à-vis the two Koreas, using the best and perhaps only real weapon at its disposal, namely energy. These actions paid off for Moscow at the August 2011 summit. Russian analysts, if not officials, believe that Northeast Asia offers Russia opportunities due to its energy capabilities, the region's dynamism, Europe's and the U.S. decline due to the protracted global economic crisis, and what its elites claim is the validity and vitality of its (and China's) leadership model.<sup>29</sup>

#### THE PROLIFERATION STANDPOINT

Moscow and Washington's approaches to nonproliferation issues sharply diverge, underscoring the wide conceptual and perceptual gaps between them. This poses significant challenges to any enduring reset policy let alone amity and genuine cooperation on international security. Given Russia's ambition to challenge the United States regionally by counterbalancing it, the result is a set of contending issues where Russia sees its rival as threatening principles and interests that it deems central to its security. Moscow firmly opposes adding new members to the nuclear club and regards proliferation as a threat; therefore, it works with Washington to eliminate "loose nukes" and discourage other states from expanding earlier nuclear programs, and it has stringent export control procedures established in law.<sup>30</sup> Nonetheless, on proliferation issues it follows its own interests, putting this fifth in the new defense doctrine after a series of U.S.-inspired threats, including NATO enlargement and missile defenses. The doctrine explicitly states that Russia expects that by 2020 it will be living in a proliferated world,31 where the number of nuclear weapon states has increased.<sup>32</sup> It is certainly strange to concede proliferation in advance. Leaders also publicly say that this is mainly a U.S., not necessarily a Russian, concern. In early 2002 Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov outlined Russian thinking and policy concerning proliferation.

Russia scrupulously adheres to its international obligations in the sphere of non-proliferation of mass destruction weapons, means of their delivery, and corresponding technologies. The key criteria of Russian policy in this sphere are our own national security, the strengthening of our country's international positions and the preservation of its great power status.<sup>33</sup>

Russia evaluates proliferation issues not according to whether the regime is democratic or not, but on whether a country's nuclearization would seriously threaten Russia and its interests.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, it views U.S. nonproliferation policy cynically, displaying a visible Schadenfreude when North Korea tested missiles and then a nuclear weapon in July-October 2006.35 Officials often view Washington's insistence on nonproliferation controls as mainly an effort to pressure competitors in nuclear and arms markets.<sup>36</sup> In 2009 Alexei Arbatov provided the most detailed explication of Russia's approach.

For Russia the acquisition of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles by India and Pakistan and the prospects of further proliferation are adding some new elements to a familiar and old threat, rather than creating a dramatic new one, as is the case with the United States. The USSR and Russia have learned to live with this threat and to deal with it on the basis of nuclear deterrence, some limited defenses (like the Moscow BMD system and national Air Defenses) and through diplomacy, which is used to avoid direct confrontation (and still better, to sustain normal relations) with new nuclear nations.37

Instead, Moscow regards vertical proliferation (qualitative improvement) rather than horizontal proliferation of nuclear weapons to new states with greater alarm than does the United States. Russia's posture thus reverses America's that takes greater alarm at horizontal proliferation.<sup>38</sup>

Russia does not profess undue alarm at this trend. Unlike America it advances no claim to be a global "policeman," does not deploy armed forces abroad (except in some post-Soviet states), and does not employ its forces in serious combat operations. Instead, its greatly reduced conventional power capabilities, coupled with its expansive geopolitical ambitions, are leading it to become a major exporter of sensitive nuclear technologies as it seeks to reduce U.S. influence in world politics.<sup>39</sup> It avoids challenging other countries, including actual or potential nuclear and missile-capable regimes. Due to Russia's vulnerability and lack of reliable security protection and commitments from other nations, its nonproliferation stance is much more cautious and flexible than that of the United States. Indeed, it sees the DPRK and Iran as potential partners, not enemies, and therefore will not categorically oppose their programs, as does Washington.

Given Russia's post-Cold War weakness, it has been forced to confront other security threats that are incomparably more urgent to it than proliferation. These threats, as listed by Arbatov, comprise:

- The instability and bloody conflicts across the post-Soviet space and in the North Caucasus of Russia proper (which has a 1,000 km common border with the volatile South Caucasus).
- NATO's continuous extension to the east against strong Russian objections.
- Continuing stagnation of Russian armed forces and defense industries and Russia's growing conventional and nuclear inferiority to the United States and NATO.
- The threat of expanding Muslim radicalism in Central Asia (7,000 km of common border with Russia).
- The scary growth of China's economic and military power (5,000 km of common border with Russia).
- The U.S. plans to deploy missile defenses in Eastern Europe. 40

Arbatov further observes that Russia's elite broadly believes that it should not emphasize U.S. concerns over Russian ones especially, as they believe, Washington refuses to understand or accept Russia's situation and interests.41

## THE SUMMIT'S ENERGY, MILITARY, AND SECURITY DIMENSIONS

Closer examination of the August 2011 summit simultaneously reveals both less and more than meets the eye. First, Russian officials admit that no pipeline is possible without strong guarantees from the North and South, neither of which has materialized although Seoul agreed in principle to a gas pipeline from Russia in 2008 and clearly prioritizes the search for reliable energy sources. 42 Second, neither Washington nor Seoul evidently think much of this deal, except for Seoul's enthusiasm about the energy pipeline. Third, Kim actually agreed to nothing tangible. As a South Korean observer noted, if he was serious about this moratorium he would have addressed himself to Washington, not Moscow.<sup>43</sup> Fourth, resuming the talks without preconditions directly clashes with continuing ROK, Japan, and U.S. insistence on tangible denuclearization as a precondition for reopening the talks. Meanwhile nuclearization proceeds. Fifth, Russia's agreement to provide this pipeline directly violates UN resolutions on sanctions to which it agreed and underscores Russia's delusion that North Korea can be induced to renounce nuclear weapons by rewarding it despite its long record of duplicity.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, agreeing to establish a commission to investigate setting up the pipeline commits nobody to anything except exploratory discussions that can easily be slowed or terminated whenever it suits any of the parties. Thus, Moscow is pressing Seoul to accelerate negotiations over the pipeline and the accompanying price of its gas because the new DPRK government confirms its intent to realize this project.<sup>45</sup> Since constructing any multinational gas pipeline resembles negotiating a marriage, doing so under conditions as unpropitious as those currently on the Korean peninsula will inevitably be a long, slow affair. Moreover, although North Korea needs the revenues that the pipeline will generate, it will not rush to finalize an agreement lest others

think it is more desperate than it really is for those revenues. Doing so contradicts virtually everything we know about Pyongyang's negotiating tactics. Russia is the most eager advocate of this pipeline because it believes that only such energy initiatives strengthen its flagging Asian position. 46 Authorities believe that such largescale energy initiatives are an essential precondition for returning to Northeast Asia as an independent great power and for assisting the Korean peace process.<sup>47</sup> Moscow has already agreed to assume responsibility for providing South Korea gas should North Korea block transmission and will sell it at 30% below market price, although it has not specified how it will make up any shortfall.<sup>48</sup>

Other factors also justify caution regarding rapid realization of this project. Moscow may believe or at least profess that its pledge suffices to gain South Korean support and financing, but this critical issue requires more than a pledge to be credible. Moscow can only attain the great Asian power status it craves through leveraging its energy exports in Northeast Asia and building the kind of trade and infrastructural facilities contemplated in these agreements, i.e. the pipeline and the railway. However, the railway and gas pipeline also epitomize the hidden tensions and rivalry in Russian and ROK relations with China. It remains unclear who will pay for these enormous projects. Neither Seoul nor Moscow can meet these objectives today and it is unclear who will subsidize Moscow's objectives with his own resources. Samuel Kim wrote in 2004 that,

Perhaps the most revealing part of the DPRK-Russia Moscow Declaration of 4 August 2001 is embodied in Point Five: "In order to carry out a series of bilateral plans, the Russian side confirmed its intention to use the method of *drawing financial resources* from outsiders, on the basis of understanding of the Korean side." In other words, Moscow and Pyongyang are now looking to Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo to foot the bill.<sup>49</sup>

Not only does Russia dream about building this Euro-Asian trade network, South Korea has previously expressed such ideas and by locating this railway's terminus and gas pipeline at home, it gains greater security about its energy supplies, shelters them and its overland trade from China's influence, and moves to realize its earlier dream of becoming a Northeast Asian hub. 50 China too dreams of becoming such a hub through transcontinental trade projects, which bypass Russia. The railway and gas pipeline illustrate the ongoing Sino-Russian rivalry for leverage in the Korean peninsula, whose exploitation is a long-standing Kim family recipe. By doing so, it has added incentive to obstruct resolution of any issues until it gets its maximum price, whatever that is.

