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EDITED BY  
ROB YORK





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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
THE WASHINGTON DECLARATION AND THE US-SOUTH KOREA ALLIANCE: RESPONSES, IMPLEMENTATION, AND IMPACT	3
SOUTH KOREAN CRITICAL MINERAL DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICA	25
PROSPECTS FOR BETTER PHILIPPINES -US RELATIONS UNDER TRUMP 2.0	41
THE REVITALIZATION OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMAND: WHY IT IS POSSIBLE	54
STRATEGIC CULTURE AND FDI REGULATION FOR NATIONAL SECURITY: COMPARISON BETWEEN JAPAN AND AUSTRALIA	66
A STUDY ON NUCLEAR STRATEGIES IN THE KIM JONG UN ERA	83
HOW SOUTH KOREA CAN PROTECT ITS DUAL STATUS AS A US ALLY AND SEMICONDUCTOR POWER	94
ABOUT THE AUTHORS	105

# Introduction

In honor of the efforts of Pacific Forum's former president and board chairman James Kelly, Pacific Forum is honored to facilitate the James A. Kelly Korea Fellowship for emerging scholars of the Korean Peninsula. These emerging leaders, whether in resident or nonresident capacity, produce a paper under the supervision of Pacific Forum staff, and in this volume we are delighted to share five such papers: Alexander Hynd, 2022-2023 nonresident fellow joins with Max Broad to evaluate the impact of the Washington Declaration of April 2023; current nonresident fellow Daeun Choi evaluates the nuclear strategies of Kim Jong Un since his rise to power in 2011; 2023-2024 nonresident fellow James JB Park discusses options for the revitalization of the UN Command amid South Korea's population decline; current nonresident fellow Tom Ramage discusses how Seoul's efforts to secure critical mineral supplies in Africa could stimulate increased competition for such resources; and 2024 resident fellow Kendrick Farm argues that South Korea must secure its rare earth elements supply even as it secures its neutrality in a potential US-China armed conflict.

But the Kelly Fellowship is not the only means by which Pacific Forum assists in developing the next generation of foreign policy analysts, and the US-ROK alliance is hardly the only US pact undergoing transition at the time when the US-China competition is heating up and the US reevaluates the nature of its partnerships. 2022 Lloyd and Lilian Nonresident Vasey Fellow Florence Principe Gamboa evaluates how the Philippines has and should adapt to Trump 2.0, while 2024 Nonresident WSD-Handa Fellow Rei Koga evaluates the differences in FDI regulation in Japan and Australia, both key US treaty allies, certain to be part of any broad US economy security strategy to emerge under this Trump administration.

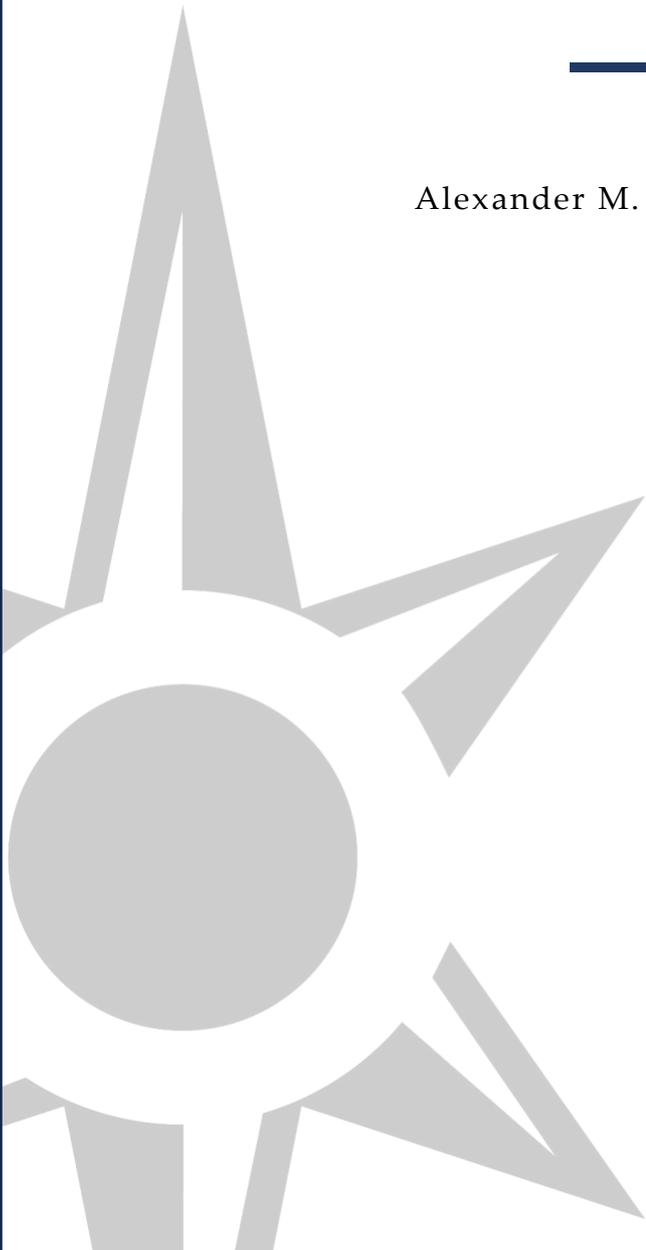
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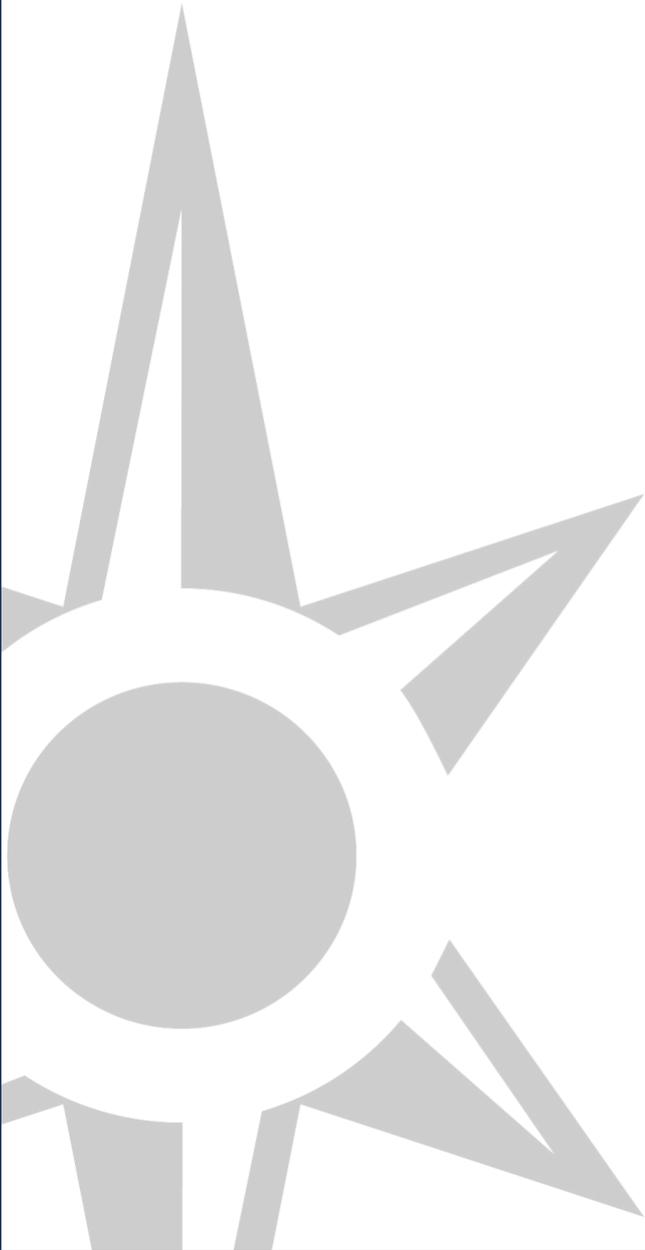


# The Washington Declaration and the US-South Korea Alliance: Responses, Implementation, and Impact

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By  
Alexander M. Hynd and Max Broad





# Executive Summary

*Alexander M. Hynd and Max Broad*

The April 2023 Washington Declaration is one of the most significant developments in the United States (US)-South Korea alliance to have taken place during the Biden-Yoon era. This new bilateral agreement included a reassertion of Seoul's status under the US nuclear umbrella, an acknowledgement by South Korea of its confidence in this extended deterrence and a reaffirmation of its commitment to nuclear nonproliferation, as well as a number of discrete commitments by the two allies to enhance cooperation and deterrence—most notably the establishment of a Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG).

In this working paper we provide an in-depth examination of the Washington Declaration through a review of official government statements and documents, media reports, and secondary policy and academic literatures. In Section One, we find that the Washington Declaration was agreed upon within a context of heightened threat perceptions around North Korea's advanced nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities, active debate about nuclearization in South Korea, and tensions in the US-South Korea alliance. In Section Two, we map out diplomatic and civil society responses to the agreement among key stakeholders: the allies South Korea and the US; and their rivals in North Korea, China, and Russia. In Section Three, we establish that the allies' commitment under the Washington Declaration to enhance consultation and planning, deploy US strategic military assets, and engage in joint exercises and training, has largely been fulfilled. However, in Section Four, we find that this agreement has had limited impact on South Korea's perceptions of the US security guarantee due to problems with the definition and communication of its key commitments, the substance of the agreement, and its weak durability. In the long-term, we argue that the Washington Declaration has not done enough to restrain South Korea's nuclear ambitions.

In the final section, therefore, we offer nuclear nonproliferation-sympathetic decision makers in the US three key recommendations. First, that the US should publicly make clear the distinction between key features of the Washington Declaration's NCG and the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) to avoid conflation between the US' commitments within each alliance framework. Second, that the US should take a more holistic approach to the alliance that takes the interplay between economic security, military security, and trust between allies into account. Third, we argue that the US should recognize the limits of its ability to unilaterally safeguard nuclear nonproliferation in South Korea, and additionally begin to work with its other Indo-Pacific allies, partners—and even rivals—to reinforce Seoul's security, promote public education, and create a regional political context in which nuclear saliency is reduced.

## Introduction

The Washington Declaration was announced by US President Joseph Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol during a bilateral summit in Washington, DC, on April 26, 2023 that marked the 70th anniversary of the US-South Korea military alliance. A significant new development in the two states' bilateral relations, the agreement's key passages include:

- South Korea's acknowledgement that it "has full confidence in US extended deterrence commitments and recognizes the importance, necessity, and benefit of its enduring reliance on the US nuclear deterrent."
- The US' commitment to "further enhance the regular visibility of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula, as evidenced by the upcoming visit of a US nuclear ballistic missile submarine to [South Korea]."
- South Korea's reaffirmation of its "longstanding commitment to its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty as the cornerstone of the global nonproliferation regime as well as to the US-[South Korea] Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy."

The agreement also includes a number of joint commitments for the allies, including:

- The decision to establish a "new Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) to strengthen extended deterrence, discuss nuclear and strategic planning, and manage the threat to the nonproliferation regime posed by [North Korea]."
- The two states' commitment to "deeper, cooperative decision-making on nuclear deterrence" and to "improve combined exercises and training activities on the application of nuclear deterrence on the Korean peninsula."<sup>1</sup>

The upcoming two-year anniversary of the signing of the Washington Declaration, the end of the Biden administration and transition to new US leadership under President Donald Trump, and the ongoing political turmoil in South Korea caused by President

Yoon's disastrous December 2024 martial law bid provide an opportunity for reflection on the Washington Declaration. Important questions around the agreement have yet to be fully addressed in detail. Indeed, viewed in isolation from any broader political context, the Washington Declaration may appear puzzling. Why would South Korea—a longstanding advocate of nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament and good international citizenship—need to reaffirm its dedication to nuclear nonproliferation? After all, isn't it Kim Jong Un and the North Korean military that poses the challenge to nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament around the peninsula? Why would the US—which has around 28,500 military personnel deployed to bases in South Korea as well as regular deployments of major strategic naval and air force platforms to the waters and air around the peninsula<sup>2</sup>—be asked to make its (already well known) overwhelming nuclear superiority more readily visible? And why would these two states, whose longstanding military alliance involves regular consultations through multiple overlapping mechanisms,<sup>3</sup> require yet another bilateral consultative group?

A small number of existing policy and academic papers have begun to narrowly grapple with individual aspects of the Washington Declaration.<sup>4</sup> In this paper, we build on these existing works through a review of official government statements and documents, media reports, and secondary policy and academic literatures. In doing so, we place the Washington Declaration within its full and proper context; examining its causes, reactions, implementation, and impacts. We address the

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<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Jim Garmone, "US, South Korea Want Peace in Indo-Pacific," *DOD News*, Jan. 31, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3282870/us-south-korea-want-peace-in-indo-pacific/>.

<sup>3</sup> Including, but not limited to, the Integrated Defense Dialogue, Defense Ministers' meetings, Security Consultative Meetings, and the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group.

<sup>4</sup> See Sung-Yoon Chung, "Washington Declaration: Evolution of the Extended Deterrence," *Korea Institute for National Unification*, May 3, 2023, <https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/14342/1/CO23-16%28e%29.pdf>; Minsung Kim, "Significance of the ROK-US Nuclear Consultative Group and North Korea's Perception," *KINU Online Series*, Aug. 10, 2023, <https://repo.kinu.or.kr/bitstream/2015.oak/14523/1/CO23-19%28e%29.pdf>; James Trottier, "Assessment of the South Korea-US Summit April 26, 2023," *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*, May, 2023, [https://assets.nationbuilder.com/cdfai/pages/5287/attachments/original/1684188876/Assessment\\_of\\_the\\_South\\_Korea-US\\_Summit\\_April\\_26\\_2023.pdf?1684188876](https://assets.nationbuilder.com/cdfai/pages/5287/attachments/original/1684188876/Assessment_of_the_South_Korea-US_Summit_April_26_2023.pdf?1684188876).

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<sup>1</sup> "Washington Declaration," *The White House*, April 26, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/04/26/washington-declaration-2/>.

following questions: what were the key motivations and contextual factors underpinning this new agreement? How did Indo-Pacific states respond to the announcement of the deal? To what extent has it been implemented by the two sides? What impact has it had? We argue that, at its core, the Washington Declaration should be understood as combining three major political motivations: the US' desire to restrain South Korea's nuclear ambitions, South Korea's desire to strengthen its understanding of, and involvement in, the US' extended deterrence, and the two states' shared desire to signal the strength of their alliance in the face of North Korea's military challenge.

## SECTION ONE: BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

In this section, we help to explain the emergence of the Washington Declaration by situating it within its political, economic and security context—with particular reference to the developments that took place immediately prior to the deal in 2022 and early 2023. We examine three overlapping developments on the Korean Peninsula: (i) North Korea's advanced nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities; (ii) South Korea's nuclear proliferation debates; and (iii) alliance tensions between South Korea and the US.

### *(i) North Korea's advanced nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities*

North Korea has conducted six nuclear tests since 2006 and has an estimated arsenal of around 50 nuclear warheads.<sup>5</sup> Its ability to deliver these payloads is similarly advanced, with a range of short, medium, and intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that are operationally deployed throughout the country to enhance their survivability under attack.<sup>6</sup> At the same time, these material capabilities have been politically buttressed in North Korea, with a September 2022 law reaffirming the country's absolute commitment to its

nuclear arsenal (codified into its constitution a year later) predating the Washington Declaration by a matter of months.<sup>7</sup> Furthermore, North Korea's hostile rhetoric towards South Korea has included regular reference to Pyongyang's nuclear capabilities. For example, following President Yoon's 2022 offer of massive economic assistance in return for the North's commitment to denuclearize, senior North Korean regime figure, Kim Yo Jong, issued a statement in which she called Yoon an "idiot" and threatened Seoul as a "target" of the North's capabilities.<sup>8</sup>

Through the combination of this continued testing, legal changes, and political rhetoric, North Korea has sought to create the impression that its nuclear capabilities are now set in stone and are not up for negotiation with outside powers. Of course, in a highly centralized authoritarian state where power ultimately rests in the hands of one person—leader Kim Jong Un—it is still possible that North Korea could change its course. Particularly if, for example, North Korea faced a new economic or political crisis and Kim viewed it as politically expedient to enter negotiations around disarmament once again. The return of President Trump's unorthodox diplomacy may have some impact here over the next four years.<sup>9</sup> However, a strong improvement in bilateral ties between North Korea and Russia since the latter's invasion of Ukraine means that Pyongyang is far less diplomatically and economically isolated than it was previously. Given these developments, it is quite possible that the extraordinary flurry of summits and negotiations in 2018-19 are remembered as the final serious attempt to fully denuclearize North Korea.

