

# CALM BEFORE THE STORM?

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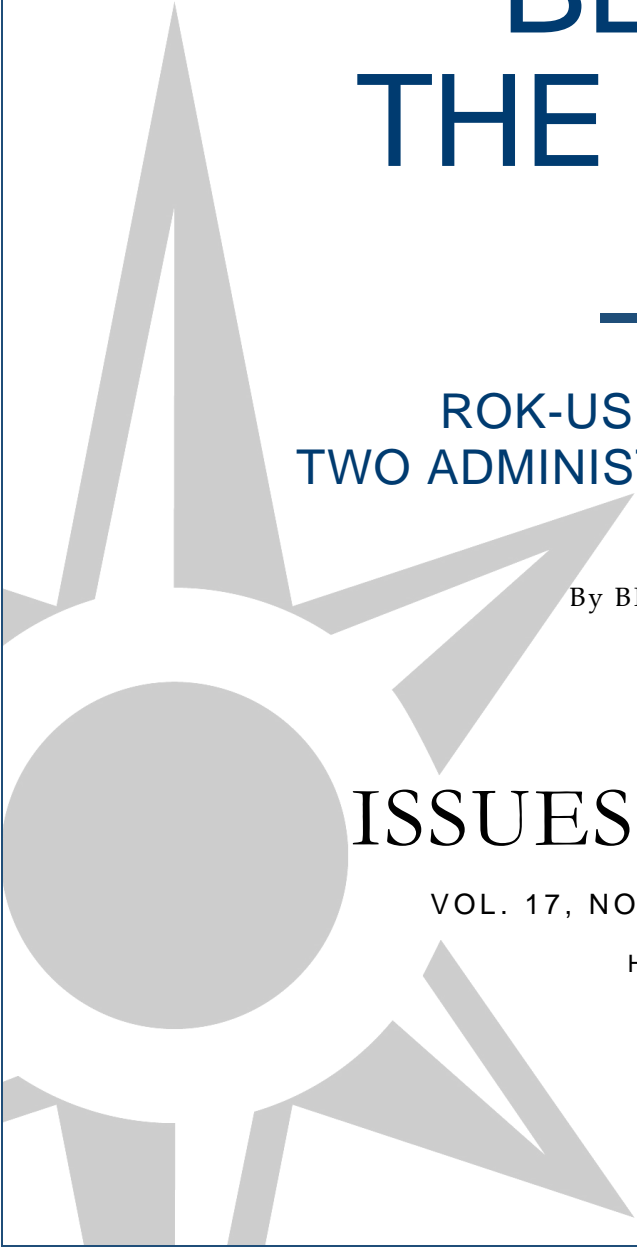
ROK-US RELATIONS AS  
TWO ADMINISTRATIONS SETTLE IN

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Northeast Asian History Foundation (NAHF) is a government-affiliated organization established in 2006. NAHF seeks to contribute to peace and prosperity in Northeast Asia by clarifying historical facts in Northeast Asia that are often misinterpreted and misrepresented. To achieve this goal, the NAHF focuses on conducting long-term and comprehensive research on Northeast Asian history, establishing systematic and strategic policies, and supporting promotion and education activities. The particular research focuses of the NAHF are Korea-China relations, Korea-Japan relations, and Dokdo-related issues.



Based in Honolulu, the Pacific Forum CSIS operates as the autonomous Asia-Pacific arm of the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, DC. The Forum's programs encompass current and emerging political, security, economic, business, and oceans policy issues through analysis and dialogue undertaken with the region's leaders in the academic, government, and corporate areas. Founded in 1975, it collaborates with a broad network of research institutes from around the Pacific Rim, drawing on Asian perspectives and disseminating project findings and recommendations to opinion leaders, governments, and members of the public throughout the region.

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## Executive Summary

The 2016 elections of US President Donald Trump and ROK President Moon Jae-in provide a unique opportunity to assess the state of the US-ROK alliance. To promote a better understanding of areas of conflict and opportunities for cooperation, the Northeast Asian History Foundation (NAHF) and the Pacific Forum CSIS convened in June 2017 the second iteration of a workshop on the interplay of historical and current events in the US-ROK bilateral relationship. Participants discussed changing political dynamics in each country, the significance of populist and nationalist movements, and the impact of those trends and the broader Northeast Asia security environment on the US-ROK alliance. While there are good reasons to be confident, there are equal if not more compelling reasons to be concerned. As always, alliance management is a must.

The political forces that brought about the rise of Trump and Moon are, on the surface, similar. Both tapped into voters' discontent with the status quo, whether it be disillusionment in the aftermath of Park Geun-hye's corruption scandals or the economic discontent of voters in the US who felt they were ignored by the political elite. But these political forces led to very different results – a conservative in the White House and a progressive in the Blue House – and those differences could produce conflict, particularly in regard to North Korea policy.

Mixed messages from both administrations have led to some uncertainty and diminishing confidence; a divergence in policies in Washington and Seoul could undermine efforts to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula. Skillful diplomacy is needed to keep both countries moving in the same direction. Public opinion may make this difficult, however, as anti-North Korean sentiment has been growing in the US while progressives in the ROK may call for increased engagement.

Populist movements in both countries have increased nationalism, but that phenomenon must be appraised accurately. In the United States, populism has assumed protectionist characteristics and created uncertainty about international commitments, while in Korea it has not taken on anti-US characteristics. Within the US-ROK context, ROK nationalism aims at greater autonomy within the security partnership. There is, however, concern about South Korean nationalism in regard to Japan: it is unclear if the Moon administration will seek short-term political gains by playing on this sentiment or will work instead to preserve the ROK-Japan relationship.

While there are points of friction, shared interests and the constraints of a security crisis on the Korean Peninsula leave the alliance “fundamentally strong.” As always, however, more work needs to be done if the alliance is to continue to serve each country in a changing security environment. Questions over Japanese rearmament, China's regional rise, North Korea's progress toward a working nuclear weapon, and the Trump administration's Asia policy have taken on increased visibility in 2017.

While there is reason to be confident about the US-ROK alliance in the event of a crisis on the Korean Peninsula, it is much more difficult to make assumptions once focus shifts to broader issues – for example, China's efforts to re-establish itself as a regional power. The

South Korean mindset of “a shrimp among whales” can serve as an excuse for inaction and reduce Seoul’s leverage when negotiating with Beijing. In this regard, the deployment of THAAD has proven to be a useful case study. Participants generally agreed, however, on a preference for a strong China over a weak China or, as one ROK participant suggested, “a strong but not an assertive China.”

Domestic constraints may lead to additional challenges. Uncertainty over the Trump administration’s willingness to commit political and financial resources to maintain US commitments in Asia, questions over alliance burden-sharing and calls in the ROK to develop indigenous defense capabilities, and a generational shift in the ROK away from unification as an end goal could breed tensions.

The US-ROK alliance is vital to the security of the Asia Pacific, and while its foundation remains strong, core issues can prove destabilizing if not managed correctly. It is more important than ever for policymakers and advocates to promote an accurate understanding across borders and to communicate the importance of the alliance to their respective publics.

**Northeast Asian History Foundation Workshop:  
Conference Report  
By Brad Glosserman  
Honolulu, June 23, 2017**

There is, in the first half of 2017, a curious contradiction at the heart of the US-ROK relationship. On one hand, there are tensions created by the two countries' leadership. An inexperienced and sometimes bellicose leader (US President Donald Trump) has questioned fundamental premises of the bilateral alliance. His partner is a progressive South Korean (President Moon Jae-in) whose approach to core issues – alliance burden sharing, relations with Japan, engagement with North Korea – sometimes clashes with those of the US. At the same time, however, structural factors push the two countries together. Thus, there is a belief that the North Korean threat sufficiently constraints both governments to limit their choices in dealing with Pyongyang. Moreover, even when instincts in the Blue House and White House diverge, as occurred during the Roh Moo-Hyun-George W. Bush years, the national interests of the two countries will force them to reach mutually satisfactory compromises.

How these tensions will be resolved is unclear. Given that both governments are still trying to find their balance and equilibrium, uncertainty is to be expected. In hopes of better understanding the forces at work on the bilateral relationship and channeling them in productive directions, the Northeast Asia History Foundation (NAHF) and the Pacific Forum CSIS, with support from the ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the consulate in Honolulu, convened a workshop on June 23, 2017 to examine the two countries' domestic and foreign policies, anticipate the trajectory of bilateral relations, and provide recommendations to steer their relationship in ways that benefit both countries and the entire region. While there are good reasons to be confident, there are equal if not more compelling reasons to be concerned. As always, alliance management is a must. In particular, both governments must do a better job communicating expectations and working together to address problems – real and imagined – before they occur.

### **Security Perspectives**

There are three distinctive features of the Northeast Asian security environment. The first is China's unmistakable ambition to realize "the China dream"<sup>1</sup> under President Xi Jinping, to assert its pre-eminence in Asia, and shake up the regional and global order. Many observers consider this to be a radical transformation of the Asian balance of power; for most Chinese, however, it is merely a return to the natural state of things and the re-rise of the Middle Kingdom. The second feature is the growing bellicosity of the North Korean regime and an inflated confidence (matched or abetted by its growing military capability). While all of North Korea's supreme leaders have been single-minded and aggressive in their pursuit of the national interest as they saw and defined it, many observers discern a qualitative difference in Kim Jong Un.<sup>2</sup> The third key component of the regional security picture is the coming to power of Moon Jae-in and Donald Trump, two leaders who are feared to be in the thrall of ideology or convictions that challenge pillars of their country's security policies; more

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<sup>1</sup> "Xi Jinping and the Chinese Dream," *The Economist*, May 4, 2013, at <https://www.economist.com/news/leaders/21577070-vision-chinas-new-president-should-serve-his-people-not-nationalist-state-xi-jinping>

<sup>2</sup> Lankov, Andrei. "Kim Jong Un is a Survivor, not a Madman" *Foreign Policy*, April 26, 2017, at <http://foreignpolicy.com/2017/04/26/kim-jong-un-is-a-survivor-not-a-madman/>

worrisome is the potential for a clash between their two visions. Historically minded observers, such as Keynote Speaker former Foreign Minister Han Sung Joo, note that “this is déjà vu all again,” pointing to the parallels (inexact, but compelling) between this moment and that of the Roh Moo-hyun-George W. Bush presidencies. Indeed, Moon’s tenure as Roh’s chief of staff and their close friendship compels many to see his presidency as an opportunity to validate Roh’s policies and implement them at last.<sup>3</sup>

Some of those same observers caution against taking the analogy too far, however. NAHF President Kim Hosup pointed out, for example, that Roh proved to be as committed to the security partnership as his conservative predecessors, strengthening relations with the United States and dispelling fears that his version of the Sunshine policy would come at the expense of the alliance with the US.<sup>4</sup> Our conference convened shortly before the first meeting of Presidents Moon and Trump and there were fears that history might repeat the disastrous first encounter between President Kim Dae Jung and President George W. Bush in 2001. But, the Moon-Trump summit went well,<sup>5</sup> and the memory of – and lessons learned from – that other summit is given credit for some of the success. The two men agreed on far more than they disagreed, presenting a united front on policy toward North Korea and showing little sign of discord. (Economic matters are a different story, however: US insistence on re-examining the Korea-US Free Trade Agreement (KORUS) appears to have caught Moon off guard, although those tensions have thus far been contained.<sup>6</sup> Given the domestic strains in each country and their origin in economic concerns, this could become an issue in the bilateral relationship.)

