



Weighing Future Paths for the Korean Peninsula

A Conference Report
of the 2019 Northeast Asia Regional Young
Leaders Security Symposium

By
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY & KEY FINDINGS

BY KEONI WILLIAMS

In April 2019, Pacific Forum hosted the Northeast Asia Regional Young Leaders Security Symposium (NEARYLSS), a two-day dialogue in Tokyo, Japan, during which 25 young scholars and security analysts from China, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), and the United States explored regional security perspectives and opportunities for multilateral cooperation. Forming teams based on nationality, young scholars identified their country's top regional threats in Northeast Asia and their desired, acceptable, and unacceptable outcomes for the Korean Peninsula.

The shared challenge of dealing with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) provides a basis for regional cooperation, and the extent to which each team's desired, acceptable, and unacceptable outcomes converge serves as a useful guide in determining possible scenarios on the Korean Peninsula. During off-the-record plenary discussions, country teams explained the rationale for their assessments and answered follow-up questions from other country teams. Team responses were then compiled into a win-set (Figure 1). Notable convergences and divergences observed in the win-set and plenary discussions were identified around three key themes: denuclearization, Korean reunification, and the status quo of intermittent negotiations.

Responses converge on denuclearization but diverge on its definition

The topic of denuclearization revealed a general convergence among the country teams. All teams included denuclearization in their desired outcome for the Korean Peninsula. However, desired outcomes varied from complete verifiable

irreversible denuclearization (CVID) (USA), to tangible steps toward CVID (Japan), to denuclearization under international terms (ROK), to denuclearization with economic sustainability (China). The responses underscore the reality that definitions of denuclearization still vary among countries.

South Korean delegates determined that while denuclearization under international terms was their desired outcome, removal of some nuclear stockpile in conjunction with recording and reporting by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) was an acceptable outcome. Explaining further, ROK team members expressed that they would want to remove production capability, but leave some stockpile in the DPRK as a security guarantee. In their perspective, an acceptable agreement should allow the DPRK to feel secure while managing to give regional neighbors greater security.

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Japanese delegates assessed that while it is not ideal, it could be acceptable to allow the DPRK to keep limited capabilities, such as short- and medium-range ballistic missiles (SRBM and MRBM), while prioritizing the removal of nuclear and other WMD threats. Significantly, Japanese delegates also expressed the possibility that civilian use of nuclear power in the DPRK could be acceptable under the condition that there is a transparent international verification system

under the nonproliferation regime or a similar standard. Explaining their rationale, Japanese delegates acknowledged the DPRK had achieved a *fait accompli* with its nuclear and missile programs.

The US team acknowledged that while CVID has been the ultimate objective of US policymakers for decades, it is a position that the Trump administration has not taken. The Joint Statement of President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un at the Singapore Summit in 2018 explicitly referenced to the complete denuclearization of the “Korean Peninsula.” Whether future US administrations will return to the CVID policy is debatable.

Chinese delegates welcomed the prospect of jointly working on the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula while acknowledging that nuclear proliferation is a shared concern. Explaining further, Chinese delegates did not want the DPRK’s nuclear capability to trigger a nuclear race in the region and subsequently hinder regional peace, stability and prosperity.

The US, Japan and ROK teams determined the recognition of the DPRK as a nuclear power to be unacceptable.

Critical questions on Korean reunification

Discussion on Korean reunification revealed significant divergences in perspectives. The US and ROK teams expressed that Korean reunification under the ROK was their desired outcome for the Korean Peninsula. In contrast, Chinese delegates found Korean reunification to be an unacceptable outcome. The Japan team made no mention of Korean reunification in any of their outcome responses.

Although they did not explicitly mention Korean reunification, Japanese delegates expressed that the future trajectory of the Korean peace process could be a counterproductive one for Japan and beyond. From their perspective, a declaration of peace that ends the Korean War would diminish the US rationale for the US-ROK alliance and

forward presence of US assets as a deterrent, possibly leading to the downsizing or total withdrawal of United States Forces Korea (USFK). They believed such a scenario could create a power vacuum on the Korean Peninsula, changing regional stability anchored by the US military presence and pose a negative impact on the credibility of the US commitment to Northeast Asia.

The Japan team welcomed the peace process in principal, but strongly recognized that the trajectory of Korean peace can deeply affect regional security. Based on this understanding, they hoped to pursue a multilateral peace process.

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During discussions, the ROK team was asked whether they would prefer a unified Korea with or without nuclear weapons. After an internal vote among five members, the team opted for a denuclearized unified Korea. However, the decision was not unanimous; two voted in favor of a nuclear unified Korea.

An ROK team member quoted a speech by South Korean President Moon Jae-in at the Korber Foundation in Berlin which stressed that CVID is “the demand of the international community and is the absolute condition for peace on the Korean peninsula.” From their perspective, if the DPRK was a lesser threat to regional powers, it could

lower the security cost for both Koreas as a result of arms control and also minimize costs for the USFK. Further, the two Koreas would have an opportunity to pursue cooperation and development in economic, social, and security areas, which could eventually lead to a peaceful reunification in the future.

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A series of questions regarding whether a unified Korea would lean more on the US, China, or balance both sides alluded to underlying concerns...

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A China team member explained that the peace process on the Korean Peninsula drew their attention to consider how a unified Korea would think and behave. A series of questions regarding whether a unified Korea would lean more on the US, China, or balance both sides alluded to concerns that seemed to inform the China team’s decision to assess Korean reunification as an unacceptable outcome.

Could the status quo lead to decoupling?

Perspectives on the status quo of intermittent negotiations exposed both divergences between the US and its allies and a convergence between the US and China team. Both US and China teams assessed that the continuation of intermittent negotiations was an acceptable outcome for the Korean Peninsula. In contrast, both the ROK and Japan teams categorized the continuation of intermittent negotiations as unacceptable.

Despite concluding that intermittent negotiations was an acceptable outcome, Chinese delegates

expressed concern about tacitly allowing a nuclear DPRK.