The expansion of Pyongyang's nuclear capabilities, and its recent disinterest in negotiation, impacted the emergence of the Washington Declaration in two key ways. First, despite the US' unrivalled global influence between the end of the Cold War and the 2008 Global Financial Crisis (and international support from both the UNSC and regional allies in

<sup>5</sup> As of January 2024. See Arms Control Association, "Arms Control and Proliferation Profile: North Korea," June, 2024, <https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/arms-control-and-proliferation-profile-north-korea#:~:text=Policies%2C%20and%20Practices-.The%20Nuclear%20Arsenal%2C%20An%20Overview.kilograms%20of%20highly%20enriched%20uranium.>

<sup>6</sup> Joseph S. Bermudez Jr, Victor Cha and Lisa Collins, "Undeclared North Korea: Missile Operating Bases Revealed," *CSIS Beyond Parallel*, Nov. 12, 2018, <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/north-koreas-undeclared-missile-operating-bases/>; See also Daniel Wertz, "North Korea's Ballistic Missile Program," *National Committee on North Korea*, 2023 (version updated by Jeffrey Lewis in April 2024), <https://www.ncnk.org/resources/briefing-papers/all-briefing-papers/north-koreas-ballistic-missile-program.>

<sup>7</sup> South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Understanding the North Korean Nuclear Issue," n.d., [https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m\\_5474/contents.do.](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_5474/contents.do)

<sup>8</sup> Chung-hwan Yu (유충환), "김여정, 윤대통령 향해 막말 "천치바보를 왜 보고만 있나" (Kim Yo Jong: why are people looking at stupid Yoon?), MBC 뉴스 (MBC News), Nov. 24, 2022, [https://imnews.imbc.com/news/2022/politics/article/6429933\\_35666.html](https://imnews.imbc.com/news/2022/politics/article/6429933_35666.html)

<sup>9</sup> See: Sang-Hun Choe, "Will Trump Rekindle a Bromance With Kim Jong-un? South Koreans Worry," *The New York Times*, Nov. 11, 2024, [https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/11/world/asia/south-korea-trump-kim-jong-un.html.](https://www.nytimes.com/2024/11/11/world/asia/south-korea-trump-kim-jong-un.html)



Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy also commits Seoul to nonproliferation. However, some South Korean elites have begun to explore ways to extricate the country from these obligations.<sup>18</sup> Some US elites have also begun to throw their support behind the efforts of these would-be proliferators, citing the growing threat from North Korea.<sup>19</sup>

Of course, there is a wide variance of motivation among South Korean foreign policy elites when it comes to the nuclear question. Adam Mount and Toby Dalton have usefully constructed a tripartite typology of pro-nuclear elites in South Korea. They distinguish between the “zealots” who genuinely believe in the power of nuclear weapons “as a matter of national strength and based on a simplistic adage that ‘only a nuke can deter a nuke’”; the “populists” that want to benefit from the widespread domestic public support for pro-nuclear weapons policies; and the “alliance bargainers” that aim “to use the threat of proliferation to extract concessions from the United States, mainly in the form of nuclear assurances.”<sup>20</sup>

It is possible that President Yoon’s public statement on Jan. 11, 2023 supporting weapons acquisition, which was closely followed by the Washington Declaration, puts him in the camp of proliferation-sympathetic “alliance bargainers.” In May 2023, the director of South Korea’s National Security Office, Cho Tae-yong, was quoted by domestic media saying that “the Americans came up with the idea of creating a separate document [the Washington Declaration].”<sup>21</sup> However, an indictment by the US Justice Department of an alleged unregistered foreign agent for the South Korean government provides additional evidence. The indictment includes a transcript of a recorded conversation from January 10, 2023, in which the alleged foreign agent was told by their South Korean government handler that South Korea wants “a nuclear consultation group with the US” that would

“involve...South Korea in decision making... like a nuclear decision process and more active information sharing... on North Korea.”<sup>22</sup> If true, the timing of this conversation, which was one day prior to President Yoon’s public statement, suggests that the latter could have been a (successful) attempt at “alliance bargaining.” Regardless, Yoon’s comments appear to have sufficiently alarmed the Biden team, with the resultant Washington Declaration clearly demonstrating an attempt to restrain South Korea’s nuclear ambitions.

### (iii) Alliance tensions

The US-South Korea alliance has continuously evolved in the post-Cold War era, reflecting both Seoul’s increased stature, power, and desire for greater autonomy and the US’ interest in reducing the costs of defending its junior ally while retaining leadership.<sup>23</sup> In the contemporary era, there are a number of areas of tension in the alliance, ranging from fears in South Korea of diplomatic isolation and abandonment, to disagreement over cost-sharing for the US military presence in South Korea, to broader concerns around diverging techno-industrial economic and political interests.

Diplomatically, since 2017, South Korea has been increasingly anxious about the potential for so-called ‘Korea-passing’—in which Seoul’s interests are ignored by US decision makers as Washington negotiates with others in the region (primarily Pyongyang).<sup>24</sup> This could have serious consequences for South Korean security. For example, there are ongoing concerns in Seoul that the US could (hypothetically) strike a bargain with North Korea in which the latter retains its nuclear weapons and short/mid-range ballistic missiles but agrees to halt its ICBM development. This would substantially reduce the threat to mainland US but leave South Korea well within range.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>18</sup> See e.g. Cheong Seong-chang (정성창), *왜 우리는 핵보유국이 되어야 하는가* (Why South Korea Should Become a Nuclear-Armed State), (Seoul: Medici Media, 2023).

<sup>19</sup> Jennifer Lind and Daryl G. Press, “Should South Korea build its own nuclear bomb?,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 7, 2021, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/should-south-korea-go-nuclear/2021/10/07/a40bb400-2628-11ec-8d53-67cfb452aa60\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/outlook/should-south-korea-go-nuclear/2021/10/07/a40bb400-2628-11ec-8d53-67cfb452aa60_story.html).

<sup>20</sup> Adam Mount and Toby Dalton, “America’s Ironclad Alliance With South Korea Is a Touch Rusty,” *Foreign Policy*, April 27, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/27/biden-yoon-summit-north-south-korea-nuclear-assurances/>.

<sup>21</sup> Je-hun Lee, “The Washington Declaration is the product of mutual distrust between S. Korea and US,” *Hankyoreh*, May 3, 2023, [https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/english\\_editorials/1090419](https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/english_editorials/1090419).

<sup>22</sup> United States District Court Southern District of New York V. Sue Mi Terry, 24 Crim. 427, July 18, 2024, [https://www.justice.gov/d9/2024-07/US\\_v\\_terry\\_indictment\\_0.pdf](https://www.justice.gov/d9/2024-07/US_v_terry_indictment_0.pdf).

<sup>23</sup> See Alexander Hynd and Daniel Connolly, “Domination for the Rest? Creating and Contesting Secondary State-Led International Hierarchies”, *International Studies Quarterly* 67, no. 4 (2023): sqad098; Alexander Hynd, “Repositioning middle powers in international hierarchies of status and order”, *International Relations* (2025) (Online First).

<sup>24</sup> Hwan Kang, “Korea Passing: Seoul’s New Foreign Policy Concern,” *The Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI)*, Sept. 16, 2017, <https://keia.org/the-peninsula/korea-passing-seouls-new-foreign-policy-concern/>.

<sup>25</sup> See e.g. Da-gyum Ji, “‘Trump may seek surprise NK deal at expense of Seoul’,” *The Korea Herald*, Nov. 7, 2024, <https://news.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20241107050660>.

At the same time, tensions in the alliance have become more acute since Donald Trump's ascendancy within the US domestic political system since 2016. During his first administration (2017-21), President Trump's longstanding alliance skepticism<sup>26</sup> was particularly noticeable in his calls for South Korea to pay as much as 400% more in financial contributions to the substantial cost of stationing US military personnel and other capabilities on South Korean territory.<sup>27</sup> However, some of South Korea's political elites are increasingly resentful of what they view as exploitative demands by their security-providing ally. Indeed, one argument put forward by some in Seoul—though still currently on the margins of political debate—is that instead of Seoul contributing to the cost of US military bases, it is the US that should be paying South Korea for military access to its prime strategic location on the Asian continent—valuable to Washington, DC in its geostrategic competition with China.<sup>28</sup>

Under President Biden, cost-sharing tensions were somewhat cooled. However, this did not mean that the alliance was free from economic disputes. In 2022, considerable anger was expressed in Seoul towards the US' trade policy under the Biden administration's signature Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) because it was seen as damaging the interests of Hyundai/Kia's electric vehicle exports to the US. One commentator called the move a "diplomatic blunder," while a columnist for South Korea's conservative-leaning *JoongAng Ilbo* labeled Biden's policy "MAGA all over again" for its alleged anti-free trade consequences.<sup>29</sup> This misstep added to frustrations that the US had done too little to support Seoul in the face of damaging weaponized trade from China in 2016-17 and that the US was putting strategic competition with China above

South Korea's financial interests in pursuing semiconductor export controls through an envisioned "Chip-4" Alliance.<sup>30</sup>

Collectively, these alliance tensions contributed to the Washington Declaration's emergence because Seoul sought reassurance and the reassertion of the US' nuclear umbrella—particularly amid the region's structural transition to multipolarity and the US' renewed interest in neo-isolationism. At the same time, these alliance tensions have fueled South Korea's domestic nuclear debates, particularly the high levels of support for an independent nuclear capability. Furthermore, the US' economic missteps around China's THAAD weaponized trade, the Biden administration's IRA, and—most recently—pressure to limit South Korea's semiconductor trade with China, all risked intensifying distrust of the US alliance in South Korea.<sup>31</sup>

Together, North Korea's increased threats, South Korea's domestic nuclear debates, and alliance tensions all mutually reinforced the sense that more needed to be done to reassure Seoul of Washington's support in a nuclear showdown, to increase dialogue between the two allies on nuclear issues, and to restrain South Korea's nuclear ambitions. It was in this context that the Washington Declaration was brought into being. In the following section, we move ahead to the day of the agreement's announcement, April 26, 2023—mapping responses to this deal around Northeast Asia.

## SECTION TWO: RESPONSES

In this section, we review and examine responses to the Washington Declaration among two consequential groups of states: (i) the two allies and signatories to the agreement—South Korea and the US; and (ii) the US' geopolitical rivals and competitors in Northeast Asia—North Korea, China, and Russia. Responses from other Indo-Pacific states are not reviewed in this section as they were largely absent or muted.

### *i. Allies: South Korea and the US*

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<sup>26</sup> See Victor Cha and Andy Lim, "Database: Donald Trump's Skepticism of US Troops in Korea since 1990," *CSIS Beyond Parallel*, Feb. 25, 2019, <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/database-donald-trumps-skepticism-u-s-troops-korea-since-1990/>.

<sup>27</sup> Taejun Kang, "Trump suggests \$10 billion price tag for US troops in South Korea," *Radio Free Asia*, Oct. 16, 2024, <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/korea/trump-usfk-sma-10162024034010.html>.

<sup>28</sup> See Jeffrey Robertson, "The Ugly American" needs to be re-read with a focus on Korea," *Diplomatic Seoul*, Oct. 19, 2024, [https://www.junotane.com/p/the-ugly-american-needs-to-be-reread-with-focus-on-korea?utm\\_source=publication-search](https://www.junotane.com/p/the-ugly-american-needs-to-be-reread-with-focus-on-korea?utm_source=publication-search).

<sup>29</sup> Jaemin Lee, "How a Biden Legislative Achievement Jeopardized Relations With South Korea," *The Diplomat*, Jan. 6, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/01/how-a-biden-legislative-achievement-jeopardized-relations-with-south-korea/>; Hyun-sang Lee, "MAGA all over again," *JoongAng Ilbo*, Aug. 28, 2022, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2022/08/28/opinion/columns/Biden-electric-vehicles-subsidy/20220828200144114.html>.

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<sup>30</sup> See Darren Lim and Victor Ferguson, "Informal economic sanctions: The political economy of Chinese coercion during the THAAD dispute," *Review of International Political Economy* 29, no. 1 (2021): 1–24; Hoe-seung Kim, Mi-na Kim, In-seon Chung, Young-bae Kim and Hyun-june Choi, "Korea's dilemma: US-led chip alliance or Chinese market?," *Hankyoreh*, July 21, 2022, [https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_business/1051886.html](https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_business/1051886.html).

<sup>31</sup> See e.g. Andrew Yeo, "Can South Korea trust the United States?" *The Washington Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2023): 109–125.

The Yoon and Biden administrations' respective responses to the Washington Declaration were both positive, though the Yoon administration tended to be more emphatic about the extent of the achievement. President Biden called the deal "a prudent step to reinforce extended deterrence and respond to (the) advancing [North Korean] nuclear threat," but also made clear that "I (the US President) have absolute authority as Commander-in-Chief and the sole authority to use a nuclear weapon"—while for President Yoon it was "an unprecedented expansion and strengthening of the extended deterrence strategy."<sup>32</sup>

Additionally, both administrations clearly tied the logic of the Washington Declaration to the North Korean nuclear threat. For example, President Yoon noted that the agreement "significantly strengthen[s] extended deterrence of our two countries (South Korea and the US) against North Korea's nuclear and missile threats."<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Daniel Kritenbrink, Assistant Secretary of the US Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, told a US Senate hearing on May 2, 2023, that "the Washington Declaration was issued primarily because of the unprecedented and growing nature of the threat from North Korea" and that "in the face of the growing [North Korean] threat and threatening rhetoric, we will take the steps that we need to defend our allies and the American people, and I think in a nutshell that is what the Washington Declaration means."<sup>34</sup>

Despite this show of unity, a minor but revealing gap in messaging did emerge shortly after the deal's announcement when South Korea's deputy national security advisor, Kim Tae-hyo, claimed that the Washington Declaration would make South Koreans "feel that they are sharing nuclear weapons with the United States." In response, Edgard Kagan, special assistant to the president and senior director for East Asia and Oceania of the US National Security Council, appeared to outrightly reject this

characterization, telling the press "[s]o let me just be very direct. I don't think that we see this as a de facto nuclear sharing," and reasserting the US' position that the Washington Declaration was instead a reinforcement of nuclear deterrence.<sup>35</sup>

The civil society responses of both allies featured a diverse range of perspectives. In South Korea, some praised the agreement for having strengthened nuclear deterrence.<sup>36</sup> On the other hand, others were disappointed that it did little to restart talks with North Korea or resolve economic security issues in the US-South Korea alliance, and could lead to tensions in Seoul's relations with Beijing and Moscow.<sup>37</sup> Jina Kim was among those experts who noted the prior existence of similar consultative groups within the US-South Korea alliance, stating that the NCG's "potential additional functions remain to be determined."<sup>38</sup> Many in South Korea were less focused on deterring North Korea and more concerned about the Washington Declaration's effects on Seoul's nuclear ambitions. For example, South Korea's leading daily newspaper, the conservative *Chosun Ilbo*, complained that the Washington Declaration amounted to a tightening of the country's "nuclear shackles" because of Yoon's recommitment to the NPT.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, in the left-leaning *Hankyoreh*, liberal commentator, Lee Jehun, labeled the agreement "a redundant declaration produced by mutual distrust in the South Korea-US alliance" while noting that "multiple former government officials have observed that the unspoken truth of the Washington Declaration is that Biden got Yoon to commit to rejecting the idea of nuclear armament."<sup>40</sup>

<sup>32</sup> "Remarks by President Biden and President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea in Joint Press Conference," *The White House*, April 26, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2023/04/26/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-yoon-suk-yeol-of-the-republic-of-korea-in-joint-press-conference-2/>.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> "Fiscal Year 2024 Budget Request for East Asia and the Pacific. Hearing Before the Subcommittee on East Asia, the Pacific, and International Cybersecurity Policy of the Committee on Foreign Relations," *United States Senate*, May 2, 2023, <https://www.foreign.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/1e44f443-b41b-1297-2952-a3e7ab354729/05%2002%2023%20-%20FY%202024%20Budget%20Request%20for%20East%20Asia%20and%20the%20Pacific.pdf>.

<sup>35</sup> Duk-kun Byun, "Washington Declaration will help deter N. Korean threat but not a 'nuclear sharing' agreement: US official," *Yonhap News*, April 28, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230428003200325>.

<sup>36</sup> See e.g. Sung-lac Wi, "What the Washington Declaration means," *JoongAng Ilbo*, May 10, 2023,

<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2023/05/10/opinion/columns/Washington-Declaration-Yoon-Suk-Yeol-Joe-Biden/20230510203647982.html>.

<sup>37</sup> Heyong-cheol Shin, "Experts predict strong backlash to S. Korean president's 'enemies or allies' diplomacy," *Hankyoreh*, May 1, 2023, [https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_national/1090094.html](https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/1090094.html).

<sup>38</sup> Jina Kim, "The Washington Declaration fails to address Seoul's nuclear concerns," *East Asia Forum*, July 29, 2023, <https://eastasiaforum.org/2023/07/29/the-washington-declaration-fails-to-address-seouls-nuclear-concerns/>.

<sup>39</sup> 조선일보 (*Chosun Ilbo*), "[사설] 한미 핵 협의그룹 창설, 韓 핵 족쇄는 강화됐다 ([Editorial] The establishment of the Korea-US nuclear consultative group and the 'nuclear shackles of South Korea' have been strengthened"), April 19, 2024, <https://www.chosun.com/opinion/editorial/2023/04/27/PVGRGYDKBFASPPKFLSRBRLPPGE/>.

<sup>40</sup> Je-hun Lee, "Mutual distrust."

US commentators were generally more positive, with the Carnegie Endowment's Ankit Panda calling the agreement "a software upgrade for the US-South Korea alliance."<sup>41</sup> However, the Heritage Foundation's Bruce Klingner described the deal as "focused more on enhancing reassurance to Seoul than increasing deterrence,"<sup>42</sup> while scholar Mel Gurtov complained that "[f]urther stoking the fire with talk of nuclear war" in combination with the agreement's other deterrence features "may only magnify tensions (with North Korea) on the peninsula."<sup>43</sup>

Overall, public communications around the deal's announcement succeeded in promoting the message that the target of the Washington Declaration was North Korea—not China. But, despite attempts to domestically sell the deal as a major new enhancement of South Korea's security, questions and objections were raised in South Korea and the US around the novelty of the agreement, its constraining effect on South Korea's nuclear options, and the allies' failure to restart negotiations with North Korea.