Despite Russia's plans for an overland freight service along the Trans-Siberian railway from China to Europe, China has no plans to cooperate on a Far East highspeed railway.<sup>51</sup> Instead, it has launched a global offensive to build low-cost highspeed railways, to undercut Japanese and potential Russian competitors. Chinese officials openly say that due to these investments Chinese products will spread further, the image of Chinese brands will improve, and the result will be to "heighten China's political influence in the importing countries."52 No wonder officials like Xi Jinping maintain that Russia is a vital market for China's "going global" business strategy.<sup>53</sup>

Perhaps Moscow's understanding of the consequences of China's growing commercial and economic power throughout Northeast Asia explains why a recent article in International Affairs stated openly that the economic development of other countries in the Asia-Pacific region actually threatens Russia because it generates unbridled geopolitical competition of influence.<sup>54</sup> Since leaders expressly link development of the RFE to Russia's capacity to play a "system-forming" role in Asia, failure to develop the area through such major energy, transportation, and trade projects consigns it to being linked to China's regional development plan and contributes to the failure of Russia's "Ostpolitik," a failure having profound strategic implications. Despite Russia's professed identity of interests with China, Medvedev's policy of enhancing Russia's Asian profile does not entail yielding to China in Korea. Therefore, the gas pipeline expresses Northeast Asian rivalries and competing political agendas. It allows Russia to pose as a great Asian power and enhances its standing in the Six-Party Talks because it gains an apparent mechanism through which to influence both Koreas. Otherwise, Russia possesses no way of leveraging tensions in Korea that it openly viewed as perhaps even more dangerous than Iran's proliferation as a threat to international security even before the crises of 2010.<sup>55</sup>

Russia also still envisions engaging South Korea in large-scale transportation, energy, and infrastructure projects in the RFE to forestall a Chinese economic bloc in Northeast Asia and enhance Russia as an intercontinental transportation and trade hub between Europe and Asia.<sup>56</sup> It is now pushing deals also involving LNG exports to South Korea.<sup>57</sup> North Korea's unresolved situation and the inability of Russia and China to negotiate an alternative pipeline route through China to the ROK have obstructed meaningful progress on this deal.<sup>58</sup> Yet Seoul is considering alternatives, e.g. cooperation with Japan to procure LNG, either by joint ownership of a Russian field or cooperating regarding North American shale gas.<sup>59</sup> It is also intensively working to increase exports from Central Asia.<sup>60</sup>

A breakthrough in this pipeline reduces China's leverage on Russian energy exports. Hitherto any gas pipeline from Russia to the ROK would, absent Pyongyang's assent, have to traverse China, which vetoed any alternatives through Mongolia. Moreover, China and Russia are embroiled in difficult negotiations over a Russian gas pipeline to China. China demands a below market price. Since China has alternatives, Russia had to offer it a concessionary price of \$250/tcm. But a pipeline to South Korea through the DPRK bypasses China, reduces its leverage on Russia, which would be able to supply gas to all of Asia, and allows Russia to insist upon a higher price to China. Indeed, Moscow recently announced that it would not lower its price for gas through the projected pipeline to China even as it offers South Korea a 30% discount. 61 Also, it gains more access to North Korea (one byproduct of the summit is that a Russian intelligence officer will mentor Kim Jong-un, on world affairs).

For North Korea, this defense cooperation revives, at least to some degree, an earlier military relationship. Kim Jong-il visibly sought a military and negotiating partner or supporter/s in the Six-Party Talks. In 2011 China refused to offer military assistance, and imposed resuming the Six-Party Talks unconditionally as its condition of new economic assistance. Meanwhile China's influence upon North Korea's economy has steadily grown. North Korean officials clearly resent this dependence on China that contradicts the autarchic Juche (self-reliance) ideology even though they need Chinese assistance and support for the succession to Kim.<sup>63</sup> Indeed, we should never forget that nuclearization also aims to emancipate North Korea from China's tutelage upon its foreign and defense policies. That desire to escape China's pressure also underlies Pyongyang's frequent, if ham-handed, efforts at rapprochement with Washington. Kim apparently had no choice but to accept China's conditions, but he invoked Pyongyang's long-standing tradition of playing off Russia and China as rivals for influence. And when China announced that it was strengthening military cooperation with North Korea in November 2011 this probably was prompted by Pyongyang's August agreements with Moscow.<sup>64</sup> This outcome also validated Kim's insight about the ongoing Russo-Chinese rivalry over North Korea.

Pyongyang benefits by expanding ties with Moscow since that induces Beijing not just to be more obliging on military aid but also to relax its linkage between trying to get North Korea to talk seriously with South Korea and providing aid. For example, the DPRK denounced Lee Myung-bak and his "gang of traitors," right after Kim returned from his Beijing summit in May 2011 and announced that the DPRK would wait out the remainder of his term.<sup>65</sup> This suggests that Pyongyang believes that, "Maintenance of a tense inter-Korean relationship can be a way for North Korea to underscore dissatisfaction with China for failure to fully meet North Korean economic demands and expectation."66 Another way to react to disappointment with China is to upgrade ties with Russia.

While Russia clearly covets the status of a major actor on the Korean peninsula, it will do nothing that could potentially destabilize the area lest conflict break out. Therefore, it too would not give North Korea major military assistance. Moreover, North Korea's precarious economic situation means that Moscow would probably be left holding the economic bag for all expenses and costs incurred in doing so. Therefore the limited nature of cooperation restricted to search and rescue operations and the summit's economic agreements, represent, to some degree, a surrogate for the defense agreements that Kim wanted. Nonetheless, for Russia such accords are important because they give it a channel by which it can now talk to the North Korean military, clearly the strongest political bloc or faction in the DPRK. That dialogue could become vital in North Korea's succession and be a means by which Moscow can attempt to restrain what it deems as potentially provocative actiwons.

Russia knows that DPRK provocations in 2010 not only fostered tighter U.S.-ROK alliance mechanisms, but also triggered South Korea's visible upgrading of defense capability and intolerant stance toward future DPRK provocations. Gaining any leverage over DPRK defense policies without committing Moscow to support those provocations and giving North Korea something to lose if it does act provocatively makes sense under the circumstances.

More recently, North Korea and the United States concluded an agreement wherein North Korea agreed to suspend uranium enrichment, nuclear, and missile tests and allow IAEA inspectors to visit its main nuclear facility in return for 240,000 tons of nutritional supplements. Moscow welcomed the agreement, adding that it now believed the Six-Party Talks would soon be resumed.<sup>67</sup> Some Russian experts further commented that Russia should exploit the situation after the "Leap Day" accord not just to facilitate resumption of the talks, but also to attempt to reconcile North and South Korean negotiating positions. 68

Also of potential interest regarding the Korean question is the fact that on March 1 Putin, shortly before being elected president again, stated that he hopes to resolve the territorial dispute with Japan over the Kurile Islands and have the negotiators start at the beginning and work their way through to resolution of the issue. These remarks were welcomed by Tokyo and lent further credence to the idea that Russia was seeking a diplomatic rapprochement with Japan.<sup>69</sup> Yet, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs immediately responded by saying that the Kurile Islands' status was not negotiable, a statement that leaves a question mark over Putin's initiative and implicitly over Russia's Asian policy in general. 70 Worse yet, soon after the "Leap Day" accord, North Korea announced its intention to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Kim Il-sung's birthday on April 12 by launching a space satellite, an action that would clearly violate UNSC resolutions concerning North Korean testing of missile capabilities and was promptly called a "deal breaker" by Washington. 71 As of this writing, the future of the February 29 accord and Putin's initiative towards Japan are uncertain, but both resolution of the Korean issue and the Russian effort to make its voice as an independent great power heard in Asia face serious obstacles. For the moment North Korea can pocket Moscow's gifts and Moscow can delude itself that it is now a great Asian power, but nuclearization continues, the Six-Party Talks remain moribund, and even if they start there will probably not be much to discuss. This may conform to preconceptions of Russian interests, but it is hard to see how anyone benefits from perpetuating the regional stalemate and playing into China's hands.

So it is not surprising that Moscow has again urged Pyongyang to mothball its uranium enrichment program,72 but it will be surprising if Pyongyang heeds Moscow's call or agrees to conditions for resuming the talks. After all, what can Moscow do to it? It appears to North Korea that, "the northern triangle of Russia, China, and North Korea has come back to life,"73 reviving the division in Northeast Asia between sea and land powers.74

The coincidence of strategic interests among these three states is once again binding them together, even though they are not free from intermittent bickering over Pyongyang's nuclear and missile adventures. Even though Pyongyang's anachronistic behaviors from time to time baffle Beijing and Moscow, the geostrategic considerations basically drive the two giant neighbors' policy towards Pyongyang. 75

[Author's note: The views expressed here do not represent those of the U.S. Army, Defense Department, or the U.S. Government.]

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# Japan's Response to Nuclear North Korea

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hen scholars and commentators discuss Japan's response to nuclear-armed North Korea, many jump to the conclusion that Japan will start thinking about arming itself with nuclear weapons while others contend that Japan will remain forever "pacifist." This polemic tendency in the discourse on Japan's security policy has created an unfortunate lack of understanding of Japanese policy. In fact, Tokyo has taken extensive non-nuclear military measures in order to cope with the North Korean threat while being less active in using diplomacy. This chapter sheds light on the military and diplomatic measures that Japan has taken and assesses how effective these measures are, based on the extent and the nature of the North Korean threat toward Japan.