The US team explained that the intermittent process of negotiating with the DPRK – even if unsuccessful – was broadly seen as preferable to military conflict. Admittedly, the trading of concessions with reciprocal ebbs and flows often amount to a program of “strategic patience” given the slow pace of progress. This strategy relies to some extent on the assumption that the DPRK regime will collapse on its own, and that the US can safely bide its time rather than push for a swifter and messier resolution to challenges in the DPRK.

Explaining why they assessed the status quo to be an unacceptable outcome, Japanese delegates expressed concern about the potential for the US and the DPRK to make a deal on intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) without addressing other problems such as chemical or biological weapons, and SRBM/MRBM capabilities that could threaten Japan. From their perspective, this scenario could pose a risk of decoupling the US-Japan alliance if not managed properly. No negotiation was considered better than a bad deal.

Key takeaways

The extent to which country team perspectives converge or diverge around denuclearization, Korean reunification, and the status quo of intermittent negotiations served as a useful guide in determining the scenarios that are possible on the Korean Peninsula.

The US, China, ROK, and Japan teams all sought to benefit from a denuclearized DPRK. However, divergent views on Korean reunification seem to limit prospects for cooperation toward that end. From the ROK team’s perspective, the goal of denuclearization was to be pursued within the context of the Korean peace process and Korean reunification. Through discussion, it became evident that the Japan team members believed the Korean peace process may be counterproductive for their country. US extended

deterrence in Northeast Asia could weaken as a result of the peace process and negatively impact their national security. Similarly, China team members expressed concerns about how a unified Korea would act. A pro-US unified Korea would remove the buffer zone that the DPRK provides vis-a-vis the US and its allies in the region.

The US, China, ROK, and Japan teams also held divergent interpretations of denuclearization. US and Japan teams referenced CVID while the ROK and China teams only mentioned denuclearization in their desired outcome for the Korean Peninsula. Exploring acceptable outcomes, the Japan team demonstrated a pivot from a CVID agenda to an arms control and nonproliferation agenda. Noting that the DPRK has achieved a *fait accompli* with its nuclear and missile programs, Japanese delegates determined that allowing limited capabilities and civilian use of nuclear energy could be an acceptable outcome.

On the surface, denuclearization appeared to provide a basis for regional cooperation. However, probing deeper, valid concerns regarding the implications of a Korean peace process and how a unified Korea would act, coupled with contrasting CVID and arms control agendas, severely limit the prospects for multilateral cooperation.

Based on these observations, the extent to which a CVID or arms control/nonproliferation agenda can be pursued independent of a Korean peace process may indicate the level of cooperation that is possible in the short-term. Concerns regarding the orientation of a unified Korea demonstrate that the Sino-US trust gap must be bridged to achieve denuclearization of the DPRK. On one hand, the aim of denuclearization within the context of a Korean peace process may contribute to heightened Sino-US competition for influence on the Korean Peninsula. Alternatively, it could lead to implicit acceptance of the status quo on a peninsula divided by US and Chinese spheres of influence.

[Figure 1] Win-set based on country team responses at the 2019 NEARYLSS

	US team	Japan team	ROK team	China team
Desired outcome for the Korean peninsula:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization (CVID) - Korean reunification under ROK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Tangible steps toward CVID - Removal of WMDs and ballistic missiles - US resume large scale military exercises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Denuclearization under international terms - Korean reunification under ROK terms 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Denuclearization with economic sustainability
Acceptable outcome for the Korean peninsula:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of intermittent negotiations (status quo) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal of WMDs - Limited capabilities (SRBM, MRBM) remain - Maintain current level of US force posture - Peaceful use of nuclear energy after secure verification process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Removal of some nuclear stockpile - Recording and reporting by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) - Improvement of human rights conditions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of intermittent negotiations (status quo)
Unacceptable outcome for the Korean peninsula:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of DPRK as nuclear power - Withdrawal of US troops from ROK - Normalization of relations between DPRK-ROK-Japan-US - Sanctions relief 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Recognition of DPRK as nuclear power - Continuation of intermittent negotiations (status quo) - US focus on removal of ICBM capability but not short- and medium-range missile capability - Less-assured alliance as a result of diplomatic bargaining with DPRK 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuation of intermittent negotiations (status quo) - More nuclear tests - Weakening deterrence from the US 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Collapse of DPRK regime - Korean reunification

ASSESSMENT OF SECURITY THREATS IN NORTHEAST ASIA: JAPAN'S PERSPECTIVE

BY AMANE KOBAYASHI, DAICHI ICHIMURA, TAKASHI SETO, HIDEAKI UNO, AMANE YAMAZAKI

Introduction

Northeast Asia is a region with multiple complex security challenges, including China's military assertiveness and North Korea's development of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles. US-China strategic competition has recently overshadowed bilateral security cooperation between Washington and its allies in the region. Despite two summits between President Donald Trump and Chairman Kim Jong Un, there has been no credible and tangible progress toward denuclearization on the Korean Peninsula.

While Japan is trying to actively contribute to global and regional security, it must also respond to existential threats that challenge its national interests and the interests of the US-Japan alliance.

1. Japan's top three perceived threats in Northeast Asia

Armed confrontation in the Senkaku Islands or the Taiwan Strait

Involvement in a military confrontation with China over the Taiwan Strait or the Senkaku islands issues is a major concern for Japan. As long as Taiwan is a flashpoint between the United States and China, Japan cannot rule out a military confrontation between the great powers for Taiwan in its security calculations. Japan

would have to decide to support US military operations or maintain its "neutral" position between Washington and Beijing. However, the Japan-US security alliance may put pressure on Japan to support US military operations against China in the Taiwan Strait. This "entrapment scenario" – based on the Japan-US Security Treaty that grants the US use of military bases in Japan – would compel Japan to stand with the US. In this scenario, Japan cannot remain impartial should China target US bases once armed conflict breaks out.