## ii. Rivals: North Korea, China, and Russia

As the clearly identified threat and target of the Washington Declaration, North Korea's response was unsurprisingly hostile. Senior regime figure Kim Yo Jong issued a lengthy statement on April 29, 2023. She characterized the agreement as "a typical product of [South Korea and the US'] extreme anti-[North Korea] hostile policy reflecting the most hostile and aggressive will of action" and asserted that it would result in the "peace and security of Northeast Asia and the world be[ing] exposed to more serious danger." Claiming that the deal's components add to "the currents of instability," Kim Yo Jong further suggested that the Washington Declaration "provides us (North Korea) with an environment in which we are compelled to take more decisive action in order to deal with the new

security environment."<sup>44</sup> Subsequently, North Korea has also issued statements in response to meetings of the US-South Korea Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG). For example, following the second meeting of the NCG in December 2023, a spokesperson for North Korea's Ministry of National Defense called the dialogue "an open declaration on nuclear confrontation" and claimed that the US and South Korea were "maximizing the tensions in and around the peninsula with hostile and provocative acts against [North Korea]."<sup>45</sup> While the North Korean military did not directly respond to the Washington Declaration through any new provocation or attack, it did continue to conduct ballistic missile tests of varying scale and success throughout 2023 and 2024.<sup>46</sup>

China's response to the Washington Declaration was also negative but reflected a different set of priorities compared to Pyongyang. On April 27, 2023, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson, Mao Ning, made clear that Beijing opposed the contents of the agreement which she said had come about due to Washington's "selfish geopolitical interests." Mao also accused the US of having "put regional security at risk and intentionally used the issue of the [Korean] peninsula as an excuse to create tension."<sup>47</sup> On the same day, Chinese state media outlet, Global Times, noted that Beijing was opposed not only to the Washington Declaration, but also the bilateral summit's accompanying joint declaration which referenced the need to maintain "peace and stability" around the Taiwan issue.<sup>48</sup> Subsequently, a spokesperson for the Chinese Embassy in Washington, Liu Pengyu, told press that "[t]he US behavior is a result of its Cold War mentality. What the US has done stokes bloc confrontation,

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<sup>41</sup> Ankit Panda, "The Washington Declaration Is a Software Upgrade for the US-South Korea Alliance," Carnegie Endowment, May 1, 2023 <https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2023/05/the-washington-declaration-is-a-software-upgrade-for-the-us-south-korea-alliance?lang=en>.

<sup>42</sup> Bruce Klingner, "US-South Korean nuclear document focused more on reassurance than deterrence," *Washington Times*, May 2, 2023, <https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2023/may/2/us-south-korean-nuclear-document-focused-more-on-r/>.

<sup>43</sup> Mel Gurtov, "Nuclear Politics" The US-South Korea "Washington Declaration," *Counterpunch*, May 8, 2023, <https://www.counterpunch.org/2023/05/08/nuclear-politics-the-us-south-korea-washington-declaration/>.

<sup>44</sup> Mitch Shin, "North Korea Issues Warning after US-South Korea Summit," *The Diplomat*, May 1, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/05/north-korea-issues-warning-after-us-south-korea-summit/>.

<sup>45</sup> Xinhua, "DPRK condemns US-South Korea second Nuclear Consultative Group Meeting," Dec. 18, 2023, <https://english.news.cn/20231218/ae8ebcda0989432daa0908daefce725d/c.html>.

<sup>46</sup> See e.g. Jean Mackenzie, "North Korea fires most powerful long-range missile after South Korea-US meeting," *BBC News*, Dec. 18, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-67745684>.

<sup>47</sup> Liu Zhen, "China denounces US plans to send nuclear ballistic submarine to South Korea," *South China Morning Post*, April 27, 2023, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3218601/china-denounces-us-plans-send-nuclear-ballistic-submarine-south-korea>.

<sup>48</sup> Sheng Yang, "US-S.Korea agreements add new danger; 'extended deterrence' could trigger 'another nuclear crisis' in peninsula," *Global Times*, April 27, 2023, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202304/1289926.shtml>.

undermines the nuclear nonproliferation system, and hurts the strategic interest of other countries.”<sup>49</sup>

Russia’s response had a similarly negative focus on the potential for the Washington Declaration to trigger destabilization and geopolitical confrontation. A statement from the Russian foreign ministry on April 28, 2023 called the agreement “clearly destabilizing in nature” and further alleged that it “will have serious negative consequences for regional security, impacting on global stability.”<sup>50</sup> Subsequently, in October 2024, Russian foreign minister, Sergei Lavrov, accused the US of constructing a “nuclear alliance” in the region. A further statement from the Russian foreign ministry appeared to blame the Washington Declaration for the failure to denuclearize North Korea, saying that “[t]he denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula is impossible in a situation where the South Korea-US alliance has been elevated to a nuclear level.”<sup>51</sup>

Among these responses from the US’ Northeast Asian geopolitical rivals, it is notable that North Korea, Russia, and China all couched their criticisms, at least in part, around claims that the Washington Declaration would increase security instability and tensions. Beijing’s opposition also noted concerns around nuclear nonproliferation and was accompanied by a separate (non-Washington Declaration specific) frustration with President Yoon’s summit commentary on the Taiwan Strait issue.<sup>52</sup> However, whereas in 2016-17 China responded to South Korea agreeing to host the US’ THAAD anti-missile defense system on its territory with massive weaponized trade, in 2023, China’s response to the Washington Declaration was more subdued and confined to conventional diplomatic statements of opposition. It is possible that a fear of similar economic retaliation from China may have motivated South Korea (and the US) to repeatedly insist that the sole target of the Washington Declaration was Pyongyang and to reportedly give

Beijing advance briefings ahead of the announcement of the Washington Declaration.<sup>53</sup>

Separately, it is also possible that the shared opposition of Pyongyang and Moscow to the Washington Declaration may have further contributed to the recent improvement in these two states’ bilateral relations. Indeed, in its reporting of a new comprehensive strategic partnership with Russia in June 2024, North Korean state media cited Russian President Vladimir Putin as stating that the “main reason for escalating tensions on the Korean peninsula is the confrontational policy of the US scaling up and intensifying military exercises with the involvement of the countries hostile toward [North Korea], including [South Korea] and Japan”—in part a possible reference to the Washington Declaration.<sup>54</sup>

Overall, initial praise for the Washington Declaration by the Biden and Yoon administrations—which focused on its North Korean target and strengthening of nuclear deterrence—was tempered by domestic criticisms, with some in South Korea particularly resistant to its nonproliferation implications. Among the allies’ rivals and competitors in Northeast Asia, criticism focused on the agreement’s alleged potential to destabilize regional security. In the next section, we turn to examine the implementation of the Washington Declaration in the period since the April 2023 summit.

### SECTION THREE: IMPLEMENTATION

The Washington Declaration outlines several discrete commitments for the US and South Korea. These include: to enhance consultation and cooperative decision-making on nuclear weapons deterrence and usage, including through a new Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG); to more frequently deploy US nuclear assets to the peninsula; and to engage in joint planning and

<sup>49</sup> Christy Lee, “Experts: China Finds Threat in Latest Move By US-South Korea Alliance,” *Voice of America*, May 4, 2023, <https://www.voanews.com/a/experts-china-finds-threat-in-latest-move-by-us-south-korea-alliance/7079459.html>.

<sup>50</sup> Reuters, “Russia says US-South Korea nuclear deal could destabilise region,” April 28, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/russia-says-us-south-korea-nuclear-deal-could-destabilise-region-2023-04-28/>.

<sup>51</sup> Michael Lee, “Russia blames tighter South Korea-US security ties for making North’s denuclearization ‘impossible,’” *JoongAng Ilbo*, Oct. 3, 2024, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-10-03/national/northKorea/Russia-blames-tighter-South-KoreaUS-security-ties-for-making-Norths-denuclearization-impossible/2147546>.

<sup>52</sup> Sheng Yang, “Agreements add new danger.”

<sup>53</sup> Although, it is equally possible that Beijing chose not to retaliate economically because of a belief that such retaliation would be less effective 6 years after the THAAD incident, given Seoul has taken steps to reduce its dependencies on the Chinese economy. Beijing also may have judged that support from the US was likely, and would have dulled the impact of weaponized trade. Sheng Yang, “Agreements add new danger.”

<sup>54</sup> Rodong Sinmun, “Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea and the Russian Federation Signed The respected Comrade Kim Jong Un Signs Treaty with Comrade Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin,” *KCNA Watch*, June 20, 2024, <https://kcnawatch.org/newstream/1718895015-73310455/treaty-on-comprehensive-strategic-partnership-between-the-democratic-people%e2%80%99s-republic-of-korea-and-the-russian-federation-signed-the-respected-comrade-kim-jong-un-signs-treaty-with-comrade-vl/>.

exercises related to nuclear deterrence, including for South Korean conventional support to US nuclear operations. This section examines the extent to which these commitments have been fulfilled from April 2023 to December 2024.

### *i. Consultation and planning*

*“The Alliance commits to engage in deeper, cooperative decision-making on nuclear deterrence, including through enhanced dialogue and information sharing regarding growing nuclear threats to [South Korea] and the region.”*

*“The two Presidents announced the establishment of a new Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) to strengthen extended deterrence, discuss nuclear and strategic planning, and manage the threat to the nonproliferation regime posed by [North Korea].”*

– Washington Declaration excerpts

First, as agreed in the Washington Declaration, Washington and Seoul have taken steps to enhance consultation on nuclear weapons usage and deterrence, including through the new NCG. The NCG has held four semi-annual meetings since April 2023—in July<sup>55</sup> and December<sup>56</sup> 2023, in June<sup>57</sup> 2024, and in January 2025—where officials have sought to bolster cooperation on information sharing, conventional-nuclear integration, and other matters relevant to nuclear deterrence. These meetings were held at the assistant-secretary level, with Cara Abercrombie performing the duties of Deputy Under Secretary for Policy and Dr. Cho Chang Lae, ROK Deputy Minister for National Defense Policy, leading discussions in the January 2025 meeting. A framework document for the NCG was agreed upon and announced following a separate meeting at the Pentagon in February 2024, though its contents were not released.<sup>58</sup> More

importantly, meetings of the NCG were briefly postponed after President Yoon declared martial law in South Korea on Dec. 3, 2024.<sup>59</sup> At the time of writing, it is unclear what lasting impacts these events will have on the NCG and on the Washington Declaration more broadly.

Notably, according to the NCG’s inaugural joint statement, meetings were originally intended to be held quarterly and an explanation for dialing back the frequency of the meetings has not been given publicly.<sup>60</sup> Relatedly, while NCG meetings in 2023 were chaired by representatives from each country’s national security council, responsibility for the group was shifted to each country’s defense department in 2024.<sup>61</sup> What this change means for the relative institutionalization of the group, and the extent to which it reflects on the ongoing strategic importance of the NCG for each country’s senior leadership, is unclear.

Since establishing the NCG, Washington and Seoul have reached several significant agreements related to consultation. Most prominently, in July 2024, the two countries agreed to the *US-ROK Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Operations on the Korean Peninsula*. These Guidelines were notable because of their high-level endorsement—Presidents Yoon and Biden released a joint statement approving the document on the sidelines of the July 2024 NATO Summit<sup>62</sup>—and because of their contents. While this document has not been released to the public, media briefings indicate that it contained some novel agreements. For one, it reportedly commits the US to deploy strategic assets to the peninsula at a “constant” level, during both peacetime and wartime.<sup>63</sup> For another, Korea’s

<sup>55</sup> The White House, “Joint Readout of the Inaugural US-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group Meeting,” July 18, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/07/18/joint-readout-of-the-inaugural-u-s-rok-nuclear-consultative-group-meeting/>.

<sup>56</sup> The White House, “Joint Press Statement on Nuclear Consultative Group Meeting,” Dec. 16, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/12/16/joint-press-statement-on-nuclear-consultative-group-meeting/#:~:text=Biden%2C%20Jr.,Peninsula%20and%20in%20the%20region>.

<sup>57</sup> US Department of Defense, “Joint Press Statement on the 3rd Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) Meeting,” June 10, 2024, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3801107/joint-press-statement-on-the-3rd-nuclear-consultative-group-ncg-meeting/>.

<sup>58</sup> US Department of Defense, “Readout of US, South Korea Nuclear Consultative Group Framework Signing,” Feb. 14, 2024,

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3676776/readout-of-us-south-korea-nuclear-consultative-group-framework-signing/>.

<sup>59</sup> Michelle Ye Hee Lee, Kelly Kasulis Cho and Niha Masih, “South Korean opposition moves to impeach president after remarkable misstep,” *The Washington Post*, Dec. 4, 2024,

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2024/12/04/south-korea-martial-law-president-impeachment-news/>.

<sup>60</sup> The White House, “Inaugural US-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group Meeting.”

<sup>61</sup> Sang-kyu Lee, “The US-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group: Achievements and Future Direction,” Korea on Point, July 19, 2024,

<https://koreaonpoint.org/view.php?id=327>.

<sup>62</sup> Embassy of the Republic of Korea in the USA, “Joint Statement by President Joseph R. Biden of the United States of America and President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea on US-ROK Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Operations on the Korean Peninsula,” July 12, 2024, [https://down.mofa.go.kr/us-en/brd/m\\_4511/view.do?seq=761852&page=1](https://down.mofa.go.kr/us-en/brd/m_4511/view.do?seq=761852&page=1).

<sup>63</sup> Minji Lee, “US strategic assets to be assigned to Korean Peninsula on ‘constant’ level: ministry,” Yonhap News, July 12, 2024, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240712007300315?section=national/diplomacy>.

Deputy National Security Advisor Kim Tae-hyo said that the Guidelines assign individual nuclear assets with specific roles in certain contingencies—another novel development.<sup>64</sup> Kim also suggested that the Guidelines mark the first time that Washington had declared that it would assign specific missions related to conventional support for US nuclear operations to Seoul on paper.<sup>65</sup>

Beyond the Guidelines document, South Korea and the US have enacted a number of additional nuclear weapons-related adjustments to their joint planning. It was reported after the October 2024 Security Consultative Meeting that the US and South Korea had agreed to include a “North Korean nuclear attack scenario against South Korea” in their operational plans.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, Seoul has launched a Strategic Command with the explicit intention of mirroring the US Strategic Command structure to facilitate integration of its conventional weapons capability with the US’ extended nuclear deterrence.<sup>67</sup> While not all of these developments appear to be directly tied to NCG negotiations, they nevertheless represent significant upgrades of bilateral defense cooperation.

As reaffirmed by the Washington Declaration, the two countries have also continued to engage with each other on defense and extended deterrence through existing channels. Notably, the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (EDSCG) has been revived. The EDSCG was announced<sup>68</sup> in October 2016 and held its inaugural meeting in December of that year.<sup>69</sup> Presidents

Donald Trump and Moon Jae-In initially agreed that they would regularize EDSCG meetings to occur annually.<sup>70</sup> However, the group’s January 2018 meeting would be its last for more than four-and-a-half years. This was because President Moon decided to suspend the group as part of his efforts toward rapprochement with North Korea.<sup>71</sup> Presidents Biden and Yoon have successfully restarted these meetings, although it should be noted that their agreement to do so predated the Washington Declaration.<sup>72</sup>

Other high-level meetings related to defense and nuclear deterrence which have taken place since the Washington Declaration was signed include the Korea-US Integrated Defense Dialogue, 2+2 meetings, the ROK-US Defense Ministers meetings, and Security Consultative Meetings. The continued frequency of these established discussions and summits, in tandem with the inauguration of new ones, indicates that consultation between South Korea and the US has been strengthened since the signing of the Washington Declaration.

## ii. Deploying US strategic assets

*“The United States will further enhance the regular visibility of strategic assets to the Korean Peninsula...”*  
– Washington Declaration excerpt

Second, the Washington Declaration included a commitment by the US to increase the number of deployments of strategic military assets to South Korea. It appears that this commitment has been largely fulfilled. Most prominently, and as explicitly promised in the text of the Washington Declaration, a nuclear-powered ballistic missile-armed submarine (SSBN), the SSBN Kentucky, docked in South Korea in July 2023. As one of the most valuable assets in the US naval fleet, the visit was a significant gesture—this was the first time an SSBN

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<sup>64</sup> Hyung-Hin Kim, “US and South Korea sign joint nuclear deterrence guidelines in face of North Korean threats,” Associated Press, July 12, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/south-korea-us-nuclear-guidelines-a0446c1ad624442e49061d02db92d165>.

<sup>65</sup> Seung-jun Lee, “Leaders of S. Korea, US formalize deployment of US nuclear assets to peninsula,” *Hankyoreh*, July 12, 2024, [https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/1148911.html](https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/1148911.html).

<sup>66</sup> Ji-ho Yang, “South Korea, US to add nuclear defense scenarios in military strategy,” *Chosun Ilbo*, Oct. 31, 2024, <https://www.chosun.com/english/north-korea-en/2024/10/31/CTHL37A6PIHGVLV7WO4FGO7RRO/>.

<sup>67</sup> South Korea’s Strategic Command will also have responsibility for the country’s Three-Axis system for defense against North Korea. Indo-Pacific Defense Forum, “South Korea launches Strategic Command to integrate with US, counter North Korea, push peace through strength,” Oct. 14, 2024, <https://ipdefenseforum.com/2024/10/south-korea-launches-strategic-command-to-integrate-with-u-s-counter-north-korea-push-peace-through-strength/>; Doyeong Jung, “South Korea’s Revitalized “Three-Axis” System,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, Jan. 4, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/south-koreas-revitalized-three-axis-system>.

<sup>68</sup> US Department of State, “Joint Statement of the 2016 United States - Republic of Korea Foreign and Defense Ministers’ Meeting,” Oct. 19, 2016, <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2016/10/263340.htm>.

<sup>69</sup> US Department of Defense, “Joint Statement for the Inaugural Meeting of the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group,” n.d., <https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/joint-statement-for->

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<the-Inaugural-Meeting-of-the-Extended-Deterrence-Strategy-and-Consultation-Group.pdf>.

<sup>70</sup> US Department of State Office of the Spokesperson, “Joint Statement on the Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group,” Sept. 5, 2017, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/joint-statement-on-the-extended-deterrence-strategy-and-consultation-group/>.

<sup>71</sup> Sang-ho Song, “(LEAD) S. Korea, US to hold high-level talks on N. Korea deterrence next week,” *Yonhap News*, Aug. 31, 2024, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN2024083005951315>.

