

STRATEGIC ASIA 2017–18

POWER, IDEAS, AND MILITARY STRATEGY

in the Asia-Pacific

Edited by

Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Wills

South Korea

**South Korea's Grand Strategy in Transition: Coping
with Existential Threats and New Political Forces**

Chung Min Lee

RESTRICTIONS ON USE: This PDF is provided for the use of authorized recipients only. For specific terms of use, please contact <publications@nbr.org>. To purchase *Strategic Asia 2017–18: Power, Ideas, and Military Strategy in the Asia-Pacific*, please visit <<http://www.nbr.org>> or contact <orders@nbr.org>.

© 2017 The National Bureau of Asian Research



THE NATIONAL BUREAU of ASIAN RESEARCH
Seattle and Washington, D.C.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This chapter examines the development of South Korea's grand strategy, with special reference to the military dimension, and argues that it is critical for South Korea to undertake structural military reforms and create a new bipartisan national security paradigm.

MAIN ARGUMENT

Several facets of South Korea's grand strategy remain constant, such as the goals of achieving peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula, deterring and defending the country's territorial and political integrity from a range of North Korean threats, ensuring its global economic competitiveness, and sustaining its democratic foundations. Yet even as these pillars remain the same, South Korea must now adapt this strategy to address an unprecedented range of threats. It not only must contend with a growing spectrum of North Korean threats and nonlinear scenarios; it also must consider China's anti-access/area-denial capabilities around the Korean Peninsula in an acute military crisis. These challenges will test the ability of the political leadership in Seoul to break out of its constant political infighting and build a new national security consensus.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- The South Korean government and military must anticipate hybrid conflict scenarios and the growing possibility of volatile transformations on the Korean Peninsula. The National Assembly should create a new national security committee to ensure bipartisan approaches to critical diplomatic, military, and intelligence issues.
- The U.S. must ensure the credibility of extended deterrence by demonstrating its military, political, and economic commitment to Asia as a critical superpower counterbalance vis-à-vis China.
- Despite outstanding historical differences and lingering legacies, it is important for South Korea and Japan to enhance their bilateral security, defense, and intelligence cooperation.

South Korea's Grand Strategy in Transition: Coping with Existential Threats and New Political Forces

Chung Min Lee

South Korea's grand strategy, particularly in the context of its military capabilities, doctrines, and strategies, has gone through several phases since the Republic of Korea (ROK) was founded in 1948. Its traditional goals remain the same: pursuing reunification, prevailing in the event of major North Korean attacks, and maintaining a decisive and irreversible economic and technological edge over the North. More recently, however, other major factors have come into play that will significantly affect South Korea's grand strategy, including North Korea's rapidly progressing nuclear and missile programs, the accelerated rise of China's power-projection capabilities in the East and South China Seas and throughout Northeast Asia, the potential for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) to intervene during a severe North Korean crisis, and accelerating Sino-U.S. strategic competition.

The range of threats now confronting the ROK is unprecedented and shows no signs of abating. Conceptualizing and implementing a viable grand strategy under omnidirectional pressures will place massive burdens on the political leadership. Moreover, the government's ability to fund much higher defense budgets in an era of rising social welfare costs and to push forward the development and deployment of critical asymmetrical assets will require sustained defense budget increases to respond more effectively to North Korea's expanding asymmetrical threats.

To examine these strategic challenges in greater detail and assess the attendant policy ramifications for both the U.S.-ROK alliance and U.S. security policy, the chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section outlines the major strategic problems and threats confronting the ROK. Second, the chapter provides an overview of South Korea's grand strategy with an emphasis on the development of Seoul's military strategy, capabilities, and missile programs. The third section analyzes thorny issues in South Korea's current military strategy, including reliance on U.S. extended deterrence and coordination with the United States and U.S. allies, the hitherto taboo subject of developing an indigenous nuclear weapons capability, defense modernization, and the regaining of wartime operational control (OPCON). Fourth, the chapter evaluates ROK and joint U.S.-ROK capabilities and plans for executing South Korea's grand strategy and concludes by analyzing the policy implications for the alliance and U.S. policy toward the Korean Peninsula.

Major Strategic Challenges Confronting the ROK

Three main forces—rapidly expanding North Korean nuclear and missile threats, intensifying domestic and regional political pressures on South Korea, and China's increasingly aggressive and robust power-projection capabilities—have altered South Korea's strategic landscape and reshaped its grand strategy. The burden on the political leadership and the ROK Armed Forces to successfully manage all three challenges is high today but will progressively worsen depending on internal dynamics in North Korea and the extent to which Pyongyang continues to threaten the United States.

North Korea's Growing WMD Arsenal and South Korean Responses

On September 3, 2017, North Korea conducted its sixth nuclear test and the most potent to date. While estimates vary on the bomb's yield, the consensus was that it ranged between 100 and 120 kilotons—six times as large as North Korea's nuclear test on September 9, 2016, and approximately eight times the yield of the atomic bomb dropped on Hiroshima.¹ According to reports from North Korea's state news agency, the hydrogen bomb tested “was adjustable to hundreds of kilotons in explosive power and could be detonated at high altitudes, with its indigenously produced components allowing the

¹ “North Korea's Sixth Nuclear Test: A First Look,” 38 North, September 5, 2017, <https://www.38north.org/2017/09/punggye090517>.

country to build as many nuclear weapons as it wants.”² The growing consensus in the intelligence communities in Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo is that the September 2017 nuclear test was a thermonuclear bomb. Coming on the heels of North Korea’s intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) tests on July 4 and July 29, the nuclear test significantly increased tensions in South Korea, Japan, and especially the United States. On September 14, North Korea tested an intermediate-range ballistic missile that flew over Japan in defiance of the latest round of UN sanctions. One senior U.S. military official called it “a test shot that was also meant as a warning that the primary American bomber base in the Pacific, which would be central to any military action on the Korean Peninsula, was within easy reach of the North’s intermediate-range missiles.”³

With these tests, Pyongyang has demonstrated considerable progress toward developing the capability to launch a nuclear-tipped missile at countervalue and counterforce targets in the continental United States.⁴ While the statement by the North American Aerospace Defense Command that “the missile launch from North Korea did not pose a threat to North America” was technically true, the ICBM was estimated to have a range of nine thousand to ten thousand kilometers (km), which would have allowed it to target the United States.⁵ Equally worrisome for South Korea is the North Korean navy’s development of submarine-launched ballistic missile (SLBM) capabilities, given the absence of any realistic early warning should North Korea opt to target U.S. and South Korean military and civilian sites. To date, North Korea has tested at least four Pukguksong-1 (KN-11) SLBMs. In addition to the test barge at Sinpo, satellite imagery has discovered a second test barge at Nampo.⁶

Following the September 2017 nuclear test, Secretary of Defense James Mattis briefed President Donald Trump on potential military options and affirmed that if North Korea took very aggressive action, the United States would respond with a “massive military response” that would be “effective

² Justin McCurry, “North Korean Nuclear Test Confirmed in Major Escalation by Kim Jong-un,” *Guardian*, September 3, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/sep/03/north-korean-nuclear-test-confirmed-in-major-escalation-by-kim-jong-un>.

³ Choe Sang-hun and David E. Sanger, “North Korea Launches Another Missile, Escalating Crisis,” *New York Times*, September 14, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/14/world/asia/north-korea-missile.html>.

⁴ William J. Broad et. al., “This Missile Could Reach California. But Can North Korea Use It with a Nuclear Weapon?” *New York Times*, August 22, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2017/08/22/world/asia/north-korea-nuclear-weapons.html>.

⁵ David E. Sanger, Choe Sang-hun, and William J. Broad, “North Korea Tests a Ballistic Missile That Experts Say Could Hit California,” *New York Times*, July 28, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/28/world/asia/north-korea-ballistic-missile.html>.

⁶ “North Korea’s Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile Program: Are the Tests Poised to Accelerate?” 38 North, May 1, 2017, <https://www.38north.org/2017/05/nampo050117>.

and overwhelming.”⁷ South Korea responded by undertaking tests with its own land-based Hyunmu ballistic missile to simulate an attack on North Korean nuclear sites. The South Korean Joint Chiefs of Staff stated that the target was set according to the distance of North Korea’s nuclear test site and to augment the ROK military’s precision-strike capabilities and cut off North Korean reinforcements.⁸

Taken together, North Korea’s accelerating nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities pose an existential threat to South Korea. Although South Korea and the United States were surprised at the pace of North Korea’s nuclear weapons program, the September 2017 nuclear test appears to be a critical tipping point in South Korea. Public perceptions of the North Korean nuclear threat have reflected growing alarm, even under a progressive government. How Seoul responds militarily, politically, and economically remains a highly politically charged issue, given the ruling Democratic Party’s inclination to downplay North Korea’s array of threats while continuing to stress dialogue and engagement with Pyongyang.⁹

This represents a significant shift in public thinking. Decades of North Korean provocations and even successive nuclear tests since 2006 were not really perceived as “existential” threats by a significant portion of South Koreans. Complacency was one factor, but another was the enthusiasm for inter-Korean cooperation and dialogue following the first South-North summit in June 2001. President Kim Dae-jung stated that North Korea had neither the capability nor the will to make nuclear weapons.¹⁰ Even after its first nuclear test in October 2006, Kim continued to insist that North Korea did not have malicious intentions toward the South.¹¹ The sinking of the ROK Navy corvette *Cheonan* in April 2010, killing 47 sailors, and the bombing of Yeonpyeong Island in December 2010 marked the first

⁷ David E. Sanger, “How the U.S. Could Respond to Another North Korean Missile Test,” *New York Times*, September 7, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/07/world/asia/north-korea-missile-test-us-options.html>.