### **Political Dynamics in Washington and Seoul**

A genuine understanding of policy in both capitals demands an accurate assessment of the political dynamics at work in each country. That should not be too hard as similar forces are at work in each country. Both Moon and Trump were propelled into office by riding a wave of great public anger. South Koreans were dismayed and many felt betrayed that Moon’s predecessor Park Geun-hye, a woman once considered to be the mother of the country was in the thrall of a charlatan, distant and aloof from the public, and ultimately driven to self-enrichment.<sup>7</sup> Trump tapped a wellspring of indignation among voters who felt they were forgotten, ignored, and marginalized by a self-interested and self-serving political elite. Both sought to reverse the policies of their predecessors and reorient their capitals and in their governments, to ensure that the interests of their supporters were articulated and drove policy. Both men sought to communicate directly with those supporters and used new social media and friendly media outlets to paint the traditional media as adversarial. Similarly, upon taking office, both men have doubled down on their campaign messages, appealing to their “base” rather than reaching out to opponents to forge a broader consensus. Finally,

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<sup>3</sup> Seon-hyung, Lee, “Moon Jae-in’s Foreign Policy and Roh Moo-hyun’s Shadow,” *The Asan Forum*, June 29, 2017, at <http://www.theasanforum.org/moon-jae-ins-foreign-policy-roh-moo-hyuns-shadow/>

<sup>4</sup> “Moon Says Defense One of Two Important Pillars of Nation,” *Yonhap*, July 18, 2017, at <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2017/07/18/88/0301000000AEN20170718007600315F.html>

<sup>5</sup> Jae-soon, Chang, “Moon-Trump summit went better than expected: U.S. experts,” *The Korea Times*, July 6, 2017, at <http://www.koreatimesus.com/moon-trump-summit-better-than-expected-u-s-experts/>

<sup>6</sup> Ramirez, Elaine “South Korea Still Mum on US Trade Deal Renegotiation” *The Diplomat*, July 8, 2017, at <http://thediplomat.com/2017/07/south-korea-still-mum-on-us-trade-deal-renegotiation/>

<sup>7</sup> Cheng, Jonathan, “Former South Korean president Park Geun-hye is Arrested in Corruption Probe,” *The Wall Street Journal*, March 30, 2017, at <https://www.wsj.com/articles/former-south-korean-president-park-geun-hye-is-arrested-in-corruption-probe-1490898448>



economic concerns drove both candidates to reject pillars of conventional economic policy and wisdom: Moon sought to loosen the iron grip of the *chaebol* on South Korea,<sup>8</sup> while Trump challenged the US commitment to free and open trade and its stewardship of the liberal international order.<sup>9</sup> Both administrations will have considerable difficulties overcoming traditional thinking and the institutional order to realize their respective visions.

A key difference, notes Bruce Klingner of the Heritage Foundation, is that while the pendulum has swung in both countries, it has swung in two different directions. In South Korea, a progressive is back in the Blue House after a 10-year absence, while a conservative Republican (who occasionally styles himself a populist) has claimed the White House. This divergence is most visible in North Korea policy: Klingner argued that the two men “upended both countries’ policies toward North Korea, producing both uncertainty and concerns.” In fact, the two presidents have sent mixed messages on how they would deal with Pyongyang. While insisting that “strategic patience” is finished and implying that the military option has risen on the list of US alternatives,<sup>10</sup> Trump has also said that he would sit down and talk to Kim Jong Un.<sup>11</sup> Moon is thought to favor engagement – as did his progressive predecessors – but his rhetoric has stressed the importance of the alliance with the United States, emphasized the need for international consensus, and the necessity of sanctions. In both cases, however, there is little confidence in either president and fear that each will pursue policies that increase strains with his alliance partner.

While Americans tend to view Moon’s presidency through the lens of North-South engagement, his priorities are domestic: ending corruption and the systemic pressures that facilitate it, promoting transparency in government decision-making (as an end in itself and as a means to accomplish the previous objective), creating more jobs and establishing a new balance of power between labor and capital in South Korea. He is, explained Byoung Kwon-Sohn, “repeating and rebranding progressive administrations.” In foreign policy, he seeks “a more balanced policy,” one with less reliance on the US (while preserving the alliance) and Japan, while pursuing closer ties with China, India and ASEAN.

Participants warned that anti-North Korean sentiment was hardening in the United States: the death of student Otto Warmbier, which occurred just days before our meeting, and the relentless development of a missile capability that could threaten the United States, were pushing policymakers toward an even harder line against Pyongyang.<sup>12</sup> There was little appetite for engagement in Washington and a growing belief that sanctions should be tightened to further squeeze the North.<sup>13</sup> There is even pressure to return North Korea to the state sponsors of terrorism list. While Moon

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<sup>8</sup> Lee, Youkyung, “South Korea’s New Leader Moon Jae-in to Take on Chaebol,” *USA Today*, May 12, 2017, at <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/05/12/south-koreas-new-leader-moon-jae--take-chaebol-family-owned-empires/101586220/>

<sup>9</sup> “Donald Trump’s Victory Challenges the Global Liberal Order,” *Financial Times*, November 9, 2016, at <https://www.ft.com/content/a4669844-a643-11e6-8b69-02899e8bd9d1>

<sup>10</sup> Diamond, Jeremy, “Trump: U.S. Patience with the North Korea regime ‘is over’,” *CNN*, June 30, 2017, at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/30/politics/trump-moon-jae-in-rose-garden/index.html>

<sup>11</sup> Kopan, Tal, “Donald Trump Would Speak with North Korea’s Kim Jong Un,” *CNN*, May 18, 2017, at <http://www.cnn.com/2016/05/17/politics/donald-trump-kim-jong-un-north-korea/index.html>

<sup>12</sup> Frej, Willa, “Otto Warmbier Dies Days After Returning to the U.S.,” *Huffington Post*, June 20, 2017, at [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/otto-warmbier-dead\\_us\\_594834d4e4b0cddbb008ccff](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/otto-warmbier-dead_us_594834d4e4b0cddbb008ccff)

<sup>13</sup> Rogan, Josh, “Congress Wants Trump to Pressure North Korea, Rather Than U.S. Allies,” *The Washington Post*, May 1, 2017, at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/05/01/congress-wants-trump-to-pressure-north-korea-rather-than-u-s-allies/?utm\\_term=.9734daa63719](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/josh-rogin/wp/2017/05/01/congress-wants-trump-to-pressure-north-korea-rather-than-u-s-allies/?utm_term=.9734daa63719)

may believe that engagement should remain a viable option, the prevailing view among Americans was that “history will show that Washington reached out and Pyongyang slapped back.” South Korean participants warned, however, that the progressive base in South Korea wants Moon to try to reopen dialogue with the North – and, they reminded the group, the new president is sensitive to public opinion.<sup>14</sup>

The power of public opinion is evident on two other key issues in South Korea: relations with Japan and deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Aerial Defense (THAAD) antimissile system. The ROK public remains deeply suspicious of the deal struck with Japan in December 2015 that would “irrevocably settle” the Comfort Women issue between the two countries, with just over 21 percent of respondents approving of the deal in the June 2017 Genron NPO-East Asia Institute poll.<sup>15</sup> Moon has taken a page from Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo’s book and called for the separation of “historical” and security issues, and suggesting that his government would like to “re-examine” the agreement while insisting that he is not giving up on it. That is a fine line – as Abe discovered – but skepticism about the deal is an easy way for Moon to differentiate himself from his predecessor. There is no certainty about how Moon will resolve this issue, although there is a belief that security concerns will force his hand and oblige him to preserve a working relationship with Tokyo.

That outcome is increasingly likely given the pressure that China has applied to show its displeasure at the ROK decision to deploy the THAAD system.<sup>16</sup> The Beijing government has protested the move, arguing that it threatens China’s nuclear deterrent and has imposed economic sanctions against South Korea in response, antagonizing the public and squandering considerable goodwill.<sup>17</sup> While insisting that THAAD deployment will continue, Moon has called for an environmental impact survey of the THAAD deployment which will slow the process.<sup>18</sup> He justified that move in the name of transparency, arguing that the decision to deploy was rushed through by the Park administration, but he maintains that this is a delay not a reversal. While some ROK analysts argued that this was a shrewd way of demonstrating that the deployment was not his decision – and an assertion of Blue House prerogatives against a Ministry of Defense that withheld details of the deployment from the new administration – Americans cautioned that Moon must not suggest to its ally anything less than complete willingness to follow through with the deployment.<sup>19</sup>

## **Populism, Nationalism, and Globalization: Emerging Trends and their Implications**

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<sup>14</sup> Harris, Bryan, “US uneasy as South Korea’s Moon Jae-in tilts towards China,” *Financial Times*, June 9, 2017, at <https://www.ft.com/content/84be1794-4cc2-11e7-919a-1e14ce4af89b>

<sup>15</sup> “The Fifth Japan-South Korea Joint Public Opinion Poll,” *The Genron NPO*, July 20, 2017, at [http://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion\\_polls/archives/5363.html](http://www.genron-npo.net/en/opinion_polls/archives/5363.html)

<sup>16</sup> Hernandez, Javier, “South Korean Stores Feel China’s Wrath as U.S. Missile Defense System is Deployed,” *New York Times*, March 9, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/09/world/asia/china-lotte-thaad-south-korea.html>

<sup>17</sup> Jiyeon, Kim and Lee, John J, “Changing Tides: THAAD and Shifting Korean Opinion Towards the United States and China,” *ASAN Institute Issue Brief*, March 20, 2017, at <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/changing-tides-thaad-and-shifting-korean-public-opinion-toward-the-united-states-and-china/>

<sup>18</sup> “S. Korea to Conduct Extensive Environmental Survey of THAAD,” *The Korea Times*, July 28, 2017, at [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/07/205\\_233780.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2017/07/205_233780.html)

<sup>19</sup> Sang-Kun, Choe and Hanger, David, “After North Korea Test, South Korea Pushes to Build up its Own Missiles,” *New York Times*, July 29, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/29/world/asia/us-south-korea-north-korea-missile-test.html?mtrref=www.bing.com>

The Moon and Trump presidencies are the culmination of larger forces at work in each society. Trump in particular represents a populist trend that has manifested in the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom as well as a surge in rightwing, nationalist parties throughout Europe. This phenomenon is fueled in the West by growing dissatisfaction among the middle classes, triggered primarily by a sense of diminishing economic opportunities, along with resentment at immigrants. Growing inequality in the US (and elsewhere) is one of the most important sources of this sentiment.<sup>20</sup> This populism also finds expression in greater nationalism, which, in the US at least, has demanded more focus on problems at home and less attention to those beyond national borders. These trends crystalize among the public as a rejection of both globalism and pillars of the international economic order. Subtle differences exist, however, in the expression of these trends in the two countries.<sup>21</sup> While the Trump administration voices ever louder skepticism of a free and open trading system and greater readiness to adopt protectionist measures, Jung-kun Seo argued that South Koreans target specific institutions like the International Monetary Fund, rather than broad principles.

More alarming, however, is a tendency to weaponize policy differences. While ideological divisions have always run deep in South Korea, a similar trend is emerging in the US. In both countries, Seo warned the other party is no longer merely the opposition, but increasingly “a threat to the nation’s well-being.”

Especially troubling for some is South Korea’s growing nationalism vis-à-vis Japan. This is evident most immediately in Korean hostility to the Comfort Women agreement, but there are many enduring causes: territorial disputes, history textbooks, and the legacy of Japanese colonization of the Korean Peninsula. Seoul appears to be taking a page from Japan’s book as it tries a “two track” approach that separates history and security issues, but there are concerns that a key influence on Japanese thinking when the Abe government was “re-examining” history – an activist US government, committed to fostering cooperation between its two Northeast Asia allies – will not similarly shape deliberations in Seoul. Blame a US administration that is less inclined “to meddle” in issues that it considers of less immediate concern. Observers with a sense of history counter that bilateral relations between Seoul and Tokyo encounter frequent (if not regular) ups and downs and that the practical requirements of security cooperation will prevail over parochial domestic political concerns. They also note that there is considerable dissent within Japan from the Abe administration’s views on history. Since Japanese nationalism tends to be elite-led, much depends on the particular personalities of the Tokyo government. (This contrasts with nationalism in South Korea, which is more public-led – and therefore, ironically, more difficult to channel or corral.) The immediate question for ROK-Japan relations then is whether the Seoul government will indulge those nationalist inclinations for immediate political advantage, or will instead try to constrain them for fear of unleashing passions and policies that do permanent damage to the relationship with Japan.