# ASSESSING NORTH KOREA'S NUCLEAR AND MISSILE CAPABILITIES

#### **Nuclear Capabilities**

In order to determine North Korea's nuclear capabilities, attention must be paid to the amount of plutonium that the country has, the level of sophistication of its explosive device, and the extent to which miniaturization has been achieved. In 2007, the U.S. intelligence community estimated that North Korea had possessed up to 50 kilograms of plutonium, enough for at least six nuclear devices before the first nuclear test in October 2006.1 Also, the Institute for Science and International Security assessed that while North Korea possessed zero to ten kilograms of separated plutonium enough for up to two nuclear bombs in 1994, the amount had increased to 33 to 55 kilograms enough for six to thirteen nuclear devices in 2006.2 In addition, Siegfried S. Hecker, an American nuclear expert who has visited North Korean nuclear facilities multiple times, has assessed from the operations of the five-megawatt reactor in Nyongbyon (called Yongbyon in South Korea) that in the past North Korea had produced 36 to 54 kilograms of plutonium, enough for six to nine nuclear bombs.3

These estimates are more or less consistent with North Korea's declaration on its nuclear status. In June 2008, Pyongyang declared that it had produced 38.5 kilograms of plutonium, of which 31 kilograms had been extracted and 26 kilograms had been used to produce nuclear bombs. It also claimed that two kilograms had been used in the 2006 nuclear test and that 7.5 kilograms still remained in spent fuel rods.4

Two nuclear tests in 2006 and 2009 proved that North Korea had successfully produced nuclear devices. In 2006, North Korea predicted explosion yield of four kilotons, but achieved less than one kiloton. So, it was "[s]uccessful, but not perfect." However, North Korea achieved a much larger nuclear explosion in the range of a few kilotons in 2009.6 Hecker estimated it to be in the two to four kiloton range.7 These estimates are ominously consistent with North Korea's prediction in 2006.

The only remaining missing link in determining whether North Korea's nuclear weapons have become usable is in the issue of miniaturization. On this point, the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) assessed in March 2009 that North Korea

"may be able to successfully mate a nuclear warhead to a ballistic missile." This latest estimate was not a definitive answer to the question, but certainly a scary suggestion. In 2011, the DIA declared that "North Korea may now have several plutonium-based nuclear warheads that it can deliver by ballistic missiles and aircraft as well as by unconventional means."9

#### Missile Capabilities

Although international attention has largely been focused on the launch of longrange Taepodong missiles, what really matters to the security of Japan is the medium-range Nodong missile capable of covering almost the entire territory of Japan. The Nodong's first flight test took place in May 1993. The missile flew about 500 kilometers and landed in the Sea of Japan; its flight path was in the direction of Tokyo. In July 2006, two or three Nodong missiles were successfully launched in the northeastern direction between the Russian Far East and Japan's Hokkaido area.10 All of these Nodong missiles impacted in different areas, suggesting that some of them had achieved lofted launches. 11 In July 2009, two more Nodong missiles were launched successfully. 12

The Japanese government has assessed that the Nodong has a range of 1,300 kilometers with a payload of 700 to 1,200 kilograms and circular error probable (CEP) of 2.5 kilometers. If aimed at the center of Tokyo, there is a 50% probability the missile would fall somewhere inside the circular Yamanote subway line. A Nodong would reach Japan within seven to ten minutes of its launch and would be flying at a speed of Mach 15 to 20 at the time of impact. 13

By 2003, North Korea had deployed some 175-200 Nodong missiles, designed to accommodate conventional, nuclear, biological, and chemical warheads. 14 A more recent report stated that as many as 320 Nodong missiles had been deployed.<sup>15</sup> As it is difficult to spot Nodong missiles mounted on mobile launchers, of which North Korea reportedly possessed about thirty, destroying them before they are launched would be extremely difficult. 16 A positive aspect of this is that the Nodong might not be too destabilizing in a crisis situation since North Korea would not have to launch them prematurely for fear of preemption.

In late 1999, the Korean People's Army (KPA) established the Missile Training Guidance Bureau and all ballistic missile units were subsequently subordinated to this bureau. Since the 2001-02 training cycle when the KPA started to conduct ballistic missile exercises at battalion level instead of battery level, annual exercises with Scud and Nodong units have expanded and many ballistic missile units had been redeployed.<sup>17</sup>

As a result, North Korea is already capable of attacking Japan with ballistic missiles. Conventional, chemical, or biological weapons can be used although it might not be technically easy to use chemical or biological weapons effectively. Given the DIA's estimate of North Korea's ability to miniaturize the nuclear device, the assessment is that North Korea "may be able to" now use nuclear weapons against Japan.

## SCENARIOS OF MISSILE USE AGAINST JAPAN

There are three scenarios in which North Korea might actually use missiles against Japan. First, there is a military-diplomatic scenario in which North Korea would launch missiles as a part of its effort to coerce Japan into diplomatic submission. Second, there is a wartime deterrence scenario in which North Korea would use or threaten to attack Japan in order to deter the United States and Japan from assisting South Korea in case of war on the Korean peninsula. Finally, there is a scenario in which desperate North Korean leaders launch all-out attacks against Japan. I am not contending here that the likelihood of these scenarios' occurrence is very high. Rather that if North Korea should attack Japan, these would be likely scenarios.

#### Scenario 1: Military-Diplomatic Use of Force

In this scenario, North Korea would launch a small number of missiles in or near Japan to scare Japanese leaders and citizens into diplomatic submission. North Korea would launch a large enough number of missiles to provoke fear, but limit their damage so that the situation would not escalate too much. North Korea's policy objective in this case would be to obtain concessions to achieve diplomatic normalization with Japan. North Korea could do this by taking the following actions.

North Korea launches one Nodong missile in the direction of Tokyo, but has it fall far short of the city and impact on international waters in the Sea of Japan. It then announces: (a) there would be no more missile tests; (b) the missile tests were necessary only because of Japan's aggressive policy and the steps it has been taking to possess offensive capabilities against the government of the DPRK; and (c) it would like to normalize relations with Japan.

If Japan does not respond positively to the overture, North Korea could then launch a Nodong missile tipped with a conventional warhead toward Tokyo, but have it land in a rural, sparsely populated area on the Japanese mainland. It then announces: (a) the missile was launched only because Japan continued to take a "hostile policy" toward the DPRK and (b) the DPRK will take every necessary measure to prevent escalation of the situation and seek to normalize relations with Japan.

Given North Korea's past adventurism, this scenario is within the range of its rational choices.

#### Scenario 2: Wartime Deterrence

In this scenario, North Korea would use or threaten to attack Japan in order to prevent the United States and Japan from assisting South Korea in case of war on the Korean peninsula. As in the first scenario, North Korea would scare Japanese leaders and citizens into making a decision to limit Japan's commitment to the defense of South Korea. More importantly, it would seek to prevent Japan from allowing the United States to use military bases and facilities on its soil as part of the war effort in Korea. North Korea would threaten the use of nuclear weapons against Japan unless it accepts Pyongyang's demands. In order to make its coercion credible, North Korea would launch a relatively large number of missiles against U.S. bases and major cities in Japan. On the one hand, if Japan chose to refuse the United States the right to use its bases, it would risk the end of the U.S.-Japan alliance after the war. On the other hand, if it chose to ignore North Korea's demand, it would risk the mass destruction of Tokyo.

At the same time, Pyongyang would demand that Washington choose between Seoul and Tokyo. In this variant of a Cold War nuclear scenario, Pyongyang would typically ask, "Would you be willing to sacrifice Tokyo for Seoul?"

#### Scenario 3: Suicidal Attacks

In this scenario, desperate North Korean leaders would launch an all-out attack against Japan. For example, if Kim Jong-un realized that his regime was collapsing and his days were numbered, he might decide to launch massive suicidal attacks against Japan to leave his legacy (though infamous) on Korean history. In this scenario, massive destruction of Japan itself would be the objective. All available forces would be used to attack Japan. For this purpose, North Korea would use some 320 Nodong missiles armed with conventional, or possibly chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons. In the worst-case scenario, several nuclear bombs would be used.

## THE JAPANESE RESPONSE

#### Military Response

Japan's military response to the North Korean threat has three pillars: ballistic missile defense (BMD), civil defense, and extended nuclear deterrence provided by the United States.