⁸ “South Korea Simulates Attack on North Korea’s Nuclear Site after Test,” NBC News, September 4, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/north-korea-claims-h-bomb-test-experts-urge-trump-talks-n798431>.

⁹ For example, when Choo Mi-ae became head of the then main opposition Minju (Democratic) Party in August 2016, she stated that “I will make opposition to THAAD battery the party’s official position [and that] we cannot let China and the U.S. clash on the Korean Peninsula.” See “South Korea’s Main Opposition Party ‘Takes Stand Against THAAD,’” *Time*, August 28, 2016, <http://time.com/4470154/south-north-korea-thaad-missiles-minjoo-party>.

¹⁰ Goh Sung-hyuk, “Kim Dae-jung–Roh Moo-hyun bukhek ohngho baleon moeum” [Compilation of Kim Dae-jung’s and Roh Moo-hyun’s Remarks Defending North Korea’s Nuclear Weapons], *New Daily*, February 5, 2013.

¹¹ “South Korea’s Kim Dae-jung Believed North Would Disarm,” Reuters, August 18, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-korea-president-kim-comments-sb/south-koreas-kim-dae-jung-believed-north-would-disarm-idUSTRE57H16A20090818>.

time since the Korean War that North Korea bombed South Korea. Despite reports by an international fact-finding commission and by the Ministry of National Defense (MND) concluding that North Korea was responsible for the attack,¹² a significant number of progressive politicians believe that there is no definitive proof that a North Korean torpedo sank the *Cheonan*.¹³

The September 2017 nuclear test, however, is being seen by the South Korean public as a qualitatively different military threat. Survey results from Gallup Korea conducted during the first week of September 2017 revealed that 76% of respondents perceive the sixth nuclear test as a threat, with 53% characterizing it as very serious.¹⁴ Only 20% replied that it was either not really a threat or not a threat at all, while 4% responded that they had no opinion.¹⁵ In addition, 60% of respondents agreed with the statement that South Korea should develop its own nuclear weapons, while only 35% disagreed.¹⁶ According to the same poll, 65% of respondents stated that if North Korea does not give up its nuclear weapons, all assistance and aid should be cut off, while only 35% said that humanitarian aid should be continued.¹⁷

New Political Pressures

President Moon's maneuverability in coping with North Korea's growing WMD threats is heavily affected by two opposing demands. First, there is an urgency to respond by effectively using all the capabilities available and significantly accelerating South Korea's own offensive weapons systems that could be used against the North. At the same time, Moon must placate his progressive and left-of-center political base even as he pursues a more pragmatic and realistic stance on a range of critical national security issues. For example, although he has taken steps to bolster South Korea's defense capabilities after the North's sixth nuclear test and successive ICBM launches,

¹² Bard Lendon, "S. Korea's Final Report Affirms *Cheonan* Was Sunk by N. Korean Torpedo," CNN, September 14, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/asiapcf/09/13/south.korea.cheonan.report/index.html>; and Joint Civilian-Military Investigation Group, *Investigation Result in the Sinking of the ROKS "Cheonan"* (Seoul: Ministry of National Defense, 2010), 5.

¹³ For example, former minister of unification Jeong Se-hyun and former head of the Justice Party Lee Jung-hee asserted that there was no conclusive evidence that the *Cheonan* was sunk by a North Korean mini-submarine. In addition, former prime minister Han Myung-sook maintained that she could not believe in the credibility of the multinational committee's findings owing to the hiding of critical facts. See Seo Yook-shik, "Cheonanham pokchimae daehan jwaik 50myung-eui mangeon" [50 Reckless Remarks by Leftists on the Sinking of the *Cheonan*], AllinKorea.net, March 24, 2014, http://allinkorea.net/sub_read.html?uid=29494§ion=section12.

¹⁴ Gallup Korea Daily Opinion, September 5–7, 2017, 10.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., 12.

he has also been firm that humanitarian assistance should continue (to the consternation of Washington and Tokyo).

Heightened tensions between the two Koreas, strains between the United States and both North Korea and China, and mixed signals between Seoul and Washington mean that the North Korean nuclear threat will dominate the agenda of Moon's single five-year term. To the dismay of his core supporters on the left, Moon has come out in favor of the rapid deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system after hedging on the issue during the presidential campaign. In a statement issued on September 8, Moon said that "the government has decided that it is no longer possible to delay the temporary deployment of the THAAD units to prevent the outbreak of war and to safeguard our citizens' livelihood and security...[though] the ultimate decision to deploy THAAD will be made after a thorough environmental impact study has been finished."¹⁸ Moon stressed the importance of upgrading South Korea's military capabilities as soon as possible in order to respond to North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats. Specifically, he noted the importance of implementing fundamental military reforms while pursuing a more autonomous defense posture.¹⁹ During a meeting with Vladimir Putin in Vladivostok on September 6, 2017, Moon also asked for Russian support in implementing extremely tough sanctions on North Korea, such as cutting off Russian oil supplies, but Putin firmly disagreed.²⁰

China's Looming Shadow

China now possesses much more sophisticated power-projection capabilities, which could encumber and mitigate U.S. and South Korean military actions—a factor that will become even more crucial in the years and decades ahead. There is an increasing possibility that the PLA would become involved in a major crisis in North Korea, including through intervening militarily in case of regime collapse, actively undertaking counter-military operations against ROK and U.S. forces, or cooperating with Russia to prevent the ROK and the United States from taking proactive measures.

¹⁸ Heo Wan, "Moon Jae-in daetongryeong, 'THAAD baechineun hyun sanghwang-eso chwhihalsoo itneun choeseoneui jochi,' iphang jeonmun" [President Moon Jae-in, "Deployment of THAAD Is the Best Response under Current Circumstances," Full Statement], *Huffington Post Korea*, September 8, 2017, http://www.huffingtonpost.kr/2017/09/08/story_n_17936336.html.

¹⁹ Jeong Eun-hye, "Moon Jae-in daetongryung 'bukhek-misail dae-eung jeolryeok hwakbo shikeub'" [President Moon Jae-in "Urgent Need to Acquire Military Capabilities to Respond to North Korea's Nuclear and Missile Threats"], *JoongAng Ilbo*, August 8, 2017, <http://news.joins.com/article/21828589>.

²⁰ "Moon Presses Putin over North Korea Oil Supplies but Russian Leader Is Reluctant," *South China Morning Post*, September 6, 2017, <http://www.scmp.com/news/asia/diplomacy/article/2110039/moon-presses-putin-over-north-korea-oil-supplies-russian-leader>.

In particular, Beijing has been extremely vocal in its opposition to South Korea's decision to deploy THAAD. It has not only responded with vitriolic and shrill denunciations but also implemented partial sanctions on Korean companies and urged its citizens to boycott Korean goods and pop culture. In early March 2017, Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson Geng Shuang stated that "our position on THAAD is very clear. We are firmly opposed to the deployment of THAAD [in South Korea]."²¹ China's vehement opposition is based on the fear that the THAAD radars can see deep into Chinese military installations and denigrate China's deterrence capabilities.²² On September 7, a Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson reiterated China's stance on THAAD.²³ China's position makes little sense, however, given that there are already two THAAD radars in Japan that can see into China and that the THAAD radars in South Korea are configured not to peer into China.²⁴ Moreover, "China has state-of-the-art radars in the northeastern province of Heilongjiang with a maximum range of 5,500 km, while operating S-400 anti-aircraft radars with a detection range of 700 km in Shandong Province overlooking the Korean Peninsula across the West Sea."²⁵ Chinese media reported in March 2017 that the PLA was installing over-the-horizon radars with a range of 3,000 km that cover all of South Korea and Japan.

More importantly, if a major crisis were to erupt in North Korea, China could intervene militarily to install and bolster a new regime, shore up the Korean People's Army (KPA), safeguard North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile sites to prevent U.S. or South Korean forces from acquiring them, and signal to Seoul and Washington that Beijing will not stand idle if they mount operations to decapitate the North Korean regime or assume de facto control over the North. China has never revealed its contingency plans relating to North Korea, but several insights can be gained from open sources. According to press reports, the PLA has deployed some 150,000

²¹ Seema Mody, "China Lashes Out as South Korea Puts an American Anti-missile System in Place," CNBC, April 28, 2017, <https://www.cnbc.com/2017/03/17/thaad-anti-missile-system-makes-china-lash-out-at-south-korea.html>.

²² "China, Russia, Share Opposition to U.S. THAAD in South Korea: Xi," Reuters, July 2, 2017, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-thaad-russia/china-russia-share-opposition-to-u-s-thaad-in-south-korea-xi-idUSKBN1900N8>.

²³ "Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Geng Shuang's Regular Press Conference," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, September 7, 2017, http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/xwfw_665399/s2510_665401/2511_665403/t1490884.shtml.

²⁴ "Why China Is Wrong to Be Furious about THAAD," *Economist*, May 23, 2017, <https://www.economist.com/news/asia/21719485-deployment-american-anti-missile-system-south-korea-does-not-threaten-chinas-nuclear>.