Regarding the Senkaku Islands, China might harness the growing forces of its maritime militias to support operations of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) in the East China Sea. Beijing has skillful methods to mobilize networked fishing vessels and personnel that try to hide their military capability. Such "gray zone" (the use of force falling short of armed attack) strategy could threaten advantages, strengths, interests, and the national security of Japan as a result. In 2013, Defense Minister Itsunori Onodera [warned](#) that "the intrusions by China in the territorial waters around the Senkaku islands fall in the 'grey zone' [between] peacetime and an emergency situation," suggesting Tokyo is on high alert against Beijing's strategy. Unless China's "gray zone" is deterred effectively, it raises the risk of miscalculation both for Japan and China, which could lead to conflict escalation. Moreover, Tokyo has been feeling insecure about Washington's commitment to Japan's defense, granting China [leverage](#) over the alliance. The Senkaku issue could be regarded as an "abandonment scenario" for Japan.

China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region

China's rise poses a growing threat to Japan in the longer term. First, China has been making a significant investment in its naval forces. The PLAN's expansive maritime strategy will be a destabilizing factor in the Indo-Pacific Region, making some regional countries feel insecure and challenged. Second, even though Beijing stresses that the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is beneficial to countries in its peripheral region,

ambitious projects and increasing influence could be utilized as political leverage against them. In particular, Japan shares concerns about China's 'debt trap' [strategy](#). Finally, deepening China-Russia strategic ties should not be overlooked. Against the backdrop of the burgeoning China-Russia strategic [partnership](#) that could lead to a military alliance between them, Japan needs to be wary of the changing balance of power in the region.

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If China obtains capabilities to ensure its military dominance over the Indo-Pacific can deter US engagement/intervention, China could wield its coercive power in situations under the threshold of a full-scale war in which conventional and non-conventional means are hybridized. For example, through China's maritime strategy and BRI the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) has been investing in projects in transportation infrastructure, border economic zones, hydropower dams, schools, and military hospitals. Several ports in regional countries such as Myanmar, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka were developed for potential Chinese maritime and naval purposes, in addition to the market or manufacturing industry.

This destabilization of the maritime power balance between Japan and China would impose

greater challenges to the security of Japan's sea lanes and create geopolitical instability.

North Korea's nuclear and missile capabilities

North Korea's emerging nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities are the gravest, short-term threat to Japan. North Korea continues its efforts to develop these military programs, which Pyongyang could utilize in a crisis on the Korean Peninsula. This also poses a risk of "entrapment" for Japan, if an armed conflict breaks out between the US and North Korea (or between South and North Korea) involving other regional countries. The potential targets of North Korea's missiles could be both US and Japanese Self-Defense Forces (JSDF) bases in Japan.

A crisis on the Korean Peninsula would force Japan to rescue around 40,000 of its citizens living or staying in the southern part of the peninsula. The Government of Japan (GoJ) should seriously formulate and conduct a plan for the non-combatant evacuation operation (NEO) from ROK to Japan. However, cooperation will not come easy for Tokyo and Seoul. Given the issues ranging from history to public opinion of ROK and ongoing territorial disputes between the two countries, JSDF deployment to the Korean Peninsula – even just discussing such an option – would be controversial between the two capitals, making it almost unattainable to agree to and implement a feasible NEO plan for contingency.

2. Threat perception toward North Korea: desired, acceptable, and unacceptable outcomes

Japan perceives North Korea as an existential threat to its national security. With an array of WMD-capable short- and intermediate-range ballistic missiles and other asymmetric-warfare tools such as offensive cyber capabilities, they can carry out a [massive strike](#) against US bases in Japan to disrupt rapid deployment to the Korean Peninsula, or at least blackmail Tokyo and Seoul into denying the US access. North Korea indicated this tactical consideration in November 2017 with a [statement](#) vowing to make Japan and

US bases disappear. Erring on the side of caution, GoJ recognizes North Korea has both the capability and intention to resort to such measures.

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North Korea's continuous development of its military strike capabilities is, however, only a part of issues when it comes to Japan's threat perception on North Korea.

In addition, a future trajectory of the Korean peace process could be counterproductive for Japan. A declaration ending the Korean War would [diminish](#) the US rationale for the US-ROK alliance and the forward presence of military assets as a deterrent, possibly leading to downsizing or total withdrawal of USFK. Such a scenario would create a power vacuum on the Korean Peninsula, changing regional stability [anchored](#) by the US military presence and negatively impacting the US commitment to security in Northeast Asia. This means North Korea's stance and subsequent regional responses, regardless of its aggressiveness or seeming peacefulness, could greatly affect the stability *beyond* the Korean Peninsula.

Based on this consideration, Japan has assessed whether a trajectory of North Korea and responses from regional powers are (a) desired, (b) acceptable or (c) unacceptable, mainly in reference to the following criteria: 1) Level of threat from North Korea's WMD, and 2) Degree of US commitment to maintain current extended deterrence posture through the US-ROK alliance, and reassurance to regional allies.

(a) [A desired \(but unrealistic\) scenario](#)

Tokyo desires the complete elimination of North Korea's WMD and ballistic missile programs, which includes not only [nuclear weapons and ICBMs](#) but also intermediate-range ballistic missiles with [biological and chemical weapons](#) that threaten Japan. North Korea should take tangible steps to denuclearize, complying with the term of Complete, Verifiable, and Irreversible Denuclearization (CVID). This requires an internationally-monitored and verifiable framework for dismantlement of WMD warheads and production facilities and some regulations on delivery systems.

Regarding the US-ROK alliance, Tokyo expects both the US and the ROK to resume its large-scale military exercises – known as *Foal Eagle* and *Key Resolve* – which put pressure on North Korea, maintain readiness of their forces, and provide the credibility of extended deterrence and reassurance for regional allies.

Japan, however, understands that this desired outcome is overambitious and unrealistic given the current situation. North Korea has achieved a *fait accompli* with its nuclear and missile programs, and both the Moon and Trump administrations have been pursuing détente with North Korea to keep those items on the negotiating table.