The key, for Alexis Dudden, is an accurate understanding of Korean nationalism. The instinctive tendency to consider such nationalism anti-American is an inaccurate and outdated trope. While South Koreans rail against US heavy-handedness and seek a diminution in tensions with North

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<sup>20</sup> Hirsh, Michael, “Why the new nationalists are Taking Over,” *Politico*, June 27, 2016, at <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/06/nationalism-donald-trump-boris-johnson-brexit-foreign-policy-xenophobia-isolationism-213995>

<sup>21</sup> Fisher, Max, “When a Political Movement is Populist, or Isn’t,” *The New York Times*, May 10, 2017, at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/05/10/world/asia/populism-france-south-korea.html>

Korea, there is no rejection of the alliance; instead, Koreans want greater autonomy within that security partnership. Consistent with that analysis, large majorities in the ROK back both THAAD and engagement with North Korea.<sup>22,23</sup> It is remarkable and telling, Dudden noted, that throughout months of passionate protest against Park administration, the demonstrations never assumed an anti-US character. Grievances were directed against the South Korean government, not a proxy (the US), which would have been expected if there was significant anti-American sentiment.<sup>24</sup> As always, however, she warned that one incident could turn public opinion; the US must be vigilant to avoid giving those who seek to make the US an enemy a reason for rallying public opinion to them.

Similarly, Dudden explained, the progressives' call for engagement with the North is an attempt to empower South Koreans in the peninsular dispute and to ensure that they are the primary actors and agents in negotiations over what is, after all, their future. There is abiding skepticism in the South toward unification and a preference for living with Pyongyang – as long as the price is not too high. And Moon's domestic agenda demands a stable international environment to focus on and promote economic reforms. Again, relations with the North are key. For President Moon and his supporters, establishing peace is not appeasement but the means to a distinct political end – improved democracy in South Korea.

### **Challenges for Northeast Asia Security**

China's ambition to establish itself as the regional hegemon constitutes Asia's most important security challenge. China's re-emergence is a world historical event, not just because of the country's size and the formidable resources it can draw upon, but because it seeks to reshape Asian affairs to reflect its preferences and priorities. It aims to reorient the very system of regional relations, which has profound implications for virtually every country in Asia, and especially for those in Northeast Asia. As Denny Roy explained, particularly worrisome is the Chinese belief that their country has been victimized over the past 150 years and its actions are rationalized as long overdue correctives of historical injustices.<sup>25</sup> The readiness to take action has accelerated in the aftermath of the 2007-8 Global Financial Crisis, which convinced many Chinese that the US, their only real rival, was declining and unable to block or halt the reassertion of Chinese power and influence.<sup>26</sup>

South Koreans are bearing the brunt of this newfound sense of power, most especially in the THAAD dispute. Suk-hee Han deemed the test of wills between Seoul and Beijing “the inevitable consequence” of a rising China that seeks to keep North Korea as its client and extend its influence to the ROK. Dissatisfied with South Korea's refusal to bow to Chinese objections and abandon

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<sup>22</sup> “THAAD in the Korean Peninsula,” *ISDP Backgrounder*, November 2016, at <http://isdp.eu/publication/korea-thaad/>

<sup>23</sup> “Poll: Most South Koreans support inter-Korean dialogue” *UPI*, June 22, 2017, at [https://www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2017/06/22/Poll-Most-South-Koreans-support-inter-Korean-dialogue/8491498149424/](https://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2017/06/22/Poll-Most-South-Koreans-support-inter-Korean-dialogue/8491498149424/)

<sup>24</sup> Kafura, Craig, “Public Perceptions and U.S. Alliances in the Asia-Pacific,” *PacNet* #52, July 20, 2017, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/pacnet-52-public-perceptions-and-us-alliances-asia-pacific-0>

<sup>25</sup> Kaufman, Alison, “Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission Hearing on ‘China's Narratives Regarding National Security Policy’,” *USCC*, March 10, 2016, at <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/3.10.11Kaufman.pdf>

<sup>26</sup> Grant, Wyn and Wilson, Graham, “The Consequences of the Global Financial Crisis: The Rhetoric of Reform and Regulation,” *Oxford University Press*, September 2012, at <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/view/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199641987.001.0001/acprof-9780199641987-chapter-12>

deployment, China has used the substantial leverage it has as the ROK's number one trading partner to pressure Seoul. Two obstacles block this ambition: South Korean dignity and the US-ROK alliance, which shields Seoul from China.

There is uncertainty about South Korea's readiness to continue to defy Beijing, however.<sup>27</sup> The tactical decision by the previous ROK government to court China to get Beijing to moderate North Korean behavior prompted fears – exaggerated, say more discerning observers – that Seoul was loosening its ties to the alliance and was entering China's orbit.<sup>28</sup> While that fear proved premature, there are doubts about a similar outcome given Moon's progressive inclinations (and assumed suspicion of and hostility toward the US-ROK alliance). Han said that THAAD will prove a case study – for US relations with Asia, ROK foreign policy, and China's regional ambitions, warning that this could be another sign of Beijing's readiness to recreate the ancient Chinese tributary system in Asia. While one participant cautioned against drawing premature conclusions from the THAAD controversy, noting that it was the first real test of ROK-China relations since normalization, another speaker suggested avoiding the use of the “tributary” formula, fearing that it could inadvertently legitimize such ambitions.

Most disturbing, however is the South Korean logic and mindset. The Korean belief that it is “a shrimp among whales” minimizes its agency and provides a ready excuse for inaction or acquiescence to Chinese pressure. The observation that China has not employed similar pressure on Japan for Tokyo's decision to deploy missile defense systems is consistent with this logic. While some Korean participants warned that their country's sensitivity to Chinese concerns reduced Seoul's leverage in negotiations with Beijing, others saw a still more troubling flaw: a “blind spot” when it comes to recognizing the Chinese threat to the ROK. It is ironic, then, that virtually all participants agreed that a weaker China is a potentially greater security threat than a strong China; one ROK participant qualified that conclusion, however, noting that the world wanted “a strong but not an assertive China.”

The second regional security problem is the most obvious: a belligerent North Korea. This is a Cold War legacy that has not gotten easier to solve over time. The rivalry between the two Koreas should have ended long ago given the North's many manifest failures, but the regime's determination to survive and its commitment to acquiring a nuclear weapon capability to secure that objective has meant that the problem endures. Fortunately, the magnitude and immediacy of the North Korean threat have proven sufficient to override political issues that would otherwise prevent security cooperation to contain and defeat that challenge.<sup>29</sup> And, as a US participant noted, the limits on trilateral cooperation are imposed by the Blue House; the two militaries agree on the threat and the appropriate response. Unfortunately, those limits still constrain security cooperation off the Korean Peninsula. An ROK participant warned that “those problems aren't directly related to us and we can't afford to antagonize China.” Moreover, a majority of South Koreans worry more about war than North Korea itself: as an ROK participant reminded the group, it is impossible for even a conservative South Korean politician to say that “all options are on the table.”

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<sup>27</sup> Lee, Benjamin, “THAAD and the Sino-South Korean Strategic Dilemma,” *The Diplomat*, October 7, 2016, at <http://thediplomat.com/2016/10/thaad-and-the-sino-south-korean-strategic-dilemma/>

<sup>28</sup> Glosserman, Brad and Igata, Akira, “The ROK Adrift? Not Quite,” *PacNet* #84, December 9, 2015, at <https://www.csis.org/analysis/pacnet-84-rok-adrift-not-quite>

<sup>29</sup> “Japan, U.S., South Korea vow ‘maximum pressure’ on North Korea,” *The Japan Times*, July 8, 2017, at <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2017/07/08/national/japan-u-s-south-korea-vow-maximum-pressure-north-korea/#.WXqnArpFyUk>



A third key issue for the regional security environment – a problem for some and a boon for others – is Japan’s evolving security policy. Tokyo is recovering its confidence under Prime Minister Abe and its economy has regained its footing.<sup>30</sup> Recovery and revitalization are good for Japan and the ROK, opined one Korean participant. Yet while Americans seek a still more forward leaning posture from Japan, it is more common for South Koreans to be troubled by a more confident and assertive Japan, fearing that Tokyo might resume the expansionist policies that marked the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Tokyo’s security policies are evolving, and Abe has made considerable progress in lifting constraints on Japan’s military since returning to office in 2013. But, as most participants agreed, this trajectory remains evolutionary and important restraints persist.<sup>31</sup> As one American warned, South Korea should be more concerned about a Japanese decision to sit out a conflict on the Korean Peninsula, rather than one to intervene.

A final important factor in regional security affairs is the US White House. As was noted, Trump has challenged core principles of US foreign policy. While the articulation and implementation of policy have followed traditional lines – as evidenced by the visits of Secretaries Mattis and Tillerson to the region – there remain doubts about the president’s commitments to US alliances, given previous utterances.<sup>32</sup> His deal-making approach to foreign policy and a seeming focus on short-term gains (and the absence thus far of a coherent long-term strategic vision or strategy) compounds concerns. The Asian security order is founded upon US leadership and an alliance network that constitutes the sinews of the regional security architecture. It is unclear how much President Trump believes in either and is prepared to spend US capital to maintain them.

## **The ROK–US Alliance**

Despite the doubts, the alliance is considered strong today. Uncertainties in the security environment have created a convergence in outlook and shared interests between Seoul and Washington. In his assessment, Bill McKinney concluded that the “alliance remains sufficiently strong so long as we remain within an armistice-controlled North Korea-focused security environment limited to the Korean Peninsula.”

Look closely at that conclusion and areas of possible contention are quickly apparent. McKinney’s summary acknowledges the problems that the alliance has if it shifts its focus from the Korean Peninsula. This is a polite way of saying the two governments disagree on China. While some ROK defense planners and security experts believe their government needs to assume a more prominent regional security role, that is a minority view and there is no agreement even among advocates on what it means or how it would be realized. Then there is the issue of “armistice-controlled.” This raises the question of command and control arrangements, which in turn demands a rethinking of the appropriate sharing of burdens between the two allies, particularly as Seoul seeks more input into and say over alliance decision making. The debate over the transfer of operational control of

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<sup>30</sup> O’Brien, Matt, “Don’t Believe the Headlines About Japan’s Economy,” *The Washington Post*, November 9, 2015, at [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/work/wp/2015/11/19/dont-believe-the-headlines-about-japans-economy/?utm\\_term=.42a08f1dbf0c](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/work/wp/2015/11/19/dont-believe-the-headlines-about-japans-economy/?utm_term=.42a08f1dbf0c)

<sup>31</sup> Seig, Linda, “Japan PM Abe’s ‘Holy Grail’ of Revising Pacifist Constitution Increasingly Elusive,” *Reuters*, July 31, 2017, at <http://www.businessinsider.com/r-japan-pm-abes-holy-grail-of-revising-pacifist-constitution-increasingly-elusive-2017-7>

<sup>32</sup> Watson, Ivan and Boykoff, Pamela, “US Defense Chief: ‘Americans will do the right thing’ in Pacific,” *CNN*, June 3, 2017, at <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/03/asia/mattis-asia-pacific-security-conference/index.html>

wartime command (OpCon) is the most obvious manifestation of this tension.<sup>33</sup> While the transfer was agreed over a decade ago, actual transfer has been repeatedly delayed, the result of concerns about the signal it might send to Pyongyang, as well as worry about the US commitment to the ROK defense and the ROK readiness to assume the responsibility. The first concern is valid; the second two are not.

Costs are an always inflammatory element of the burden-sharing debate: the apportioning of financial contributions, ever an alliance issue, has taken on new urgency in the Trump administration. Financial questions assume still greater salience as the ROK military faces more difficult funding issues resulting from its defense reform and modernization plans.

If there is agreement on how to deal with the North in times of conflict – an assumption that may prove flimsy during a crisis – the previous discussions should make clear that there are potentially large differences in how the ROK and US governments seek to deal with Pyongyang during peacetime. Differences between the two allies are also likely to emerge when they contemplate intervention by third parties, such as China or Japan, during crises.

These concerns are distant. As McKinney observed, “changing security dynamics are causing cracks in the alliance’s foundation but none are yet serious enough to threaten its structural integrity.” Issues that might prove destabilizing include the call for an indigenous ROK nuclear capability – although US opinions are divided on whether that would prove to be an alliance breaker – along with the demand for the withdrawal of all US troops on the peninsula (although some Americans noted that even the US military is divided when asked about the desirability of that option). Several US participants noted that reversal of the decision to deploy THAAD could blossom into an existential crisis for the alliance, as would demand for immediate transfer of OpCon, consequences be damned.

One problem for the alliance is the interplay of ROK defense policy reform and alliance management. Hong Kyudok underscored the ROK desire to promote indigenous defense capabilities, which would (among other things) reduce the funds available to support alliance initiatives.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the desire to create a Korean missile defense program undercuts Seoul’s enthusiasm for deployment of the THAAD system. Calls for a recalibration of the respective weights of each of the ROK services is another domestic issue with implications for the alliance.