²⁵ Lee Kil-seong, "China Sets Up More Long-Range Radars," *Chosun Ilbo*, March 14, 2017, http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2017/03/14/2017031401319.html.

troops near the 1,400 km border it shares with North Korea.²⁶ The PLA Air Force conducted drills on September 5, 2017, for a “surprise attack” and shot down several missiles in Bohai Bay, the innermost gulf between North Korea and China.²⁷ Other reports suggest that China is preparing for a range of contingencies along the North Korean border, including the creation of a new border defense brigade, bunkers against nuclear and chemical attacks, and full-time surveillance using drones.²⁸

South Korea’s Grand Strategy and the Primacy of Countering Asymmetrical Threats

What will shape the ROK’s grand strategy heading into the 2020s is the expanding spectrum of threats confronting it, the need to maintain and strengthen the critical alliance with the United States, and political and military leaders’ ability to skillfully manage growing strategic pressures from China. At the same time, efforts must be made to craft a new bipartisan national security consensus and modernize the bureaucratic machinery in a way that would enable Seoul to meet current and increasingly potent over-the-horizon threats. The following discussion will examine the development of South Korea’s grand strategy, with special reference to its military dimension.

The Development of South Korea’s Grand Strategy

Until the restoration of democracy in 1987, South Korea’s grand strategy was characterized by three key elements: (1) the preponderance of presidential power, with no real checks and balances by the National Assembly and a heavy emphasis on the armed forces and key intelligence agencies, both civilian and military, (2) the highly limited role of the media and public opinion in the formation of strategy (especially military strategy, doctrines, and defense R&D), and (3) tension between the push for a more “self-reliant defense” (*jaju kukbang*) posture and the desire to ensure

²⁶ Kelly McLaughlin, “China Deploys 150,000 Troops to Deal with Possible North Korean Refugees over Fears Trump May Strike Kim Jong-un Following Missile Attack on Syria,” *Daily Mail* (London), April 10, 2017, <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4399076/China-deploys-150-000-troops-North-Korea-border.html>.

²⁷ Charlotte Gao, “China’s Air Force Tests Missile Defense Near North Korea Border,” *Diplomat*, September 7, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/chinas-air-force-tests-missile-defense-near-north-korea-border>.

²⁸ Matthew Dunn, “China’s Military Preparing for a Potential Crisis in North Korea,” *News.com.au*, July 26, 2017, <http://www.news.com.au/technology/innovation/inventions/chinas-military-preparing-for-a-potential-crisis-with-north-korea/news-story/531eb0a06df3468290ceecfdacc4441>.

sustained military and political support from the United States.²⁹ This basic structure survived even after the restoration of democracy during the term of President Roh Tae-woo (1988–93), who himself was a career soldier.

The process of formulating grand strategy began to shift during the term of President Kim Young-sam (1993–98), who was a lifelong democracy advocate and a giant in Korean politics. Kim sharply curtailed the military's influence on key national security decisions, including South Korea's policies toward the North. His biggest contribution to civilian control was publicizing and then abolishing an elite and powerful secret society within the army, known as Hanahoe (Group of One), that selectively recruited the best and brightest graduates of the Korean Military Academy.³⁰ On March 8, 1993, just two weeks into his term, Kim asked for the resignation of all of his top generals, including the army chief of staff and head of the Defense Security Command (army intelligence).³¹

But it was not until the administration of Kim Dae-jung (1998–2003) and the introduction of his Sunshine Policy that South Korea's national security paradigm ceased to be dominated by conservative forces. After the first inter-Korean summit in June 2001 and the second in November 2007 during the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003–8), the ROK began to push the envelope by attempting to balance the U.S. alliance, inter-Korean “détente,” and the ROK's rapidly expanding economic and political ties with China since the normalization of relations in 1992.

The progressive leadership of Kim and Roh was followed by a decade of conservative governments under Lee Myung-bak (2008–13) and Park Geun-hye (2013–17). Progressives regained the presidency in May 2017 after a snap election was held to replace Park, who was impeached in March. On the one hand, South Korea's single, five-year presidential terms have resulted in significant fluctuations in military and national security policies

²⁹ South Korea's prevailing security dilemma is characterized by the need to emphasize its alliance with the United States so that Washington will not abandon Seoul, while also expanding its own deterrence and defense capabilities should the United States' commitment to South Korea's defense waver. The announcement of the Nixon Doctrine in 1969, the removal of the U.S. 7th Infantry Division in 1971, the downfall of South Vietnam in 1975, and the Carter administration's initial decision to phase out U.S. ground forces from South Korea all contributed to growing uncertainty about the alliance. Managing this “tension of opposites” remains a priority today, especially since 1987 and subsequent changes in governments from the right to the left and vice versa.

³⁰ “YS: ‘Hanahoe cheungsan eopseoteumyun DJ-Roh daetongryong an duetseul-keot’” [Kim Young-sam: “If Hanahoe Was Not Abolished, Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun Wouldn't Have Become Presidents”], SBS News, April, 20, 2009, http://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1000579552.

³¹ See Nam Jae-hee, “Kim Young-sam jeon daetongryeong-eul bonemyeo... tong keuko keonkanghan bosu jeongdo kuleun keo san... damdaehetdon Hanahoe cheok-kyul keun eopjeok” [Bidding Farewell to President Kim Young-sam... A Healthy Conservative with Broad Strokes... Biggest Achievement Was Disbanding the Arrogant Hanahoe], *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, November 23, 2015, http://news.khan.co.kr/kh_news/khan_art_view.html?artid=201511232256485&code=910100.

depending on the ideological orientation of the incoming government, which has limited continuity. On the other, changes in power from the left to the right and vice versa have increasingly convinced South Koreans about the merits of more centrist policies. In this sense, while President Moon is from the progressive wing of the ideological spectrum, his term in office will likely be different from any previous government. He cannot afford to cater solely or even primarily to his liberal base because he must address the widest array of security threats faced by any South Korean president.

It is too early to tell how the Moon administration will craft South Korea's grand strategy. When he became president, Moon proposed a number of dialogues with North Korea, such as holding bilateral meetings to lower military tensions and ascertain possible areas of cooperation. For example, the government decided on an \$8 million aid package to North Korea, although the timing has been postponed due to rising military tensions. North Korea's sixth nuclear test and ICBM tests compelled Moon to react much more realistically, to the consternation of his core left-of-center political base. He has emphasized that while there must be no war or preemptive attack on the North, it is imperative to accelerate South Korea's military capabilities such as the "kill chain" and to begin discussion about reverting wartime operational control to South Korea as soon as it is politically, technologically, and strategically feasible. For the moment and so long as North Korea continues to push the threat envelope, Moon is unlikely to press for unilateral engagement with the North. Even as he has stressed the importance of securing peace, he has reiterated the centrality of the ROK's alliance with the United States.

South Korea's Military Strategy

Since the end of the Korean War in 1953, and especially since the 2000s, the ROK's basic military strategy has been shaped by four critical factors. First, it confronts an enemy—North Korea—that is not only the most militarized nation on the planet but also the most dangerous given the potent mix of formidable conventional and special forces matched with WMD capabilities. Second, South Korea must defend Seoul at all costs, including through developing the capability to launch massive counterattacks, given the capital's proximity to the demilitarized zone (DMZ) that separates the two Koreas and the primordial need for massive counterattacks owing to the impossibility of a defense-in-depth strategy. The third factor is the critical role of extended deterrence provided by the United States, including the 28,000-strong U.S. Forces Korea (USFK) and the capacity for rapid augmentation from U.S. bases in Japan, Guam, Hawaii, and the continental United States. The fourth

factor is cohesion and jointness between the ROK military and USFK, which is without parallel in any other multilateral or bilateral alliance, coupled with the ROK military's sustained modernization since the 1970s.

Faced with the North's growing nuclear and missile capabilities, South Korea's military strategy has shifted from one that emphasizes absorbing a North Korean assault and mounting a counterattack to a proactive deterrence posture. Although the reversion of wartime operational control to the ROK is seen by the Moon administration as an essential part of augmenting South Korea's defense posture, the preservation of jointness and combined operations with the USFK and other U.S. military forces remains the *sine qua non* of South Korea's deterrence and defense posture. Given the growing asymmetrical nature of threats from North Korea—such as more advanced long-range artillery, nuclear-tipped ballistic missiles, and accelerating SLBM capabilities—ROK and U.S. forces must be prepared to fight beyond the forward edge of the battle area. This requires enhancing early-warning capabilities and devising a plan to mount rapid counterattacks or even a preemptive strike in case of definitive evidence of an impending North Korean ballistic missile or nuclear attack. Other key elements of the ROK's robust deterrence posture against the North are the capabilities to take out North Korea's critical command-and-control centers and nuclear and WMD sites and to mount an aggressive campaign to decapitate North Korea's leadership:

During Phase 1, U.S.-ROK forces would conduct a vigorous forward defense aimed at protecting Seoul. Their campaign would be dominated by combined-arms ground battles waged with infantry, artillery, and armor. U.S. air and naval forces would conduct close air support, interdiction, and deep strike missions. After Phase 1, U.S.-ROK operations in Phase 2 would probably focus on seizing key terrain, inflicting additional casualties on enemy forces, and rebuffing further attacks. Phase 3, to start when the U.S. ground buildup was complete and ROK forces were replenished, would be a powerful counteroffensive aimed at destroying the DPRK's military power. The war plan envisions amphibious assaults into North Korea by U.S. Army and Marines at the narrow waist of North Korea. The entire resources of the U.S. Marine Corps would flow there to establish a beachhead, with substantial Army resources quickly conducting over-the-shore operations.³²

As a result of the primacy of threats from the North, the South Korean military has prepared for a range of North Korea-centric war and conflict scenarios. With the rapid growth of the nuclear threat, the ROK Armed Forces have placed greater emphasis on acquiring the requisite weapons systems, expanded intelligence platforms, and modernized C4ISR (command, control,