(b) [An acceptable goal](#)

Japan could accept the condition where the current US force posture in the region is maintained, while North Korea agrees to demobilize and dismantle all weaponized nuclear, biological, and chemical materials. The peaceful use of nuclear energy by North Korea would be acceptable if measures to secure a transparent verification process are taken.

Regarding North Korean delivery systems, it is not ideal but realistic to allow North Korea to keep limited capabilities, namely short- and medium-range missiles. In this scenario, Japan would prioritize the removal of nuclear and other WMD threats. While conventional warheads and

delivery systems remain, Japan and the US could respond as long as their Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) architecture works seamlessly. To maintain readiness, ensure interoperability, and reassure allies in the region, Tokyo would expect Washington to facilitate regional security exercises while maintaining restraints against North Korea.

In addition, GoJ would consider approaching the US, ROK, and even North Korea directly at the high-level without preconditions to avoid a situation in which Japan would lose its leverage in determining the trajectory of the Korean Peninsula and consequent regional stability.

(c) The worst case and unacceptable outcome

The worst-case outcome for Japan is to accept and recognize North Korea as a de-facto nuclear-armed state like Pakistan. It would be devastating for Japan's security and diplomacy to eliminate UN Security Council (UNSC) sanctions against North Korea without any tangible progress toward denuclearization. Once sanctions against North Korea are removed, it could arm itself with nuclear weapons. Such a scenario would have huge repercussions for the effectiveness of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

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Even if the denuclearization process makes some progress, Tokyo could not accept a scenario where the US focuses on the removal of ICBMs

but leaves short- and intermediate-range missiles, which would leave Japan vulnerable.

In the context of the trajectory of a peace process and the USFK forward presence, Japan could not accept a less-assured alliance risking regional stability as a result of diplomatic bargaining with North Korea. Therefore, it is important to avoid any provisions for bilateral or quadrilateral peace agreement among the signatories to Korean Armistice Agreement that could create a power vacuum in the region via total withdrawal of USFK and the dissolution of Combined Force Command (CFC) and United Nations Command (UNC).

Japan should welcome and respect efforts toward reaching a peace deal among the parties of the Korean War. However, it should argue that “peace” cannot be easily compromised in favor of North Korea because it could drastically change the status quo of regional stability. The worst case in this context is the withdrawal of USFK as a precondition to North Korea's steps toward denuclearization, which would create a power vacuum. These actions could mistakenly send a “signal of appeasement” and lead to North Korea's opportunistic assertive actions.

Conclusion

The assessment of potential threats toward Japan's national security and its alliance with the US indicates that its business in the security realm will continue to grow more severe in foreseeable future. While diplomatic flexibility is required to avoid possible crises and escalations, it could also be argued that the allies should stick to their coherent and coordinated policies to deter any threats to regional peace and security. Japan needs to work harder to keep the alliance unified in tackling strategic challenges in the region.

THE UNITED STATES' TOP THREE PERCEIVED THREATS IN NORTHEAST ASIA

BY JANELLE FUNTANILLA, CRAIG KAFURA, ANNIE KOWALEWSKI, KENDRICK LEONG, ZEPHANII SMITH EISENSTAT, WRENN YENNIE LINDGREN

Short-term threat: North Korean strike capabilities

In team deliberations, it was determined that North Korean strike capabilities are the primary short-term threat facing the US today. Concerns centered around North Korean strike capabilities directed against both the United States and its allies. These capabilities included North Korean [intercontinental ballistic missiles \(ICBMs\)](#) with the capacity to carry nuclear warheads, aimed at US territories and the US mainland; short- and medium-range ballistic missiles (SRBM/MRBM) carrying nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons targeting US allies and US forces in the region; and North Korea's conventional forces arrayed against the Republic of Korea (ROK) and US forces stationed on the Korean Peninsula. As of this writing, tensions continue to rise as missile testing [proceeds](#) in the Pacific.

Medium-term threat: changing US relationships with allies and adversaries

In the medium-term, the US team was concerned about shifting relationships in region, with allies and adversaries alike.

Current tensions between the US and its allies in Asia under the Trump administration are largely driven by US behavior, and particularly, by the

[personality](#) of the president and his views on how US allies should [compensate](#) the US for troops based on their territory. The US-ROK [negotiations](#) over the Special Measures Agreement, which concluded in a one-year temporary deal, is one example. However, the US team did not foresee that this tension-generating approach toward US allies would be a long term trend, given the [absence of support](#) for these policies among either the American public or the US national security policy community. The US team hoped that a shift away from the current administration's approach would translate into improved alliance relationships.

Other intra-ally tensions, however, were deemed as not directly stemming from US conduct. For instance, the [thawing of relations](#) between North and South Korea, while welcomed by the US team as a de-escalation of tensions on the Korean Peninsula, also raised concerns around [alliance cohesion](#) and the presentation of a united US-ROK front in dealing with North Korea.

Team caucus discussions also touched on how other states in the region can capitalize on this medium-term threat. In particular, China was identified as likely to take advantage of rifts between the US and regional allies wherever possible, and to use its economic leverage as a wedging tool.

Long-term threat: great power rivalry

This brought the US team to its third, and long-term, threat: the return of great-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. While the US team was clear that the US welcomes the rise of a peaceful and prosperous China, it also aired concerns about recent Chinese behaviors and unilateral actions. These included the rapid expansion of [Chinese military power](#) with a focus on power projection and [access-denial capabilities](#), Chinese [claims](#) of vast areas of international maritime waters as Chinese territorial waters, the use of [Chinese maritime militia](#) bullying smaller claimants' civilian fishing vessels, the construction and militarization of [artificial islands](#) throughout the South China Sea, the use of coercive Chinese

[economic power](#) against US allies and partners for political ends, the [detention](#) of Canadians Michael Kovrig and Michael Spavor, and the treatment of [Uighur Muslims](#) in China.