Just below the surface of the military debate is a larger and more substantial issue: the evolution of views regarding unification. Simply put, support for unification is flagging, with growing numbers of South Koreans, especially among the younger generations, questioning its desirability.<sup>35</sup> As younger Koreans (members of the Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders group) explained during our discussion, their generation tends to view unification through the prism of economics, not security, and they are increasingly disinclined to inconvenience themselves to pay for unification. They

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<sup>33</sup> Denney, Steven, “South Korean Politics Drive OpCon transfer,” *The Diplomat*, October 28, 2017, at <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/south-korean-politics-drive-opcon-transfer/>

<sup>34</sup> Bora, Kukil, “South Korea Seeks Indigenous Missile Defense System to Deal with North, Raises 2017 Defense Budget,” *International Business Times*, August 30, 2016, at <http://www.ibtimes.com/south-korea-seeks-indigenous-missile-defense-system-deal-north-raises-2017-defense-2409128>

<sup>35</sup> Jiyeon, Friedhoff, and Chungku, Euicheol, “South Korean Attitudes Toward North Korea and Reunification,” *ASAN Institute*, January 29, 2015, at [http://thediplomat.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/thediplomat\\_2015-01-29\\_13-53-09.pdf](http://thediplomat.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/thediplomat_2015-01-29_13-53-09.pdf)

distinguish their position from that of their elders by noting that they are more rational, and less committed (and connected) personally to a unified Korea.

As always, there was unanimity on the need for both governments to make the case for the alliance to their respective publics. Both countries need to better understand the continuing relevance and importance of the bilateral security partnership even at a time of changing regional security dynamics. Responsible policymakers and advocates will argue for the alliance today and for the future. In fact, that should not be a hard case to make. But, as some of our more distinguished and far-sighted (and older) participants pointed out, there are core issues that could unsettle and unravel the alliance if not handled correctly. There are always reasons to be concerned about the future of the ROK-US alliance but that is no reason to take this moment – and the problems that it portends – lightly.



## **Unpredictability Meets Uncertainty: Trump and Moon Policies Toward North Korea**

*by Bruce Klingner*

The elections of Donald Trump and Moon Jae-in as the presidents of the United States and South Korea have upended both countries' policies toward North Korea, producing both uncertainty and concerns. Despite having been in office for five months, Trump has yet to fill critical vacancies for policymakers covering Asia at a time when numerous threats and potential crises are growing.

Trump brags about his deal-making acumen as well as his unpredictability, which he claims increases his negotiating leverage. This may explain why his administration has issued conflicting signals on its approach to North Korea, including how willing Trump is to use military force to prevent Pyongyang from completing its development of an ICBM that could threaten the US homeland.

Senior US officials had to reassure allies unnerved by Trump's campaign comments calling into question his commitment to the post-World War II US foreign and security policy framework. These reassurances, however, have occasionally been undermined by subsequent comments or tweets by President Trump.

Moon Jae-in, a leftist candidate elected in a special election following the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, has yet to define his approach toward Pyongyang. This is understandable since his administration is only one month old and had no transition time, having to assume office immediately after the election.

However, uncertainty over which path Moon will take in his approach toward North Korea has caused concerns in Washington. On the one hand, Moon and some advisors underscore the importance of the alliance with the US, that now is the time for sanctions not dialogue, and the necessity of coordinated international consensus on North Korean policy.

But Moon and his appointees have also articulated a more unilateral approach, advocating "preemptive engagement" with Pyongyang, including behind the curtain negotiations with North Korea. These comments resurrect memories of Moon's two progressive predecessors who secretly negotiated summit meetings with North Korea, only notifying its ally less than 24 hours before the public announcement. If Moon were to return to the failed engagement policies of the past, it would put Seoul at odds with the international consensus on the need to punish Pyongyang for its repeated of the international community and repeated violations of UN resolutions and US laws. Moon's actions hindering the deployment of the THAAD missile defense system could cause significant strains in the bilateral relationship with Washington.

### **Catalyst for Change**

Trump and Moon were both elected because their electorates rejected the legacy of the incumbents. As such, both presidents represent a reversal of the political pendulum, though in opposite directions from each other. Both candidates rode a wave of anger to victory, capitalizing on discontent with the status quo. Bitter and divisive campaigns reflect electorates factionalized over policies and, more broadly, the future vision of their countries. Though Trump has a majority in

both houses of Congress, he faces severe challenges in his relations with the legislature and already faces an uphill battle in achieving policy successes.

As with most presidential elections, South Korean voters predominantly voted their pocketbooks. While the election featured the usual struggle between a conservative market-based growth strategy and liberal redistributionism, voters were driven in large part by a desire to end their nation's seemingly ingrained political corruption.

Moon currently enjoys strong approval ratings, in part because his open and transparent leadership style is appreciated by a populace fed-up with the reclusiveness and imperiousness of Park Geun-hye. Moon's conservative opponents are weakened by Park's impeachment but would capitalize on public dissent with Moon's policies if they are seen as too radical.

Both leaders have vowed to dismantle the domestic and foreign policies of their predecessor. Overcoming economic disparity was a predominant theme in both elections with Trump and Moon blaming not only the incumbent but entrenched interests and endemic corruption.

Foreign policy debates in each country reflected candidate and societal differences over how insular or internationalist their nation should be. While North Korea loomed larger in the South Korean election than the US, both Trump and Moon articulated an approach to Pyongyang that was at least declared to be significantly different from their predecessor.

How differently the pledged policy will be actually implemented, as well as whether the two presidents' vastly different North Korean policies will clash with each other, remains to be seen.

### **Differing Approaches to North Korea**

Discussions with US officials indicate five main components to Trump's policy toward North Korea.

First, an emphasis on "maximum pressure," going beyond the timid incrementalism of half-hearted sanctions that President Barack Obama pursued. While Obama talked a good game on sanctions, he only timidly and incrementally enforced US laws. US bureaucrats privately comment that they have long had lists of sanctionable entities but were prevented by senior Obama officials from targeting them. If Trump carries through on more vigorously applying existing legal authorities, including for secondary sanctions, to more fully implement US law, it would be the most striking difference between his and Obama's policies.

Second, The Trump administration will re-strengthen the US military to offset degradations in capabilities incurred from budget cuts during the last several years. Trump and the Republican Congress have vowed to increase the US defense budget. However, a Heritage Foundation study, *Index of U.S. Military Strength*, assesses a significant and sustained effort will be necessary to repair the damage done during the Obama administration.

Third, augment ballistic missile capabilities to better protect against the North Korean missile threat. This includes deploying the THAAD missile defense system to South Korea. The THAAD is better than any system that South Korea has, or will have, for decades. To *not* deploy the system would be

to knowingly capitulate to Chinese economic warfare and to put South Korea, and the US troops stationed there, at greater risk.

The Trump administration is also assessing additional funding for strategic missile defense programs that President Obama curtailed or cancelled.

Fourth, like its predecessors, the Trump administration will remain open to holding working-level diplomatic discussions with North Korean counterparts. However, North Korea has been reticent to engage in diplomacy. Pyongyang had severed the “New York Channel” last July, severing the last official communications link. Inter-Korean dialogue collapsed in December 2015 after both sides couldn’t even agree on an agenda – Pyongyang declared that inter-Korean relations were worse than ever before. And the regime literally doesn’t pick up the phone at the Joint Security Area in Panmunjom.

Fifth, the Trump administration will not return to formal negotiations, including the Six-Party Talks, as long as Pyongyang rejects the basic premise of those discussions which is the denuclearization of North Korea. While the door will remain open for diplomatic engagement, it will likely only be a secondary objective, due to North Korea’s recent provocative behavior and the international consensus to punish the regime for its refusal to abide by UN resolutions calling for the regime to denuclearize.

### **Getting Its House in Order**

The Trump administration’s Asia policy has been troubled by inconsistent statements that have caused uncertainty about the administration’s positions, objectives, and methods. The administration’s rollout of its North Korea policy review was hampered by differing depictions of its own willingness to impose secondary sanctions on China, preconditions for negotiating with Pyongyang, or conditions for pre-emptive military attack.

Confusing, contradictory signals from the US raise anxiety among its allies and could cause opponents to miscalculate and trigger crises. Moreover, the Trump administration’s intent to more fully implement US laws, including imposing secondary sanctions on Chinese violators, is now on hold pending actions from China to fulfill pledges it made regarding North Korea during the summit.

Since the US-China summit meeting, President Trump has heaped praise on Chinese President Xi Jinping for his perceived assistance on North Korea. Trump walked back a campaign promise, declaring, “Why would I call China a currency manipulator when they are working with us on the North Korean problem?” He also adopted a softer tone on Xi’s help with North Korea: “I believe he is trying very hard. ... He is a very good man, and I got to know him very well. ... I know he would like to be able to do something; perhaps it’s possible that he can’t.”

Trump even claimed that “nobody has ever seen such a positive response on our behalf from China.” But China has repeatedly assured successive US presidents of its resolve in pressuring North Korea, only to under-deliver every time.

### **Which Path Will Moon Choose?**

During the campaign, Moon tacked to the center on national security issues to gain conservative votes, but it remains uncertain how he will actually implement his foreign and security policies. Moon previously served as chief of staff to President Roh Moo-hyun, whose term was marred by tense relations with Washington over policy differences on North Korea, as well as Roh's demand for more autonomy in the alliance.

Moon has described himself as "America's friend" and said that the US alliance is the "most important foundation for our diplomacy and national security."

Yet Moon also advocates being able to "say no to the Americans," strengthening South Korea's independent defense capabilities, and regaining wartime operational control of South Korean military forces from the United States. Currently, control of South Korean military forces will be turned over to the UN commander (always a US general) when the two presidents decide a state of war exists. He called for South Korea to "take the lead" on Korean matters rather than taking a back seat as the US and China discuss North Korean policy.

Moon is no doubt looking to resurrect many of Roh's liberal policies, yet North Korea's increased belligerence since Roh's presidency may constrain how vigorously he pursues unconditional engagement with Pyongyang.

Some South Korean experts believe North Korea's hostile actions in recent years – its development and testing of nuclear weapons, its attacks on South Korea in 2010, and its recent assassination of North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un's half brother – have erected a "wall" that will prevent Moon from moving too far left. Other pundits reject that out of hand, saying that "if a wall exists, Moon will jump over it or dig under it so he can be as far left as Roh."

While Moon originally opposed the US deployment of the THAAD (Terminal High Altitude Area Defense) missile defense system in South Korea, he shifted during the campaign to sitting on the fence, saying he was "open to both possibilities" (of deploying or withdrawing THAAD) and would "pass the issue to the next government." After entering office, he directed that completing deployment of the THAAD system should await an environmental impact assessment which could take 1-2 years. Doing so increases the risks from North Korean nuclear, chemical, and biological attack to South Korean citizens as well as the 28,500 American sons and daughters put in harm's way to defend South Korea.

Moon favors maintaining South Korea's own missile defense system independently from the broader allied network due largely to nationalist resistance to more closely integrating its security system with that of Japan. This has also constrained signing of a General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) with Tokyo which would allow for more effective sharing of intelligence and improving allied deterrence and defense against the common North Korean security threat.

Moon has criticized his predecessors and Washington, D.C., for an overreliance on sanctions and pressure tactics. Instead, he advocates a return to the unconditional engagement policies of previous liberal presidents. Moon will more eagerly engage with and offer economic inducements to North Korea at a time when the United States and international community are more rigorously implementing UN sanctions and enforcing US law.

Moon advocates reopening the Kaesong joint economic venture with North Korea as part of broader economic largesse to Pyongyang. Kaesong was a South Korean attempt to provide massive economic benefits in order to induce North Korea to implement economic and political reform and moderate its foreign policy. The economic experiment failed. Doing so, however, would likely be a violation of United Nations Security Council resolutions. UN Resolution 2094 (paragraphs 11-15) requires UN member states to prevent financial services that could contribute to North Korea's nuclear and missile programs. UN Resolution 2321 (paragraph 32) goes even further in restricting economic ventures with North Korea, prohibiting any financial support to Pyongyang unless it is specifically approved in advance by the UN 1718 Committee.