³² "OPLAN 5027 Major Theater War—West," GlobalSecurity.org, <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/ops/oplan-5027.htm>.

communications, computers, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance) capabilities and systems. The government has also increased defense spending: the defense budget for fiscal year 2017 is \$36 billion, which is a 4% increase from 2016, and includes the procurement of 40 F-35 joint strike fighters (with options for 20 more), missile defenses, accelerated development of next-generation ballistic and cruise missiles, and improvements to C4ISR. In 2016 the ROK MND estimated that it must add \$200 billion to the defense budget from 2016 to 2020 to effectively respond to North Korean threats.³³ Moon announced in July 2017 that he plans to increase South Korea's defense budget from 2.4% of GDP to 2.9%—or by up to \$51 billion—during his term, emphasizing that “there must never be a gap in national defense regardless of changes in governments or commanders.”³⁴ Yet current ROK and USFK frameworks will need to change in response to North Korea's hydrogen bomb test and growing ability to target U.S. bases in the Pacific and parts of the continental United States with nuclear-armed intermediate-range ballistic missiles and ICBMs.³⁵

As shown in **Table 1**, North Korea's conventional forces significantly outnumber those of South Korea. In addition, the ROK and the USFK must also prepare for a wide range of lethal but limited attacks from both North Korea and China (see **Table 2**). Another key factor that the ROK and the

TABLE 1 South-North military balance, 2016

Category	South Korea	North Korea
Army	490,000	1,100,000
Navy	70,000 (including 29,000 marines)	60,000
Air force	65,000	110,000
Strategic forces	0	10,000
Total	625,000	1,280,000

SOURCE: Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *2016 Defense White Paper* (Seoul, 2017), 268.

³³ Vivienne Machi, “Record Defense Budget Ahead for South Korea,” *National Defense*, February 15, 2017, <http://www.nationaldefensemagazine.org/articles/2017/2/15/record-defense-budget-ahead-for-south-korea>.

³⁴ Kim Jae-deuk, “Moon Jae-in daetongryeong imkine kukbang yesan GDP daebi 2.4%→2.9%ro ol-lil kot” [President Moon Jae-in Will Increase Defense Budget as Percentage of GDP from 2.4% to 2.0% during His Term], *Joongang Ilbo*, July 18, 2017, <http://news.joins.com/article/21768963>.

³⁵ Broad et al., “This Missile Could Reach California.”

TABLE 2 Critical North Korean and Chinese asymmetrical threats

	Category	Threats	Likelihood	Magnitude	Impact
North Korea	WMD attacks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited nuclear attack, blackmail, and electromagnetic pulse attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unlikely unless Kim Jong-un believes that his regime's survival is at stake or a preemptive or preventive war is imminent 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rapid escalation into a major conflict involving nuclear and conventional forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extremely wide military, political, economic, and social repercussions
	Nuclear demonstration (i.e., offshore detonation in South Korean waters)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Taking Seoul hostage or forcing South Korea to bargain for peace under North Korea's conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not very high, given that even a nuclear demonstration would be perceived as a de facto nuclear attack 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perceived as a major escalation calling for requisite military responses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unparalleled political tensions and dilemmas over appropriate military responses
	Conventional and irregular forces	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rear-area attacks Decapitation of ROK leaders Massive cyberattacks Attacks on ROK naval vessels and forward-island bases behind the Northern Limit Line Mining of major South Korean harbors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Likely methods of choice to test South Korea's resolve and responses, given North Korea's track record 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Would not be seen as existential threats but as attacks that will spike public fears, sink markets, and cause massive evacuations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Perception of South Korea as being on the brink of a major war

Table 2 continued.

	Category	Threats	Likelihood	Magnitude	Impact
China	<p>PLA's warning not to interfere in "internal" North Korean developments, including regime collapse</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Categorical Chinese warnings against U.S.-ROK joint operations in North Korea following military actions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If the Kim Jong-un regime collapses, China will activate its own contingency plans, including ones to deal with an onslaught of refugees 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would lead to increased forces along the Sino-North Korean border 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would add significant political challenges and hurdles for the United States and South Korea with little leverage to stop Chinese actions
	<p>Partial military intervention by the PLA</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tailored threats against U.S.-ROK forces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If U.S. or ROK forces cross the 38th parallel, the PLA will take action 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Could quickly escalate into a U.S.-China military showdown 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depending on U.S. actions, different signals would be sent to key allies and influence China's next moves

SOURCE: Adapted and modified from Duk-ki Kim, "The Republic of Korea's Counter-Asymmetric Strategy: Lessons from ROKS Cheonan and Yeonpyeong Island," *Naval War College Review* 65, no. 1 (2012): 61.

United States must consider is China's growing military power and the high probability of Chinese military intervention during an acute North Korean crisis. While China opposes North Korea's nuclear weapons program, it continues to believe that an unstable Pyongyang that could lead to the downfall of Kim Jong-un poses a greater national security risk. It also believes that a nuclearized North Korea—as much as it hurts Chinese interests by compelling South Korea and Japan to beef up their defense capabilities—buys time for China to catch up militarily with the United States.

Preparing for Korean War 2.0

In the event of an outbreak of war on the Korean Peninsula, North Korea's principal strategy would be to launch a blitzkrieg, beginning with over five hundred long-range artillery pieces, and occupy Seoul prior to the augmentation of U.S. forces beyond the 28,000 currently deployed in South Korea. Given that the population of Seoul and the surrounding area is over 20 million people, any major attack would be devastating. As the political, economic, cultural, and social heartland of South Korea, if Seoul falls to the KPA or is the target of North Korea's nuclear weapons, then for all practical purposes it would be the end of the ROK as we know it. North Korea would also suffer huge casualties. By one estimate, North Korea would suffer 20,000 casualties daily as U.S. and ROK forces begin massive bombing campaigns.³⁶

As the North Korean nuclear and ballistic missile threats have assumed a new urgency, some high-level U.S. officials and politicians have advocated preventive surgical strikes to take out North Korea's nuclear sites. Although there is every reason to bolster the deterrence and defense capabilities of the ROK military and USFK, a preventive or preemptive strike by the United States would quickly escalate into a full-blown war between the two Koreas. In this scenario, South Korea would suffer millions of civilian casualties and its economy would grind to a halt. In the event of war, U.S. and ROK forces would attempt to track down and destroy as many targets as possible, but there is no assurance that a preemptive attack against North Korean WMD facilities would be fully successful. Real-time intelligence would be limited, and how the Kim Jong-un regime might decide to

³⁶ For an account of how a war with North Korea might unfold, see Rob Givens, "What War with North Korea Would Look Like: 20K NK Dead a Day," *Breaking Defense*, September 6, 2017, <http://breakingdefense.com/2017/09/what-war-with-north-korea-would-look-like-20k-nk-dead-a-day>.

retaliate is unknown.³⁷ But it is important to understand that even under the best of circumstances, U.S. and ROK forces would be likely to confront significant challenges, including the following:

(1) locating, isolating and eliminating WMD program elements; (2) managing the consequences (to include humanitarian assistance, decontamination, disaster relief, etc.) of possible WMD attacks; (3) missile defense; (4) locating, seizing and securing weapons depots; (5) rendering constituted WMD safe through dismantlement of the warhead or weapon delivery mechanism; (6) maritime interdiction to prevent leakage off the peninsula; (7) stopping movement of people and materials of concern along land borders; and (8) dismantlement of possible proliferation networks so that materials of concern or even weapons do not move out of the theater in the midst of a chaotic security environment.³⁸

The ROK's Kill Chain Program

To address the threat from North Korea, the ROK military has focused on building up its counter-asymmetrical capabilities, including more advanced intelligence platforms to target and destroy the North Korean command-and-control system (including Kim Jong-un and his immediate inner circle) with South Korea's ballistic and cruise missiles. The Kill Chain is a South Korean triad system consisting of the following components. The first piece of the system is detecting, targeting, and destroying North Korean missiles by incorporating advanced surveillance assets such as high-altitude reconnaissance unmanned aerial vehicles, developing and deploying a full range of ballistic and cruise missiles, and operationalizing joint direct-attack munitions and laser-guided missiles into the force structure.³⁹ During the 46th Security Consultative Meeting (the highest-level annual bilateral defense review) in 2014, South Korea and the United States agreed on a tailored "4D" strategy (detect, disrupt, destroy, and defend) to counter North Korea's growing array of ballistic missiles. In 2015, both sides began to define operational guidelines that included diplomacy, information, and economic

³⁷ David Wroe, "North Korea: A Terrifying Glimpse into What War with Kim Jong-un's Military Would Look Like," *Sydney Morning Herald*, July 15, 2017, <http://www.smh.com.au/federal-politics/political-news/north-korea-a-terrifying-glimpse-into-what-war-with-kim-jonguns-military-would-look-like-20170713-gxadej.html>.

³⁸ Robert J. Peters, "The WMD Challenges Posed by a Collapse of North Korea," 38 North, April 14, 2015, <http://www.38north.org/2015/04/rpeters041415>.