#### Ballistic Missile Defense

Japan's BMD program has come a long way. The government of Japan began preliminary consultations on BMD with the United States in 1993 after the first Nodong flight test took place earlier in the same year. It commenced a comprehensive study on the posture of the air defense system and a U.S.-Japan joint study on BMD in 1995. In 2003, the Japanese government made the decision to actually procure BMD systems. Based on this decision, deployment of BMD units in the Self-Defense Forces (SDF) began in 2007. The deployment is scheduled to be completed by April 2012.<sup>18</sup>

Two different systems are being introduced as key components of the Japanese BMD measures. One is the Standard Missile-3 (SM-3) Block IA, an upper-tier, midcourse defense system deployed on Aegis destroyers, capable of shooting down 1,500 kilometer-range ballistic missiles. Four Aegis destroyers will be equipped with the SM-3. The other system is Patriot Advanced Capabilities-3 (PAC-3), a ground-based, lower-tier, terminal-phase defense system. Four air and missile defense groups, with four fire units each equipped with PAC-3, will be deployed in the Tokyo metropolitan area, the central area, and northern Kyushu. Of these two systems, the Aegis-based SM-3 is more important than PAC-3 in the sense that the SM-3 has much wider area coverage, and two to three Aegis BMD destroyers will be enough to protect most Japanese territory. Each Aegis BMD destroyer has ninety vertical launch system (VLS) cells, and the SM-3 missiles will be deployed together with anti-aircraft SM-2 and anti-submarine missiles.<sup>19</sup>

With the introduction of BMD systems, the newly developed warning and control radar FPS-5, capable of dealing with both aircraft and ballistic missiles, will be deployed (eventually there will be four of them); and the ground-based early warning and control system—Base Air Defense Ground Environment (BADGE)—has been upgraded and renamed Japan Aerospace Defense Ground Environment (JADGE). The budget earmarked for BMD in FY2012 is going to be 63.3 billion yen, or some \$510 million.<sup>20</sup> The total expenditure of procuring the entire system was expected to be between 800 billion and 1 trillion yen, or \$8.7 billion and \$10.9 billion. However, the cumulative expenditure on BMD had already reached 800 billion yen, or \$8.7 billion by 2009.<sup>21</sup>

So far, four SM-3 interception tests have been conducted in December 2007, November 2008, October 2009, and October 2010 respectively in the sea off Hawaii's Kauai Island. In the first, third, and fourth tests, targets were successfully intercepted outside the atmosphere by a SM-3 missile fired from the Kongo, Myoko, and Kirishima Aegis destroyers. The second test was conducted with the Chokai Aegis destroyer, but failed due to the malfunctioning of thrusters.<sup>22</sup> PAC-3 has been tested successfully twice in September 2008 and September 2009.<sup>23</sup>

In April 2009, both sea-based and ground-based BMD systems were for the first time put into operation for actual contingencies in response to North Korea's Taepodong launch. Under the Self-Defense Forces Law revised in 2007, the Minister of Defense issued an advance order to the Self-Defense Forces units to prepare for the destruction of the rocket which might fall on Japanese territory.

In addition, a U.S.-Japan joint project for developing the next-generation seabased BMD system is underway. After North Korea launched Taepodong 1 in 1998, Japan embarked on joint technological research with the United States on four major components—kinetic kill vehicles, infra-red seekers, rocket motors, and nose cones—for the next-generation advanced interceptor missile SM-3 Block IIA. In 2005, the Japanese government approved U.S.-Japan cooperative development of the advanced interceptor. The two countries are also working together to improve the capabilities of radar and combat command systems.<sup>24</sup>

#### Civil Defense

Civil defense measures had long been non-existent in Japan. However, given the new strategic environment of a North Korean threat, as well as the existence of lowintensity but high-probability threats such as terrorism, Japan has started to take steps to pave the way for providing better civil defense to its citizens. In this context, the Law concerning the Measures for Protection of the People in Armed Attack Situations, or Civil Protection Law, was enacted in 2004. It stipulated how the national and local governments should implement evacuation and relief operations and take necessary measures in response to armed attacks. In 2005, the Basic Guidelines for Protection of the People were adopted and the civil protection plans for administrative agencies were developed. In 2006, based on the guidelines, prefectural governments and designated public institutions in Japan completed the development of civil protection plans. Municipal governments and designated local public institutions are currently developing their own plans. The central government would issue warnings and

instruct prefectural governors to take evacuation measures and use multiple means of communication such as radio networks and satellite communication in case of emergency. In 2005, the Cabinet Secretariat prepared a new warning siren designed specifically for civil defense purposes.<sup>25</sup>

#### U.S. Extended Nuclear Deterrence

In addition to strengthening missile defense and civil defense capabilities, Japan has taken steps to maintain and possibly enhance the credibility of U.S. extended nuclear deterrence. In February 2009, Japanese officials met with the members of the U.S. Congressional Commission on the Strategic Posture of the United States and expressed their concerns and wishes regarding the future of the nuclear umbrella provided by the United States to Japan. They said: (a) low-yield nuclear devices with a capability to penetrate underground targets would strengthen the credibility of an extended nuclear deterrence; (b) if the U.S. government was to consider decommissioning the Tomahawk, nuclear-equipped, sea-launched cruise missile (TLAM-N), Japan wanted to be consulted beforehand; and (c) the Japanese government wanted to know more about U.S. nuclear posture and operation plans.<sup>26</sup>

Apparently as a result of such efforts, the Congressional Commission's final report released in 2009 addressed some of Japan's concerns. Regarding the Tomahawk decommissioning, the report wrote that extended deterrence in Asia relied heavily on the deployment of the nuclear Tomahawk and that "some U.S. allies in Asia" would be very concerned by its retirement.<sup>27</sup> It also called for a much more robust process of strategic dialogue, saying, ". . . now is the time to establish a much more extensive dialogue with Japan on nuclear issues, limited only by the desires of the Japanese government."28

The Nuclear Posture Review (NPR) published by the Department of Defense in April 2010 was, however, less attentive to Japan's requests made under LDP rule. The NPR did not mention low-yield nuclear earth penetrators, and announced that the TLAM-N served a "redundant purpose" in the U.S. nuclear stockpile and would be retired.<sup>29</sup> Some Japanese government officials felt betrayed by this since the TLAM-N had long been hailed as the centerpiece of the U.S. extended nuclear deterrent provided to Japan.<sup>30</sup> On this point, the NPR contended that forwarddeployment of bombers and dual-capable fighters with bombs or cruise missiles as well as intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM) and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) would adequately substitute for the TLAM-N.31

On the positive side, the NPR offered assurance that no changes to U.S. extended deterrence capabilities would be made without continued close consultation with allies and partners and pledged that the United States would "[c]ontinue and, where appropriate, expand" discussions with its allies.<sup>32</sup> In addition, some Japanese policymakers and experts welcomed the U.S. decision not to provide "negative security assurance" to North Korea. They were also satisfied that while the United States would reduce the role of nuclear weapons, it has reserved its right to use them in order to deter and respond to non-nuclear attacks conventional, biological, or chemical—by North Korea.<sup>33</sup>

In the meantime, the advent of the DPJ-led coalition government in Tokyo brought about a marked shift in Japan's attitude toward U.S. nuclear policy. In December 2009, Minister for Foreign Affairs Okada Katsuya sent a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gate addressing the new government's position on nuclear policy. Okada argued that the new government would neither request the United States to acquire low-yield nuclear earth penetrators nor oppose the retirement of TLAM-N. He requested, however, an explanation on the impact of TLAM-N retirement on U.S. extended deterrence and the ways to make up for the possible negative consequences.34 Okada's letter seems to have made the issue of low-yield nuclear earth penetrators much less important and enabled the United States to retire TLAM-N without straining the alliance relationship.

#### Effectiveness

Japan has deployed BMD systems and taken civil defense measures for the purpose of enhancing deterrence, improving counter-coercion capabilities, and providing damage limitation capabilities. Enhanced resilience to North Korea's military-diplomatic coercion would be the most important asset for Japan in the first scenario. In the third suicidal attack scenario, damage limitation would be of utmost importance. The second scenario requires the mixture of capabilities needed to deal effectively with the first and the third scenarios.

BMD and civil defense are important in improving Japan's counter-coercion power by providing better denial and damage limitation means. With BMD systems in place, ballistic missiles are no longer an "absolute weapon," and the utility of ballistic missiles as a scare weapon would be undermined. On this point, the fact that nobody knows exactly how effective (or ineffective) the BMD systems are in shooting down North Korean missiles helps. The kill ratio would vary significantly depending on the availability of information on the location of enemy ballistic missile launchers and the disposition of friendly Aegis BMD destroyers. It would also depend on missile trajectory, vibration, and the existence of countermeasures. In a world without BMD, North Korean leaders could predict the consequences of a missile attack with confidence. In a world with BMD, they could not be sure what would happen if they actually launched missiles against Japan. They might or might not get shot down. They might or might not create large numbers of deaths and casualties. By complicating North Korea's strategic calculations, the BMD systems would enhance Japan's counter-coercion capabilities.

Japan deployed BMD systems and activated civil defense measures when it was revealed that North Korea's Taepodong 2 launch was imminent in late March 2009. Under the Self-Defense Forces Law amended in 2007, the Minister of Defense issued an advance order to the Self-Defense Forces units to prepare for the destruction of a rocket which might fall on Japanese territory. Two Aegis BMD destroyers were deployed in the Sea of Japan and one was deployed in the Pacific Ocean. PAC-3 units were deployed in the Tokyo area and the northern part of Honshu.<sup>35</sup> There were some hitches, such as the minor traffic accident caused by a PAC-3 unit on the way to its destination and false missile launch alarms. Though lamentable, these incidents inevitably happen in contingencies. In fact, Japan came out better with lessons learned from these experiences.

In the most extreme case in which nuclear weapons were used against Japan, shooting down the incoming missiles and taking necessary evacuation operations would make a huge difference. According to a study conducted by Michael Yoo and Dexter Ingram, if a 12-kiloton nuclear weapon is used in Tokyo, 420,000 deaths and 390,000 casualties would result.<sup>36</sup> BMD systems with a conservative 50% kill ratio could theoretically save hundreds of thousand of lives. In a more likely scenario of conventional attacks, BMD and civil defense might not make such a big difference, but they would certainly provide necessary protection to the Japanese citizens and help create a sense of security among them, which could be critical in avoiding escalation. It would also make it easier for Japan to find a way out of a crisis.