Additionally, in plenary discussions, it was clear that one of China's primary policy objectives is to oust the US from the region and dismantle the US alliance network in the Indo-Pacific.

How North Korea relates to US threat perceptions

North Korea is one of the “+3” in the [2017 National Security Strategy](#)'s “2+3” formulation. The “2” represents the two great power competitors identified as China and Russia, while the “3” refers to a set of lower-level but still important security challenges: Iran, North Korea, and violent extremist organizations.

In dealing with the North Korean problem, the US **desires** the complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization (CVID) of North Korea and the peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula under the Republic of Korea. This has been the ultimate objective for US policymakers for decades, and remains so today.

However, this ultimate objective remains far from completion. The US has been unwilling to resume negotiations with the North until it satisfies commitments made in previous rounds of negotiation. While this is a position the Trump administration has [not taken](#), future US administrations may return to this policy. The US has viewed acknowledging the DPRK as a nuclear power as **unacceptable**, because it both highlights past failures and sets a [dangerous precedent](#) for other potential nuclear powers; thus, paving a path for them to pursue nuclear weapons and proliferate nuclear material with the hope of later acquiring international legitimacy. The US also views a range of major concessions, such as [withdrawing](#) US troops from the ROK or disarming its own nuclear capabilities, as unacceptable. These limitations on US and allied concessions, combined with North Korea's apparent unwillingness to engage

in serious bargaining, has led some to [pivot](#) away from a CVID agenda to an arms control and nonproliferation agenda.

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The US views the intermittent process of negotiating with the North, even if unsuccessful, to be **acceptable**. These negotiations are broadly seen as preferable to military conflict, even if they often [amount](#) to a program of “[strategic patience](#)” given the slow pace of progress. Such a strategy relies to some extent on the assumption that the regime will collapse on its own, and that the US can safely bide its time rather than pushing for a swifter and messier resolution to challenges in North Korea.

LOOKING NORTH: AUSTRALIAN AND NEW ZEALAND VIEWS ON SECURITY DYNAMICS IN NORTHEAST ASIA

BY DAVID LANG AND LIAM
THOMAS

Australia and New Zealand's perceived threats in Northeast Asia

Australia and New Zealand share many similarities in the way they view the world and their role in global affairs. At the heart of their external engagement lies their deep investment in ensuring that the international rules-based order is maintained and strengthened over time. This is particularly the case when it comes to their region in the Indo-Pacific, where rules and norms are coming under considerable strain.

While these two liberal maritime democracies are not central players in Northeast Asia's security landscape, they watch developments closely and seek opportunities to expand influence and take action through personal relationships and multilateral institutions. Since Australia and New Zealand carry unique perspectives and values alongside capabilities and treaty obligations, often there can be a wide gulf between the countries' positions depending on the issue. However, there is still utility in focusing broadly on the common ground between them.

Canberra and Wellington have a common perspective on the most acute security threat to regional stability and the global rules-based order, namely the missile and nuclear programs under development by North Korea. The *2017 Australian Foreign Policy White Paper* [speaks](#) of

these programs as a 'grave and growing threat' representing 'the region's most immediate security challenge'. Similarly, the *2018 New Zealand Strategic Defence Policy Statement* describes North Korea as a 'critical disarmament and non-proliferation challenge'. The countries recognize North Korea as a multifaceted threat with a range of concerns including nuclear developments, ballistic missiles and a formidable conventional force, including artillery targeted at Seoul. These countries also understand that any conflict on the peninsula will result in sizable strategic, economic and humanitarian repercussions, and a threat to global non-proliferation efforts. The many opportunities for miscalculation and escalation from North Korea is supplemented by its cyber capabilities and stockpiles of chemical weapons.

The future of Taiwan is of significant concern for both Australia and New Zealand. The countries consider Taiwan an increasingly sensitive and dangerous issue under the assertive and nationalistic policies of President Xi Jinping. At the same time, Taiwan's foreign allies are under considerable pressure to align with Beijing, with a number of these countries shifting their attitudes over recent years to be more accommodating to the People's Republic of China. Both countries would take serious issue with any Chinese attack on Taiwan and look to mitigate the chances of this through initiatives to support friends, allies and partners, and protect the rights of small states in consistency with the rules-based order. They are also interested as fellow liberal maritime democracies with active security engagements with island nations in the South Pacific. Australia and New Zealand perceive that while a military incident does not appear imminent, the prospects for an attack and whether the issue should be considered as a short, medium or long-term challenge depends largely on the foreign policies pursued by the administrations of China, Taiwan, and the US.

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The future of Taiwan is of significant concern for both Australia and New Zealand.

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New Zealand and Australia also show concern with the territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas, seeing these as intermediate-term potential triggers for conflict. In the East China Sea, a long period of Chinese provocations has heightened tensions with Japan particularly over the Senkaku Islands, tensions that have been fanned by fervent nationalism in both countries. Discord has deepened in the South China Sea owing to Beijing’s belligerent actions, such as the construction and militarization of artificial islands expanding over contested territory, in addition to bellicose rhetoric and failing to heed the 2016 ruling of the arbitral tribunal at the Permanent Court of Arbitration. While the international community’s attention on these issues has receded in recent years, Beijing has continued to entrench its position by maintaining the challenge to Japan in the East China Sea and constantly expanding its presence in the South China Sea, giving reason to believe that this is more of a medium- or long-term threat. Australia and New Zealand are acutely aware of the security implications of further negative developments in both areas, particularly with their proximity to critical shipping routes.

How North Korea relates to Australia and New Zealand’s perceived threats

Australia and New Zealand recognise that North Korea presents one of the most egregious challenges to the international rules-based order. Australia’s views and actions are guided by an acknowledgement that Canberra’s treaty obligations to the United States would compel

their involvement in any military contingencies on the Korean Peninsula. While New Zealand is not bound by such a commitment, Wellington would most likely seek to play a role in supporting its allies to come to a suitable and swift resolution to myriad security challenges resulting from potential conflict.