³⁹ Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *2016 Defense White Paper* (Seoul, 2017), 69–70, http://www.mnd.go.kr/cop/pblicitn/selectPublicationUser.do?siteId=mndEN&componentId=51&categoryId=0&publicationSeq=777&pageIndex=1&id=mndEN_031300000000.

capabilities at the outermost ring, followed by related military components in the second ring, and finally counter-missile capabilities at the inner core.⁴⁰

The second component of the triad system is the Korea Air and Missile Defense system, with advanced early-warning, command-and-control, and interception capabilities; deployment of the PAC-3 missile defense system; and development of medium-range surface-to-air missiles and long-range surface-to-air missiles designed to intercept North Korean missiles at the terminal phase.⁴¹ The third component is operationalizing the Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR) plan. This plan was initially announced after North Korea's fifth nuclear test in September 2016, and defense sources note that it includes launching "pre-emptive bombing attacks on North Korean leader Kim Jong-un and the country's military leadership if signs of their impending use of nuclear weapons are detected or in the event of a war."⁴² In addition, "every Pyongyang district, particularly where the North Korean leadership is possibly hidden, will be completely destroyed by ballistic missiles and high-explosive shells as soon as the North shows any signs of using a nuclear weapon."⁴³ In July 2017, the *National Interest* described the KMPR plan as follows:

Unlike Kill Chain, which involves only precision-guided missile strikes and a handful of special operations forces, KMPR actually involves a seemingly suicidal invasion of the north by three thousand Republic of Korea marines. The brigade-sized unit, dubbed "Spartan 3000," is reportedly trained to "remove the North's wartime command and paralyze its function if war breaks out." Given the centralized nature of the North Korean government, that sounds an awful lot like an amphibious raid on Pyongyang.⁴⁴

Following North Korea's sixth nuclear test, Defense Minister Song Young-moo informed the National Assembly that a special forces brigade would be set up by the end of 2017—a "decapitation unit" tasked with preparing for cross-border raids and detecting and killing high-value targets. According to one report, "the South's increasingly aggressive posture is meant to help push North Korea into accepting President Moon Jae-in's offer

⁴⁰ Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *2016 Defense White Paper*, 68.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 71.

⁴² "S. Korea Unveils Plan to Raze Pyongyang in Case of Signs of Nuclear Attack," Yonhap, September 11, 2016, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2016/09/11/65/0301000000AEN20160911000500315E.html>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Kyle Mizokami, "This Is How South Korea Plans to Stop a Nuclear Attack from North Korea," *National Interest*, July 10, 2017, <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/how-south-korea-plans-stop-nuclear-attack-north-korea-21472>.

of talks.”⁴⁵ But for the KMPR plan to be successful, the special units would need accurate and real-time intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities, and extremely well-coordinated support systems under war or near-war conditions.

Lifting Constraints on South Korea’s Missile Development Capabilities

From the early 1980s to the mid-2000s, South Korea was heavily constrained in developing ballistic and cruise missiles after being pressured to sign an agreement on missile development guidelines with the United States in 1979. The initial agreement limited South Korea’s ballistic missile range to 180 km, which was increased to 300 km in 2001 and to 800 km, with a payload of up to 500 kilograms, in 2010. These guidelines were put into place by the United States after intelligence reports revealed that South Korea was working on a nascent nuclear weapons program, which did not go beyond the conceptual phase before it was killed by the United States. It was only when North Korea’s ballistic missile arsenal began to pose a serious military threat that Washington agreed to incrementally relax the restrictions on South Korean missile programs.

One of the deepest ironies in the U.S.-ROK alliance is that even though the United States provided indispensable defense support for South Korea during and after the Korean War, it worried about whether the ROK military would have asymmetrical capabilities against North Korea that would create a strategic imbalance. During the Park Chung-hee era (1961–79), the United States agreed to provide assistance in modernizing the ROK Armed Forces only after Park agreed to send three South Korean infantry divisions to South Vietnam to support the U.S. war effort. Even then, however, Washington was wary of Seoul developing more indigenous systems, including ballistic missiles. But at the same time, North Korea was embarking on an ambitious ballistic missile program with the ultimate goal of developing ICBM capabilities to directly threaten the United States.

According to assessments made by the Nuclear Threat Initiative based on U.S. sources, North Korea is estimated to have deployed various versions of the Scud missile (300 km range), approximately 200 Nodong missiles (1,300 km range), fewer than 50 Musudan missiles (3,500 km range), and

⁴⁵ Choe Sang-hun, “South Korea Plans ‘Decapitation Unit’ to Try to Scare North’s Leaders,” *New York Times*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/09/12/world/asia/north-south-korea-decapitation-.html>.

a small number of Taepodong missiles.⁴⁶ The Taepodong-1 has a range of 2,000–2,900 km, while the Taepodong-2 has an estimated range of 6,000–9,000 km.⁴⁷ North Korea also possesses an ICBM known as the KN-14 (or Hwasong-14 or KN-08 Mod 2) with a range of 10,000 km and the KN-08 (also known as the Hwasong-13) with a range of 11,500 km.⁴⁸ Scud missiles are deployed 100 km from the DMZ and intended exclusively for hitting targets throughout South Korea, while the longer-range Nodong missiles are likely to be employed against U.S. military bases in Japan as well as Japanese targets.

South Korea currently deploys the Hyunmu-2A and -2B surface-to-surface missiles (SSM), with ranges of 300 and 500 km.⁴⁹ Its ballistic and cruise missile arsenal includes the aforementioned Hyunmu SSMs and the Haeseong (SSM-700K) anti-ship cruise missile with a 200 km range. The ROK Navy has also deployed the Haeseong-2 ship-to-surface cruise missiles and the Haeseong-3 submarine-to-surface cruise missiles, with a range of up to 1,000 km.⁵⁰

The MND announced in April 2017 that it will develop and deploy hypersonic anti-ship missiles (with speeds of Mach 3–4) by 2020. Although details have not been revealed, these new missiles are expected to have a range between 200 and 500 km.⁵¹ Additionally, as tensions rose over the course of 2017, the United States reportedly deployed AGM-158 joint air-to-surface standoff missiles at Kunsan Air Base “designed to destroy hostile air defenses and high value, well defended, fixed and relocatable targets while keeping aircraft safely out of range from hostile air defense systems. Armed with a penetrator/blast fragmentation warhead, the operational range of the missile is estimated at over 370 kilometers.”⁵²

⁴⁶ “North Korea: Missile,” Nuclear Threat Initiative (NTI), July 2017, <http://www.nti.org/learn/countries/north-korea/delivery-systems>; and Han Sang-mi, “Bukhan tando misail 1cheonyeo ki... Hankuk ‘Kill Chain-KAMD-THAAD-ro daeung’ [About 1,000 North Korean Ballistic Missiles... South Korean ‘Kill-Chain-KAMD-THAAD Response’], Voice of America (Korean), July 20, 2016, <https://www.voakorea.com/a/3426832.html>.

⁴⁷ “North Korean Ballistic Missile Models,” NTI, March 21, 2016, <http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/north-korean-ballistic-missile-models>.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Franz-Stefan Gady, “South Korea Test Fires New Ballistic Missile,” *Diplomat*, April 7, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/04/south-korea-test-fires-new-ballistic-missile>.

⁵⁰ Kim Jong-won, “Haegun, hamdaejji Haeseong-2-jamdaejji Haeseong-3 misail baechi” [Korean Navy Deploys Ship-to-Surface Haeseong-2 and Submarine-to-Surface Haeseong-3 Missiles], *Asia Today*, March 23, 2015, <http://www.asiatoday.co.kr/view.php?key=20150322010013247>.

⁵¹ “Kun, choeumsok daham misail kaebal 2020nyunke siljeon baechi mokpyo” [Military Plans to Deploy Supersonic Anti-ship Missiles by 2020], Yonhap, April 20, 2017, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2017/04/19/0200000000AKR20170419168800014.HTML>.

⁵² Franz-Stefan Gady, “U.S. Deploys 10 Long-Range Air-to-Ground Missiles to South Korea,” *Diplomat*, June 26, 2017, <http://thediplomat.com/2017/06/us-deploys-10-long-range-air-to-ground-missiles-to-south-korea>.

As a result of successive North Korean missile tests and Pyongyang's ability to miniaturize nuclear warheads, Washington finally began to incrementally shift its position on South Korea's need for a more proactive defense posture. After North Korea's two ICBM tests in July 2017 and its thermonuclear test of a hydrogen bomb in September 2017, President Moon told President Trump that it was imperative to remove the constraints placed on South Korea's missile programs. After the phone consultation between the two leaders, the White House announced that Trump "gave his in-principle approval to South Korea's initiative to lift restrictions on their missile payload capabilities...[and] also provided his conceptual approval for the purchase of many billions of dollars' worth of military weapons and equipment from the United States by South Korea."⁵³

Following the agreement to enhance South Korea's missile capabilities, the MND is planning to develop a new SSM with a two-ton payload. Dubbed the "Frankenmissile," it is the Korean version of the United States' MOAB (massive ordinance air blast but more frequently referred to as the "mother of all bombs") and would be the most lethal ballistic missile developed by South Korea.⁵⁴ The missile would be designed to destroy North Korea's underground military facilities, wartime commands, and other critical military targets. After North Korea's sixth nuclear test, the ROK also conducted the first live-fire drill with its advanced air-launched cruise missiles—the Taurus system made in Germany, which has a maximum range of 500 km.⁵⁵

Assessing the ROK's Current Military Strategy

While North Korea's growing nuclear and missile threats to South Korea and the region have fundamentally altered the strategic landscape on the Korean Peninsula, the primacy of defending Seoul remains as the backbone of the ROK's dominant military's strategy. But precisely because of North Korea's nuclear capabilities and South Korea's vulnerabilities, the ROK military has shifted its strategy of initially absorbing the brunt of North Korean assaults and mounting a counterattack to a proactive deterrence posture that entails a

⁵³ Mallory Shelbourne, "Trump Agrees to Lift Limits on South Korean Missile Payloads," *Hill*, September 4, 2017, <http://thehill.com/homenews/administration/349137-us-south-korea-agree-to-end-missile-payload-limits>.