<sup>72</sup> The White House, “United States-Republic of Korea Leaders’ Joint Statement,” May 21, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/21/united-states-republic-of-korea-leaders-joint-statement/>.

had publicly made a port call in the country since the 1980s.<sup>73</sup> US officials also agreed to host President Yoon as the first foreign leader to tour an American SSBN.<sup>74</sup> However, despite Secretary of State Antony Blinken stating that the US was “restarting”<sup>75</sup> these visits, the docking of the Kentucky has not been replicated since July 2023; no other SSBNs have publicly visited South Korea since.

In addition to the docking of the SSBN Kentucky, the US has continued to fly B-52 nuclear-capable bombers in the airspace over or near South Korean territory on a number of occasions.<sup>76</sup> The landing of one such bomber during the 2023 Seoul International Aerospace and Defense Exposition reportedly marked the first time a B-52 had publicly landed in the country in over thirty years.<sup>77</sup> Other major US assets to visit the country since the signing of the declaration include aircraft carriers USS *Ronald Reagan*, *Carl Vinson*, and *Theodore Roosevelt*,<sup>78</sup> as well as the nuclear-powered (not armed) submarines USS *Missouri*, *Michigan*, *Vermont*, *Santa Fe*, *Annapolis*, and *Alexandria*.<sup>79</sup>

There has also been a recent uptick in South Korean visits to US nuclear assets. On April 18, 2023, immediately prior to the signing of the Washington Declaration, Rear Admiral Lee Su Youl visited a US SSBN stationed in Guam alongside a Japanese official.<sup>80</sup> In addition, Admiral Yang Yong-mo, chief

of naval operations, [toured](#) the US SSBN Alaska in Georgia in February 2024—the first visit to the Kings Bay base by a South Korean naval chief.<sup>81</sup>

Overall, since the signing of the Washington Declaration, the US has made strategic assets more available to South Korean officials and more visible to rival countries and the South Korean public. While the frequency of public port visits by SSBNs has been limited, the overall pace of strategic platform deployment to the peninsula has been consistent with the ambitions of the Washington Declaration.

### iii. Joint exercises and training

*The Alliance will work to enable joint execution and planning for [South Korean] conventional support to US nuclear operations in a contingency and improve combined exercises and training activities on the application of nuclear deterrence on the Korean Peninsula.”*

– Washington Declaration excerpt

Third, US forces have regularly participated in joint exercises and drills alongside South Korean forces since April 2023. One new initiative is the Nuclear Consultative Group Simulation, a tabletop simulation launched on Sept. 5, 2024. While the details of the simulation are not fully known, joint statements indicate that it involved tabletop “planning for potential nuclear contingencies on the Korean peninsula.”<sup>82</sup> Similarly, the two countries participated in a three-day discussion-based exercise named ‘Iron Mace’ from July 30 to Aug. 1, 2024. According to officials, this exercise, “a direct due out” from the Washington Declaration,<sup>83</sup> focused on the integration of South Korea’s conventional forces with US nuclear forces and will be held annually.<sup>84</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Josh Smith, “Rare submarine visit reminds North Korea of US nuclear missiles,” *Reuters*, July 21, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/rare-submarine-visit-reminds-north-korea-us-nuclear-missiles-out-sight-range-2023-07-21/>.

<sup>74</sup> Office of the President, Republic of Korea, “President Yoon makes historic tour of US missile-armed submarine,” July 21, 2023, <https://eng.president.go.kr/briefing/k2puHMVS>.

<sup>75</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Secretary Antony J. Blinken’s Keynote Remarks at the 8th Annual CSIS ROK-US Strategic Forum,” Sept. 25, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/secretary-antony-j-blinkens-keynote-remarks-8th-annual-csis-rok-us-strategic-forum>.

<sup>76</sup> Greg Hadley, “B-52s Keep Up Surge in Bomber Activity over Korean Peninsula,” *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, July 1, 2023, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/b-52s-surge-bomber-activity-korean-peninsula/>; United States Forces Korea, “US strategic bomber and ROK-US fighters conduct combined aerial training,” July 13, 2023, <https://www.usfk.mil/Media/Press-Products/Press-Releases/Article/3458305/us-strategic-bomber-and-rok-us-fighters-conduct-combined-aerial-training/>.

<sup>77</sup> Unshin Lee Harpley, “B-52 Stratofortress to Land in South Korea for First Time in Decades,” *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, Oct. 16, 2023, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/b-52-stratofortress-land-south-korea/>.

<sup>78</sup> See e.g. Hyung-Jin Kim, “US aircraft carrier arrives in South Korea as North’s leader Kim exchanges messages with Putin,” *Associated Press*, Oct. 12, 2023 <https://apnews.com/article/north-korea-us-aircraft-carrier-kim-putin-91b4534faea919f9e5e4384114c7654a>.

<sup>79</sup> See e.g. Yun-hwan Chae, “US nuclear-powered submarine arrives in Busan to replenish supplies,” *Yonhap News*, Sept. 23, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240923004100315>.

<sup>80</sup> Sang-ho Song, “US military discloses photos of S. Korean, US, Japanese, officials boarding nuclear sub,” *Yonhap News*, May 4, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230504006500325>.

<sup>81</sup> Wongju Yi, “Navy chief visits US naval base housing nuclear submarines,” *Yonhap News*, Feb. 4, 2024, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240204001400315>.

<sup>82</sup> US Department of Defense, “Joint Statement on the US-ROK Nuclear Consultative Group Simulation,” *US Indo-Pacific Command*, Sept. 6, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/ITF-Micronesia/Article/3898302/joint-statement-on-the-us-rok-nuclear-consultative-group-simulation/>.

<sup>83</sup> United States Forces Korea, “ROK JCS and US Joint Staff conduct CNI TTX,” Aug. 1, 2024, <https://www.usfk.mil/Media/Press-Products/Press-Releases/Article/3857474/rok-jcs-and-us-joint-staff-conduct-cni-ttx/>.

<sup>84</sup> Sang-Ho Yun, “S. Korea, US hold first-ever table-top military exercise in Pyeongtaek,” *The Dong-A Ilbo*, Aug. 2, 2024, <https://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20240802/5094631/1>; Note - it appears Iron Mace drills may be incorporated into the annual Ulchi Freedom Shield exercises rather than being held separately. Ji-ho Yang and Su-hyeon Park, “South Korea, US to add nuclear defense scenarios in military strategy,” *The Chosun Ilbo*, Oct. 31, 2024, <https://www.chosun.com/english/north-korea-en/2024/10/31/CTHL37A6PIHGVLY7WQ4FGO7RRO/>.

In addition to these new exercises, US and South Korean forces continued their participation in long-established joint training operations such as the Ulchi Freedom Shield, Ssang Yong, Freedom Flag, and Freedom Edge exercises. Exercise Ulchi Freedom Shield 24, as agreed upon at the December 2023 NCG meeting,<sup>85</sup> included training for a hypothetical North Korean nuclear attack for the first time.<sup>86</sup>

Taking a broad view of Washington and Seoul's defense cooperation since April 2023, it appears that the two allies have been successful in fulfilling the discrete commitments contained in the Washington Declaration related to consultation, asset deployment, and joint exercises. In the next section, we turn to examine what impacts these initiatives have had on the alliance.

#### SECTION FOUR: IMPACT

In Section One, we noted that one of the US' central ambitions underpinning the Washington Declaration was to restrain South Korea's nuclear ambitions by delivering reassurance to the country that it would receive Washington's protection in a nuclear contingency. Measured against this objective, the Washington Declaration seems to have made limited progress. On the one hand, since April 2023, President Yoon has not made any further statements supportive of nuclear proliferation, Seoul has not made official moves to leave the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT), and there have been no (public) attempts to increase the country's nuclear latency. However, proliferation-sympathetic policies still have significant domestic support within South Korea and other major political players have continued to advocate for nuclearization. Seoul Mayor Oh Se-hoon has consistently advocated for South Korea to acquire an independent nuclear arsenal. "North Korea behaves with... impunity because they possess nuclear weapons, and we do not," he said in a Facebook post after inspecting a South Korean army facility in October 2024.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, Kyung Won Na, a candidate for

leadership of the main conservative People Power Party, has also advocated for nuclearization, saying that "we have to arm ourselves with nuclear weapons too"<sup>88</sup> in July 2024. In September 2024, former Defense Minister Kim Yong-hyun (then nominee) said that he would be "open" to the country developing nuclear weapons.<sup>89</sup>

Likewise, public opinion polling does not indicate that the allies' accomplishment of their commitments under the Washington Declaration has significantly improved South Koreans' trust in the US nuclear umbrella. A JoongAng Ilbo poll in August 2024 found that only 41.2% of respondents agreed that "US-provided nuclear deterrence is sufficient to respond to a North Korean nuclear threat."<sup>90</sup> Comparing this figure to earlier polling, this represents only a two percent increase in confidence since December 2023 and an overall ten percent drop in confidence since December 2022.<sup>91</sup> Meanwhile, research from the Korean Institute for National Unification found that support for South Korea acquiring nuclear weapons rose from 60.2% in 2023 to 66.0% in 2024.<sup>92</sup>

We argue that, in part, South Korea's long-term nuclear ambitions have not been tempered because the US has failed to reassure the country that it would receive US protection in a nuclear contingency. First, the alliance has not yet fully defined the purpose and structure of its central institution, the Nuclear Consultative Group. Second, the substance of the Washington Declaration has failed to positively impact South Koreans' perceptions of the alliance. Third, the durability of

<sup>85</sup> Jin-myung Kim, Hye-jin Lee, Eun-joong Kim and Su-hyeon Park, "S. Korea and US jointly simulate N. Korean nuclear threat in UFG exercise," *The Chosun Ilbo*, Dec. 16, 2023, <https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2023/12/21/ZH6QSUWSWNAWTBRRCKSLSYHGE/>.

<sup>86</sup> Chosun Ilbo, "Editorial: Years late, South Korea finally conducts nuclear response drill," Aug. 20, 2024, <https://www.chosun.com/english/opinion-en/2024/08/20/HLBML0OXFVCCXJRIDC2HSPSE6A/>.

<sup>87</sup> Da-hyun Jung, "Seoul mayor calls for S. Korea's nuclear armament amid North Korean threats," *The Korea Times*, Oct. 18, 2024, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/11/113\\_384530.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/11/113_384530.html).

<sup>88</sup> Jeongmin Kim, "After a lull, South Korea is suddenly talking about going nuclear again," *NK News*, July 5, 2024,

<https://www.nknews.org/2024/07/after-a-lull-south-korea-is-suddenly-talking-about-going-nuclear-again/>.

<sup>89</sup> William Gallo and Juhyun Lee, "Under Yoon, calls for South Korean nukes 'normalized,'" *Voice of America*, Sept. 9, 2024,

<https://www.voanews.com/a/under-yoon-calls-for-south-korean-nukes-normalized/7777068.html>.

<sup>90</sup> Ji-Eun Seo, "South Korean support for own nuclear arsenal grows as confidence in US wanes," *JoongAng Ilbo*, Oct. 10, 2024,

<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-10-10/national/diplomacy/South-Korean-support-for-own-nuclear-arsenal-grows-as-confidence-in-US-wanes/2152176>.

<sup>91</sup> Note that these polls asked about the expected US response to a North Korean nuclear attack. Polling compiled from different sources here: Peter K Lee and Chungku Kang, "Comparing Allied Public Confidence in US Extended Nuclear Deterrence," *The Asan Institute for Policy Studies*, March 27, 2024, <https://en.asaninst.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Issue-Brief-Comparing-Allied-Public-Confidence-in-US-Extended-Nuclear-Deterrence.pdf>.

<sup>92</sup> Korea Institute for National Unification, "KINU's announcement of the result of the 2024 KINU Unification Survey: North Korea's Two-State Claim / US Presidential Outlook and ROK-US Relations," June 27, 2024, [https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/board/view.do?nav\\_code=eng1678858138&code=78h7R6ucKsuM&idx=24481](https://www.kinu.or.kr/eng/board/view.do?nav_code=eng1678858138&code=78h7R6ucKsuM&idx=24481).

both Washington and Seoul's commitments under the Washington Declaration remain uncertain.

### *i. Definition and communication*

The continued currency of pro-nuclearization advocacy can be partially explained by a failure to define the initiative at the center of the Washington Declaration, the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG), early on.

A primary reason for this is that the allies did not explain how the NCG, and broader US-South Korea nuclear cooperation, compares with US-NATO nuclear cooperation and its central body, the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) - the body upon which the NCG was at least partly modelled. In fact, the debate about US-South Korea cooperation since April 2023 has regularly featured assertions about whether the NCG is better or worse than the NPG.<sup>93</sup> Perhaps confusingly, the two bodies are similar in both purpose and name—the NPG also has the primary purpose of determining the alliance's policies and planning related to nuclear weapons usage and deterrence. However, given that NATO and the US-South Korea alliance are inherently different, particularly because of the lack of nuclear sharing between Washington and Seoul, they are not completely analogous, and comparisons between the two can be misleading.

For example, while President Yoon may be technically correct in asserting that the NCG "is more effective than NATO's nuclear planning group, because it enables deeper and more frequent one-on-one conversations between South Korea and the US,"<sup>94</sup> NATO's nuclear sharing arrangements mean that the two are not completely comparable. While the NPG plays a role in authorizing nuclear missions performed by NATO states,<sup>95</sup> US officials have repeatedly emphasized that if the US were to conduct a nuclear mission on the Korean peninsula, this decision and the authority to do so would lie solely with the US president. It is possible that attempts to conflate consultation forums like the NCG and NPG with broader nuclear policy

stemmed from the need to strike a middle ground between the allies' different aims. The Biden administration saw the deal as a way to apply brakes to South Korea's alarming nuclear ambitions; whereas some in Seoul may have privately viewed the NCG as an important stepping stone towards a more ambitious nuclear policy that included future 'nuclear sharing' or a return of US tactical nuclear weapons to the peninsula.

The two countries are also yet to fully distinguish the NCG from the range of other bilateral consultative mechanisms already in existence. This has led to claims that the Washington Declaration is simply "old wine in a new bottle."<sup>96</sup> For example, the aforementioned Extended Deterrence Strategy and Consultation Group (EDSCG), which was suspended in 2018 and reactivated in 2022, appears to have been given a somewhat similar mission to the NCG. Joint statements from each group indicate that discussions center on nuclear deterrence and involve the countries making commitments to consultation, the deployment of strategic assets, and exercises. On top of this, while NCG meetings only involve defense representatives, EDSCG meetings feature vice ministers and undersecretaries from the two countries' foreign ministries as well as deputy ministers and assistant secretaries from their ministries of defense. The annual Korea Integrated Defense Dialogue (KIDD), which was held for the 25<sup>th</sup> time in 2024, is another ostensibly similar forum. Ultimately, confusion about the nature and purpose of the NCG—stemming from both misjudged comparisons to NATO's NPG and a failure to distinguish the body from existing forums for consultation—has likely dulled the Washington Declaration's long-term success in drawing South Korea away from its nuclear ambitions.

### *ii. Substance*

The challenges associated with the Washington Declaration, however, are not solely a matter of definition and communication. They are also a matter of substance.

Indeed, while one driver of the Washington Declaration was to assuage South Korea's ambitions to acquire an indigenous nuclear capability, not enough was done to bolster South Korea's independent conventional counterforce capabilities. Measures such as joint training, consultation, and

<sup>93</sup> See e.g.: Jung-won Park, "South Korea's fateful nuclear choice," *The Korea Times*, May 1, 2023, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2024/10/638\\_350082.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/opinion/2024/10/638_350082.html).

<sup>94</sup> Hyun-woo Nam, "'Washington Declaration is nuclear-based upgrade of ROK-US alliance,'" *The Korea Times*, May 2, 2023, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/11/113\\_350227.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2024/11/113_350227.html).

<sup>95</sup> North Atlantic Treaty Organization, "NATO's Nuclear Sharing Arrangements," *Public Diplomacy Division Press & Media Section*, Feb., 2022, [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/2/pdf/220204-factsheet-nuclear-sharing-arrange.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/2/pdf/220204-factsheet-nuclear-sharing-arrange.pdf).

<sup>96</sup> Jina Kim, "Old wine in a new bottle."

asset deployment serve an important purpose, however they inherently tie South Korea's defensive aptitude to the US' military assets. At a time when (as discussed below) confidence in US defense guarantees cannot be assumed, this sort of cooperation serves only a limited purpose. There is also a risk that the repetition of the US' strong nuclear commitment to South Korea may backfire by increasing the salience of nuclear weapons and the perceived necessity of a nuclear capability.<sup>97</sup> For these reasons, there is a need for cooperative measures, such as greater technology sharing or the provision or sale of advanced conventional systems to South Korea, which could bolster Seoul's independent conventional counterforce deterrence.

In addition, legitimate criticisms can be made of the actual significance of many of the measures promised in the Washington Declaration, at least in the public eye. Indeed, the three core pillars of the agreement—consultation, asset deployment, and joint exercises—each represented upgrades of existing cooperation rather than new work streams or initiatives. For example, while new joint exercises and training may translate into strengthened operational compatibility, joint exercises themselves are not new for the South Korean public. While the Washington Declaration might well enhance the force integration of the allies, it is hard to demonstrate success in this regard to broader South Korean audiences. Relatedly, while the visit of a US SSBN to Busan was notable as it was the first time in decades that a vessel of this type has docked in the country, this was a one-off visit which has not been publicly replicated since. This is unlikely to leave a strong imprint in South Korea's public consciousness. Indeed, an irony of the US' commitment to deploy SSBNs to South Korea is that while doing so might be impactful to reassure South Korea about the reliability of the US' nuclear umbrella, it is in some respects an empty gesture. For one, the range of an SSBN means that actual proximity to the Korean peninsula is only minimally related to the US' capability to launch a nuclear strike against North Korea. For another, the strategic value of an SSBN is largely derived from its stealth, and so revealing its location nullifies one of its most important capabilities.