Moon sees economic engagement with North Korea as a means of bringing the north back to the negotiating table and eventually achieving "economic unification" of the two Koreas. Rather than making North Korea make the first concession to resume denuclearization negotiations, he said he would "try to make both North Korea and the US act simultaneously." But there is little utility to such negotiations as long as Pyongyang rejects their core premise, which is abandonment of its nuclear weapons and programs. The best way to engage in negotiations is after a comprehensive, rigorous, and sustained international pressure strategy, including enforcement of US laws.

Everything that is being proposed today as the basis for future negotiations with North Korea has already been offered, tried, and failed. It is a fool's errand to resume Six-Party Talks as long as North Korea rejects the basic objective of those negotiations. It is just as meaningless to pursue a freeze when Pyongyang shows no intention of giving up its nuclear arsenal. Pyongyang may be willing to talk—but not about the topic of paramount US concern: the denuclearization required by UN resolutions and to which Pyongyang repeatedly committed and did not fulfill.

If the US and South Korea end up pursuing divergent policies, it may undermine efforts to pressure Pyongyang and will increase the potential for friction within the U.S.-South Korea alliance. Keeping Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo all pulling in the same direction to address common threats will require deft diplomacy as Moon and Trump fill their administrations and formulate policies. The path ahead could be rough, but North Korea and China will undoubtedly act in their typical confrontational way, which will remind South Korea of who its true friend and protector is.

Pyongyang has conducted several missile launches since Moon's inauguration. Moon "strongly condemn[ed]" the missile launch and declared that while "South Korea remains open to the possibility of dialogue with North Korea, it is only possible when North Korea shows a change in attitude." Moon now faces a dilemma on pursuing his intended engagement toward North Korea or defending UN resolutions. While his initial response appears pragmatic, there are concerns in Washington that he will return to the one-sided provision of economic largesse to Pyongyang without first demanding compliance with U.N. resolutions or the regime's previous pledges to denuclearize.

The regime's willingness to violate UN resolutions on Moon's watch shows that the regime will not act any more benevolently to Moon than to his conservative predecessors. In 2009, Pyongyang similarly disabused President Barack Obama of his view that the regime would act differently than it had under President George W. Bush. This shows that North Korean intransigence and provocations are to blame for diplomatic stalemates rather than US or South Korean policies.



## **“Populism, Nationalism, and Globalization: Emerging Trends and Their Significance”** *by Alexis Dudden*

In a wonderful recent essay, political scientist Karoline Postal-Vinay evokes walls as the central metaphor of our current historical moment: “Walls,” she writes, “Old and new, disassembled or reassembled – constitute a pictorial trope of how governments and societies have been making sense of global togetherness since the end of the Cold War.”<sup>36</sup>

During the past year or so, extremist social dividers have achieved prominence throughout the world. Collectively and conceptually, these people can be understood as the hard and fast wall builders and are best witnessed in forms ranging from Brexiteers, Marie Le-Pen, and Donald Trump to Turkey’s Erdogan and Japan’s Abe Shinzo. Notwithstanding, in the past few months alone, there has been significant pushback to this “wall it off”/“anti-everything” trend – making both wall building and tearing down equally constitutive of this historical juncture. Instances such as Emmanuel Macron’s victory that will keep France in Europe, Jeremy Corbyn’s brake slam on an inward-turning United Kingdom despite the recent series of awful attacks within England, and Moon Jae-in’s overwhelming victory in South Korea that seeks at once to dismantle the nation’s internally entrenched inequality as well as to engage South Korea with North Korea make clear that the politics of rigid fortification is not a given, and, in fact, could crumble away under the weight of its own a-historicity and economic impossibility.

For its part, the United States of Donald Trump has fostered a more openly fractious America than any in recent memory – largely because of imaginary walls that some would make real. Thumping away on the narrow-minded populist drum that helped elect him in November 2016, President Trump fans policies of anti-immigration/anti-immigrant/anti-people-of-any-color-other-than white regardless of the anti-populist policy proposals manifest in his health care and tax restructuring plans. Moreover, President Trump’s continued call for a permanent – and tall – wall along the Mexican border is as impractical and undesirable as his proposed Muslim travel ban. Nonetheless, he and his supporters speak of the wall’s existence as if it will be a reality any day now, with some creating miniature versions in their towns and schools and behaving as if these fanciful creations give them the legal right to act with the sort of impunity Trump’s vision of “Fortress America” summons.

By contrast, President Moon Jae-in’s hoped-for South Korea reveals a diametrically opposed approach to the common global moment. Still lacking a catchy name, the Moon administration has already sought to punch holes in the world’s most dangerous, actually existing wall: the border between South and North Korea. President Moon has committed a delegation to travel to Pyongyang to commemorate the June 15 accord; and, moreover, his administration has invited North Korean athletes and government representatives to attend the February 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, declaring that they can drive overland to travel there should they wish.

With these two images in mind – an unattainable, internally-turning America on the one hand and a South Korea seeking to overhaul its domestic society and to reengage with North Korea on the

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<sup>36</sup> Karoline Postal-Vinay, “The Global Rightist Turn, Nationalism and Japan,” *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol. 15, Issue 10, May 15, 2017.

other hand – it becomes possible to see how broader forces of nationalism and populism are revealing themselves in different ways in each society, with very different policy choices in the air.

### Populism That Isn't Populist

First, it is important to understand upfront that what is going on in South Korea right now vis a vis Seoul's desired shifts in North Korean policy is decidedly *not* anti-American in tenor; rather, it is a tangible expression of the so-called "people's power" that impeached President Park Geun-hye and swept President Moon into office on May 9, 2017. This impetus' chief concerns lie with domestic issues, yet its support for a differently balanced policy toward the North is at once aware of the reality of the security crisis surrounding the Korean Peninsula – there is very little if any hint of an open embrace for a late 1990s/early 2000s style imagined unification, and really none of it among people under 40, who, like President Moon himself, are roundly supportive of international sanctions that target the Kim dynasty in the North. At the same time, it is also aware that approaching Pyongyang through humanitarian assistance packages and aid via monitored openings recognizes the signal reality that the entirely "walled-off" approach would deny: that there are 22 million people living in North Korea and only through them can a true shift in North Korean society occur. Otherwise, the outcome of the current Korean moment is a bloodbath, which South Koreans more than any others refuse to accept.

Moreover, South Korea's "people's power" is substantially different from the populism that stormed the United States last November to help elect Donald Trump. To be sure, both waves are riding tangible, common economic factors: youth unemployment in South Korea is above 8 percent, and income inequality in the United States is nearing levels not seen since the Great Depression. Nonetheless, the base racism, sexism, xenophobia, and vituperative hate that accompanied Donald Trump's victory, and which permeates so much of his presidency thus far – most clearly measured by the spike in racially charged attacks since his inauguration – is entirely absent from Moon Jae-in's victory. Moon's short-sightedness on LGBTQ issues notwithstanding, his presidency is predicated on creating a more open and egalitarian South Korea in which everyone will have a greater chance to access its privileges. This South Korea, too, seeks more autonomy in North Korean policy while not walking blindly through the heavily armed border.<sup>37</sup>

### History in the Mix

There is a lot of discussion in East Asia about the so-called "history problems" that stem from the legacies of Japan's era of imperial rule and total war in the Asia-Pacific region. It is not, however, a term that has currency in the American context. That said, the United States is no different insofar as its history informs its present, meaning that the United States, too, very much has critical "history problems" of its own. Arguably, Americans' most profound area of collective denial fueled the populist wave that rode Donald Trump into office: the nation's systemic racism that results from the *still* un-reconciled legacies of African-American slavery.<sup>38</sup> In immeasurable and measurable ways, supporters of America's new president and the president himself make abundantly clear that

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<sup>37</sup> This is not an entirely new phenomenon. See David Kang and Jiun Bang, "The Pursuit of Autonomy and South Korea's Atypical Strategic Culture," in Ashley J. Tellis, et al., *Strategic Asia 2016-2017: Understanding Strategic Cultures in the Asia-Pacific* (Washington: The National Bureau of Asian Research, 2016).

<sup>38</sup> See Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic*, June 2014.



negating the fact of President Obama is their only goal for the United States.<sup>39</sup> Ironically, however, such overtly, racially charged governance has so little place in US foreign relations that Team Trump continues to make clear that it has no idea what to do with itself outside the country's integral 48-state borders – with Attorney General Jeff Sessions' Hawaii gaffe being singularly revealing of Washington's current understanding of the nation and its place in the world.

With the terrible exception of Trump's removal of the United States from the Paris Accord, on a daily basis outside the United States President Trump's uninformed bluster intended to play to his populist base is swiftly followed by various different clean-up squads doing damage control to reassure allies that in fact the United States values NATO, for example, or understands that South Korea is not part of China. Taken together, now six months into office, on a world stage this dynamic plays out in terms of policy that is fairly consistent with the Obama-era (and likely would have continued under a Hillary Clinton administration) – something especially felt in East Asia. In short, the internal and fearful populism that elected Donald Trump has made the United States dangerous and divided at home and a fool on the international stage – which arguably the world does not want but apparently 36 percent of Americans are comfortable with. In short, at this stage, we will have to wait and see how the volatile domestic combinations will affect US policy abroad.

Meanwhile, in South Korea, a different kind of “history problems” excited the candlelight revolution that brought about former President Park Geun-hye's impeachment and the early election in May 2017 of Moon Jae-in: systemic inequality in South Korean society. In clear ways, the lived memory and ongoing reality of social inequality in South Korea turned into a truly historical event. In a country still haunted by its recent past of violent domestic upheaval, including internationally famous moments such as the 1980 Gwangju uprising and also the less televised but constantly occurring democracy demonstrations from 1960 through the mid-1990s, entirely non-violent mass protests resulted in a parliamentary motion to impeach a democratically elected president. The date of the landslide impeachment vote, Dec. 9, 2016, became immediately historicized as the “Candlelight Revolution,” and sprang from the collective realization that if you were not richly connected you *still* could not “get in” to society; worse, your kids could not “get in” no matter how hard you worked.

Informed by South Koreans' memory of the tear gas and police truncheons that defined much of their country's post-Korean War era of division, the 2016-2017 demonstrations were “pro-Korean” and in the present tense – no burning of US flags and scant denunciation of Japanese imperialism. Small children routinely participated with their parents and secondary school students in uniform willingly stated their names to television cameras to explain that they were on the streets to make it possible for everyone to have a chance in South Korea. Equally important to younger participants especially were memories of sacrifice for the 1997 Asian financial crisis for which their generation still pays. Noticeably, of the more popular protest placards read, “Toward A Country of Equal Opportunity,” and once victory was secured signs read, “This Kind of Country; This Kind of Justice.”

President Moon's desired policy reboot to North Korea is of course constrained not simply by the

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<sup>39</sup> See Kevin Liptak's excellent analysis on CNN, “Trump's Strain With Obama Marks Departure From Presidential Fraternity,” June 11, 2017; on cnn.com: <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/10/politics/donald-trump-obama-presidents-club/index.html>

four superpowers which surround him, but also most importantly North Korea's Kim Jong-Un, who appears to revel in playing with fire more than his father or grandfather – and with far greater consequences for his gamble in the offing.

Therefore, while the possibilities for redirection with North Korea remain on hold, it is noticeable that Moon is making good on a host of promises to the “people power” movement. His first act was the creation of a task force on job creation, and his second – largely symbolic – the negation of deposed President Park Geun-hye's attempt to create a state-sponsored history textbook that at once glorified her father's reign and downplayed the accomplishment of South Korean democracy itself. In short, President Moon is making clear a desire to bring a newly defined South Korea into being, which will take clearest expression in the coming months as legislators work to write a new constitution that Moon has called for by June 2018.

And this brings us briefly in closing here to Japan, the other key US ally in the region, where a more Trumpian form of national branding and identity definition is very much in full swing. Like South Korea, Japan, too, will be embroiled in the coming months in debates over constitutional revision, which more than anything else will likely bring into relief the profoundly divided nature of Japanese society these days. Noticeably, Japan's issues resonate with global concerns: will a tightly inscribed understanding of the nation be carved into new constitutional and legislative provisions – some such as the December 2014 Secrecy Law and the unfolding Anti-Conspiracy Legislation are already in play – or will a more cosmopolitan Japan re-emerge and re-engage with East Asia in constructive ways more consistent with its geography and economic needs?