Moreover, if North Korea continues to increase the number of nuclear weapons, possible use of low-yield tactical nuclear weapons must be debated. Japan will have four BMD-equipped Aegis destroyers by 2012 and they will provide reasonably credible capability to take on a relatively small number of nuclear weapons. However, if the number reaches a certain threshold, BMD will no longer be enough. Given the fact that North Korea's Nodong missiles are operated on mobile launchers, tracking them down and destroying them before they are launched could be extremely difficult with conventional systems. In such a case, the Japanese government might decide to request the United States to think about developing and deploying tactical nuclear weapons including the low-yield earth penetrators.

#### **Future Military Options**

In order to cope with North Korea's nuclear and missile development, further military options are being discussed and developed. Among them, the most widely debated option is for Japan to possess limited strike capabilities to conduct counterforce operations against North Korean missiles and missile bases.

On this point, the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, an official advisory group for Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro, has already discussed the issue of possible introduction of attack capabilities in its report in 2004. It stated:

Regarding the question of whether it is appropriate, when there is no alternative, to possess offensive capabilities against enemy missile bases as a last resort, a decision should be made after thoroughly examining the credibility of deterrence provided by the United States, effectiveness of missile defense systems, cost-effectiveness of the offensive option, and the impact this will have on countries in the region.<sup>37</sup>

In the same vein, the Council on Security and Defense Capabilities, organized by Prime Minister Aso Taro in 2009, suggested that to investigate the possibility of acquiring the capability to strike enemy missile bases, Japan should conduct studies of weapons systems, operational concepts, and cost-effectiveness while examining appropriate roles and mission sharing.38 It seems that Japanese security specialists think that possessing independent attack capabilities could actually undermine the credibility of the U.S.-Japan alliance by giving the United

States an option of not taking responsibility for defending Japan and having Japan do the job on its own. As a result, they seem to argue, Japan's continued reliance on U.S. strike capabilities is consistent with Japan's national interest.

In contrast, the LDP has been more positive about possessing strike capabilities. The LDP produced a report entitled, "On the New National Defense Program Guidelines," in June 2009, which suggested that Japan possess counter-missile attack capabilities jointly with the United States by making use of intelligencegathering and communications satellites, cruise missiles, and small solid-fuel rocket technologies.<sup>39</sup> It also suggested that the Aegis SM-3 BMD system be upgraded, real-fire exercises be conducted, and sea-based cruise missiles (namely Tomahawk missiles) be procured. 40 Though the LDP argues more favorably about possessing attack capabilities, it is noteworthy that it discussed acquiring attack capabilities within the framework of the U.S.-Japan alliance.

Japan has already acquired rudimentary strike capabilities by procuring F-2 fighters, airborne refueling aircraft, and the Joint Direct Attack Munition (JDAM), a guidance kit that converts unguided gravity bombs into precision-guided munitions. However, in order for Japan to conduct militarily meaningful offensive anti-missile operations against North Korea, it would take much more robust strike capabilities and, even if Japan acquired such capabilities, U.S. support on intelligence gathering and targeting would be indispensable. Anti-missile operations are easier said than done.<sup>41</sup>

Finally, the Japanese government has addressed legal issues related to attacking enemy missiles and missile-related facilities. In 2003, the Minister of State for Defense Ishiba Shigeru stated that Japan could take military action only if the threatened attack was imminent, no other means would deflect it, and the action was proportionate. Then he contended that the threatened attack would become "imminent" when the enemy initiated the action to attack Japan. Based on this definition, Ishiba said that Japan could start attacking enemy missile forces if missiles were erected on the launcher and fueled, and the enemy's intention to attack Japan became evident. He explained that Japan's attack in such a case would not constitute preemption. 42

#### **Diplomatic Response**

One of the basic assumptions in Japan's diplomatic approach to North Korea is that the country's most important policy objective is regime survival by way of defying military/diplomatic pressure from outside, normalizing relations with the United States and Japan, and obtaining economic assistance from the outside.

It was in this context that Japan offered normalization of bilateral relations and provision of significant economic assistance in the September 2002 Pyongyang Declaration on the condition that North Korea properly addressed nuclear as well as other issues of Japanese concern. Given the economic reform that North Korea had initiated in July 2002, sizable economic assistance from Japan seemed to have been quite attractive. The Pyongyang Declaration was exceptionally specific in stating what kind of aid packages Japan was willing to provide as a summit-level document: "grant aids, long-term loans with low interest rates and such assistances

as humanitarian assistance through international organizations . . . and . . . other loans and credits by such financial institutions as the Japan Bank for International Co-operation with a view to supporting private economic activities." The total amount was expected to be at least several billion dollars.

When North Korea informed Tokyo that many of the Japanese abductees had died and presented fake death certificates, however, the Japanese general public was outraged. Since then, the abduction issue has become a big political issue and the Japanese government has had no alternative but to take a tough position toward the North. Just after North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in October 2006, Japan imposed unilateral sanctions on North Korea, banning all North Korean vessels from entering Japanese ports and implementing a total ban on the import of goods from North Korea.<sup>43</sup> As a result, Japan refused to provide not only the economic assistance specified in the Pyongyang Declaration but also the 200,000-ton energy aid based on the Six-Party agreements in February and October 2007. Japan imposed additional sanctions after North Korea conducted the second test in 2009, banning all trade activities between the two countries.

Despite these negative developments, Japan and North Korea took steps to improve their relations in 2008. In June 2008, as a result of bilateral talks held in Beijing, the Japanese government expressed its willingness to partially lift sanctions on North Korea if it took concrete steps to resolve pending issues such as the abduction issue. To this end North Korea reversed its previous position that the abduction issue had been resolved and pledged that it would again investigate the issue.44 Moreover, in another round of bilateral talks in August 2008, the North Korean side promised to conduct a comprehensive investigation on the abduction issue and complete it by the autumn. The Japanese side agreed to lift its ban on travel to and from North Korea as well as on chartered flights between the two countries when the investigation started.<sup>45</sup> However, when pro-Asia Prime Minister Fukuda Yasuo resigned in September, North Korea unilaterally suspended the implementation of the agreements, announcing that it would wait to see what the next prime minister would do. The cautious diplomatic initiative of 2008 stalled.

#### CONCLUSION

Military, diplomatic, and economic policy tools are fairly well mixed, and both positive and negative incentives have been used in Japan's approach to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. Contrary to its "pacifist" outlook, Japan has taken significant military steps to cope with North Korea's nuclear and missile threats. On the diplomatic front, the 2002 Pyongyang Declaration was a major strategic step forward to solve the nuclear issue and other bilateral issues in a package deal.

In contrast to the steady progress Japan has made on the military front, however, Japan-North Korea normalization talks have been stalled, and Japan's singleminded emphasis on the abduction issue has made it difficult to bring about the same level of progress on the diplomatic side. As a result, the most important question at the present time is whether Japan can reinvigorate its diplomatic effort and make significant progress on this front.

At least on the surface, the DPJ has been more willing to improve relations with North Korean than the LDP. When Hatoyama Yukio came into office in September 2009, he announced his intention to normalize relations with North Korea in accordance with the Pyongyang Declaration, conditioned on comprehensive resolution of abduction, nuclear, and missile issues. 46 To this, Song Il-ho, North Korean ambassador in charge of Japan-DPRK talks, remarked that North Korea would be willing to resume talks with Japan based on the Pyongyang Declaration, and insisted that two sides decide how to define "resolution" of the abduction issue. Song also said he had taken note of the DPJ emphasis on Asia in its foreign policy platform.<sup>47</sup> Japan's policy did not change before the arrival of Prime Minister Noda Yoshihiko, who reiterated in his inaugural policy speech that while the Japanese government would do its utmost to bring all the abductees back as soon as possible, it would seek to "normalize its diplomatic relations with North Korea through the comprehensive resolution of the outstanding issues of concern, including the abduction, nuclear, and missile issues, and settling the unfortunate past" in cooperation with other countries and based on the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration. 48 He also told the abductees' family members that he would be willing to visit North Korea anytime if that leads to the resolution of various pending issues including the abduction issue.<sup>49</sup> On the abduction issue, Foreign Minister Genba Koichiro has noted that definition of what would constitute "resolution" of the abduction issue must be debated within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.50

If normalization comes about, Japan may provide grant aid, loans, and credits amounting to several billions of dollars to North Korea as part of its effort to reconstruct the country—potentially a game-changer for Korea and the region. However, North Korea is notorious for not repaying loans and is unlikely to dismantle its nuclear and missile arsenal before obtaining economic assistance from Japan. The best Japan can do is to demand that North Korea draw down its nuclear and missile forces in a step-by-step, action-for-action process with the aim of their eventual elimination.

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# The View from South Korea

TAEHO KIM

hange over continuity is now the tenor of the times on the Korean peninsula and election-year politics in many capitals including Beijing, Moscow, Seoul, Taipei, and Washington. For another, the passing of Kim Jong-il has added a new uncertainty to the future of the Pyongyang regime as well as to a host of salient peninsular issues. For still another, in tandem with the beginning of Pyongyang's self-acclaimed kangsung daekook ("strong and prosperous great country") drive this year, recent adjustments in the defense planning of main actors—such as South Korea and the United States will likely unleash new dynamics in peninsular and regional security.