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<sup>97</sup> Lauren Sukin and Toby Dalton, "Reducing Nuclear Salience: How to Reassure Northeast Asian Allies," *The Washington Quarterly* 44, no. 2, (2021): 149. Relatedly, Sukin has observed that security guarantees can backfire if the public does not trust the guarantor not to unnecessarily use or precipitously escalate a crisis. See: Lauren Sukin, "Credible Nuclear Security Commitments Can Backfire: Explaining Domestic Support for Nuclear Weapons Acquisition in South Korea," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 6 (2020): 2.

Another important point is that a purely bilateral arrangement may not be the optimal means to persuade South Korea that nuclearization is not its best option. During the 1970s, it was only through pressuring France and Canada that the US was able to ensure that South Korea terminated its nuclear weapons program.<sup>98</sup> Under the Washington Declaration, Washington has pursued its efforts unilaterally, apparently without due consideration for a number of other potentially influential actors. In the context of weakening international nuclear nonproliferation norms,<sup>99</sup> however, broad multilateral efforts to bring about compliance for these norms may be more difficult.

### iii. Durability

*"President Biden reaffirmed that the United States' commitment to [South Korea] and the Korean people is enduring and ironclad, and that any nuclear attack by [North Korea] against [South Korea] will be met with a swift, overwhelming and decisive response."*  
– Washington Declaration excerpt

A third explanation for South Koreans' consistent lack of confidence in the US nuclear umbrella is that not enough has been done to demonstrate that the US' commitments to South Korea will be durable. Events since the signing of the Washington Declaration have continued to erode both South Koreans' confidence in the consistency of US policy after changes in US administrations, as well as their confidence in Washington's continued interest in the security of the peninsula amid conflict and competition in other theatres.

Indeed, although officials repeatedly reaffirm that the US' commitment to the country is "ironclad" and that agreements under the NCG are "irreversible",<sup>100</sup> key US political figures have been publicly skeptical of the US' support for South Korea. Most prominently, and as noted in Section One, President Donald Trump has been a persistent critic of the country's alliance commitments since at least 1990.<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Lyong Choi and Jooyoung Lee, "The Falling-Out of Nuclear Suppliers: US-France-Canada Negotiations and Debates on the ROK Nuclear Program," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 24, no. 1 (2024).

<sup>99</sup> Benjamin Engel, "Back to Square One? The Breakdown of Cold War Nuclear Arms Agreements and the Consequences for the Korean Peninsula," *Korea On Point*, Nov. 29, 2024, [https://koreaponpoint.org/view.php?topic\\_idx=153&idx=370](https://koreaponpoint.org/view.php?topic_idx=153&idx=370).

<sup>100</sup> Eun-jung Kim, "N. Korea succeeded in ICBM flight test, re-entry technology unverified: defense chief," *Yonhap News*, Dec. 21, 2023, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20231221007800315>.

<sup>101</sup> See Cha and Lim, "Database: Donald Trump's Skepticism."

This is not a niche view within the Republican Party, either. Trump's Secretary of Defense, Pete Hegseth, has reportedly advocated for a draw-down of US troops on the peninsula.<sup>102</sup> Further illustrating the Republican Party's alliance-skepticism, Senator (and Trump ally) Lindsey Graham said in 2017 that Trump has "got to choose between homeland security and regional security...If there's going to be a war to stop [Kim Jong Un], it will be over there. If thousands die, they're going to die over there. And Trump's told me that to my face."<sup>103</sup> Overall, there are sufficient grounds for South Korea to be skeptical about the new Trump administration's support for the alliance and South Korea's security.

Some steps were taken to sure up or 'Trump-proof' the alliance ahead of the January 2025 Trump inauguration. US and South Korean officials launched negotiations for the renewal of the cost-sharing Special Measures Agreement (SMA) early in June 2024, a full 20 months before the six-year deal was set to expire, signing a renewed agreement on Nov. 4, 2024, the day prior to the US election.<sup>104</sup> Of course, this does not preclude Trump from reopening negotiations, and the Washington Declaration and its associated initiatives are equally by no means set in stone.

Secondly, the war in Ukraine has meant that the South Korean public has seen first-hand how the US sought to provide assistance for a country facing aggression from a nuclear-armed state. Of course, the Russia-Ukraine conflict is not completely analogous to tensions on the Korean Peninsula—primarily because unlike Ukraine, South Korea is a treaty ally of the US. Nevertheless, aspects of the US' response to the war would have been worrying for South Korean strategists. For one, the US' commitment to Ukraine has varied, especially since the re-election of Trump as president. Washington initially promised to support Kyiv for "as long as it

takes"<sup>105</sup> but has increasingly sought to push the country toward negotiations. Observers have also pointed out that Russia's possession of nuclear weapons caused the US under President Biden to adopt a self-detering approach at times; the administration's fear of provoking escalation by the Kremlin caused it to be slow in delivering certain capabilities to Ukraine, including ATACMs missiles.<sup>106</sup> In addition, the war has demonstrated that the US' defense industrial base may not be capable of fully sustaining a massive or protracted conflict.<sup>107</sup>

Analysts have equally pointed to a trend of "subsuming the US-[South Korea] alliance through the lens of US-China competition in the Indo-Pacific"<sup>108</sup> among US officials. Indeed, it is not uncommon for analysts and observers to posit that US military deployments to South Korea are intended to prepare for a contingency related to China, not North Korea.<sup>109</sup> Given that deterring North Korea remains the central priority of the South Korean defense posture, indications that Washington and Seoul are not walking in lockstep on this issue can be harmful.

In sum, although the US and South Korea were broadly successful in stepping up their cooperation on nuclear deterrence after signing the Washington Declaration, this has not translated into success in achieving one of the US' key objectives—dampening South Korea's nuclearization ambitions. A failure to publicly define and communicate the nature and purpose of the initiative at the center of the Washington Declaration—the NCG—has resulted in nebulous public discourse about the value of the program. Meanwhile, the allies' commitments under the Washington Declaration predominantly amounted to upgrades of existing initiatives, which

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<sup>102</sup> Ji-Eun Seo, "Trump taps Kim Jong-un defender Pete Hegseth as Pentagon chief," *JoongAng Ilbo*, Nov. 13, 2024, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/2024-11-13/national/diplomacy/Trump-taps-Kim-Jongun-defender-Pete-Hegseth-as-Pentagon-chief/2176880>.

<sup>103</sup> Uri Friedman, "Lindsey Graham Reveals the Dark Calculus of Striking North Korea," *The Atlantic*, Aug. 1, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/lindsey-graham-north-korea/535578/>.

<sup>104</sup> William Gallo and Juhyun Lee, "Trump's possible return reignites South Korea nuclear debate," *Voice of America*, May 3, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/trump-s-possible-return-reignites-south-korea-nuclear-debate/7596584.html>; Seung-yeon Kim, "S. Korea, US sign defense cost-sharing deal ahead of US elections," *Yonhap News*, Nov. 4, 2024, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20241104010200315>.

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<sup>105</sup> The White House, "Remarks by President Biden and President Zelenskyy of Ukraine in Joint Press Conference," Dec. 21, 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/12/21/remarks-by-president-biden-and-president-zelenskyy-of-ukraine-in-joint-press-conference/>.

<sup>106</sup> Robert E. Kelly, "South Korea's Nuclear Anxieties Haven't Gone Away," *Foreign Policy*, June 9, 2023, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/06/09/south-korea-nuclear-weapons-north-korea-washington-declaration/>.

<sup>107</sup> David Barno and Nora Bensahel, "America is not prepared for a protracted war," *War on the Rocks*, Dec. 4, 2024, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/12/america-is-not-prepared-for-a-protracted-war/>.

<sup>108</sup> Clint Work, "Under Trump the US-ROK Alliance Will Increasingly Be About China," *The Peninsula*, Nov. 25, 2024, <https://keia.org/the-peninsula/under-trump-the-us-rok-alliance-will-increasingly-be-about-china/>.

<sup>109</sup> Robert Ross, "US-Korea policy: Is it all about China?," *Responsible Statecraft*, July 26, 2023, <https://responsiblestatecraft.org/2023/07/26/us-korea-policy-is-it-all-about-china/>.

likely failed to significantly impact South Koreans' faith in the US' nuclear umbrella. Finally, developments in the US' domestic politics and the country's response to the war in Ukraine would not have inspired much confidence in South Korea about the US' ongoing reliability in a nuclear contingency. For these reasons, though the Washington Declaration led to short-term upgrades in bilateral cooperation, it has not meaningfully impacted debates about nuclearization in South Korea.

## SECTION FIVE: RECOMMENDATIONS

Although the allies have largely fulfilled their commitments under the Washington Declaration, the US has made little long-term progress toward one of its central objectives: restraining South Korea's nuclear ambitions. In this final section we offer three distinct recommendations for nuclear nonproliferation-sympathetic US decision makers to advance the goal of a secure and prosperous non-nuclear South Korea.

- 1. The US government should make differences between the features of the Washington Declaration's Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) and the NATO Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) more clear to the public.**

The Washington Declaration emerged, in part, from an ambition among US policymakers to prevent South Korea from seeking to acquire an independent nuclear capability. As such, institutions such as the NCG have been established to help reassure South Korea about the reliability of its nuclear umbrella. However, the two allies have not done enough to publicly clarify the workings of the NCG and exactly how the US' commitments to South Korea have changed since its establishment. In particular, comparisons with NATO's NPG have obfuscated rather than illuminated the nature and purpose of the group.

For this reason, US policymakers should consider what steps they can take to better communicate the nature and benefits of the NCG to South Korea and the South Korean public. They should consider the merits of declassifying some information related to the group, including the NCG Framework, to clarify how it operates.

These measures would allow the US to not only bolster public confidence in the NCG, but also prevent drift in its aims, objectives, and resourcing. Indeed, absent further public diplomacy and debate about the NCG, there is a risk that the institution will be pushed away from its original nonproliferation purpose.

- 2. The US government should take a more holistic approach to the alliance; one that recognizes the interplay between economic security, military security, and trust between allies.**

Efforts to strengthen South Korea's confidence in the US as a reliable partner would be enhanced by acknowledging that the international line between economics and security is increasingly blurred.<sup>110</sup> Illustrating this, as discussed in Section One, are the events following the deployment of THAAD to South Korea in 2016-17. In this instance, South Korea's defense engagement with the US prompted China to launch a massive campaign of weaponized trade against Seoul.

At times, Washington has demonstrated an understanding of the interplay between economic and security considerations. For example, following Beijing's introduction of coercive trade measures against Lithuania in 2021, the US State Department established an economic coercion response team nicknamed 'The Firm.' During an interview with Yonhap News in May 2024, the then-head of this team, Melanie Hart, said that "if South Korea faced economic coercion, we would do all we can."<sup>111</sup> Similarly, in May 2023, the Group of Seven (G7) agreed to launch a Coordination Platform on Economic Coercion which would use early warning and information sharing to aid states targeted by coercive economic measures.<sup>112</sup>

However, the US' own efforts to protect its domestic industry and preserve technological advantages have also recently drawn the ire of allies and

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<sup>110</sup> See e.g. Elizabeth Thurbon, Alexander Hynd, Hao Tan, Susan Park and Andrew Walter, "Green Energy Statecraft for Comprehensive National Security", *AP4D Studies in Statecraft* #2024. Asia-Pacific Development, Diplomacy & Defence Dialogue, Canberra | Reimagining the Economy, Harvard Kennedy School, Boston, M.A. (2024) <https://asiapacific4d.com/idea/green-energy-statecraft/>.

<sup>111</sup> Sang-ho Song, "(Yonhap Interview) US will do 'all' it can to back S. Korea in case of China's economic coercion: official," *Yonhap News*, May 5, 2024, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20240504000800315>.

<sup>112</sup> The White House, "G7 Leaders' Statement on Economic Resilience and Economic Security," May 20, 2023, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/g7-leaders-statement-on-economic-resilience-and-economic-security/>.

partners such as South Korea. For example, the US Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) was intended to, among other objectives, preserve the advantages of US manufacturers in strategic industries. South Korea was initially alarmed by the Act as it threatened to hurt some South Korean firms, including electric vehicle manufacturers. More recently, President Trump's frequent impositions or threats of tariffs on US imports have understandably caused some nervousness among South Korean officials.<sup>113</sup> Relatedly, the US' efforts to control sales of advanced semiconductors, which are widely used in both household devices as well as advanced weaponry, have applied pressure on Seoul to restrain firms like Samsung and SK hynix from developing ties with Chinese industry.

Demonstrating the connection of these issues to South Korea's security policy, opposition leader Lee Jae-myung's first reaction to the Washington Declaration was that "during the summit, it seems that no solutions have been secured regarding the issues of semiconductors and automobiles in relation to the United States."<sup>114</sup>

US policymakers should acknowledge the interlinkages of economic and security issues, and ensure that defense diplomacy is accompanied by stronger consultation and engagement on economic and related techno-industrial issues.

- 3. The US government should recognize the limits of its unilateral ability to safeguard nuclear nonproliferation in South Korea and additionally begin to work with its other Indo-Pacific allies, partners—and even rivals—to reinforce Seoul's security, promote public education, and help to create a regional political context in which nuclear saliency is reduced.**

The aspirations of some South Korean actors for an independent nuclear capability should be worrying not only to the US, but to all third party states that have an interest in securing peace on and around the Korean peninsula. Accordingly, the US should do more to garner cooperation among third party states to support South Korea's defense and assuage Seoul's concerns about its vulnerability in the face of North Korean aggression.

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<sup>113</sup> Reuters. "South Korea's industry minister seeks exemption from Trump's tariffs," March 1, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/south-koreas-industry-minister-seeks-exemption-trumps-tariffs-2025-03-01/>.

<sup>114</sup> Hyun-woo Nam, "Nuclear-based upgrade."

Recent US diplomacy has been characterized by an acknowledgement that broad engagement with allies and partners, including through 'minilateral' forums such as the Quad, can allow the US to pursue its regional aims more effectively. However, Washington has not yet sought to approach security on the Korean peninsula with such a coalition-based approach.

As noted earlier, efforts to restrain South Korea's nuclear ambitions during the 1970s hinged on collaboration between the US, Canada, and France. Indeed, these countries were thought to be supplying South Korea with weapons-grade material until the US intervened. In the 2020s, Washington should reflect on the benefits of this type of collaboration and seek to lead a broad cast of states in its contemporary advocacy for nuclear nonproliferation on the Korean peninsula. It should also be aware of the risk that without a broad, multilateral approach, Seoul could covertly seek out nuclear capabilities with assistance from other partners.

In the context of a perceived decline in US regional hegemony, a coalition-based approach to security on the Korean peninsula would also help to reinforce South Korea's sense of security. As demonstrated in Section Four, there are many challenges related to preserving South Korea's confidence in the US as its primary security partner. Both the US and South Korea stand to benefit from diplomacy which calls for other Indo-Pacific secondary states to contribute to efforts to bring about peace and arms control on the peninsula.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> See Hynd, "Dirty, Dangerous... and Difficult?."

APPENDIX A. THE WASHINGTON DECLARATION: A TIMELINE

Jan. 11, 2023	President Yoon floats the possibility of South Korea acquiring nuclear weapons.
Jan. 31, 2023	The US commits to deploy more of its strategic assets to South Korea.
March 12, 2023	Seoul Mayor: “difficult to convince” the public that South Korea should not have nuclear weapons.
March 16, 2023	North Korea launches Hwasong-17 ‘monster missile’ ICBM.
April 18, 2023	Rear Adm. Su Youl Lee visits a US SSBN in Guam.
April 26, 2023	<u>Washington Declaration signed by President Biden and President Yoon, establishing the NCG.</u>
April 27, 2023	US official notes that the NCG does not amount to ‘nuclear sharing.’
July 18, 2023	<u>1<sup>st</sup> NCG meeting held.</u>
July 18-21, 2023	US SSBN Kentucky docks in Busan with much publicity – President Yoon tours it.
Dec. 15, 2023	<u>2<sup>nd</sup> NCG meeting held.</u>  The US and South Korea agree to develop guidelines on a shared nuclear strategy.
Dec. 21, 2023	South Korean defense minister calls the NCG “irreversible” regardless of US presidential election outcome.
Feb. 2, 2024	South Korean Naval Chief visits US SSBN naval base in King’s Bay for the first time.
February 12, 2024	NCG Framework Document signed.
June 10, 2024	<u>3<sup>rd</sup> NCG meeting held.</u>
July 11, 2024	Allies agree to the US-ROK Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Operations on the Korean Peninsula.
July 30, 2024	South Korean Cabinet approves the launch of Strategic Command to parallel the US Strategic Command.