⁵⁴ Yeo Jun-suk, "Seoul Seeks to Develop 'Frankenmissile' Targeting North Korea: Sources," *Korea Herald*, September 5, 2017, <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20170905000841>.

⁵⁵ "South Korea Conducts First Live Cruise Missile Drill amid North Korea Threats," *Irish Independent*, September 13, 2017, <http://www.independent.ie/world-news/south-korea-conducts-first-live-cruise-missile-drill-amid-north-korea-threats-36127398.html>.

preemptive attack or, at a minimum, simultaneous and massive counterattacks throughout North Korea.

As North Korea's asymmetrical capabilities have made major advances in the past several years, South Korea and the United States have to take into account the possibility of a North Korean nuclear strike. Or at a minimum, they must consider that the North might hold the ROK and Japan hostage with a possible nuclear attack in order to dissuade the United States from reinforcing troops and combat assets in the Korean theater. What has transformed the battle landscape on the Korean Peninsula is the need to mount a massive counterattack as soon as hostilities begin. There is no alternative but to pursue an aggressive forward-defense strategy while absorbing initial North Korean artillery, ballistic missiles, and possible biochemical weapon attacks.

In this context, where the ROK military spends its defense resources over the duration of the Moon administration is crucial. The new government has emphasized the need for South Korean nuclear-powered attack submarines (SSN) to undertake more robust antisubmarine warfare, especially since North Korea has attained SLBM capabilities.⁵⁶ Advocates argue that South Korea needs at least six SSNs, with deployment from 2026 to 2035.⁵⁷ But the more urgent need must be focused on accelerating South Korea's ballistic and cruise missile capabilities, missile defense, and other counterstrike assets. Assuring that the ROK can have an effective "kill chain" is far more important at this time than spending billions in developing SSNs. Taking the war deep into North Korea is the central strategic capability that needs the full attention of the MND and the National Security Council.

Alternative military strategies could be considered such as defense-in-depth (as was the case until the 1980s when the KPA had a numerical advantage over the ROK armed forces) or the repositioning of U.S. tactical weapons. However, nuclear artillery and landmines were withdrawn in the late 1950s, and all U.S. tactical nuclear weapons were withdrawn in 1991. The main rationale for a robust defense-in-depth strategy was to augment U.S. forces based in the Pacific or the continental United States so that the ROK forces and USFK could buy time. However, with North Korea's deployment of long-range artillery across the DMZ, ballistic missiles and biochemical weapons aimed at key counterforce and countervalue targets, and nuclear

⁵⁶ Wi Moon-hee and Ahn Hyo-seong, "Dandok, Hanmi, Hankuk hekchujin jamsuham boyu habeui" [Breaking News: South Korea and the United States Agree on Korea's Development of SSN], *Joongang Ilbo*, September 20, 2017, <http://news.joins.com/article/21952147>.

⁵⁷ "Jeonmunka 'Hankuk, 8 nyunnae hek jamsuham keonjo kaneung...6cheok hwakbo haeya'" [According to an Expert, "South Korea Can Deploy an SSN and Needs a Total of Six"], *Yonhap*, September 27, 2016, <http://www.yonhapnews.co.kr/bulletin/2016/09/27/0200000000A KR20160927044200014.HTML>.

capabilities, the ROK now has no choice but to mount an aggressive and immediate counterstrike or even a preemptive attack against North Korean forces. Seoul cannot be held hostage as a bargaining chip; North Korea must understand that the moment deterrence fails for South Korea, it can only lead to massive retaliation.

The Credibility of U.S. Extended Deterrence

A critical aspect of South Korea's military strategy toward North Korea is the degree to which the United States is willing to protect the ROK with nuclear weapons. Ever since North Korea conducted its first nuclear test in 2006, the United States has publicly reaffirmed its nuclear commitment to South Korea. The joint communiqué released after the 48th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting in October 2016 strongly stated the U.S. commitment to the ROK's defense by noting that "any North Korean aggression or military provocation is not to be tolerated and that the United States and the ROK would work shoulder-to-shoulder to demonstrate our combined resolve." The two sides asserted "that the U.S.-ROK alliance remains vital to the future interests of both nations in securing peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in Northeast Asia."⁵⁸ The communiqué also confirmed the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, including the nuclear umbrella.

The secretary reaffirmed the continued U.S. commitment to provide extended deterrence for the ROK using the full range of military capabilities, including the U.S. nuclear umbrella, conventional strike, and missile defense capabilities. The secretary also reiterated the longstanding U.S. policy that any attack on the United States or its allies will be defeated, and any use of nuclear weapons will be met with an effective and overwhelming response. The secretary and the minister committed to ensuring that extended deterrence for the ROK remains credible, capable, and enduring by continuing to enhance alliance deterrence measures and capabilities in response to the increasing North Korean nuclear, WMD, and ballistic missile threat and continuing to promote information-sharing and interoperability.⁵⁹

Given the growing North Korean threat, and notwithstanding deeply rooted historical differences between South Korea and Japan, Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington have no choice but to cooperate on enhancing their joint responses. The three countries have also expressed their concern over China's increasingly robust military presence in the region, although their statements on this issue have not been nearly as explicit as those on North Korea. After the eighth trilateral U.S.-Japan-ROK defense ministers' meeting

⁵⁸ "Joint Communiqué of the 48th U.S.-ROK Security Consultative Meeting," Washington, D.C., October 20, 2016, 2.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

in Singapore on the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2017, a joint press statement stressed the importance of trilateral security cooperation while stating that “the three ministers also discussed other regional security issues, including the importance of maritime security.” In particular, the three ministers:

lauded the progress in trilateral defense cooperation and praised collective efforts to enhance interoperability and exercise a variety of communication channels to share information and coordinate responses to North Korea’s provocative actions. The three ministers applauded recent efforts to improve trilateral response capabilities, to include the execution of four missile warning exercises, an inaugural antisubmarine warfare exercise, a maritime interdiction operations exercise, and combined flight training events with U.S. bomber aircraft....The three ministers reaffirmed that freedom of navigation and overflight must be ensured, and that disputes should be resolved in a peaceful manner.⁶⁰

Another important component of the U.S. defense posture in the Asia-Pacific is the increasing defense cooperation between the United States, Japan, and Australia. Such cooperation is perceived by key U.S. allies in the region, including South Korea, as an indispensable demonstration of U.S. military assurance.

Yet while Seoul continues to believe in the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence, South Korea is also much more focused on building up its offensive capabilities. What has changed during the so-called second nuclear age, defined by the rise of new nuclear powers such as India, Pakistan, and North Korea, is that the calculus of deterrence has become much more complex due to Pyongyang’s rapid progress in developing a direct nuclear threat against the United States that has added a new layer of uncertainty. David Santoro and John Warden have written that “as the Northeast Asian security environment deteriorates—with continued North Korean nuclear threats and increased Chinese assertiveness—experts in Japan and South Korea more frequently debate whether the U.S. nuclear umbrella in Asia should evolve toward an arrangement that more closely resembles the NATO model.”⁶¹ A report published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies in 2016 also asserted that extended deterrence in the 21st century was less credible than during the Cold War:

U.S. extended deterrence has lost much of its credibility and allies and friends are less dependent on the United States for their security. Real assurance, to the extent it exists, will depend on effective and demonstrated deterrence.

⁶⁰ “United States–Japan–Republic of Korea Defense Ministers Meeting,” Joint Press Statement, June 3, 2017, 1.

⁶¹ David Santoro and John K. Warden, “America’s Delicate Dance between Deterrence and Assurance,” *National Interest*, February 1, 2016, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/americas-delicate-dance-between-deterrence-assurance-15076>.

The degree to which extended deterrence has failed, or the degree to which states can be assured, will differ across and within regions throughout the hierarchy of nuclear powers.... In a world where positive security guarantees are less credible or desirable, major nuclear powers may seek to tip or balance the scales of deterrence through other means of support, such as with transfers of technology to their smaller nuclear-armed partners.⁶²

Unlike NATO, in which a Nuclear Planning Group coordinates nuclear issues and policies, extended deterrence vis-à-vis South Korea is coordinated through bilateral consultations. Seoul and Washington have adopted a “tailored deterrence” approach to cope with the full spectrum of nuclear and ballistic missile threats. The Extended Deterrence Policy Committee and the Counter-Missile Capability Committee, which were established to foster greater coordination, merged into the Deterrence Strategy Committee in April 2015, and the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group was set up in October 2016.⁶³ One key issue for reinforcing the credibility of the U.S. extended deterrence guarantee is where the United States should deploy nuclear weapons for maximum flexibility:

As for the location of nuclear weapons, this also presents a dilemma. On the one hand, unless these weapons are forward-based in or near the theater, they might not be particularly useful in a crisis or credible as deterrent—especially air-delivered weapons that are carried by relatively short-range platforms. On the other hand, forward-based weapons can be particularly vulnerable to attack, and the political complications of stationing them abroad could create even bigger problems.⁶⁴

Should Seoul Develop Independent Nuclear Weapons?

In the aftermath of successively more powerful North Korean nuclear tests, many South Koreans believe that the ROK’s military strategy should include an indigenous nuclear deterrent. In a survey conducted by the *Joongang Ilbo* in February 2016, 67.7% supported South Korea’s development of its own nuclear weapons (32.8% very strongly and 34.9% somewhat), while only 30.5% rejected the idea (20.9% opposed and 9.6% strongly opposed).⁶⁵

⁶² Clark Murdock et al., *Thinking about the Unthinkable in a Highly Proliferated World* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2016), 39–40.