The countries both desire a freeze on launches and the complete and verifiable decommissioning of test sites. Particularly, Canberra and Wellington would support moves that lead to the complete abandonment of North Korea’s missile and nuclear programs, given the overwhelmingly positive implications for regional stability. This is in line with respecting multilateral statements as the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1718 calling for North Korea to “not conduct any further nuclear test or launch of a ballistic missile [and] suspend all activities related to its ballistic missile program.”

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The countries both desire a freeze on launches and the complete and verifiable decommissioning of test sites.

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There may be situations where both countries would find it acceptable for Pyongyang to retain a nuclear weapons capability under sufficiently strict and verifiable controls and limitations by multilateral organisations such as the International Atomic Energy Agency. However, the acceptable terms for Australia and New Zealand would be heavily determined by decisions from the United States and their allies in Northeast Asia due to the limited capacity for these countries to take a leading role on this issue.

In any case, these two countries will heavily advocate the use of multilateral mechanisms to determine a collective decision whether an outcome with North Korea is acceptable or not, alongside the most appropriate response.

Both countries would find any North Korean use of nuclear missiles against other states completely unacceptable, as well as attacks on or direct acts of aggression towards neighbours or others. They would also find it unacceptable to see the continued growth of North Korea's nuclear arsenal or further testing of its nuclear and missile capabilities. At a broader level in the region, unacceptable outcomes for Canberra and Wellington would be more nuclear proliferation by countries in response to North Korea, and for Washington to retract from the region or the rescinding of US regional security agreements such as its nuclear umbrella.

Australia and New Zealand are small players when it comes to resolving the challenge posed by North Korea's missile and nuclear programs or an increasingly belligerent China. This leaves the countries to play a strong middle power role and work in solidarity with partners and allies to support developments that strengthen peace, security and stability in the Indo-Pacific, and with them the rules and norms that govern the international system. The possibility of major powers scaling back on foreign policy may leave room for middle powers to become increasingly important in these areas. Consequently, these factors make a strong case for Australia and New Zealand to continue an active presence in regional security matters.

NORTHEAST ASIA'S THREE MAIN SECURITY THREATS FROM CHINA'S VIEW

BY CHEN JIA AND HAO NAN

In China's perception, three threats can be identified in the Northeast Asia region.

First, the Taiwan issue is a threat with uncertain potentialities. Due to the links between the Taiwan issue and various other issues in both Mainland China's domestic politics and regional strategic dynamics, the Taiwan issue possesses great magnitude and has naturally consumed much of China's strategic attention and resources. Given that China is involved in numerous issues with countries along the Belt and Road and has ongoing trade disputes with the US, it would be especially strained once cross-strait relations fall into an extremely hazardous scenario.

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**...Mainland China's
stability and prosperity
– particularly in a
politico-economic
sense – determines its
capability and
dedication to North
Korea...**

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The Taiwan issue is actually intertwined with the North Korea issue, not just based on China's involvement in the Korean War, which led to US containment by means of deploying the 7th fleet in the Taiwan Strait, but also based on today's dynamics in which China's stability and prosperity – particularly in a politico-economic sense – determines its capability and dedication to North Korea, even though the North Korea issue has tremendous strategic implications for China. The Taiwan issue lies in China's core interests, and therefore China would prioritize the allocation of strategic attention and resources on the Taiwan issue. This is not just because of Taiwan's geographic proximity with China's coast, where major economic engines accommodate the majority of domestic and international economic activities, but also because the Taiwan issue is intertwined with Chinese national identity, the government's legitimacy and the revitalization vision.

It would be ideal for Taiwan to be finally unified with China under “One Country, Two Systems,” which, in fact, was originally designed for Taiwan but introduced in Hong Kong first. Of course, the ongoing relations between Mainland China and Taiwan also indicate that there is room for negotiation, as long as Taiwan recognizes the fundamental “1992 Consensus” and doesn't push for independence.

The second threat is the Korean Peninsula. The impact of the issue itself has already been tremendous, let alone the potential secondary issues that might result from dynamics on the Peninsula. The North Korea issue, from China's perspective, has internal and external implications. Internally, North Korea is ideologically important because it is one of the five communist countries in today's world. North Korea's stability highly correlates with the stability and prosperity of Northeast China, which in one extreme scenario could receive thousands of North Korean refugees fleeing across the border river into China. Externally, North Korea is perceived as a buffer zone and partner vis-à-vis the US and its allies in the region. Given North Korea's nuclear capability,

China has concerns about North Korea triggering a nuclear arms race, hindering regional peace, stability, and prosperity.

The peace process on the Peninsula causes China to imagine how a unified Korea would think and behave. Several questions need to be asked: would the unified Korea lean more on the US, or more on China? Would it try to remain independent and balance both sides?

China would welcome the opportunity to jointly work on the peace process and denuclearization of the Korea. Ideally, Korea would evolve into an economic opportunity for countries in the region and finally achieve long-lasting peace and stability. China doesn't want to see North Korea fall into an extreme scenario that brings sparks to the Peninsula, refugees to neighboring countries and hinders China's development.

The third threat is the potential strategic isolation of China in the region that will occur if the above two threats manifest in dangerous ways. The Belt and Road Initiative has been widely rolled out across Asia and Europe and even extended to Africa and South America. On one hand, it brings more opportunities for both China and partner countries. On the other, it creates criticisms; risks and losses in legal, economic, and political realms; and builds skepticism from various countries, all of which have consumed much of China's capabilities and resources. Facing the criticism and skepticism, many countries have been more cautious of China. In Northeast Asia, China's increasing capabilities and foreign activities have also caused countries in the region to be more cautious. For example, Japan has been hesitant to decide whether to join the BRI, and finally ended up with a compromised approach: Sino-Japan Cooperation in the Third-Party Market.

capabilities and foreign activities have also caused countries in the region to be more cautious.