July 30-Aug 1, 2024	US and South Korea complete Iron Mace 24 Conventional-Nuclear Integration Tabletop Exercise.
Aug. 19-29 2024	US-South Korea Ulchi Freedom exercises held.
Sept. 2, 2024	Kim Yong-hyun says that he would be “open” to South Korea acquiring nuclear weapons in his confirmation hearing to become defense minister.
Sept. 5-6, 2024	First US-ROK NCG simulation.
Oct. 18, 2024	Seoul Mayor: “North Korea behaves with... impunity because they possess nuclear weapons, and we do not.”
Nov. 4, 2024	Officials sign renewed Special Measures Agreement (SMA).
Nov. 5, 2024	Donald Trump elected to serve a second term as President of the United States.
Dec. 4, 2024	4 <sup>th</sup> NCG meeting postponed after President Yoon declares martial law.
Jan. 10, 2025	<u>4<sup>th</sup> NCG meeting held.</u>



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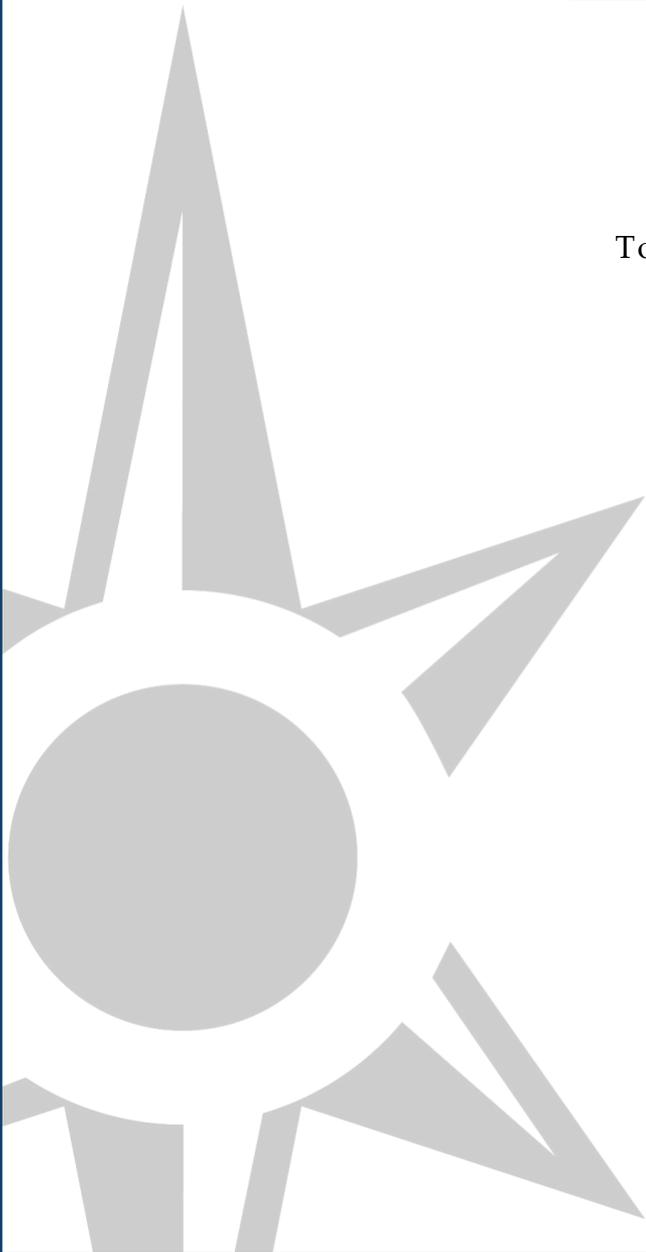
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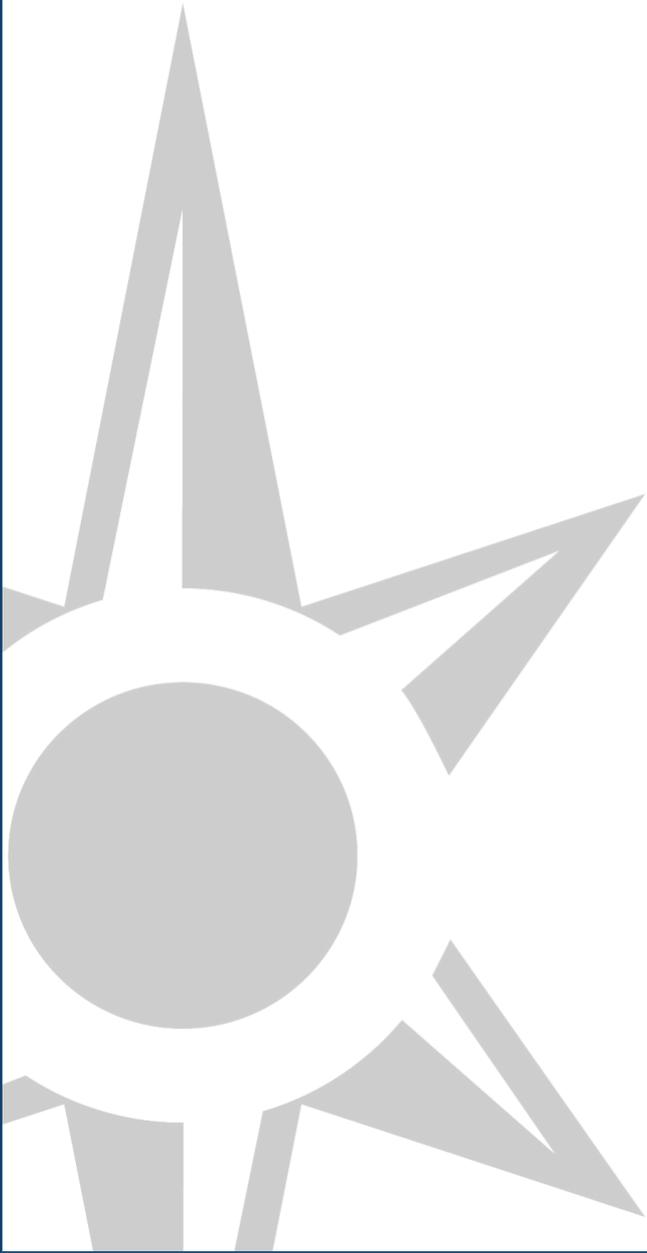
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# South Korean Critical Mineral Development in Africa

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By  
Tom Ramage





# Executive Summary

*Tom Ramage*

Efforts to secure new sources of critical minerals for Korean battery companies have driven Seoul to deepen its engagement with the African continent, aligning with the Korea-Africa Summit in 2024. This shift comes amid expanding Chinese mineral interests in Africa—specifically in the Congo—as well as actions by G7+ countries to bolster infrastructure in the region through the Lobito Corridor. Korea’s own mineral engagement in Africa began to seriously take shape from the mid-2000s into the early 2010s, with state-supported initiatives involving the Korea Resources Corporation (KORES) as well as participation from private firms. Momentum has since accelerated following the 2024 Korea-Africa Summit, where a number of substantial mineral deals were signed, while future agreements have the potential to be bolstered by the newly established Korea Mine Rehabilitation and Mineral Resources Corporation (KOMIR). For projects to be fully successful, combined efforts to develop on-site mineral processing and energy systems as well as infrastructure for global market access will be necessary to ensure the full scope of mineral supply chain security. In this context, Korea’s investment and technical oversight brought to African mineral projects may introduce political competition to China’s longstanding presence in the region and could reshape global electric vehicle battery supply chains by allowing new projects to come online. Existing and future developments are poised to expand Seoul’s global diplomatic reach and recalibrate the landscape of resource development in Africa.

## Introduction

Commitments to net-zero emissions around the world have prompted a wholesale transformation of the transportation sector, namely transitioning carbon fuel vehicles to battery electric vehicles (BEVs) and other eco-friendly designs. This transition will require substantial investment in critical minerals to meet the demand for electric vehicle batteries. With supply chains becoming increasingly globalized and increasing efforts toward diversification away from sources deemed as foreign countries of concern, providing new sources of critical minerals—and their processed outputs—will be necessary to ensure the economic security of global vehicle production.

According to the World Bank, minerals needed to meet the needs of renewable energy deployment will scale to 200 million tons per year in 2050.<sup>1</sup> For electric vehicles (EVs) —which encompass BEVs, plug-in hybrid electric vehicles (PHEVs), hybrid electric vehicles (HEVs), as well as fuel cell electric vehicles (FCEVs)—there are two areas of the world where a focus on these minerals will be paramount; South Korea, as a battery provider, and polities within Africa as sources of the minerals.

South Korean companies consistently comprise a near quarter share of the global battery market for electric vehicles, with companies like LG Energy Solution, Samsung SDI, and SK On persisting as three of the top five suppliers outside the Chinese market.<sup>2</sup> Although China currently accounts for the dominating mass of cathode and anode production—the two major components powering a battery—South Korea will likely see a greater share as a supplier as countries seek to derisk supply chains from Chinese dominance. The billions of dollars in South Korean battery investments set to come online in the United States (US) in the latter part of the decade also means that South Korea’s critical mineral supply chains will play a broader role in the US’ own economic security strategy, making their responsible and secure sourcing a US domestic imperative.

## Critical Minerals

Officially, there is no internationally shared definition of critical minerals, but they are generally agreed to comprise minerals considered vulnerable to supply chain disruptions in advanced technologies and national security. Accordingly, countries maintain their own lists of these minerals, which can vary in length and order of priority. In South Korea’s case, the Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) tables a list of 33 minerals “selected for management with regard to economic security”—10 of which are considered “strategic critical minerals” prioritized for advanced technology supply chains, such as semiconductors and secondary batteries.<sup>3</sup> The top of the list includes minerals vital for battery production; lithium, nickel, cobalt, manganese, and graphite.

### List of Critical Minerals indicated by the South Korean MOTIE

Mineral Name	
Lithium*	Vanadium
Nickel*	Platinum
Cobalt*	Tin
Manganese*	Titanium
Graphite*	Tungsten
Neodymium* (REE)	Antimony
Dysprosium* (REE)	Bismuth
Terbium* (REE)	Chromium
Cerium* (REE)	Lead
Lanthanum* (REE)	Zinc
Niobium	Gallium
Copper	Indium
Aluminum	Tantalum
Silicon	Zirconium
Magnesium	Stronium
Molybdenum	Selenium

\* Asterisk indicates “strategic critical mineral” prioritized for intensive management

“REE” indicates “Rare Earth Element.”

Source: <https://www.iea.org/policies/17943-critical-mineral-list-in-korea>

<sup>1</sup> Kirsten Hund et al, “Minerals for Climate Action: The Mineral Intensity of the Clean Energy Transition,” *The World Bank*, 2020, <https://pubdocs.worldbank.org/en/961711588875536384/Minerals-for-Climate-Action-The-Mineral-Intensity-of-the-Clean-Energy-Transition.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> James Bowen, “The Raw Materials of Economic Security: South Korea’s Evolving Energy and Critical Minerals Policies in an Era of Disruption,” *Korea Economic Institute of America*, Jan. 3, 2024, <https://keia.org/publication/the-raw-materials-of-economic-security-south-korea-evolving-energy-and-critical-minerals-policies-in-an-era-of-disruption/>

<sup>3</sup> “Critical Mineral List in Korea,” *International Energy Agency*, Last updated Dec. 8, 2023, <https://www.iea.org/policies/17943-critical-mineral-list-in-korea>

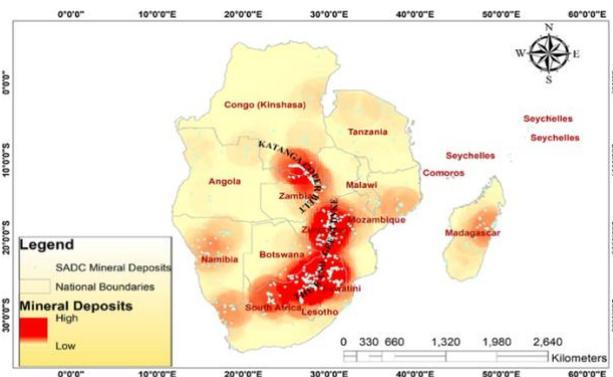
South Korea is reliant on foreign imports to meet 95% of its needs for processed critical minerals commonly used in EV batteries, and over 80% of these imports come from China.<sup>4</sup> The South Korean government has instituted a plan to reduce “foreign dependence” for 185 specific items such as batteries, minerals, and semiconductors to less than 50% by 2030—known as the “3050 strategy”—and aims to increase domestic lithium and cobalt reserves to maintain a minimum 100 days of supply by 2031. With this in mind, investment in new extraction projects and processing facilities for minerals will likely play a major role in the policies directing South Korea’s battery technologies.<sup>5</sup>

Contemporary EV battery chemistries are generally based on either a nickel-manganese-cobalt (NMC) or lithium iron phosphate (LFP) composition. NMC batteries are the most common material found in the US and European EV markets.<sup>6</sup> For lithium batteries, Chinese firms account for 99% of lithium iron phosphate (LFP) cathode active material production, meaning that alternative battery chemistries are paramount to stable supply chains.<sup>7</sup> Complicating this, on Jan. 2, 2025, China’s Ministry of Commerce issued a proposed regulation restricting the export of LFP processing technologies by requiring Chinese companies to obtain a license for doing so.<sup>8</sup> This was followed by China’s restrictions on the export of REEs (a group of 17 specific elements on the periodic table important for their use in manufacturing modern technologies) in April 2025 as part of retaliation to the tariffs instituted by the United States.<sup>9</sup> With many battery supply chains reliant on these materials, the development of NMC technologies will likely play a larger part in de-risking supply chains from the challenges of resource-based leverage in trade and South Korean firms are heavily investing in the production of NMC

batteries through new factories and mineral supply chains.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the United States includes Chinese critical mineral phase-out requirements in its EV purchase incentive programs such as the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA), making the development of stable sources of nickel, manganese, and cobalt by US trade partners a major economic security issue in Washington.

### Lay of the Land

Africa and its central mineral belt (comprising the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Zambia, and other countries in the sub-Sahara) displays some of the highest prospects for future development to obtain critical minerals for battery manufacturing. The continent is home to 30% of the world’s overall mineral reserves; over half of the world’s cobalt comes from the DRC-Zambia mineral belt, while 25% of the world’s manganese comes from South Africa.<sup>10</sup>



Referenced from: Matsa, Mark Mokomborero, Dzawanda, Beauty, et al, “The Rand-Great Dyke-Copper Belt-Katanga mineral resources axis: blessing or curse for Southern Africa,” *GeoJournal* 89(5), August 2024, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10708-024-11206-3>

Seoul’s inroads abroad are likely to increasingly focus on the African continent where critical minerals

<sup>4</sup> Bill Paterson, “South Korea’s Demand for Critical Minerals,” Australian Strategic Policy Institute, March 4, 2024, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/south-koreas-demand-for-critical-minerals/>

<sup>5</sup> Nina Hu, “South Korea to Reduce Dependence on Other Countries for Key Materials by 2030,” *Fast Markets*, Dec. 15, 2023, <https://www.fastmarkets.com/insights/south-korea-to-reduce-dependence-on-other-countries-for-key-materials-by-2030/>

<sup>6</sup> International Energy Agency, “Trends in Electric Vehicle Batteries,” April 2024, <https://www.iea.org/reports/global-ev-outlook-2024/trends-in-electric-vehicle-batteries>

<sup>7</sup> Benchmark Mineral Intelligence, “What’s the impact of China’s proposed export controls on lithium and cathode technologies?” Jan. 7, 2025, <https://source.benchmarkminerals.com/video/watch/whats-the-impact-of-chinas-proposed-export-controls-on-lithium-and-cathode-technologies>

<sup>8</sup> Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, “Notice on Soliciting Public Opinions on Adjustments to the Catalogue of Technologies Prohibited or Restricted from Export from China,” Jan. 2,

2025, [https://fms.mofcom.gov.cn/xxfb/art/2025/art\\_4717648e8ef94faba7564800b90ea3cc.html](https://fms.mofcom.gov.cn/xxfb/art/2025/art_4717648e8ef94faba7564800b90ea3cc.html)

<sup>9</sup> Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, “Ministry of Commerce and General Administration of Customs Announcement No. 18 of 2025 Decision on Implementing Export Control on Some Medium and Heavy Rare Earth-Related Items,” April 4, 2025, [https://www.mofcom.gov.cn/zwgk/zcfb/art/2025/art\\_9c2108ccaf754f22a34abab2fedaa944.html](https://www.mofcom.gov.cn/zwgk/zcfb/art/2025/art_9c2108ccaf754f22a34abab2fedaa944.html)

<sup>5</sup> In December 2023, the Korean government announced \$29 billion in investment into the Korean battery industry through 2028. In April of the same year, LG Chem and China’s Huayou Cobalt invested \$909 million into a battery precursor facility joint venture in Saemangeum in Southwest Seoul.

<sup>10</sup> Saleem H. Ali, ed. et al, “Africa’s Mineral Fortune: The Science and Politics of Mining and Sustainable Development,” *Routledge*, June 30, 2020, 71.

form an important aspect of political discussion with foreign powers. South Korea's "Global Pivotal State" strategy, which was launched in 2022, has prompted a journey of obtaining greater diplomatic influence by proactively seeking to develop international partnerships and global trade engagement. South Korea has since leveraged engagement in the African region, evidenced by the first "Korea-Africa Summit" attended by 48 African Union member states in June 2024. Its resulting commitments, coupled with investments from other democratically-aligned countries in transportation infrastructure for the region, show the progress being made surrounding South Korea's developmental and economic involvement in Africa.

The African continent's unique geological foundation is the historical accident which caused its wealth of mineral deposits. Its early geological formation made its cratons be the first to form and stabilize, ahead of other continents of the Earth. This, in turn, pushed its mineral resources to the visual surface through gradual tectonic uplift. The phenomenon is especially prominent in the sub-Saharan, where the Katanga Supergroup, Central African Copper Belt, as well as the Rand-Great Dyke provide high endowments of mineral deposits, including graphite, nickel, lithium, manganese, copper, cobalt, and REEs.<sup>11</sup>

Where mining has become an indispensable part of the region's economy, reaching its full developmental potential is complicated by the continent's lack of interior infrastructure, challenges to democratic governance, and the issues accompanying the corruptive nature of quick mineral wealth. Indeed, the latter is referred to as the "resource curse," where a sudden influx in resource-based wealth fuels internal conflicts and rent-seeking behaviors in governments, ultimately hindering political and economic progress.<sup>12</sup> Another frame of this is the "Dutch Disease" (after the consequences of the Netherlands' North Sea gas discoveries in the 1960s), where economic reliance on one sector draws resources away from other industries and increases in foreign exchange holdings from a resource boom

causes imbalances in a country's economy and subsequent price instabilities.