It should be noted at the outset that four major powers—the United States, China, Japan, and Russia—not only have shared interests in a growing number of issues revolving around the Korean peninsula and a broader East Asia, but they are also significantly affected by major developments and trend lines on the peninsula. In 2010-11 alone, such unforeseen incidents as the sinking of the Cheonan (March 2010), the artillery bombardment of Yeonpyeong Island (November 2010), and the sudden death of Kim Jong-il (December 2011) have shown that the peninsula remains a highly volatile place, thus raising the stakes for all major powers concerned.

Not only do the United States and China continue to be the two most influential outside actors on the peninsula, but Korean issues also occupy a central place in their crowded bilateral and regional agenda. Moreover, now that China's growing wealth and influence are increasingly felt in the region and beyond, the Republic of Korea (ROK), like most other regional states, has to live up to the emerging security and economic challenges of balancing its ties with both countries. It is this larger context of "competitive interdependence" between the United States and China, against which major trends and recent developments on the peninsula should be assessed.

The depth of changes on and around the peninsula calls into question some basic assumptions on which we have previously predicated our expectations concerning the interactions between the four major powers—the United States and China, in particular—and the two Koreas. While the direction and durability of recent changes at the regional and peninsular level remain uncertain, it is prudent to fall back on the enduring patterns and underlying contexts to shed light on new developments.

This essay analyzes the ROK's emerging strategic framework, covering five distinct issue areas: the domestic context, inter-Korean relations, the growing yet troublesome ties with Beijing, the strategic alliance with Washington, and preparations for a multi-task, high-tech fighting force. The thrust of this essay is not to examine the details of each issue area per se, but to identify their overall trends, major debates, and likely outcomes so as to illuminate the future patterns of change on the peninsula—as envisioned by the South Koreans themselves.

Two caveats are in order. For one, while the ROK maintains a set of long-term national security objectives, its policy priorities and choices differ from one administration to another. For this reason, the incumbent Lee Myung-bak administration's framework document—i.e., Global Korea: The National Security of the Republic of Korea—will be used here to assess the changing contexts of its policy priorities. For the other, in the

aftermath of the Cheonan sinking, the ROK government has taken several important steps to improve its own security. One prominent example is the establishment of such new institutions as the Commission for National Security Review, whose main tasks include revision of Defense Reform 2020, redefinition of the security threat, and a more responsive crisis management system. The Yeonpyeong shelling has only accentuated the need for a higher level of military preparedness to cope with a fuller spectrum of security challenges. Until the pending legislative bills and military reform measures are put in place, the arguments made here—especially those on defense reform—should be regarded as tentative.

#### THE ROK'S SHIFTING DOMESTIC CONTEXT

As befits a maturing yet fast-changing liberal democracy, South Korean society is being increasingly pluralized, divided, and even politicized. Throughout much of the authoritarian rule, the "conservative government vs. liberal society" divide was the defining characteristic of politics. After the democratization process began in the late 1980s and the so-called "386 generation" arose in the 1990s,<sup>2</sup> the political pendulum shifted to the left. In light of a new domestic consensus as well as the collapse of the Cold War international order, it stands to reason that the progressive administrations of Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun pursued an engagement policy toward North Korea (e.g., the June 2000 and October 2007 inter-Korean summits); promoted a strategy of "cooperative independence" with the United States, and redefined South Korea's role in the region as "Northeast Asian balancer." According to Byung-Kook Kim, however, "regional and peninsular politics moved in a direction unfavorable to Roh's [revisionist] strategic experiments."3

The political comeback of conservative rule under President Lee Myung-bak and the Grand National Party (GNP)—called Saenuri Party since February 2012—has resulted in an overhaul of the past two presidents' major policy agenda. In sharp contrast to Kim's "Sunshine Policy" or Roh's "Peace and Prosperity Policy" toward North Korea, Lee has pursued, on the basis of "principles and consistency," a policy of "Denuclearization, Opening-up, and 3,000," which North Korea has flatly rejected as a ploy to destroy itself. For the past four years (2008-2011) inter-Korean relations have suffered several major setbacks—the Six-Party Talks ground to a halt, the Mt. Keumkang tour was discontinued, the Cheonan and Yeonpyeong attacks caused crises, and the dispute over the dispatch of South Korean condolence delegations to the memorial services of the deceased North Korean leader led to further outrage, lasting into 2012. Inter-Korean relations have turned from bad to worse, as the Lee presidency draws to a close.

Declining support for the incumbent president and the ruling Saenuri Party is evidenced by a multitude of facts.<sup>4</sup> The April 2011 special elections for three National Assembly seats and for the Kangwon Province governorship—which was widely regarded as a mid-term approval test for the administration—turned out to be an electoral disaster. To add insult to injury, in the October 2011 Seoul mayoral race the GNP candidate was resoundingly defeated by Park Won-sun, a former prosecutor and political novice. Mayor Park's policies are close to those of

the Democratic United Party (DUP).5 Moreover, the Blue House has been engulfed in a series of scandals and bribery cases involving its senior staff members as well as family members ranging from Lee's press and political secretaries to the financial supervisory chairman to his elder brother.<sup>6</sup>

At the beginning of the 2012 South Korean politics are in crisis. The ruling Saenuri Party is run by an emergency committee chaired by the long-time presidential hopeful Park Geun-hye; it has suffered a series of bitter factional struggles and electoral defeats; and it is likely to face further decline in public support unless it comes up with new faces and platforms. The opposition DUP has fared no better. Even if it has succeeded in forming an anti-GNP coalition now headed by Ms. Han Myeong-sook, a prime minister under Roh, and is geared to prevent Ms. Park from becoming the next president, it faces an uphill battle in the April general election. Its results will significantly influence the DUP's chance for retaking presidential power and survival.

The emerging foreign policy and security implications are rather clear. Should the Saenuri Party win the December presidential election with a safe majority in the 300-seat National Assembly, the ROK's North Korea policy for the next five years is unlikely to diverge significantly from the current course, even if it will strive to build trust with and elicit cooperation from North Korea. As to its alliance ties with the United States, it is reasonable to assume that closer bilateral relations, better and more regular policy coordination on major peninsular and regional issues, and a shared vision for the international community are likely to be forthcoming.

If the DUP retakes power, its first task will be to "undo what President Lee has done to what his [two immediate] predecessors achieved," the newly elected DUP chairwoman Han avowed.<sup>7</sup> Among the likely changes are a return to the engagement policy toward North Korea, a more balanced approach vis-à-vis the United States and China, and a wider diplomatic network beyond the traditional emphasis on the four major powers. In its continuing pursuit of a populist agenda, the opposition coalition is likely to divert the government coffers from defense to welfare spending.

All in all, the increasingly polarized nature of South Korean politics points to greater stakes in the upcoming presidential race. As any major policy issue is inextricably intertwined with others, it would trigger a whole set of policy readjustments in many issue areas. In particular, the ROK's North Korea policy and its alliance relations with the United States are major issues susceptible to change.

# **NORTH-SOUTH KOREAN RELATIONS: BROTHER ENEMIES?**

North-South Korean relations as well as the "North Korean factor" remain highly sensitive issues not only to South Korean domestic politics but also to its ties with the four major powers. They touch upon a wide range of current and future security issues on the peninsula, ranging from the Six-Party Talks and denuclearization/counter-proliferation efforts to the future of the North Korean regime to peaceful Korean unification.

For the period under review the sinking of the navy corvette Cheonan and forty-six sailors aboard the ship turned out to be another sad chapter in the long history of armed conflict between the two sides. According to the final report of the ROK-led international investigation group tasked to find out the causes of the sinking, it was a DPRK-made torpedo (MS-19) launched from a Yuno (or Yeono)-class submarine that caused the devastation. Among both substantial and circumstantial evidence, the group points to the whole propellant section of the torpedo recovered from the seabed where the ship sank, a strong indication of North Korean culpability.8

Pyongyang has flatly rejected any possibility of its involvement, offering instead to send its own team to investigate the wreckage. According to Pyongyang, moreover, the factors that directly affect the security of the Korean peninsula are "DPRK-US and DPRK-Japan hostile relations, US-Japan and US-south Korea military alliances, the attempt to build US-Japan-south Korea tripartite military alliance, long-term stationing of nuclear armed US troops in south Korea and the US military strategy aimed at containing China and Russia."9 As to the Cheonan sinking, it has even argued "the US made such [an] absurd assertion [about the sinking,] which reminds one of a thief crying 'Stop the thief!'" and "the US is invariably pursuing a hostile policy towards the DPRK to isolate and stifle it."10

In the above statements, North-South relations are conspicuous by their absence; they are, in fact, in a nosedive. The prospects for an early resumption of the Six-Party Talks are slim as long as peninsular tensions remain unabated. The February 2012 deal in Beijing between Washington and Pyongyang on the temporary halting of the latter's uranium enrichment activities as well as nuclear and long-range missile tests for "nutritional assistance" has again tantalizingly raised hopes for the resumption of the Six-Party Talks. 11 A new twist, however, is North Korea's unexpected announcement in mid-March on the planned launch of a satellite atop a long-range rocket on or before the centennial of Kim Il-sung's birthday, which falls on April 15.12 In a curious yet familiar way North Korea has again identified the United States as the prime security threat to itself and the peninsula and its sole legitimate counterpart for talks.