To be sure, North Korea's provocative fondness for missile testing does nothing but fan the fires of those who would build imaginary walls to protect themselves. Yet history has shown throughout that no Iron Dome approach works forever. Intelligent engagement is truly the only secure path forward, and it is in everyone's interest to find those in each society with the courage to find holes in the wall.

## Four Contemporary Challenges Complicated by History

*by Denny Roy*

The Asia-Pacific strategic environment in 2017 is roiled by four challenges, each of which represents the culmination of slowly-incubating forces that have now broken through to high visibility. These include Japan's movement back toward the status of a militarily "normal" country, China's emergence as a regional great power, North Korea's progress toward deploying a working nuclear missile, and the Trump presidency in the United States. Each of these challenges has important historical ramifications.

### Japanese "rearmament"

Japan has very gradually emerged from beneath many of the restrictions imposed on its military capabilities and posture after World War II. At some point Japan will have moved far enough in this process that observers will stop describing Japan as "rearming" or "pacifist." With the recent moves by the Abe government, that point appears to be in the near rather than the distant future. Since Abe began his second stint as prime minister in 2012, Japan has seen the establishment of a National Security Council, the passage of a state secrets law, removal of the self-imposed ban on Japan exporting weapons, disavowal of the principle limiting Japan's military spending to 1 percent of GDP, and most importantly, implementation of legislation that allows for collective self-defense, meaning Japan can militarily assist an ally or an important non-ally even if Japan itself is not directly under attack.

In April 2017, two Japanese destroyers joined the US aircraft carrier strike group led by the *Carl Vinson*, and Japanese ASDF aircraft exercised with F-18s from the *Vinson*. This was tantamount to a joint US-Japan cold combat deployment because the US government had characterized the *Vinson* group's deployment to the northwest Pacific as a response to North Korean missile launches, even hinting at a possible US military attack that might involve the *Vinson* group.<sup>[1]</sup>

Japanese society appears to be moving more slowly than the Japanese government toward closing the "pacifist" era. With his Liberal Democratic Party-Komeito coalition enjoying a two-thirds majority in the Diet, Abe said in April 2017 he planned to seek a revision of Article 9 of the Japanese constitution. Rather than changing the existing two paragraphs, Abe said, he favored adding a third paragraph that would constitutionally recognize the Japan Self Defense Force (JSDF) as the military force charged with defending Japan's national security. Taken literally, Abe's idea would simply make official the long-established fact that the JSDF constitutes Japan's national armed forces. The literal wording of Article 9, however, has always been secondary to interpretation and intent. Consequently, Abe's idea encountered significant opposition. A majority of Japanese like the constitution and resist the notion of changing it on general principle. Furthermore, many Japanese suspect Abe's motives for changing it go beyond merely codifying the existence of the JSDF, given Abe's well-known support for conservative revisionism. An *Asahi Shimbun* editorial, for example, argued that Abe's aim was "dangerous" because the fundamental principles in the constitution had allowed Japan to achieve peace and wealth, and changing it represented a desire to "negate the path pursued by postwar Japan."<sup>[2]</sup>

Nevertheless, if the external situation called for it, Japan's people could decide to abandon this seemingly entrenched anti-militarism for another approach they believe would better serve their

fundamental national interests. Pacifism is a principle. Anti-militarism, on the other hand, has always been a policy. Foreign policies reflect a country's assessment of its best chances for achieving the goals all countries have, which are security and prosperity. In the world and regional context of the 1930s and early 1940s, which included a weak China, ineffective global leadership by the liberal West, and a failure of the international economic system, a policy of militarism seemed to deliver security and prosperity to Japan via the acquisition of a hinterland in China and later Southeast Asia. In the decades immediately following the war, with regional sensitivities about Japan's wartime aggression still raw and the United States willing to provide for Japan's defense, Japanese found anti-militarism their best path to safety and economic recovery. That calculation would require reassessment in an environment where regional fear of Japanese military aggression has faded, near neighbors pose a serious military threat to Japan, and Japanese perceive the United States as less willing or able than before to provide protection.

Japan's more purposeful movement toward "normal" status under the Abe Doctrine raises the historically-informed question of whether or not Japan is fully rehabilitated from its 20<sup>th</sup>-century fascist period. A reasonable definition for "rehabilitated" in this case would be that Japan is no more likely than the average country of its size and relative strength to engage in armed aggression. That question is unsettled. On one hand, all Japanese over 72 years of age have lived their entire lives under postwar governments with a constitution, institutions and a political culture installed by US officials with a view toward making Japan a liberal democracy, with apparent success. But on the other hand, prominent Japanese conservatives regularly revive fears of a resurgence of Japanese militarism by claiming Japan is a victim of defamation with regard to its wartime behavior. Atrocity-denial is condemned by Japanese friends such as America as well as by Japanese adversaries such as China. In Japan's defense, unwillingness to admit to culpability for atrocities that occurred last century does not necessarily make Japan more prone to committing atrocities in the future, and the Chinese government has a permanent interest in hyping the issue of Japanese guilt as a means of undercutting Japan's regional leadership potential.

### **China as systemic competitor**

Since embarking on its post-Mao program of economic reforms and robust participation in the global economy, China has emerged as a serious competitor with the United States for regional and global influence. This is a remarkable recovery from China's Century of Humiliation (1842—1949), during which foreign countries imposed unequal treaties on China, the country devolved into warlordism and civil war, and Japanese soldiers marauded through China's northeast. Anciently, however, China was the strongest military, economic, and cultural power in its region, a hegemon<sup>[3]</sup> that set the rules of international affairs. The return of China to prominence has unique historical significance because China represents the only case of a potential repeat-hegemon.

Inevitably, the historical track record of pre-modern great-power China becomes a touchstone for predictions of how China will behave as a 21<sup>st</sup> century great power. That history is long, rich and subject to interpretation and cherry-picking, providing ammunition to participants on both sides of the debate over whether China's "rise" is on balance positive or negative for the other Asia-Pacific states. Many of China's neighbors perceived antiquity as a period of oppressive Chinese domination and fear it pre-disposes the Chinese to try to revive arrangements in which China used its influence to impose Beijing's will contrary to the interests of smaller regional states. Vietnamese remember with bitterness, for example, that China occupied Vietnam for over a thousand years from 111 BC to 938 AD. Koreans bristle at suggestions from the Chinese government that China claims territory

that rightfully belongs to the Korean nation. Indonesia is highly sensitive to Chinese intervention in its domestic affairs.

For over two decades the PRC government and its supporters (including Chinese business people and academics and some sympathetic foreigners) have promulgated a stylized CCP take on Chinese history designed to assuage foreign fears about living with a rejuvenated China. This officially-sanctioned Chinese history includes the following points. First, even when it was strong enough to do so, China never invaded other countries. This purportedly proves that Chinese are inherently and permanently peace-loving and non-aggressive. Symbolic of this restrained benevolence is the legendary 15<sup>th</sup>-century Chinese Muslim eunuch Admiral Zheng He, who commanded huge fleets of gigantic ships containing thousands of troops that made several voyages to nearby countries, ranging as far as the east coast of Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Instead of conquering the places he visited, Zheng He handed out gifts, the Chinese say. Second, the official Chinese history emphasizes that in the modern age China was a victim rather than a perpetrator of imperialism. From here the Chinese government asserts that past victimization has made China sympathetic toward other potential victims and therefore inveterately averse to aggression and injustice. Third, the official Chinese history points out that Chinese culture is permeated by Confucianism, which teaches that superiors should treat subordinates with benevolence – another purported reason why China would never bully a smaller neighbor.

Critics find numerous flaws in this selective, propagandized version of history.

Historians outside of China report that pre-modern Chinese governments frequently warred against their neighbors. When pushed on this point, China apologists sometimes claim that any aggression carried out by pre-modern China occurred only when China was under the control of non-Chinese Mongol or Manchu regimes, so their conduct should not count as part of China's record. This still leaves a large catalogue of conquest and punitive warfare throughout China's history, beginning with the ancient campaigns of forced assimilation that produced what the Chinese call a single ethnic group known as the Han, who number an incredibly large 1.3 billion. Outside assessments of Zheng He's voyages see his mission as one of blandishment combined with intimidation to reaffirm Chinese regional hegemony – hence the inclusion of so large a contingent of soldiers accompanying his fleet.

The bifurcation of Chinese history into peaceful Chinese-led periods and warlike foreigner-led periods turns out to be less accurate than the observation that China was aggressive when relatively powerful and defensive when relatively weak – exactly what so many regional peoples fear today, and exactly the message that Beijing is today trying so hard to defeat. The notion that being victimized creates in nations a revulsion toward victimizing other peoples is not supported by empirical evidence. Rather there are abundant counter-examples, ranging from the Nazi movement in interwar Germany to the present-day scourge of terrorism. And while Confucianism calls on the strong to be kind to the weak, Chinese and other Confucian-influenced societies have proven just as vulnerable as non-Confucian societies to the problem of arrogant and callous treatment of the weak – both fellow nationals and foreigners – by government officials. Despite Chinese efforts to harness it to their advantage, history increases regional anxiety about China's re-emergence.

## **The North Korea crisis**

One of the sayings Deng Xiaoping is famous for is the observation, which he applied to several international disputes, that problems of history are best set aside for now and left for future generations to solve. The permanent division of the Korean Peninsula would seem to be such a problem, as it was an unintentional consequence of seemingly modest plans made by the United States and the USSR near the end of World War II for the demobilization of the Japanese soldiers occupying Korea. The current North Korea nuclear weapons crisis, however, demonstrates the danger that an unsolved problem left over from history might grow dramatically worse over time rather than either gradually fading or remaining at a manageable level.

Although massively destructive and lethal, the Korean War failed to resolve the problem of a tense and divided Korea, which for years afterward remained under the threat of a second Korean War. This danger receded for at least two decades while it was clear that the North did not have the wherewithal to conquer the South. In this sense the problem settled into a stable and manageable phase, although the people of North Korea outside of relatively comfortable Pyongyang continued to suffer hardship and repression. Now, however, the intensity level of this long crisis is spiking again as the DPRK rushes to demonstrate the capability to hit adversaries including the United States with a nuclear missile. The strategy of waiting for the problem to go away – i.e., with the regime either collapsing or reforming – has not paid off.

Historical considerations also add to the difficulty of solving this problem. From their inception, North and South Korea were rival states. The legitimacy of one government depended largely on out-performing the other. North Korea's economy was stronger than that of South up to the mid-1970s, but afterward South Korea blossomed as one of the fast-growing Asian "tiger" economies while the DPRK sputtered. South Korea's per capita GDP is about \$25,000, while North Korea's is about \$1,000. Clearly and irreversibly defeated in the race to prosperity, the DPRK government has attempted to compensate by characterizing itself as the more independent and authentic Korea, in contrast to a South Korean regime that is allegedly a puppet of Washington. Both governments have attempted to defame and destabilize each other, North Korea by violent means such as the Rangoon bomb blast in 1983 and the raid on the presidential Blue House by North Korean commandos in 1968. The exceptional bitterness of this feud now makes even minor steps toward reconciliation extraordinarily difficult.

The Pyongyang regime inherits a historical legacy that obstructs pragmatism by the DPRK government. Kim Il Sung and his close associates implemented a personality cult designed to cement Kim's pre-eminence over his domestic rivals. This evolved into a virtual religion that deifies the Kim family, clearing the way for two generational power transitions, first to Kim's son Kim Jong Il and then to his grandson Kim Jong Un. What has been good for the Kim family has proven bad for the people of North Korea. The cloak of authority provided by the religion of Kimilsungism gives cover for the elites elevated to positions of privilege – beginning with the young man who ascended to paramount leadership on the strength of no qualifications other than being a son of Kim Jong Il, and extending to his (surviving) appointees. Unfortunately, this modern-day hereditary monarchical arrangement is an additional layer of protection of the top leadership against challenges over their incompetence or malfeasance. A faction of patriotic North Korean elites dismayed by the Kim regime's poor management of the country's economy and human capital would face charges of heresy and blasphemy if they attempted something like Deng Xiaoping's turn away from the counterproductive policies of Mao's rule in China.