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The existing and potentially enhanced alliance between the US and Japan, and the US and South Korea and the ongoing efforts of the Quadrilateral Mechanism comprising the US, Japan, Australia and India, in addition to the new Indo-Pacific concept, all exclude China and even target its activities. The formation of these patterns might lead China to rethink its policy toward North Korea and further emphasize the geopolitical importance of it in the region. If China-exclusion continues as a regional trend, it would not be ideal for China to have a unified Korean Peninsula at the expense of losing its only partner and buffer zone in the region.

To avoid isolation, China hopes to use economic interdependency as a means to facilitate mutual trust-building and regional integration, thus reducing strategic skepticism from countries in the region, and preventing its strategic isolation in the regional security architecture. The least desirable scenario is to see another round of full containment under the unified efforts of the US and its allies in the region.

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**In Northeast Asia,
China's increasing**

PERCEIVED THREATS TO NORTHEAST ASIAN SECURITY: WHAT THE KOREAN TEAM THINKS

BY JOHN JONGHWA AHN, GIBUM
KIM, SAEME KIM, SARAH KIM,
AND JULIA OH

Korea's perceived threats in Northeast Asia

Given the geopolitical circumstances surrounding the Korean Peninsula, the Republic of Korea (ROK) will be subject to great power politics as well as various regional security threats. In this paper, the South Korean team has therefore narrowed down the top three perceived threats as emanating from North Korea, China's rise, and increased nationalistic sentiments in the region.

First, North Korea's [military](#) poses both short- and long-term threats to Northeast Asia. The DPRK possesses a sizeable arsenal of conventional and nonconventional weapons, including weapons of mass destruction (WMD). Concerning the latter, North Korea has tested a series of missiles, the most recent [tests](#) occurring this month. North Korea has carried out six [nuclear tests](#) from 2006 to 2017, each test demonstrating advancement in technology. In 2012, North Korea revised its Constitution to declare itself a nuclear state. In terms of chemical weapons, the South Korean [Ministry of National Defense](#) (MND) estimated in 2012 that North Korea possesses between 2,500 and 5,000 metric tons of chemical weapons. North Korea's cyber-attacks also pose a serious threat. In particular, as the North Korean regime becomes more strapped

for cash, it has been carrying out more cyber-attacks targeting [banks](#) around the world. In these ways, North Korea's development of nonconventional weaponry exerts an asymmetric leverage over the region.

Second is the trajectory of China's rise and its regional implications. China's efforts to expand its regional influence is primarily evidenced by its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and assertive behavior in the East and South China Seas. One of the ways in which China poses a direct threat to ROK is by exercising influence over North Korea in the denuclearization process. Since 80% of North Korea's trade is with China, China's participation in the international sanctions regime against North Korea determines their overall effectiveness in maintaining economic pressure upon the regime. As demonstrated in the standoff and [economic retaliation](#) against South Korea over the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), China is also inclined to practice economic statecraft by linking economic and security issues. The entanglement of China in inter-Korean affairs along with China's continued rise poses not only a concern for ROK, but also for the international community with respect to maintaining the liberal regional order based on freedom of navigation and rule of law.

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One of the ways in which China poses a direct threat to ROK is by exercising influence over North Korea in the denuclearization process.

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Third, the rise of nationalism is a threat to Northeast Asia. While ethno-cultural nationalism may not be an inherent feature of Northeast Asian states, governments' use of nationalism as a tool to further domestic agendas is a long-term threat. The security implications of nationalism for Northeast Asia include territorial disputes among all countries in Northeast Asia, swaying public opinion during election periods, and negatively affecting bilateral relations. Nevertheless, this threat is not unique to Northeast Asia but is a commonly observed trend in many regions of the world.

How North Korea relates to the Republic of Korea's perceived threats

North Korean asymmetric military capability is at the core of the ROK's threat perception on the Korean Peninsula and the region. First, it is a direct threat to ROK's national security. While the quality of the ROK conventional forces and the ROK-US combined forces far outweigh that of North Korea, its asymmetric military capabilities including nuclear and WMD weapons, ballistic missiles, long-range artillery, submarine forces, special operation forces and offensive cyber capabilities brings challenges to ROK's national security.¹

These capabilities, when considered in combination with the DPRK's perceived military strategy that focuses on surprise attacks, hybrid warfare and *blitzkrieg*, could raise various challenges in terms of military strategy and tactics during contingencies. A DPRK utilizing asymmetric capabilities to coerce the ROK or the ROK-US alliance to make certain concessions is another concern that must be dealt with through the alliance's robust, tailored extended deterrence posture on the Peninsula.

The second issue that arises from the DPRK's asymmetric capabilities is the regional and global proliferation of WMD weapons and technology to other rogue states or violent non-state actors, including terrorist networks. One of South Korea's national defense objectives is to contribute to enhancing and maintaining

regional stability and global peace.² South Korea is a member of many international non-proliferation and export control regimes including the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty, the International Atomic Energy Agency, the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Missile Technology Control Regime and the Australia Group. Unchecked and illegal proliferation of WMD technology is a grave threat to regional and global peace and stability. Development of non-strategic nuclear weapons capabilities in existing nuclear states, rogue states and also aspiring nuclear states could change calculations regarding escalation dominance and increase the danger of an actual nuclear conflict. The DPRK is already known for its proliferation activities linked to Iran and Syria.³ The destabilization of Northeast Asia as well as other regions including the Middle East is a threat to South Korea's national interests and security in terms of increased tensions and burden regarding a potential regional arms race and tailored US extended deterrence. Also, higher instability in the Middle East could yet again distract the US from focusing on the Asia-Pacific region and force them to disperse limited resources elsewhere. The DPRK's persistence to be globally accepted as a nuclear state against the terms of the Non-Proliferation Treaty and continued testing and development of nuclear warheads and long-range missiles are unacceptable in terms of regional security, particularly for the ROK and its allies.

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Unchecked and illegal proliferation of WMD technology is a grave threat to regional and global peace and stability.