The December 19, 2011 announcement of the passing of Kim Jong-il transpired in the post-Cheonan context of tense inter-Korean relations. The succession in the Kim family is a major event that has attracted keen attention but there is no way of knowing what actually goes on in Pyongyang. There are at a minimum three schools of thought on the future of heir apparent Kim Jong-un and his regime. One school points to 28- to 30-year-old Kim Jong-un's rapid succession to his father's official titles, 13 China's firm support for the younger Kim, the nonexistence in North Korea of organized opposition to his rule, and the political backing by his family members as well as by ranking party-military personnel. This orderly succession scenario assumes his eventual consolidation of political power, thanks to the "collective advisorship" or "collective interregnum." As the DPRK is a socialist state cum feudalistic kingdom, the recent collapse of authoritarian regimes in the Middle East and North Africa will not be repeated in North Korea, and that Kim Jong-un will be able to rule the country as another "great" leader, argue those who subscribe to this school.14

Another school has a long list of doubts and anxieties, including the younger Kim's leadership qualifications, his relations with septuagenarian military aides, economic problems, and diplomatic isolation. Specifically, they argue, any sort of collective leadership is inconceivable in such a dictatorial state as North Korea; its systemic weaknesses have little chance for future improvement; and in a state of "survival by instability" it must periodically rely on external instabilities and threats, which, in return, will exacerbate its internal and external difficulties. This school of thought, therefore, anticipates the continuation of tension-ridden inter-Korean relations and argues for the need to prepare for possible instability in North Korea. 15

Still another school takes neither extreme views nor a middle-of-the-road position. It essentially argues for "short-term stability, long-term instability" in North Korea. Chinese Central Party School scholar Zhang Liangui, for example, points to the fact that there are no appreciable changes in post-Kim Jong-il North Korea as if he is still alive. This does not mean that the political succession is smooth and stable, Zhang continues, it just means that the younger Kim has not yet faced the hard test of consolidating his own power base or pursuing his own policies in the face of domestic and external challenges.<sup>16</sup> Besides, as many observers have argued, how to resolve the economic problems without jeopardizing North Korea's survival which in part depends on the state of Six-Party Talks—remains a moot question.<sup>17</sup>

Outside observers emphasize endogenous factors as the main causes for North Korea's external behavior, whereas the North Koreans themselves—as well as the Chinese officials and experts alike—stress exogenous factors to explain its external and internal behavior. Regardless of the source of its behavior, the situation in North Korea remains a significant factor in considering peninsular security, thus raising the stakes for all parties concerned.

# A "STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP" WITH BEIJING?

That the ROK and China have since 1992 remarkably improved their bilateral relations in all major issue areas is beyond doubt. In economic terms, China has emerged as the ROK's "four No. 1s": its largest trading partner, its largest export market, its largest importing country, and its largest trade-surplus source. In 2011, for instance, the trade volume was \$220 billion with a surplus of \$47.8 billion in the ROK's favor.<sup>18</sup> This is, indeed, music to the Korean economist's ears as its economy has, otherwise, remained stagnant for some time. On the political and diplomatic fronts as well, China and the ROK hold frequent high-level meetings on a bilateral and multilateral basis. As long as the current and future Chinese leadership prioritizes economic development, which depends, in part, on regional and peninsular stability, China would likely continue to emphasize "peace and stability" on the peninsula. As befits growing ties and frequent contacts, the official relationship was elevated to a "strategic cooperative partnership" (zhanlue hezuo huoban guanxi) in May 2008. While growing bilateral ties are commendable, this does not mean that the two sides are supportive of each other's major policy goals—especially when it comes to concrete issues and longer-term questions on

the peninsula. Included in this long list are such important questions as Korean unification, the Koguryo historical case, North Korean residents in China, and the end-state of the North Korean regime.<sup>19</sup>

In fact, the twenty-year ties between Seoul and Beijing have shown mixed results: a) uneven growth in different issue areas—the so-called "hot economy, cold politics"; b) rapid expansion in the number of actors and in the scope of their ties; c) the effect of the "rise of China" on their bilateral ties; d) the growing gap in their respective national power; and e) a widening gap between official rhetoric and reality.<sup>20</sup> It is in this changing context that whenever bilateral disputes arise, they tend to spur popular resentment toward the other side, as seen in the death of an ROK maritime policeman in late 2011 and in the repatriation of North Koreans from China in early 2012.

In a litchi nutshell, the three most fundamental and longer-term questions in the ROK's diplomatic and security relations with China are: a) In light of the U.S. role and influence in regional and peninsular security and of China's growing importance to the ROK, how is it best to cope with the United States and its competition with China? b) How can the ROK reconcile its need for cooperation with China and, at the same time, its potential conflicts with China, as noted above? and c) What role would China actually play in the future of North Korea and the Korean peninsula? As a barrage of South Korean newspaper articles and commentaries criticized China's attitude toward the Cheonan sinking as well as toward the ensuing ROK-U.S. combined naval exercises, one may ask this critical question: "Would China behave the same way once the unification process begins as it did in this crisis?"

China's "military rise" is an issue of growing security concern to the ROK, but it is often viewed as of long-term nature. Of all factors that affect China's calculus toward the peninsula the geostrategic and historical considerations remain most enduring and consequential. First, the peninsula is not only located closest to China's capital but it also shares a 1,400-kilometer (880-mile) land border with China. Furthermore, Chinese strategists often perceive the peninsula as a "route" (tonglu) between the maritime and continental powers. Second, it is also in this peninsula that the fledgling PRC fought with the mighty United States sixty years ago. Before that, historical rivalry between China and Japan over the peninsula and the West Sea (Yellow Sea) also illustrates the strategic importance of the peninsula. Third, in China's view, fast-growing economic ties between Beijing and Seoul testify to the validity of China's ongoing reform and opening drive. Fourth, not only was traditional Korea part of the Sinocentric world order, but China's potential to become a full-fledged great power or superpower will likely be tested again on this peninsula.

More specifically, China's operational SSNs and SSBNs are not only harbored in the North Sea fleet but they mostly patrol in the Yellow Sea and the East China Sea. China's future carrier battle groups, once they become operational, would also likely be located in the vicinity of the peninsula. China's increasing number of modernized combat aircraft as well as of conventional missiles needs to be reckoned with, even if they are not necessarily targeted at the peninsula. More

immediate attention should be given to the PLA's rapid reaction forces (RRFs). By the present estimate, seven out of the PLA's eighteen group armies (GAs) are RRUs or mobile forces (MFs), and four of them are located in the Beijing (38th and 27th), Shenyang (39th), and Jinan (54th) Military Regions (MRs). In light of the past patterns of China's use of force in a diplomatic crisis as well as the growing body of evidence for North Korea's internal weaknesses, they could be employed in a variety of future North Korean contingencies such as a humanitarian crisis, a large flow of refugees, or instability in the border areas.

China's "military rise" will continue to influence the security environment. In addition to military consideration, therefore, the ROK should work for the improvement of overall bilateral ties that can pave the way to reunification. As long as China's future position on the peninsula remains uncertain, the ROK must simultaneously pursue both "exchange and cooperation" and "anticipation and preparation" in case China changes its current course of "peace and development." A hedging strategy—as adopted by most regional powers—will remain the most reasonable approach for the foreseeable future.

If China's "benign and reliable" policy is not forthcoming and, in particular, when it becomes a more daunting military power with a campaign-level fighting capability, the ROK cannot help but further strengthen its defense ties with the United States. Not only the ROK, any regional states that are likely to be affected by the PLA's growing anti-access capability should take this into consideration. Avoiding any "containment" network, the individual states should be able to prepare for any possible disruptions in the regional balance of power through regular consultations, transparent planning, and joint exercises among themselves.

# THE STRATEGIC ALLIANCE BETWEEN THE U.S. AND THE ROK

South Korea is a genuine middle power by any definition. Given its geographical location as well as its neighboring major powers, however, it is a relatively weaker power. To overcome its continuous plight, there are only two ways: "internal balancing" and "external balancing." The object of the latter should have a) no territorial ambitions, b) a will and capability to assist in time of crisis, and c) a proven historical record to be a benign power. The only country which meets the three conditions is the United States. Besides, it is imperative to ponder over how South Korea emerged from the ashes of the Korean War to become an economic powerhouse—achieving one trillion dollars in trade in 2011—with enhanced international stature. The essence of its external balancing is, therefore, to maintain a special relationship with the United States. In fact, the alliance between the ROK and the United States has been one of the most successful and enduring security ties in the post-World War II era. Their geographical and cultural distance notwithstanding, both countries have weathered political and economic storms in their growing bilateral ties. The balance sheet has been mutually satisfactory: the U.S. security commitment has helped the ROK to grow into a democratic, industrial state, while the U.S. has maintained a secure forward position at one of the world's strategic crossroads.

In the post-Cheonan context as well, Seoul has further strengthened its alliance ties with Washington. A train of such developments as U.S. support for ROK positions at the UN Security Council, the 2+2 meeting in Seoul, and the combined naval exercises indicates the Lee Myung-bak administration's closer ties with the United States and Japan. Additionally, the scheduled transfer of wartime operational control (OPCON) in April 2012 has been adjusted to December 2015, reflecting changes in the ROK's post-Cheonan security environment.