So far as the need for mineral resources goes, African countries are finding themselves at the crux of competition for the rights to extraction. Choosing between the different international partners offering assistance accordingly puts the political future of African countries at a fork in the road. This could, in turn, change the political direction of the continent, depending on which international partners offer their resource development and project governance models as a blueprint. Confounding this, too, are the risks of child labor and political violence; meaning that the participation of democratically-aligned governments in these projects, rather than players who solely focus on extraction and financial exploitation, will be critical to the national development and societal health of the African countries that benefit.

For instance, artisanal and small-scale mining (ASM) projects play a significant role in the continent's current extraction methods for gemstones and minerals, with children comprising more than half of the workers engaged in cobalt mining in the DRC.<sup>13</sup> This entails low pay and dangerous conditions, as well as major issues surrounding exploitation and other injustices. Due to the lack of funding and sufficient government support, ASM projects unnecessarily strain resources and labor as they suffer a dearth of geological surveys and other development measures which would be able to better indicate mineralized areas and accordingly where to focus labor.<sup>14</sup> Lacking oversight and responsible governance, the export of such resources has also been used to fund regional conflict before moving out of the country for processing—a phenomenon known as "minerals laundering"—directly and indirectly benefiting various armed groups in Africa.<sup>15</sup> Indeed, on Jan. 27, 2025, the M23 military group, who has been accused of participation in such minerals laundering activities, took control of the Congolese city of Goma, likely entailing a new period of security challenges for the region.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, "Mineral Value Chains and Transformation in the SADC Region: Opportunities from Critical Energy Transition Minerals," August 2024, [https://www.uneca.org/eca-events/sites/default/files/resources/documents/sro-sa/7th-sadc-industrialization-week/mvct\\_concept\\_note\\_cetms.pdf](https://www.uneca.org/eca-events/sites/default/files/resources/documents/sro-sa/7th-sadc-industrialization-week/mvct_concept_note_cetms.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> Richard Auty, "Sustaining Development in Mineral Economies: The Resource Curse Thesis" *Routledge*, September 2002

<sup>13</sup> James Morton Turner, "Charged: A History of Electric Vehicle Batteries," *University of Washington Press*, 2022, 117

<sup>14</sup> Saleem H. Ali, ed. et al, "Africa's Mineral Fortune: The Science and Politics of Mining and Sustainable Development," *Routledge*, June 30, 2020, 247.

<sup>15</sup> US Department of State, "Statement of Concern Related to Certain Minerals Supply Chains from Rwanda and Eastern Democratic Republic of the Congo Contributing to the Ongoing Conflict," July 9, 2024, <https://2021-2025.state.gov/statement-of-concern-related-to-certain-minerals-supply-chains-from-rwanda-and-eastern-drc/>

<sup>16</sup> Gabriele Steinhauser and Nicholas Bariyo, "Rwanda-Backed Rebels Enter Congo Safe-Haven City, Aid Hub," *The Wall Street Journal*, Jan. 27, 2025,

While interest in developing these resources (specifically in the DRC and Zambia's mineral belt) has been global in origin, China's state support over industrial supply chains have given it a substantial lead in developing these resources for export. Accordingly, the event horizon is quickly closing for economies wishing to create alternative arteries into sub-Saharan Africa's mineral upstream. However, South Korea's interest, demonstrated through its recent diplomatic and business engagements, means that smaller politically influential competitors are entering the arena, likely entailing new avenues of resource development for African governments outside of Chinese sources.

The presence of disparate foreign influence groups in Africa's mineral core is telling of the intense geopolitical competition in the region. Research by Vincent Darracq and Daragh Neville at Chatham House's Africa Program asserts that South Korean policymakers identify the outsized influence of China in sub-Saharan Africa and an accompanying need to project their own influence on the continent "before other global competitors take everything."<sup>17</sup> Long a Cold War battleground for global power dynamics, this competing Chinese influence in the region has been historically well-established within central Africa and the DRC. Mobutu Sese Sek, who served as President of the DRC's former iterations as both the Republic of Congo and Zaire, was influential in courting Chinese investments in the DRC in the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>18</sup> China's current mineral interests in the region appear to repeat this historical pattern: according to the Congressional-Executive Commission on China (CECC), Chinese companies own 80% of the DRC's cobalt output, where the majority of the world's reserves are contained.<sup>19</sup>

Modern investments in tune with China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have also drawn criticisms

regarding the United States' and aligned countries' latecomer interest in the region, which has allowed China more sway over the continent's political-military balance. For example, China has been providing attack drones to the DRC—prompting concerns around the inflammation of ongoing tensions between Rwanda and the DRC.<sup>20</sup> Wagner Group, a Russian private military company, too, is present in the DRC, where it provides security support for the government. In countries like the Central African Republic (CAR), such support is even exchanged for direct mineral concessions.<sup>21</sup>

### Lobito Corridor

The threat of debt-trap diplomacy from autocratic powers, as well as the possible bifurcation of Africa into separate economic blocs aligned with influence groups such as BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Egypt, Ethiopia, Indonesia, Iran, UAE), has accentuated the attention paid by policy planners in capitals aligned with the rules-based international system around the world on the need for alternative investment vehicles for the region. Parties have pushed for global projects and infrastructure development in Africa, particularly as African minerals play a larger role in worldwide decarbonization technologies. For its own part, the US has been engaged with other G7 partner countries in developing the Lobito Trans-Africa Corridor as part of the Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI). This infrastructure project connects the Atlantic and Indian Oceans through the DRC, Tanzania, and Zambia.<sup>22</sup> Through rail investments and infrastructure development, its full implementation would be core to delivering critically needed minerals to global markets. Moreover, it stands in direct competition to China's inroads in the region through its revitalization of its TAZARA (Tanzania-Zambia) Railway, which arguably seeks to

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[https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/rwanda-backed-rebels-enter-congo-safe-haven-city-aid-hub-09fdccb8?mod=lead\\_feature\\_below\\_a\\_pos1](https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/rwanda-backed-rebels-enter-congo-safe-haven-city-aid-hub-09fdccb8?mod=lead_feature_below_a_pos1); Nosmot Gbadamosi, "Why Congo is Suing Apple," *Foreign Policy*, March 12, 2025 <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/03/12/congo-apple-conflict-minerals/>

<sup>17</sup> Vincent Darracq and Daragh Neville, "South Korea's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: Fortune, Fuel and Frontier Markets," *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, October 2014, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field\\_document/20141027SouthKoreaAfricaDarracqNeville.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20141027SouthKoreaAfricaDarracqNeville.pdf)

<sup>18</sup> James Morton Turner, "Charged: A History of Electric Vehicle Batteries," *University of Washington Press*, 2022, 125

<sup>19</sup> Congressional-Executive Commission on China, "From Cobalt to Cars: How China Exploits Child and Forced Labor in the Congo," Nov. 14, 2023, <https://www.cecc.gov/events/hearings/from-cobalt-to-cars-how-china-exploits-child-and-forced-labor-in-the-congo>

<sup>20</sup> Robert Bociaga, "China Sends Military Drones to DRC Amid Fears of Regional War," *The Diplomat*, March 20, 2023, <https://thediplomat.com/2023/03/china-sends-military-drones-to-drc-amid-fears-of-regional-war/>

<sup>21</sup> Jessica Malobisky, "Prigozhin is Gone, But Wagner's Power in Africa is Only Growing," *New Lines Institute*, Oct. 5, 2023, <https://newlinesinstitute.org/state-resilience-fragility/prigozhin-is-gone-but-wagners-power-in-africa-is-only-growing/>; Vanda Felbab-Brown, "What's Ahead for the Wagner Group in Africa and the Middle East?" *The Brookings Institution*, July 18, 2023, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/whats-ahead-for-the-wagner-group-in-africa-and-the-middle-east/>

<sup>22</sup> The White House, "FACT SHEET: Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment in the Lobito Trans-Africa Corridor," Dec. 3, 2024, <https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/12/03/fact-sheet-partnership-for-global-infrastructure-and-investment-in-the-lobito-trans-africa-corridor/>

direct mineral flow to Chinese supply lines through the East of the continent.



Source: [https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/connecting-democratic-republic-congo-zambia-and-angola-global-markets-through-lobito-corridor\\_en](https://international-partnerships.ec.europa.eu/policies/global-gateway/connecting-democratic-republic-congo-zambia-and-angola-global-markets-through-lobito-corridor_en)

Accordingly, one of President Joe Biden’s last actions as US president was a state visit to Angola in December 2024, where he highlighted the Lobito Corridor Project as part of the “Lobito Corridor Trans-Africa Summit.”<sup>23</sup> The official state visit culminated \$560 million in additional US funding, supporting the initial \$6 billion in total investment for critical mineral and infrastructure projects from G7 countries and regional development banks. Language on the Lobito Corridor in the White House press release also differed from previous pronouncements, as it has since described the development organization as a “bipartisan initiative in partnership with G7+,” signaling to a potential collaboration with similarly aligned partner countries such as South Korea.<sup>∞</sup>

In this vein, in the lead-up to South Korea’s summit with African leaders, Angola—where the Lobito port project acts as the mouth to the corridor facing the Atlantic—invited South Korea to join the Corridor project in June 2024.<sup>24</sup> Subsequently, in October 2024,

South Korea’s Ambassador to Angola, Kwang-Jin Choi, stated that as part of a South Korean company delegation to the country, he hoped that the delegation would “serve as a catalyst for [South] Korean agencies and companies to get involved in the Lobito Corridor.”<sup>25</sup> Any further engagements would likely act as a litmus test for South Korea’s future commitment to multilateral investment frameworks on the continent and its moves toward a more permanent economic presence. However, in February 2025, Bloomberg reported that US financial support for the Lobito Corridor project was indefinitely blocked following the Trump administration’s freeze on foreign aid spending.<sup>26</sup> A vacuum of US engagement for the project may raise questions around Seoul’s potential commitments, while it could also give Korea a greater opportunity to be a partner for Africa in Washington’s stead.

### South Korean Engagement

For South Korea’s part, Seoul’s early diplomatic interest in the continent was in direct competition with similar efforts made by the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK). Efforts were complicated by the “One Korea” policy, which was practiced until 1973 and offered a binary choice to African countries to either recognize the government in Seoul or Pyongyang.<sup>27</sup> However, as Seoul and Pyongyang’s trajectories gradually began to diverge, President Chun Doo-hwan’s visit to Africa in 1982—specifically to Kenya, Nigeria, Gabon, and Senegal—marked the start of full-scale South Korean economic activity on the continent, further bolstered by the creation of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) in 1991.<sup>28</sup> Building on this momentum, South Korea was granted observer status in the 55-member nation African Union in 2005. Subsequently, president Roh Moo Hyun’s travel to the continent in March 2006 included state visits to Egypt, Algeria, and Nigeria. The visits were used to launch the Korea Initiative for African Development (KIAD), focusing on increasing official development assistance (ODA) and fostering resource diplomacy.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>∞</sup> There is a growing movement calling for Korea’s inclusion in the G7 grouping alongside Australia and India, including by US President Donald Trump in 2020.

<sup>24</sup> Sanjay Kumar, “[Bridge to Africa] Envoy urges Korea to join Lobito Corridor, other projects in Angola,” *The Korea Herald*, March 6, 2024, <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/3341192>

<sup>25</sup> “Korea to Strengthen Investment in Lobito Corridor,” <https://angop.ao/en/noticias/economia/coreia-quer-reforcar-lacos-no-corredor-do-lobito/>

<sup>26</sup> Michael J. Kavanagh, Paul Burkhardt, and Matthew Hill, Trump Aid Freeze Risks \$1 Billion African Minerals Project, *Bloomberg*, Feb. 18, 2025, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2025-02-18/trump-usaid-freeze-risks-curbing-africa-critical-mineral-flows?sref=61PyYII4>

<sup>27</sup> Françoise Nicolas, “Korea in Africa: Between Soft Power and Economic Interests,” *French Institute of International Relations*, January 2020, [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated\\_files/documents/atoms/files/nicolas\\_korea\\_africa\\_ifri\\_pcms\\_2020\\_3.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/nicolas_korea_africa_ifri_pcms_2020_3.pdf)

<sup>28</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Africa,” n.d., [https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpage/m\\_4910/contents.do](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpage/m_4910/contents.do)

Roh Moo Hyun's March 2006 visit to Africa, along with the creation of KIAD, prompted the first "Korea-Africa Forum" later that year where Korea committed \$100 million in official development assistance (ODA) to Africa and pledged to "share its industrial and technological expertise."<sup>29</sup> The forum laid the groundwork for the subsequent Korea-Africa Summit in 2024 by stating an aim to "nurture the forum into a biennial summit of African leaders" within 10 years of its dismissal. The forum was subsequently repeated by the Lee Myung-bak administration (2008-2013) in 2009, which made its own commitment to double the \$100 million ODA figure by 2012.<sup>30</sup> It was again reprised in 2012 and then in 2016 under the Park Geun-hye administration (2013 to 2017), which held the forum in Ethiopia.<sup>31</sup>

Linking ODA projects with mineral concessions, these engagements were part of a broader "resource diplomacy" strategy by Korea.<sup>32</sup> Along with the Korea-Africa Forum (KOAF), the launching of the Korea-Africa Economic Cooperation (KOAFEC) Ministerial Conference in 2006, the creation of MOTIE's Africa Department in 2009, and the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs' "Korea Africa Foundation" in 2018, helped to institutionalize the forward trajectory of South Korea-Africa relations. Ties were cemented through the visits by Presidents Lee Myung-bak to South Africa, the DRC, and Ethiopia in 2011 and President Park Geun-hye to Ethiopia, Uganda, and Kenya in 2016.<sup>33</sup>

Francoise Nicolas, *et al.*'s research points out that Korea's resource diplomacy has transitioned from a "defensive" to an "offensive" approach; shifting the goal of resource diplomacy from "ensuring the country's supply of energy resources," to

"strengthening the country's competitive advantage in the global race for resources."<sup>34</sup> Indeed, Lee Myung-bak's term from 2008 to 2013 may be best defined as South Korea's highest profile foray into resource diplomacy prior to the Korea-Africa Summit of 2024, and he appointed a special envoy for that purpose (Lee's brother Lee Sang-deuk). During his term, 96 Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs) were signed with other countries for natural resource development, along with \$28.5 billion spent on state-owned enterprise resource development projects around the world.<sup>35</sup> However, as Yejoon Kim suggests, many of the overseas projects in both the Roh and Lee administrations made under the auspices of resource diplomacy did not last beyond the MOU stage. Project loan repayment obligations were dismissed if projects failed to come online, leading to public scrutiny of this type of FDI policy and hesitancy toward future projects.<sup>36</sup>

One project which did make it past the planning stage, however, was South Korea's involvement in Madagascar's Ambatovy mine, focusing on nickel, cobalt, and ammonia extraction and processing. In 2006, Korea Resources Corporation contributed a 27.5% stake toward the \$7.2 billion cumulative amount along with developers from Japan and Canada, and final deal signing occurred in September 2007.<sup>37</sup>

Project investments were historically overseen by the Korea Resources Corporation (KORES), which operated under South Korea's Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) to support the development of Korea's overseas mineral industries.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, South Korea's development organizations, such as the Export-Import Bank of

<sup>29</sup> Chosun Daily, "First Korea-Africa Forum Sketches Mutual Growth," Nov. 9, 2006, <https://www.chosun.com/english/national-en/2006/11/09/CAO4BG2AFZV3NHQMVUEA3UXFNY/>

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., R. Maxwell Bone and Matthew Minsoo Kim, "South Korea's Africa Outreach," *The Diplomat*, Aug. 2, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/08/south-koreas-africa-outreach/>

<sup>31</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Africa," n.d., [https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m\\_4910/contents.do](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_4910/contents.do)

<sup>32</sup> Francoise Nicolas, et al., "La nouvelle diplomatie économique asiatique: Chine, Japon, Corée comme exportateurs d'infrastructures [The New Asian Economic Diplomacy: China, Japan, Korea as Infrastructure Exporters], *Asie.Visions* 68 (May 2014), [https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated\\_files/documents/atoms/files/ifri\\_asievisions68nicolaspajonseaman-2.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/ifri_asievisions68nicolaspajonseaman-2.pdf)

<sup>33</sup> Africa Development Bank Group, "2024 Korea Africa Summit," n.d., [https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/en\\_leaflet-2024\\_korea-africa\\_summit.pdf](https://www.afdb.org/sites/default/files/documents/en_leaflet-2024_korea-africa_summit.pdf); Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "President Park to Expand Cooperation with Africa, Europe," June 13, 2016, <https://news.mofa.go.kr/ene/newspaper/mainview.php?mvid=2249>

<sup>34</sup> Darracq and Neville research points out that President Park Geun Hye's initial planned visit to Ethiopia for January 2014 was canceled.