⁶³ Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *2016 Defense White Paper*, 67.

⁶⁴ Evan Braden Montgomery, “Extended Deterrence in the Second Nuclear Age: Geopolitics, Proliferation, and the Future of U.S. Security Commitments,” Center for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments, 2016, 34.

⁶⁵ Kim Seong-tak, “Dandok, Kaesong Gongdan jungdan, chan 55%...ban 42% kukne THAAD baechi, chan 68% ban 27%” [Special, 55% Support Closing of Kaesong Industrial Complex, 42% Opposed and 68% Support THAAD Deployment while 27% Are Against], *Joonggang Ilbo*, February 15, 2016, <http://news.joins.com/article/19566209>.

As expected, those on the right are much more supportive of an indigenous nuclear program, while those on the left are almost uniformly against it, given that such a move would considerably worsen the security environment on the Korean Peninsula.

Public sentiments, however, do not reflect official positions, although the nuclear taboo has been broken by an incessantly aggressive North Korea. President Moon stated in an interview with CNN in September 2017 that “I do not agree that South Korea needs to develop our own nuclear weapons or relocate tactical nuclear weapons in the face of North Korea’s nuclear threat.” He explained that “to respond to North Korea by having our own nuclear weapons will not maintain peace on the Korean Peninsula and could lead to a nuclear arms race in northeast Asia.”⁶⁶ At the same time, Moon emphasized that it is imperative to strengthen South Korea’s deterrence capabilities.

Those who argue that it is time for South Korea to at least consider some type of a nuclear option focus on five main points. First, they assert that de facto acceptance of North Korea’s nuclear weapons does not make sense while South Korea has to rely exclusively on the U.S. nuclear umbrella for protection. Second, the 1991 Agreement on Reconciliation, Non-Aggression, and Exchanges and Cooperation between South and North Korea (known as the South-North Basic Agreement) and the 1992 Denuclearization Accord, in which the two Koreas agreed not to develop, test, or deploy nuclear weapons, were voided by the North’s nuclear test in 2006. While South Korea might continue to adhere to its non-nuclear principle, it should at least announce that it will no longer recognize the validity of the denuclearization agreement. Third, South Korea is already surrounded by nuclear weapon states such as China and Russia, in addition to North Korea, so that concerns about creating an Asian domino effect make little sense. Fourth, India’s and Israel’s nuclear weapons programs show that when a country’s fundamental interests are at stake, a sovereign state should have the right to choose whether it wishes to pursue the nuclear path. Fifth, proponents of the nuclear option argue that, at a minimum, the United States should reintroduce tactical nuclear weapons into South Korea.

In the United States, there has always been a strong aversion to either South Korea or Japan pursuing its own nuclear weapons, which would deal a major blow to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and have global repercussions. Advocates of nuclear nonproliferation have always been suspicious of South Korea’s potential tilt toward developing its own nuclear

⁶⁶ Paula Hancocks and James Griffiths, “No Nuclear Weapons in South Korea, Says President Moon,” CNN, September 14, 2017, <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/09/14/asia/south-korea-moon-nuclear/index.html>.

weapons ever since former president Park Chung-hee tried to pursue an indigenous nuclear program.

The costs of South Korea going nuclear would be considerable, including Chinese and Russian responses, the need to consistently finance both conventional and nuclear deterrent capabilities, major damage to its alliance with the United States, and international sanctions. Thus, since the North's first nuclear test, all South Korean governments have maintained that Seoul would retain its non-nuclear posture. As noted above, President Moon has made it clear that he is opposed to the reintroduction of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons or South Korea's own development of a nuclear weapons program. But if South Korea is to retain this position, policymakers should consider establishing a policy coordination mechanism akin to NATO's Nuclear Planning Group. Moreover, as Seoul and Washington have agreed in principle, the bilateral missile agreement should be revised in order to formally lift all ceilings on South Korea's development of ballistic and cruise missiles, and the agreement should be terminated.

Regaining Wartime Operational Control and Modernizing the ROK's Military Capabilities

For more than a decade, South Korea has been working toward regaining wartime OPCON of its military, which is currently in the hands of the USFK commander. If war breaks out on the peninsula, the National Command Authorities of South Korea and the United States will transmit their own orders through their defense ministers to their respective forces. The U.S.-ROK Combined Forces Command (headed by the USFK commander) will then execute the binational orders. During the Roh Moo-hyun government, an initial agreement was reached with the United States to revert wartime OPCON to South Korea by 2012 provided that the ROK military acquired the requisite capabilities. Roh advocated wartime OPCON transfer as a means of lessening South Korea's dependence on its alliance with the United States.

When Lee Myung-bak came into office in February 2008, the decision to pursue wartime OPCON transfer was postponed, and Park Geun-hye also decided that the ROK military was not ready to assume this responsibility. The dilemma that Seoul faces is that the transfer of wartime OPCON could weaken jointness between the ROK and the USFK, which are currently integrated at all levels of operation. The OPCON transfer would abolish the Combined Forces Command and replace it with “independent, parallel national commands’ acting in close liaison.” Although this structure is effective for both NATO and the U.S.-Japan alliance, “none of those commands seriously envision a

massive ground war in traditional fashion, potentially involving hundreds of thousands of casualties.”⁶⁷

It remains uncertain how strongly the Moon administration will pursue the transfer of wartime OPCON. President Moon served as the chief of staff to the late president Roh but has given no indication that he will prioritize this issue over more urgent military concerns. One of his major campaign pledges was to initiate long-overdue structural reforms of the ROK military, overhaul the defense procurement process, and increase the defense budget. In December 2005 the MND created its first Defense Reform Basic Plan (2006–20) to adapt more adroitly to network-centric warfare and create a more advanced military. This plan was revised in 2009, 2012, and most recently 2016 to reflect the growing nuclear threat from North Korea.

The ROK’s proposed military reforms consist of the following core components: reducing total forces from 625,000 to 522,000 by 2020 by downsizing the army from 490,000 to 387,000 troops, while air force, navy, and marine corps personnel numbers will remain unchanged; reinforcing ground forces with 230-mm multiple launch rocket systems, attack helicopters, upgraded K2 main battle tanks, and K9 self-propelled howitzers; acquiring KDDX destroyers, FFX frigates, and KSS-III submarines (with added plans to develop the navy’s own SSNs); operationalizing the KF-35s and developing South Korea’s indigenous KF-X fighter aircraft; and allocating sufficient resources to expedite the military’s Kill Chain capabilities by 2020.⁶⁸

If the defense budget grows from 2.4% to 2.9% of GDP by the end of Moon’s term, it will be the biggest net increase since the 1980s, and the ROK military will be able to implement key elements of its Kill Chain program. But as outlined earlier in this chapter, the ROK has to confront four highly challenging simultaneous missions: (1) enhancing its deterrence and defense capabilities against a widening and deepening North Korean threat, (2) ensuring the highest level of coordination in the U.S.-ROK alliance, (3) coping with an increasingly aggressive China that is determined to overtake the United States as the supreme military power in East Asia, and (4) preparing for very hostile nonlinear scenarios, such as regime collapse in North Korea or PLA intervention in an acute military crisis.

The ROK and the USFK should concentrate their efforts on responding to North Korea’s expanding nuclear threat and preparing for extremely volatile nonlinear situations. The most difficult choice that ROK and U.S. political leaders will confront is how to respond in the event of a lethal but limited strike against the ROK, such as the launching of Nodong missiles at ROK

⁶⁷ Robert E. Kelly, “South Korea: Who Should Have Wartime Command?” *Diplomat*, August 12, 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/08/south-korea-who-should-have-wartime-command>.

⁶⁸ Ministry of National Defense (ROK), *2016 Defense White Paper*, 104–6.

military targets, guerilla raids in key urban centers, or the use of chemical and biological weapons. South Korea not only will need to respond with active counterattacks but also must be prepared for rapid escalation. At the same time, China's reaction and potential military response, including active countermeasures against U.S.-ROK joint operations, will become an increasingly important factor.

If North Korea threatens to detonate a nuclear warhead in South Korean waters or in a rural area to demonstrate its nuclear capability, the United States will face the critical dilemma of whether it should respond with a nuclear strike. A 2013 U.S. Department of Defense report to Congress on the United States' nuclear employment strategy noted that the "fundamental role of U.S. nuclear weapons remains to deter nuclear attack on the United States and its Allies and partners [and] *the United States will only consider the use of nuclear weapons in extreme circumstances to defend the vital interests of the United States, or its Allies and partners*" (emphasis added).⁶⁹ The National Military Strategy issued by the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 2015 emphasized meeting the full spectrum of threats facing the United States and its key allies and partners. Specifically, the report stressed the importance of defeating violent extremist organizations, while also preparing for state conflict, hybrid conflict, and nonstate conflict in order to deter, deny, and defeat both state and nonstate adversaries.⁷⁰

It is critical for the ROK and the United States to understand that they will confront pernicious, long-term uncertainty on the Korean Peninsula. There is little doubt that the United States has a critical technological edge over the KPA, and the ROK Armed Forces are likewise more advanced than North Korea's. But superior military technology has limits, as evinced by the Vietnam War and more recently by U.S. and coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Breaking the bureaucratic barrier within the ROK military to undertake structural reforms, inculcating the civilian leadership with realistic scenarios involving hybrid warfare scenarios, and ensuring that the ROK and the United States can coordinate their political and military strategies with unprecedented levels of jointness will determine whether the ROK emerges victorious in its counter-asymmetrical strategy.