## **America under Trump**

The election of Donald Trump, surprising even to many seasoned political analysts, demonstrated the strength of a previously underappreciated and widespread disillusionment among some segments of the US population. A few months into his “unconventional” presidency, Donald Trump has created a shock wave in international affairs. Although a coherent grand strategy has yet to emerge from a still-understaffed Washington, the initial signals suggest the United States is departing in significant ways from the foreign policy of recent history (i.e., since the end of World War II). This historical change of course is to the apparent advantage of Russia, China and certain other authoritarian states, but creates doubts among long-time US allies about American reliability. Trump’s nascent foreign policy creates uncertainty because of its historical unfamiliarity.

Trump’s government appears comparatively willing to entertain comprehensive deal-making across issue-areas, a break from the past tendency to compartmentalize different issues. Trump entered the presidency promising to confront China over bilateral economic issues. He then threatened to overturn the strategic poker table with China as well, through his telephone conversation with Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen and with his incoming Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s (botched) warning that China’s “access” to its man-made South China Sea islands “is not going to be allowed.”<sup>[4]</sup> But when North Korea’s progress toward developing a nuclear missile became his dominant foreign policy problem, Trump said of Xi Jinping, “I like him a lot. . . . He’s a great guy” and announced that he would disregard his campaign promise to declare China a currency manipulator because China was helping to solve the North Korea problem.<sup>[5]</sup> Observers also noted that through the first half-year of Trump’s presidency, the US government announced no new arms sale to Taiwan and publicized only one “freedom of navigation” operation to challenge China’s illegal South China Sea claims, a dramatic reduction from the Obama era.

The Trump White House has displayed a tendency to focus on specific short-term gains rather than larger and longer-term outcomes. Trump himself seems to dismiss the benefits of global leadership that the United States derives from providing international public goods. In his view, these are costs to America with little or no gain. Trump’s narrow financial transactional view of America’s alliance relationships obscures their value as long-term friendships, which have sometimes seen allied leaders support US policies that were unpopular in their own countries.

Finally, Trump seems to disbelieve in the idea of American exceptionalism, which is the basis for liberal values forming a component of US foreign policy. Trump consistently praises authoritarian leaders and seems uninterested in promoting human rights or democratization abroad. Some would welcome this as a refreshingly realist foreign policy approach, perhaps one that evokes nostalgia for the “friendly dictators” years of the Cold War. There are, however, strategic as well as moral costs to this approach. The US bond with partners such as Australia, Japan and South Korea is weakened if the values held in common with them matter less. If democratic countries are more likely than authoritarian countries to support an international system that accords with US interests, these interests will eventually suffer if America suspends its traditional campaign to foster liberalization throughout the world.

**ROK-US Alliance:  
Continuing Convergence Amid Changing Dynamics  
by William R. McKinney & David J. Wolff**

**Enduring Commitment**

On October 1, 1953, just two months after reaching the Korean Armistice Agreement at Panmunjom, the Republic of Korea (ROK) and the United States of America (USA) signed the US-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty. Following ratification, the treaty went into effect on 18 November 1954. It embodies a commitment by both countries to provide mutual aid if either faces external armed attack. It also allows for the United States to station military forces in the ROK in consultation with Seoul.

Today, if you ask a typical South Korean or US citizen why the ROK-US alliance was established, the most frequent answer: “it was created to protect South Korea from further aggression by the communist North.” That has long been considered the *raison d’être* for the alliance and, 63 years later, it remains its continuing mission. More important, over that time convergence has grown between Seoul and Washington over that foundational shared security interest, and the enduring purpose for the alliance.

For any military alliance between two or more countries to remain strong, the governments of those countries must share fundamentally and continuously the security interests around which that security partnership was created. They must have a shared understanding and perception of the threat they face, shared interests in protecting against that threat, and shared expectations on acceptable uses of their allied forces. In short, for an alliance to function properly its members must operate from the same basic set of principles regarding the structure, role, and functions of that allied military organization. In all those respects, the ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC) has long been, and continues to be, a remarkable success. All Americans and Koreans who have supported it over the years can take pride in that accomplishment.

Nevertheless, the road certainly has not been entirely smooth. Alliance managers, past and present, know how rocky that road has been at times. More important, however, the disagreements were never severe enough to fracture the solid block of strongly shared security interests, which constitute the foundation of the ROK-US Alliance. Endless evidence testifies that throughout its six-plus decades the alliance has proven to be strong enough to withstand coups, political shifts, policy disagreements, unfortunate incidents and accidents.

***Our first assessment of the state of the ROK-US Alliance: Internally, the ROK-US alliance remains fundamentally strong.***

**Changing Dynamics**

Although the ROK-US alliance was created to defend South Korea from the North, it is important to remember there was a second, larger, geostrategic reason behind its creation. As strategists (and Koreans) know, for centuries the Korean Peninsula has been the fulcrum in Northeast Asia’s balance of power equation. It sits at the nexus of US, Chinese, Japanese, and Russian vital national



interests. Therefore, the peninsula has long been described as an arena of conflict and competition: a tinderbox or flashpoint for “Great Power” confrontation.

In this case, the alliance was a child of the Cold War. It was born not merely to deter the Korean People’s Army (KPA) but for the wider purpose of counterbalancing the communist expansionism of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in Northeast Asia. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many proclaimed that the Cold War was over. Unfortunately, that has proven to be only partly true. In fact, it may be appropriate to describe the security situation today as more of a Cold Peace than a Cold War. However, the geostrategic contest between the four large powers in Northeast Asia – China, Japan, Russia, and the United States – is far from over.

In addition, several other trend lines are diverging now from our mutually acknowledged security dynamic. These dynamics – occurring both inside and outside the ROK-US Alliance – are altering the security environment in which the alliance operates. Among these, the three paramount changes and challenges are as follows:

### **The Rise of China**

The emergence of China as a major regional and global power constitutes the first (and most significant) long-term trend diverging from the established Northeast Asian security status quo. Since the PRC replaced the USSR as North Korea’s primary supporter, China’s diplomatic ties, party-to-party relations, economic trade, military cooperation, and cultural exchanges with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) have grown tremendously. It is true the DPRK-PRC relationship has become troubled of late by events such as the execution of Jang Sang-taek and China’s selective enforcement of UN sanctions against the DPRK. But to quote a recent article in *The Economist*,<sup>40</sup> claims by Chinese officials that “they have limited political leverage over the Kim regime is sophistry.” China has unrivalled economic power over North Korea, including a stranglehold on its energy supplies.” It is difficult to take seriously Beijing’s claim that it opposes North Korea’s nuclear missile development when the mobile missile launchers that roll through Kim Il-Sung Square during KPA military parades are made in China. Therefore, with hope from the Mar-a-Lago summit aside, we should expect continuing and critical PRC support for the DPRK to remain the norm.

At the same time, the PRC has built an extensive relationship with the ROK over the past several decades, steadily growing its trade and investment with South Korea to the point where China is now the largest trading partner for both Koreas. The recent dispute between Beijing and Seoul over the deployment of the THAAD system clearly illustrates that China has, and is not afraid to use, its substantial economic leverage over South Korea to influence ROK security decisions.

As we understand it, the reason the deployment of the THAAD missile defense system has been put on hold stems more from President Moon’s desire to court good relations with China (while demonstrating his independence from Washington) rather than any concern over the system’s potential impact on the environment. Ironically, a North Korean nuclear missile on South Korean soil – which THAAD is designed to prevent – would have the greatest detrimental impact on the environment.

### **DPRK Nuclear Threat**

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<sup>40</sup> How the China-North Korea equation is changing, Lexington, *The Economist*, June 8, 2017, p. 2.

The growing threat posed by North Korea's rapidly-developing strategic nuclear triad represents the second new and even more worrisome trend line. For the first 50-plus years of the ROK-US alliance, CFC had only to concern itself with deterring, and if need be, winning a conventional war. Even a conventional war would have been devastating to millions but it was a military challenge the alliance was better equipped to handle than the KPA. Consequently, North Korea never launched a second attempt to reunify the country by force. Today, thanks to further modernizations of our combined forces, backed by the extended nuclear deterrence capabilities of the United States, the alliance remains well prepared to win such a war. That said, North Korea's growing asymmetric nuclear capabilities are dramatically altering both the geostrategic and military environments in Northeast Asia. That development significantly impacts our national security strategies, military planning, and civil defense preparations. In short, this increasingly grave threat must be addressed.

### **Points of Friction in the Alliance**

While the geostrategic balance of power dynamic involving China and growing North Korean nuclear triad threat constitute growing challenges to the ROK-US alliance from *without*, the friction points discussed below pose challenges to the health of the alliance from *within*. Thankfully, while serious, these more aptly are described as "points of friction" rather than divergences. They are nonetheless important and require attention. However, the source of these frictions rise from a very positive development – the transformation of the ROK from a military-led, economically-devastated country to a modern day, well-functioning democracy and global economic powerhouse.

From the beginning, the ROK-US alliance was centered around a grand bargain in which the United States took the external political/security lead, while the ROK focused on developing its governmental institutions, economy, and military under the US protective security umbrella. For that reason, the alliance was often times described as a "big brother-little brother" relationship. Today, that phrase no longer applies to the ROK-US relationship. The "miracle on the Han" (a great achievement for which the alliance deserves much credit) made the ROK a proud, prosperous, and prominent presence in the world.

Since then, South Korean national leaders understandably have sought to rewrite portions of their grand bargain with the United States to gain a greater, co-equal say in alliance decision-making. However, the ROK adjustment has occurred without commensurate, co-equal assumption of greater alliance economic burden-sharing by the ROK.

This situation clearly stresses the alliance. This is evident in comments – although inaccurate – implying that South Korea doesn't pay its "fair share" and that it benefits unfairly from the Korea-U.S. Free Trade Agreement. The South Korean people need to understand that US citizens share these viewpoints widely. And, while misrepresenting the truth of the situation, the ROK government also regularly falsely claims that South Korea pays "half the cost" of the alliance.<sup>41</sup> The truth is ROK citizens pay about 25 percent of the total cost of maintaining US forces on the Korean Peninsula, while Americans foot the bill for the other 75 percent. Furthermore, US-recognized costs do not include the even more costly extended deterrence and extended nuclear deterrence

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<sup>41</sup> The ROK government claim refers to South Korea's burden-sharing contribution under the Special Measures Agreement (SMA). While that is a significant contribution that covers roughly half of USFK's non-personal stationing costs, that is only a sub-set of the total cost born by the United States.

capabilities. Until the US economy strengthens, burden-sharing will become a more serious point of friction in alliance relations that will need to be addressed in the near future.

In addition to Host Nation Support, other friction points within the alliance include the aforementioned THAAD deployment, Theater Missile Defense (TMD), Yongsan Relocation Plan (YRP), burden-sharing, OPCON transfer/C2, Trilateral Security Cooperation, and – what I consider to be most important – the much-needed modernization of the ROK Army. However, while these issues and others have proven difficult to manage, none have been allowed to become so problematic as to threaten the solid foundation of the ROK-US alliance.

***Our second assessment of the state of the ROK-US alliance: The changing security dynamics buffeting the alliance from without, and the friction points stressing the alliance from within, are causing cracks in its foundation, but none yet serious enough to threaten its structural integrity.***

### **Converging or Diverging Security Perspectives?**

Looking ahead, if we recognize that the ROK-US alliance is fundamentally strong, and we factor in the impact of changing internal and external dynamics, then we must consider whether those trend lines are driving Washington and Seoul closer together or further apart. In short, are ROK and US security perspectives converging or diverging? Specifically, are US and South Korean civilian and military leaders, planners, and warriors in agreement on how to respond to the various North Korean threat scenarios? And are they in agreement on how to deal with China in a North Korea contingency?

All indications point to a ROK-US alliance that remains adequately prepared to deter, defend against, and if need be destroy the KPA. There are indications, however, that our two countries are far from fully aligned when it comes to how we will respond – separately and together – in more expanded crisis scenarios. The imperatives of war are likely to wash away many of those obstacles as the two allies come together in battle, but coordination is likely to be far from optimal and misalignments could cause serious problems on the battlefield.

More troubling, though, is the potential divide that may be opening between Seoul and Washington over the right policy approach to take toward Pyongyang in Phase 0 (peacetime) to prevent future conflict. The cause for concern here comes from perceived growing difficulties in alliance management since President Trump and President Moon are far apart from one another politically. The alliance has survived prior political misalignments between conservatives in Washington, liberals in Seoul, and vice versa, but it hasn't been easy.