Another dimension of the Cheonan crisis is the growing awareness of the importance of U.S.-China relations in peninsular security.<sup>21</sup> In post-Cold War East Asia, China's rise has been a "strategic reality" to the United States and regional countries in their economic and diplomatic activities. Likewise, China's ascendancy could cause a change in the regional structure of power in which the United States maintains the leading and stabilizing role, a host of bilateral alliance and defense ties, and a set of economic and security objectives. It is in this context that what Michael McDevitt called "capabilities competition" between the United States and China should be seen.

Given China's recent series of more assertive foreign policy behavior—at a time when a more reassuring attitude is called for—such as its position on a civil nuclear agreement between Washington and Hanoi, its more confrontational behavior in the South China Sea, and its diplomatic row with Japan over a fishing boat collision, it stands to reason that neighboring countries are concerned about how China might use its new power and influence.<sup>22</sup> In addition, in light of vast differences in strategic visions, political systems, social values, and regional objectives, it is logical to assume that the United States and China will remain divergent over peninsular and regional issues, such as a missile defense (MD) system, the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), maritime safety, and "strategic flexibility." At the peninsular level future developments such as a North Korean contingency, the future status of the U.S. forces in Korea, and the strategic posture of a unified Korea are issues of great unknown consequences.

An intriguing question is whether closer ROK-U.S. alliance relations would invite a harsher reaction from China-thus detrimental to the ROK's relations with China—or would they be beneficial for China's overall posture toward it. As long as the Chinese government views the alliance as part of U.S. "containment" strategy and its position remains similar to that of North Korea, China is likely to take a critical stance toward the alliance, making peninsular and regional issues more difficult to resolve. The opposite—i.e., the ROK's distraction from the alliance—would be far more consequential for the ROK, however, possibly leading to a more independent yet isolated state without a reliable ally. It is, thus, in the interest of the ROK to maintain rock solid ties with the United States, notwithstanding the rise of China or their effect on the U.S.-China relationship.

At present, the U.S.-ROK relationship is officially termed "strategic alliance," a redundant label which emphasizes their shared values such as freedom, human rights, liberal democracy, and the market economy. Ties are built upon mutual trust, growing interdependence, and peace-building efforts at all levels. The KORUS FTA, which entered into force on March 15, 2012, as well as the "Go W.E.S.T." (Work, English Study and Travel) program for Korean youngsters are examples of continuing efforts to boost their maturing ties.

Changes in inter-Korean relations could have a significant impact on the future course of the ROK-U.S. security relationship. Recent domestic and external changes in the two countries have not only influenced the alliance, but they have also raised new issues or old issues in a different form which are endogenous to the alliance. While those issues have largely been subordinated to their national interests so far, they could become sources of strain for the alliance if long unresolved.

#### A MULTI-TASK, HIGH-TECH DEFENSE FORCE

The ROK's defense plan not only reflects long-term strategic objectives, but it also builds on existing programs such as Defense Reform 2020, which is now under significant revision. In view of the continuing dual task of preparing for presentday threats as well as future uncertainties, the ROK armed forces are geared toward achieving a host of objectives including a technology-intensive fighting capability, a balanced, joint military structure, sharing of combined assets with the U.S. forces, and a higher level of responsiveness for a wide spectrum of nontraditional security threats.

These goals will be adjusted in accordance with changes in the security environment, many of which are unknowable at this time. Included in this category are: a) the future of North Korea and its nuclear program; b) the fluctuation of U.S.-China relations and its impact on the peninsula; c) uncertainties surrounding Chinese military intentions; and d) the emergence of unforeseen security threats in the region and beyond. The Cheonan crisis, for instance, has had a far-reaching impact on the defense planning of South Korea.

The most fundamental and comprehensive defense plan for the future shape of the ROK armed forces is the Defense Reform Basic Plan, 2011-2030 or the DR 307 Plan for short. Its primary purpose is to enhance the ROK armed forces' independent fighting capability at the peninsula-level theater. It thus incorporates a gradual transition to the ROK's military role as a leading force from the previous supporting one. The timetable has already been set as December 1, 2015 when the wartime OPCON is transferred to the ROK commander from its U.S. counterpart.

Four priority programs of the DR 307 Plan are worth mentioning. First, it aims to enhance the capacity to counter future North Korean provocations by striking the origins of provocations as well as its basis of support. This is a prime lesson learned from the Yeonpyeong shelling when the same types and level of weapons were used to prevent armed conflict from escalating. Any further provocations from the North would be met with a far greater level of retaliation, including air strikes. The creation of the Northwest Defense Command in June 2011 is geared toward defending the conflict-ridden islands near the Northern Limit Line (NLL) in the Yellow Sea.

Second, the DR 307 Plan will restructure the armed forces' upper-tier command and control system. The ROK has long maintained a dual command structure in which the defense minister carries the military administrative authority, whereas the joint chiefs of staff exercise military command. Under such structure each service chief has only limited authority over military administration, but not over military command. This will be changed into an integrated structure in which each service chief exercises both functions, allowing each service to develop its own information-gathering capability, a critical factor in responding to limited provocations from the North.

Third, the DR 307 Plan sets out a phased defense modernization drive to counter North Korean provocations by improving the joint nature of all services. For the first phase (2011-12) requisite weapon systems and equipment will be acquired to counter limited provocations from the North beyond the existing acquisition program. The second phase (2013-15) will necessarily focus on securing core capabilities in preparations for the OPCON transfer. The final phase of the DR 307 Plan (2016-30) envisions a multi-task, high-tech force to deal with future challenges, which are often interpreted as regional threats.

Fourth, it also points out the emerging need for the ROK armed forces to play a greater role in regional and global security. It not only suits the ROK-U.S. Joint Vision Statement, in which the alliance's regional and global scope is specifically mentioned, but the overseas experiences will doubtless help manage contingences which might arise on the peninsula. The Plan also specifies the continuing role of ROK peacekeeping operations around the world.

Far-reaching and ambitious as it might be, the DR 307 Plan has been pending at the National Assembly and is likely to be passed some time after the formation of a new legislature in April 2012. This has already caused a delay in the implementation of several reform measures such as the Initial Operational Capability (IOC) in the first phase, as noted above.<sup>23</sup> Only then can the ROK military restructure its organizations, acquire core capabilities, and execute exercises to achieve the Full Operational Capability (FOC) by December 2015.

In terms of preparing for present and future security challenges, the ROK's defense planning based on the principle of "limited defense sufficiency" should continue.24 It means, among others, a minimum defense capability to deter and deny military provocations and to respond to small-scale conflict on and near the peninsula. In the near term, it should be able to cope with possible maritime conflict in the Yellow Sea on top of the existing military threat from North Korea. In the mid- and longer term it calls for a capability to raise the cost of military provocations, which depends upon a more independent intelligence-gathering capability, effective naval and air power, and a high-tech force.

#### CONCLUSION

From the above discussion on five issue areas that touch upon Korean security, we may deduce several findings. One is the importance of the results of the 2012 elections for programs such as defense reform and relations with North Korea and the United States. While election politics everywhere focus mostly on the domestic agenda, the politicized nature of Korean society as well as the opposition's relentless critique of the incumbent administration (the so-called "politics of vengeance") is not reassuring, especially in view of the continuing North Korean threat as well as the need for a stable transition in the ROK-U.S. alliance in the years ahead.

Another is the persistence of a host of uncertain issues that involve the United States, China, and the two Koreas. Given the possibility of prolonged "competitive interdependence" between Washington and Beijing and their likely divergent interests over peninsular and regional issues, South Korea needs to continuously prioritize its strategic relationship with the United States over that with China, even if it should also build cooperation and confidence with China. As a corollary, South Korea should be able to reap the benefits of its U.S. alliance ties with the U.S. in addressing the growing importance of the "China factor" to itself.<sup>25</sup>

Still another is the need for a two-sided strategy toward China. As it is entirely possible that China will remain a source of both despair and hope in realizing national objectives, South Korea needs to hammer out mid- to long-term policy plans toward China that encompass the Korean unification process. Its more immediate goal should be building cooperation and trust with China to raise the costs if and when the latter changes its emphasis on peace and stability on the peninsula. The quintessence of this strategy is to maintain exchanges and cooperation in select yet wider areas, while anticipating and preparing for a reversal of its present course toward the Korean peninsula—as perceived in South Korea in the aftermath of the Cheonan sinking.

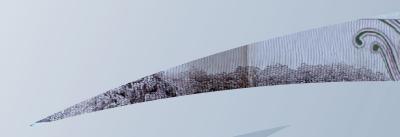
It remains a daunting challenge for the Korean government to cope with a combination of domestic and external uncertainties—now and in the future. A series of recent developments beyond the peninsula including the global economic downturn, a shift in U.S. military strategy, and new leadership line-ups in major actors would invariably interact with inter-Korean relations. At a time of great change it is sensible for all those involved to weather the current, difficult phase on the Korean peninsula in a cooperative and prudent manner. This is the real litmus test for the viability of a peaceful Korean peninsula in the face of divergent and unrelenting national interests of the United States, China, and the two Koreas.

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# ASIA AT A TIPPING POINT: KOREA, THE RISE OF CHINA, AND THE IMPACT OF LEADERSHIP TRANSITIONS

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