If the ROK and the United States are to prevail in a future conflict, it is essential to ensure that both forces have the requisite ability to mount joint counterattacks on all critical North Korean targets in parallel with massive and relentless offensive operations to cut off North Korea's

⁶⁹ U.S. Department of Defense, "Report on Nuclear Employment Strategy of the United States Specified in Section 491 of 10 U.S.C.," 2013, 4.

⁷⁰ U.S. Department of Defense, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America 2015* (Washington, D.C., June 2015), 4–6.

asymmetrical capabilities. High casualties are inevitable in another Korean War or even in a surgical strike against South Korean or U.S. forces. Making sure that allied forces will prevail with immediate, in-depth, and massive punitive strikes into North Korea lies at the heart of South Korea's "new strategic look."

Lessons for the U.S.-ROK Alliance and Policy Ramifications

Challenges Facing the U.S.-ROK Alliance

When the Korean War ended in July 1953, it would have been impossible to imagine that the ROK would ultimately emerge to become Asia's fourth-largest economy and the world's fifth-largest exporting power, possessing a modern, well-trained, and formidable military. That the U.S.-ROK alliance has grown and prospered through various domestic crises in South Korea and changes in government since the restoration of democracy in 1987 is a critical milestone. But it is important to remember that the cost for success in another Korean conflict or after a massive North Korean attack, such as a nuclear strike on Seoul, will go far beyond any war-gaming scenarios. Although the ROK and the USFK would eventually prevail and North Korea as we know it would cease to exist, the repercussions for South Korea would be truly horrific. Therefore, even as the ROK and the United States jointly prepare for a range of worst-case scenarios over the next decade, they must account for extremely difficult, volatile, and highly uncertain operations involving the KPA, as well as increasingly the PLA.

As a result, the real litmus test for the ROK's grand strategy and especially its dominant military strategy is the ability to conduct combined operations in the fullest sense of the term. The allies need to prepare for stacked military attacks from North Korea short of a major invasion but equally dangerous, such as long-range artillery and missile attacks on Seoul and key airports and sea ports. An additional priority will be controlling nuclear and other WMD sites in the event of violent regime change in Pyongyang with mass chaos in North Korea. Another possible scenario, as noted above, involves the PLA's military intervention in North Korea.

The second major variable is the response of the South Korean political leadership. Here, the ideological persuasion of the sitting president will significantly shape how the ROK chooses to respond. A left-wing administration might be inclined to reach an early and very disadvantageous political settlement with the North that is likely to lead ultimately to reunification under North Korean terms. This is only a hypothetical scenario,

but one that cannot be discounted as pure fantasy. Hence, how President Moon copes with North Korean nuclear and missile threats, as well as intensifying pressures from China and to a far lesser degree Russia, will be an extremely important benchmark in forging a new national security paradigm premised on a bipartisan political consensus, depoliticized intelligence estimates about North Korea, and strong bipartisan support for sustaining the alliance with the United States.

Political forces will become as important as military campaigns and operations because of China's growing anti-access/area-denial capabilities in and around the Korean Peninsula. Chinese intervention in the Korean War saved Kim Il-sung from certain defeat. While the circumstances in 2017 are fundamentally different from those in 1950, the fact that China's military power, strategic and tactical intelligence, and ability to project power more accurately have never been greater means that the United States and the ROK, as well as Japan, must be prepared for varying degrees of Chinese intervention—political and military—in Korean contingencies. Regardless of the level of trade between South Korea and China and Beijing's greater linkages with the international system, China's growing military power and unilateral policies suggest that managing the China factor will become as important over the next decade as addressing North Korea's multiple threats.

Ever since North Korea acquired nuclear weapons, the prevailing view in South Korea, the United States, and Japan is that China is the only power that can exercise the leverage needed to convince North Korea to roll back and even give up its nuclear program. This is arguably the biggest fallacy in the North Korean nuclear saga. Even though Beijing pays lip service to UN-mandated sanctions and considers Pyongyang to be a major nuisance, such a perception misunderstands what North Korea really means to China: a nuclearized ally that constrains U.S. strategy and force postures in Northeast Asia and the East China Sea, while enabling the PLA to modernize its forces with greater resources, acumen, and technological prowess than ever before. It has become fashionable to characterize North Korea as a strategic liability for Beijing, but given the immense power gap between China and North Korea and the latter's critical economic, political, and even military dependence on China, North Korea is a strategic asset rather than a liability in the context of China's grand strategy in the early 21st century.

The most important dilemma confronting the United States' Asian allies, including South Korea, is how to preserve their growing and irreversible economic ties with China while maintaining robust military alliances with the United States. This dilemma will become increasingly prominent in the conduct of Seoul's, Tokyo's, and Canberra's balancing policies between the

United States and China. In the case of South Korea, Seoul's leverage vis-à-vis Beijing is very limited. ROK forces are geared almost wholly against North Korean threats, but as PLA capabilities continue to grow, South Korea must consider Chinese military operations either along the Sino–North Korean border or in South Korean waters to deter U.S. and ROK forces. Politically, Seoul's ability to influence Beijing's policies is constrained given China's much more aggressive political attacks on South Korea. The only way that South Korea can maintain leverage against China is by enhancing its alliance with the United States; deepening security cooperation with Japan; strengthening trilateral intelligence and military coordination among the United States, South Korea, and Japan; and jointly responding to North Korea's nuclear and WMD capabilities.

Policy Ramifications

There are numerous policy implications for the ROK and the United States from this analysis. For the first time since the two Koreas and the People's Republic of China were founded in 1948 and 1949, all armed forces on and around the peninsula—South and North Korea, China, Japan, and the United States—are modern, combat-ready, and technologically advanced, albeit with unique force structures. One of the key lessons that can be derived from such a configuration of military power in Northeast Asia is that political responses and operational tempos will face intense pressure under circumstances of limited and accurate real-time intelligence. In sum, five policy implications in particular should receive greater attention from South Korea and the United States.

First, the ROK government must narrow the gaps and inconsistencies between its overarching strategic objective of peaceful unification and the reality of a much more volatile path toward a unified Korea. A negotiated peace settlement leading to a unified Korean government is the most optimal outcome, but it is also the most unrealistic. Both sides have maintained totally different political systems for nearly seven decades, and given the depth of mistrust and North Korea's central goal of reunifying the peninsula under its own terms, South Korea cannot but prepare for nonlinear transitions on the path toward unification. Moreover, South Korea should reconfigure civil-military relations in order to maximize favorable outcomes during potential periods of unparalleled political uncertainties, simultaneous North Korean attacks, and Chinese military intervention.

Second, it is imperative that the South Korean National Assembly and the major political parties jointly create a “national security committee” that will help build a bipartisan foundation to address the threats

confronting South Korea. The stakes are far too high for the country's political parties and their leaders to play political football over critical national security issues. Both the conservative and liberal parties must assume equal responsibility for the heretofore negative effects of putting their personal and party interests above existential national security interests. Although in any future scenario involving North Korea's employment of even "limited" nuclear attacks on South Korea, the government in power must assume primary responsibility, no major political party can run away from the legacy of decades of bitter internecine political battles that led to systematic politicization and weakened national security resolve. All major parties on the left and the right should agree on a joint defense modernization program to minimize budget battles in the National Assembly. It is also critical for the political parties to ensure that intelligence assessments are not politically biased.

Third, reverting wartime OPCON to the ROK, modernizing C4ISR and counter-asymmetrical assets, increasing the military budget, and implementing structural military reforms are important factors in augmenting the ROK military's warfighting capabilities. Yet greater attention must be paid to how civilian and military leaders will effectively respond to extremely volatile nonlinear operations. Otherwise, the ROK's ability to chart a path toward unification or respond effectively to simultaneous military crises will be denigrated, perhaps beyond repair.

Fourth, not only must the United States consider the North Korean nuclear threat as the most important security threat in the world, but it also must devote the requisite military, diplomatic, and political resources to ensuring the credibility of U.S. extended deterrence to South Korea and Japan. The worst possible outcome in the United States' East Asian alliances is if Seoul and Tokyo begin to believe that the U.S. security commitment is waning just as North Korea's nuclear threats cross new thresholds and China exercises its military muscle. Seoul and Tokyo are two of the most responsible allies in assuming common defense costs, and allegations of free riding from the highest levels of the U.S. government must stop. South Korea and Japan are critical linchpins that help shore up the U.S. military presence in East Asia, as well as being powerful economies with deep trade ties with the United States and democracies that share universal values. Denigrating these alliances will only deepen mistrust of the U.S. administration at a time when mutual trust is most needed.

Fifth, fostering greater trilateral security, defense, and intelligence cooperation among the United States, South Korea, and Japan will be an ongoing process. Deeply embedded historical memories in South Korea and just as strong historical perceptions in Japan have hindered Korean-Japanese

relations and trilateral cooperation. There is unfortunately no silver bullet for resolving these outstanding issues. But Japan is not South Korea's major adversary, nor is South Korea (or a unified Korea under South Korean leadership) a major threat to Japan. South Koreans fear a remilitarized Japan based on their colonial experience, but they should understand that Japan has been a strong democracy in the post-World War II era and that Japanese support for the unification of the peninsula will be critical. Japan, for its part, must understand that outstanding historical wounds can only begin to truly heal if it assumes greater responsibility for its prewar atrocities. Domestic politics and public opinion play outsized roles in how South Korea and Japan deal with each other, but both countries now face existential security threats. Seoul and Tokyo need visionary and bold leadership to ameliorate and incrementally resolve their historical disputes and to strengthen bilateral security and defense ties.