Most troubling of all, are indications that Seoul and Washington are already quite far apart when it comes to the question of potential third-party intervention by China and/or Japan. As pointed out at the beginning of this paper, alliances remain strong only so long as both governments have the same fundamental understanding of the threat and share similar expectations regarding their collective roles in meeting it.

The consensus view from Seoul centers on the belief that the alliance has prevented war and enabled regional prosperity, and that it continues to serve South Korea's vital national security interests. Tensions caused by the afore-mentioned divergent policy issues between Seoul and Washington

generally come from South Korean desires for decision-making autonomy, rather than any questioning of the necessity of the alliance. Naturally, a country that borders the threat, as the ROK does, will have somewhat different security concerns and priorities than a superpower that must be focused as well on larger regional and global security concerns.

The view from Washington, therefore, maintains that US forces on the Korean Peninsula remain important for deterring a second Korean War. Further, they are stationed there for reasons that evolved from the Cold War mission of containing the spread of communism to the need to counterbalance and shape the rise of China. Washington therefore prefers the ROK-US alliance assist in serving those larger U. regional security interests. The ROK resists this because it does not give security concerns outside of the Korean Peninsula a priority.

***Our third and final assessment of the state of the ROK-US alliance: Alliance cohesion remains sufficiently strong so long as we remain within an Armistice-controlled, North Korea-focused, security environment limited to the Korean Peninsula. The alliance is far less prepared to operate cohesively in a kinetic, multi-lateral, unaligned security crisis that widens to involve other regional powers.***

In other words, there is much work to be done to build a more firmly shared ROK-US consensus on how the alliance should respond to developments that are increasingly likely to go beyond current combined war planning.

### **Lord Palmerston Was Only Half Right**

Given the tremendous amount of admiration we have for the remarkable ROK-US alliance, we conclude by respectfully correcting Lord Palmerston's famous dictum: *Nations have no permanent friends or allies. They only have permanent interests.*

After devoting many years in support of the alliance, we have come to believe that Lord Palmerston was only half right. It is true that their own national interests drive governments first-and-foremost.

But, Lord Palmerston was also half wrong. Granted, in the cynical times in which he lived, it is doubtful he could imagine an alliance like this one ... born in blood and strengthened dramatically over decades by the powerful bonds of trust, friendship, and shared commitment that grew and now exist between the American and Korean people.

The ROK-US alliance has cracks in it that need repair, but its foundation remains solid. Further, the cast of that foundation is made up of far stronger stuff than naked interests.

## APPENDIX A



### **Northeast Asia History Meeting**

**Sheraton Waikiki ♦ Honolulu ♦ June 22-23, 2017**

### **AGENDA**

#### **Thursday, June 22, 2017**

6:30 PM      **Dinner – *Roy's Waikiki***

#### **Friday, June 23, 2017**

8:30 AM      **Registration – *Honolulu Room***

9:00 AM      **Introductions**

9:05 AM      **Keynote Speech**  
Sung-Joo Han

9:20 AM      **Session 1: Political Dynamics in Seoul and Washington and their Implications**

This session is intended to focus on political developments in each country: what is happening and why. What is the state of politics in each country? What forces are driving politics and motivating each administration? How can we differentiate each new government from its predecessor? What are its priorities and how will that affect the bilateral relationship? How will each president get along with his party and the legislature? How will that affect governance? What role does the opposition play in each country?

Moderator: Ralph Cossa  
Speakers: Bruce Klingner  
Byoung-kwon Sohn

10:45 AM      **Coffee Break**

11:00 AM	<p><b>Session 2: Populism, Nationalism, and Globalization: Emerging Trends and their Significance</b></p> <p>Populist, nationalist and anti-globalist forces appear to be surging throughout the world. Is that also true in the ROK and the US? How do these forces play out in each country and to what extent are they shaping politics? How do they affect the bilateral relationship? How do recent developments fit within larger historical narratives for each country? [For those struggling to differentiate this session from session 1: Session 1 will focus on contemporary politics (what has happened), while this session explores larger forces behind those developments (why and what that means for the future)].</p> <p>Moderator: James Kelly Speakers: Jung Kun Seo Alexis Dudden</p>
12:30 PM	<b>Lunch</b>
2:00 PM	<p><b>Session 3: Challenges for Northeast Asia Security</b></p> <p>How does each government assess and prioritize its security challenges? Have those assessments changed recently? If so, how and why? How does each country assess its relationship with China and its ally's relationship with Beijing? How does each country assess its relationship with Japan and its ally's relationship with Tokyo? Do trends or other factors favor one relationship over another? If so, why and what does that matter?</p> <p>Moderator: In-Taek Hyun Speakers: Denny Roy Suk Hee Han</p>
3:30 PM	<b>Coffee Break</b>
3:45 PM	<p><b>Session 4: The ROK-US Alliance</b></p> <p>How does each country characterize the state of the alliance? What factors are most important in influencing the alliance? What are each country's chief concerns regarding the alliance and what should be done to address them?</p> <p>Moderator: In-Taek Hyun Speakers: Kyu-Dok Hong Bill McKinney</p>
5:20 PM	<p><b>Concluding Remarks</b> Ralph Cossa</p>
5:30 PM	<b>Meeting Adjourns</b>
6:30 PM	<b>Dinner – <i>Sorabol Restaurant</i></b>

## APPENDIX B



### Northeast Asia History Meeting

Sheraton Waikiki ♦ Honolulu ♦ June 22-23, 2017

#### PARTICIPANT LIST

##### ROK

1. **HAN Suk Hee**  
Professor  
Yonsei University
2. **HAN Sung-Joo**  
Former ROK Minister of Foreign  
Affairs
3. **HONG Kyu-Dok**  
Professor  
Sookmyung Women's University
4. **HYUN In-Taek**  
Former ROK Minister of Unification  
Professor  
Korea University
5. **KIM Hosup**  
President  
Northeast Asian History Foundation
6. **LEE Chang Wook**  
Office of External Affairs and Public  
Relations  
Northeast Asian History Foundation
7. **SEO Jung Kun**

Professor  
Kyung Hee University

8. **SOHN Byoung-kwon**  
Professor  
Chung-Ang University
9. **YOON Jihoon**  
Northeast Asian History Foundation

##### US

10. **Ralph COSSA**  
President  
Pacific Forum CSIS
11. **Alexis DUDDEN**  
Professor  
University of Connecticut
12. **Brad GLOSSERMAN**  
Executive Director  
Pacific Forum CSIS
13. **James KELLY**  
Counselor and President Emeritus  
Pacific Forum CSIS
14. **Bruce KLINGNER**  
Senior Research Fellow, Northeast Asia

The Heritage Foundation

**15. Ji-young LEE**

Assistant Professor  
American University

**16. Michael MCDEVITT**

Senior Fellow  
CNA

**17. William MCKINNEY**

Adjunct Fellow  
CSIS

**18. Denny ROY**

Senior Fellow  
East-West Center

**Observers**

**19. HWANG Sangjin**

Consul  
Consulate-General of the Republic of  
Korea in Honolulu

**20. KIM Jeonghyun**

Navy Captain, Military Attaché  
Consulate-General of the Republic of  
Korea in Honolulu

**21. YEOM Serah**

Advisor  
Consulate-General of the Republic of  
Korea in Honolulu

**Young Leaders**

**22. CHANG Hyo Joon**

Korea Foundation Research Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**23. CHOI Jieun**

Korea Foundation Research Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**24. Hannah FALVEY**

Kelly Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**25. KIM Josh**

Korea Foundation Research Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**26. LEE Kyung Suk**

Korea Foundation Research Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**27. LEE Min Jung**

Kelly Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**28. Molly MAMARIL**

Hawaii Asia-Pacific Affairs Leadership  
Program  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**29. Jacob MERKLE**

Research Intern  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**30. SON Dae Kwon**

Korea Foundation Research Fellow  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**Staff**

**31. Jesslyn CHEONG**

Program Officer  
Pacific Forum CSIS

**32. Keoni WILLIAMS**

Program Assistant  
Pacific Forum CSIS



## **ABOUT THE AUTHORS**

**Brad Glosserman** is executive director of the Pacific Forum CSIS. Mr. Glosserman oversees all aspects of Pacific Forum activities, including conferences, fellowships, publications, and administration. He is coeditor of *Comparative Connections*, the Pacific Forum's triannual journal and writes, along with Pacific Forum president Ralph Cossa, the regional review. He is also the coauthor, with Scott Synder, of *The Japan-South Korea Identity Clash* (Columbia University Press, 2015), a study of national identity in Japan and South Korea and its impact on U.S. alliances.

**Bruce Klingner** specializes in Korean and Japanese affairs as the senior research fellow for Northeast Asia at The Heritage Foundation's Asian Studies Center. Klingner's analysis and writing about North Korea, South Korea and Japan, as well as related issues, are informed by his 20 years of service at the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency.

Klingner, who joined Heritage in 2007, has testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He is a frequent commentator in U.S. and foreign media.

Klingner is a distinguished graduate of the National War College, where he received a master's degree in national security strategy in 2002. He also holds a master's degree in strategic intelligence from the Defense Intelligence College and a bachelor's degree in political science from Middlebury College in Vermont.

**Alexis Dudden** is Professor of History at the University of Connecticut. She received her BA from Columbia University in 1991 and her PhD in history from the University of Chicago in 1998. She is currently writing a book about Japan's territorial disputes and the changing meaning of islands in international law.

**Denny Roy's** work has focused mostly on Asia Pacific security issues, particularly those involving China. Recently Roy has written on Chinese foreign policy, the North Korea nuclear weapons crisis, China-Japan relations, and China-Taiwan relations. His interests include not only traditional military-strategic matters and foreign policy, but also international relations theory and human rights politics.

Before joining the East-West Center in 2007, Roy worked at the Asia-Pacific Center for Security Studies in Honolulu for seven years, rising to the rank of Professor. In 1998-2000 Roy was a faculty member in the National Security Affairs Department at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey, California. From 1995 to 1998, Roy was a Research Fellow with the Strategic and Defence Studies Centre at the Australian National University in Canberra, where he studied and wrote on Northeast Asian security issues.

From 1990 to 1995, Roy held faculty appointments in the Political Science Departments of the National University of Singapore (Lecturer) and Brigham Young University (Assistant Professor), teaching courses on international relations and Asian politics.

Roy is the author of *Return of the Dragon: Rising China and Regional Security* (Columbia University Press, 2013), *The Pacific War and its Political Legacies* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), *Taiwan: A Political History*

(Cornell University Press, 2003), and *China's Foreign Relations* (Macmillan and Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), co-author of *The Politics of Human Rights in Asia* (Pluto Press, 2000) and editor of *The New Security Agenda in the Asia-Pacific Region* (Macmillan, 1997). He has also written many articles for scholarly journals such as *International Security*, *Survival*, *Asian Survey*, *Security Dialogue*, *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, *Armed Forces & Society*, and *Issues & Studies*.

Colonel **William R. McKinney** (USA, Ret.) had a distinguished Army career spanning 30 years and a 20-year civilian career during which he established himself as a national security expert on Northeast Asia with a focus on the Korean peninsula. From 2011 to 2016, he was a GS-15 civil servant at HQ, U.S. Pacific Command (USPACOM) in Honolulu, where he was director of the DPRK Strategic Focus Group, a mini-think tank for commander, USPACOM, providing strategic assessment and synchronization of U.S. policy toward North Korea (the DPRK). Later he served as senior country director for Korea. From 2008 to 2011, as a senior military analyst with Cubic Applications, Inc., he supported the OPCON Transition Support Team of U.S. Forces Korea (USFK). From 2005 at USPACOM, he provided analytic support for the Standing Joint Forces Headquarters and strategic assessments for the Strategy, Plans and Policy Directorate. From 2001 to 2005, he served as one of the U.S. representatives for the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO), where he represented KEDO in North Korea and was charged with conducting negotiations with DPRK counterparts, providing consular protection functions for KEDO workers and visitors in North Korea, and exercising general oversight for the Light Water Reactor Project.

**David J. Wolff** is an Asia-Pacific strategy analyst at Booz Allen Hamilton. He is a former US diplomat with 20+ years of experience advising senior civilian and military leaders on the best strategies for achieving America's goals in the Asia-Pacific region.