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In response to DPRK's *blitzkrieg* and modernization of its WMD capabilities, the ROK military has adopted the nuclear and WMD counter-system which includes the “Kill Chain” preemptive strike program, Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD), and Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR) system. The ROK military had reformulated its operation plans to allow for both defensive and offensive military strategies.

Though it utilizes the strategic play of coercion-and-provocation, the DPRK remains a potential economic partner for East Asia. The DPRK may want to keep the “Samson Option”⁴ as a

possibility on the negotiating table, the rationale being to secure the survival of the country and the regime in its current form from the threat of the US, South Korea, and their allies. However, dismantling a substantial amount of its nuclear weapons capability and limiting its missile force in exchange for humanitarian assistance and economic development could also live on as a possible negotiating option. DPRK's willing and sincere gesture to negotiate denuclearization is an acceptable outcome as ROK can pursue its *détente* policy and narrow the gap in inter-Korean relations.

The ROK considers the denuclearization of DPRK and peaceful unification of the two Koreas as a desirable set of outcomes. ROK President Moon Jae-in, in his speech at the Korber Foundation in Berlin, stressed that CVID is “the demand of the international community and is the absolute condition for peace on the Korean Peninsula”.⁵ Having DPRK as a lesser threat to the regional powers, the two Koreas have an opportunity in pursuing cooperation and development in economic, social and security areas which could eventually lead to peaceful unification in the future. Such an outcome will lower the security cost for both Koreas as a result of arms control and also minimize the costs for the USFK.

[1] ROK Ministry of National Defense. (2018). *2018 Defense White Paper* (in Korean). Seoul: Ministry of National Defense. p. 21.

[2] The three national defense objectives are defending the nation from external military threat and invasion, supporting peaceful unification and contributing to enhancing regional stability and global peace. Ibid.

[3] Bechtol, Jr., B. E. (2018). “North Korea's Illegal Weapons Trade,” *Foreign Affairs*. (URL: https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/north-korea/2018-06-06/north-koreas-illegal-weapons-trade?utm_campaign=reg_conf_email&utm_medium=newsletters&utm_source=fa_registration).

[4] Global Security. (2005). Strategic Doctrine. Weapons of Mass Destruction (www.globalsecurity.org/wmd/world/israel/doctrine.htm).

[5] The Republic of Korea Cheong Wa Dae. (2017). Address at the Korber Foundation, Germany. Cheong Wa Dae (english1.president.go.kr/BriefingSpeeches/Speeches/65

APPENDIX A

Northeast Asia Regional Young Leaders Security Symposium

Exploring vital questions for the future of Northeast Asia

THURSDAY, 11 APRIL 2019.....

- 09:00 Breakfast at leisure
Complimentary breakfast provided at hotel for guests
- 10:00 Registration
CRS Conference Room
- 10:15 Opening remarks
Speakers: Akira Igata, Keoni Williams
- 10:30 **Session 1: Country caucus**
Delegates break up into five teams (Japan, United States, South Korea, China and other stakeholders) to independently discuss: (1) What are your country's top three perceived threats in Northeast Asia? Why are they considered threats? Distinguish between short- medium- and long-term threats. (2) How does North Korea relate to your country's threat perceptions? Regarding the North Korea issue, what are desired, acceptable, and unacceptable outcomes for your country?
Moderator: Brad Glosserman
- 11:30 Coffee break
- 11:45 **Session 2: Comparing security perspectives in Northeast Asia**
The plenary will reconvene and each team will present their responses to the prompts discussed during session one.
Moderator: Brad Glosserman
- 12:45 **Boxed lunch**
- 13:45 **Session 3: Tabletop exercise deliberation**
Country teams receive a tabletop exercise scenario and independently deliberate about how their country would hypothetically respond.
Moderator: Brad Glosserman
- 15:45 Coffee break

16:00 **Session 4: Keynote remarks and roundtable discussion**
Speaker: US Embassy Tokyo Deputy Chief of Mission Mr. Joseph M. Young
Moderator: Keoni Williams

17:30 Dinner

FRIDAY, 12 APRIL 2019.....

09:00 Breakfast at leisure
Complimentary breakfast provided at hotel for guests

10:00 **Session 5: Tabletop exercise assessment**
The plenary reconvenes to discuss tabletop exercise deliberations. Each team presents their responses to the scenario and explains their rationale.
Moderator: Brad Glosserman

11:15 Coffee break

11:30 **Session 6: Five-party talks**
The plenary reconvenes for a moderated roundtable discussion that builds upon the previous session. Where do country responses converge? Where do they diverge? How do divergences in responses relate to divergences in threat perceptions? How could divergent responses be reconciled? To what extent is that possible?
Moderator: Brad Glosserman

13:00 **Boxed lunch**

14:00 **Session 7: Country caucus**
Country teams independently discuss how differences highlighted during the previous session could be resolved. Where could your team possibly make compromises? What would your team like to see in a joint statement? Teams then draft a joint statement to be voted on by the other teams. Focus on the key items or bullet points that should be included. Do not get caught up with the grammar and phrasing of the document.
Moderator: Brad Glosserman

15:30 Coffee break

15:45 **Session 8: Joint statement and key takeaways**
The plenary reconvenes for each team to present their joint statement and explain their rationale. Teams then vote on whether they would sign or not sign each version. To the extent possible, the version with the most votes will be modified until all parties agree to sign it. The session concludes with a roundtable discussion on key takeaways from the process. What divergences among countries were revealed? What could be done to close those gaps and move regional cooperation forward? What are the key

lessons learned from this exercise?

Moderator: Akira Igata

17:30 Closing dinner

APPENDIX B

Northeast Asia Regional Young Leaders Security Symposium

Exploring vital questions for the future of Northeast Asia

April 11-13, 2019 | Tokyo, Japan

PARTICIPANT LIST

1. **Mr. John Jonghwa AHN (ROK)**
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11. **Mr. David LANG (AUS)**
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26. **Mr. Keoni WILLIAMS (USA)**
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