<sup>34</sup> Nicolas, Francoise, et al., "La nouvelle diplomatie économique asiatique : Chine, Japon, Corée comme exportateurs d'infrastructures [The New Asian Economic Diplomacy: China, Japan, Korea as Infrastructure Exporters], *Asie.Visions* 68 (May 2014),

[https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated\\_files/documents/atoms/files/ifri\\_asievisions68nicolaspajonseaman-2.pdf](https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/migrated_files/documents/atoms/files/ifri_asievisions68nicolaspajonseaman-2.pdf)

<sup>35</sup> Yejoon Kim, "South Korea's Changing Political Environment and the Impact on its Africa policy," *African East-Asian Affairs*, no. 4, Dec. 2016, <https://doi.org/10.7552/0-4-185>

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., Hankyoreh, [Special investigation part I] Resource diplomacy: \$4 billion in losses, and no one responsible, Jan. 25, 2015, [https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_national/675100.html](https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_national/675100.html)

<sup>37</sup> Saleem H. Ali, ed. et al., "Africa's Mineral Fortune: The Science and Politics of Mining and Sustainable Development," *Routledge*, June 30, 2020, 122

<sup>38</sup> Jaewon Chung, "The Mineral Industry of the Republic of Korea," in USGS 2020-2021 Minerals Yearbook Republic of Korea [Advance Release], *United States Geological Survey*, May 2024, <https://pubs.usgs.gov/myb/vol3/2020-21/myb3-2020-21-republic-korea.pdf>

Korea (KEXIM), the Economic Development and Cooperation Fund (EDCF), and the Korea Development Bank (KDB) extended infrastructure loans to African countries on the condition that South Korean companies managed the projects by and that loans could be reimbursed through the in-kind transfer of natural resources.<sup>39</sup>

Following political backlash against "resource diplomacy" initiatives pursued by previous administrations, the Moon Jae-in administration (2017–2022) viewed deficit-generating overseas mining projects as potential items for sale, where overseas resource development projects were dubbed as "past evils."<sup>40</sup> Under the Moon term, KORES sold nearly half of its overseas assets and the administration considered selling the government's stake in Madagascar's Ambatovy mine.<sup>41</sup> The succeeding Yoon Suk Yeol administration (2022–2025), however, halted plans to sell off overseas mining projects, signaling the administration's emphasis on the strategic importance of securing critical minerals.<sup>42</sup>

Subsequently, on Sept. 10, 2021, the South Korean government merged KORES with the Mine Reclamation Corporation (MIRECO) to create the Korea Mine Rehabilitation and Mineral Resources Corporation (KOMIR). KOMIR's mandate is to facilitate South Korea's access to critical minerals by subsidizing private-sector mining projects abroad rather than making direct government investments.<sup>43</sup> According to KOMIR, it maintains at least six "Overseas Cooperation Country" relations in Africa—namely with Tanzania, the DRC, Central African Republic, Sierra Leone, and Algeria—while the Ambatovy project in Madagascar serves as one of its four "Overseas Investment Management" projects.<sup>44</sup> Individual South Korean companies, can also make their own ventures or investment stakes in Africa with the ability to benefit from KOMIR support. Korea's national export credit agency, Korea

Trade Insurance Corporation (K-SURE), too, supports the development of overseas mineral projects through the provision of financing and trade insurance.

### Significant South Korean Mineral Ventures in Africa

Date	South Korea Entity	African Entity	Project	Location	Notes
March 2025	Korea Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources (KIGAM)	Tanzania Ministry of Minerals/ Geological Survey of Tanzania	MOU to conduct joint research project to identify new areas rich in critical minerals. <sup>45</sup>	Tanzania	
March 2024	POSCO Future M	Balamba Graphite Operation	Deal to import 60 thousand tons of natural graphite annually for 6 years. <sup>46</sup>	Cabo Delgado Province, Mozambique	
November	KIGAM	Nigerian Geolo	MOU for cooper	Nigeria	

<sup>39</sup> Vincent Darracq and Daragh Neville, "South Korea's Engagement in Sub-Saharan Africa: Fortune, Fuel and Frontier Markets," *The Royal Institute of International Affairs*, October 2014, [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field\\_document/20141027SouthKoreaAfricaDarracqNeville.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/field/field_document/20141027SouthKoreaAfricaDarracqNeville.pdf)

<sup>40</sup> Kang Chon-gu, "Resources as a Political Football," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, March 30, 2022, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2022/03/30/opinion/columns/resources-Lee-Myungbak-Moon-Jaein/20220330200547281.html?>

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> So-Hyeon Kim, "S.Korea to Scrap Plans to Sell Ambatovy Mine Stake," *The Korea Economic Daily*, April 7, 2022, <https://www.kedglobal.com/energy/newsView/ked202204070010>; Man-su

Choe, "South Korea Seeks to Exit Africa Mining JV Despite Rising Nickel Demand," *The Korea Economic Daily*, April 26, 2020, <https://www.kedglobal.com/energy/newsView/ked202008260005>

<sup>43</sup> The Korea Herald, "Korea to Launch New Mining Agency on Sept. 10," Aug. 24, 2021, <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/2675425>

<sup>44</sup> Korea Mine Rehabilitation and Mineral Resources Corporation (KOMIR), "The Whole Life Cycle of Mining," 2023, <https://minedocs.com/24/KOMIR-Brochure-2023.pdf>

<sup>45</sup> "Tanzania, South Korea firm to Conduct Joint Geoscientific Research," <https://dailynews.co.tz/tanzania-south-korea-firm-to-conduct-joint-geoscientific-research/>, *Daily News*, March 27, 2025

<sup>46</sup> Hyung-Kyu Kim, "Posco Future M to Import Natural Graphite from Africa," *The Korea Economic Daily*, March 1, 2024, <https://www.kedglobal.com/batteries/newsView/ked202403010003>

er 2024		gical Surve y	ation on minera l explora tion reserve assess ment and critical minera l research and develop ment. <sup>47</sup>		
Dec emb er 2011	KORE S	Zand kopsd rift Projec t	10% stake in Canad a's Frontie r Rare Earths Ltd. South African REE mining project. <sup>48</sup>	Nort hern Cape Provi nce, South Afric a	
July 2011	Korea Trade Insura nce Corp. (K- Sure)	Geca mines	MOU for Gecam ines to provid e South Korean firms with opport unities	Dem ocrati c Repu blic of the Cong o (DRC )	

			to co- develo p raw materi al project s in the DRC with K- Sure financi ng. <sup>49</sup>		
Dec emb er 2010	KORE S	Came roonia n Gover nment	C&K Mining Joint Ventur e over Mobilo ng Diamo nd Mine. <sup>50</sup>	Yoka dou ma, Came roon	Major ity share s sold to Chine se share holde r in late 2013. <sup>51</sup>
Octo ber 2010	Korea Eximb ank, Taejoo Synthe sis Steel, Samsu ng, Hyun dai, and Daew oo	Sodim ico	\$300 million bid to refurbi sh Musos hi Coppe r Mine. Part of \$1 billion total minera ls for infrastr ucture offer involvi	Haut- Kata nga, DR Cong o	

<sup>47</sup> YH Ahn, "MOU Signing between KIGAM and Nigerian Geological Survey (NGSA)," *Korea Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources*, Nov. 15, 2024, [https://www.kigam.re.kr/board.es?mid=a20401000000&bid=0032&list\\_no=61248&act=view](https://www.kigam.re.kr/board.es?mid=a20401000000&bid=0032&list_no=61248&act=view)

<sup>48</sup> Cecilia Jamasmie, "Korea and Canada to Boost Large-Scale Rare Earth Resources Mine in South Africa," *Mining.com*, Dec. 5, 2011, <https://www.mining.com/korea-and-canada-to-boost-large-scale-rare-earth-resources-mine-in-s-africa/>

<sup>49</sup> Tae-gyu Kim, "K-Sure Jolts Korean Exports," *The Korea Times*, Aug. 16, 2011, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/tech/2025/03/129\\_92905.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/tech/2025/03/129_92905.html)

<sup>50</sup> Maeil Business News Korea, "C&K Mining Obtains License to Exploit Diamond in Cameroon," Dec. 17, 2010, <https://pulse.mk.co.kr/news/english/4826082?> Reuters, "Cameroon to Launch First Industrial Diamond Mine this Month, Jan. 22, 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/article/markets/cameroon-to-launch-first-industrial-diamond-mine-this-month-idUSL6N0AM6P6/>

<sup>51</sup> Business in Cameroon, "Cameroon: C&K Mining Sells Assets in Mobilong Diamond Mining to Chinese-American Investor," Nov. 26, 2014, <https://www.businessincameroon.com/mining/2611-5145-cameroon-c-k-mining-sells-assets-in-mobilong-diamond-mining-to-chinese-american-investor>

			ng Korea Eximb ank. <sup>52</sup>		
Febr uary 2010	KEPC O/KH NP, Korea Water Resour ces Corpo ration, KORE S	Gover nment of Niger	13.5% stake in Orano Expans ion operati ng compa ny for Imoura ren Uraniu m Mine. <sup>53</sup>	Agad ez Regio n, Niger	
2010	KOMI R	Azeli k Mines Comp any	5% stake in Société des mines d’Azeli k (SOMI NA) joint ventur e for Azelik/ Teguid da Mine. <sup>54</sup>	Take dda, Niger	Suspe nded in 2015, restar ted in July 2023 with China Nucle ar Intern ationa l Uraniu m Corpo ration to take over the projec t.

Sept emb er 2007	KORE S	Amba tovy Miner als S.A. (AMS A)	27.5% stake in multin ational consort ium exploit ing Ambat ovy nickel and cobalt mine. <sup>55</sup>	Mora mang a, Mada gasca r	Korea n KOMI R stake since increa sed to 45.82 %. Other 54.18 % held by Japan’ s Sumit omo Corpo ration <sup>56</sup>
Mar ch 2006	KORE S, Korea Institu te of Geosci ences and Miner al Resour ces	Geolo gical Surve y of Nigeri a	Agree ment for joint research and docum entatio n of minera l resour ces in Nigeri a made as part of Ro Moo- hyun’s visit to Nigeri a. <sup>57</sup>	Niger ia	

<sup>52</sup> Mining Review Africa, “South Korea Moves into the DRC,” Nov. 1, 2010, <https://www.miningreview.com/top-stories/south-korea-moves-into-the-drc/>

<sup>53</sup> World Nuclear Association, “Nuclear Power in South Korea,” Updated May 3, 2024, <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/country-profiles/countries-o-s/south-korea>

<sup>54</sup> Enerdata, “The Chinese-owned Group Somina Plans to Resume Uranium Mining at Azelik (Niger), May 15, 2024,

<https://www.enerdata.net/publications/daily-energy-news/uranium-mining-restarting-production.html>

<sup>55</sup> Korea Herald, “KORES to Launch Nickel Production at Madagascar Mine,” March 31, 2011, <https://www.koreaherald.com/article/10338359>

<sup>56</sup> Ambatovy, “Sustainability Report,” 2022, <https://ambatovy.com/en/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/Ambatovy-Sustainability-Report-2022-EN.pdf>

<sup>57</sup> Petroleum Africa, “South Korea Signs \$6 billion in Nigerian Deals, March 14, 2006, <https://www.petroleumafrika.com/south-korea-signs-6-billion-in-nigerian-deals/>

## Mobilong Diamond Mine Scandal

After conducting an exploration in 2006, South Korean metals and mining company, CNK International, received a mining permit over the Mobilong Diamond Mine in East Cameroon as part of a joint venture between Cameroon and Korea (C&K Mining) in 2010.

The mine became the center of a scandal in South Korea, beginning in December 2010 when South Korea's Ambassador for Energy and Resources, Kim Eun-seok, was accused of inflating the mine's diamond reserves in a Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) press release to take advantage of CNK Mining's stock price appreciation, along with claims of insider trading.

Reporting by *JoongAng Daily* estimated that CNK International Chairman, Oh Deok-gyun, gained more than 80 billion won from the stock sale as he was among a pool of 32 other investors, including Ambassador Kim and former Prime Minister's Office Secretary, Cho Jung-pyo. The allegations prompted a police raid on MOFAT offices and, after an investigation, CNK International was delisted from the Kosdaq exchange. The South Korean Board of Audit and Inspection (BAI) recommended Ambassador Kim to be removed from his post, and he later won an acquittal from legal charges. CNK Chairman, Oh Deok-gyun, was issued a suspended prison term.

While the nature of the scandal was ultimately an issue of financial corruption, it brought criticisms to Lee Myung-bak's (ROK President from 2008 to 2013) resource diplomacy policies in Africa and prompted increased scrutiny on the transparency of South Korean foreign investments. The scandal marks a case example in the need for greater investment in transparency and professional surveying for future South Korean mine projects abroad.

Source:

<https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/2012/01/29/industry/Accounts-tracked-in-CNK-diamond-scandal/2947636.html>

## 2024 Korea-Africa Summit

The Korea-Africa summit, which was held in Ilsan and Seoul from June 4 to 5, 2024, worked to fully institutionalize South Korea's engagement with Africa. 48 member states of the African Union attended the summit, and it marked the announcement of a significant roster of investment and trade announcements, including critical mineral access agreements. It also followed up on goals to formalize a summit of African leaders in South Korea, made as part of the Korea-Africa Forum nearly two decades prior.

For Seoul, in line with the Yoon administration's aims to turn South Korea into a Global Pivotal State, engagements with the African leaders worked to increase South Korean investment and assistance to the continent, aligning its competitiveness with other powers such as the US and China in the region. It also overlapped with the goals of the Yoon administration's "Indo-Pacific Strategy," which was introduced in December 2022 and included countries on the "African Coast of the Indian Ocean" as a focus area to develop transnational ties and "future-oriented cooperation."<sup>58</sup>

With a section committing to expand cooperation to develop industries related to critical minerals and launch a "Korea-Africa Critical Minerals Dialogue," the joint declaration signed as part of the summit kickstarted resource cooperation between Seoul and Africa. Moreover, the South Korean government committed to expanding ODA for Africa to over \$10 billion by 2030, leagues beyond the commitments made at the preceding Korea-Africa Forum.<sup>59</sup>

Its sideline "Korea-Africa Business Partnership" meeting also engaged hundreds of private sector participants from both Africa and South Korea. This resulted in significant agreements directing South Korean businesses into Africa, along with the provision of \$14 billion in export financing from the South Korean government to promote trade on the continent.<sup>60</sup> South Korea's Ministry of Land, Infrastructure and Transport held a similar forum to engage South Korean companies in infrastructure investment opportunities.

<sup>58</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Introducing the Indo-Pacific Strategy," Dec. 28, 2022,

[https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m\\_26382/contents.do](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_26382/contents.do)

<sup>59</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Joint Declaration 2024 Korea-Africa Summit," June 5, 2024,

[https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m\\_5674/view.do?seq=321015](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=321015)

<sup>60</sup> "South Korea, African Countries Sign Agreements on Minerals, Exports," *Reuters*, June 5, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/south-korea-african-countries-sign-agreements-minerals-exports-2024-06-05/>

Major Commitments Pursuant to 2024 Korea-Africa Summit

South Korean Entity	African Entity	Details	Location
Ministry of Economy and Finance (MOEF)	Tanzania	Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), Economic Development Cooperation Fund (ECDF) for \$2.5 billion over 5 years, granting South Korea access to critical minerals.	Tanzania
Korea Mineral Resources Corporation (KOMIR)	Tanzania State Mining Corporation (STAMICO)	MOU for KOMIR and STAMICO to develop strategic minerals in Tanzania. <sup>‡</sup>	Tanzania
Korea Institute of Geoscience and Mineral Resources (KIGAM)	Geological Survey of Tanzania (GST)	MOU to cooperate on research and mineral exploration.	Tanzania
POSCO	Mahenge Graphite Project	\$40 million investment by POSCO to buy 19% stake in Black Rock Mining Ltd. to	Tanzania

<sup>‡</sup> MOU signed in April 2025.

\* Trade and Investment Promotion Framework

		develop Mahenge Graphite Project.	
Ministry of Economy and Finance (MOEF)	Ethiopia	ECDF for \$1 billion in development finance over four years.	Ethiopia
Hyosung Heavy Industries	Electricidade de Moçambique	\$30 million power equipment and transformer supply deal.	Mozambique
MOTIE	Morocco MOFA	TIPF <sup>†</sup> , agreement for negotiations on a bilateral economic partnership agreement (EPA).	Morocco
MOTIE	Ghana MOFA	TIPF	Ghana
MOTIE	Malawi MOFA	TIPF	Malawi
MOTIE	Zimbabwe MOFA	TIPF	Zimbabwe
MOTIE	Madagascar MOFA	TIPF	Madagascar
Korea International Trade Agency (KITA)	African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)	Establishment of Korea-Africa Economic Cooperation Commission.	N/A

**Future Prospects**

<sup>†</sup> MOFA Summit document 'Korea's Endeavors for Cooperation with Africa,' also signaled working toward conclusion of TIPFs with Benin, Rwanda, Mauritania, Sierra Leone, and Zambia.

The institutionalization of the Korea-Africa Summit on an annual basis is likely to act as an ongoing dialogue to match Africa's mineral resources with South Korea's technical assistance and capital. The \$24 billion total committed by the South Korean government to the continent as part of the 2024 Korea-Africa Summit moreover prolongs commitment for an extended timeframe. The \$10 billion ODA portion reaches its maximum in 2030. The other \$14 billion allocated toward export financing for South Korean firms' project facilitation in Africa similarly entails sustained engagement on projects.

The follow-up has already begun. As part of commitments made at the 2024 Korea-Africa Summit, the first iteration of the Korea-Africa Critical Minerals Dialogue took place in South Africa in February 2025, with an emphasis on mine development and knowledge sharing.<sup>61</sup> Seoul's participation in this forum is likely to mirror other global arrangements, such as the 14-member country Minerals Security Partnership (MSP)—where South Korea began a one year chairmanship in July 2024—as well as the Critical Minerals Dialogue (CMD) launched by the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF). Both contain good examples for Korea on how to strategically implement early warning systems for supply chains, mineral recovery, and the promotion of new mineral projects to identify undeveloped resource potential.

Beyond infrastructure development and exploration or extraction projects, the next greatest fruit for engagement may be processing itself. The critical minerals coming out of Africa are typically processed abroad before reaching their input for battery manufacturing. Without significant investment in processing, the midstream of the process becomes exposed to undue foreign influence, effectively undermining efforts for derisking and diversifying the critical mineral supply chains. To mitigate this, on-site processing can be considered as a built-in feature to be included in the extraction projects surrounding South Korea's engagement with Africa. Also keeping in mind that a significant limiting factor to processing capability in Africa remains its high

costs of energy (the comminution or "rock grinding" process alone is thought to use 2% of all electricity generated on the planet), energy infrastructure will be unavoidable for developing the full potential of such mineral projects.<sup>62</sup> In this vein, the confluence of energy infrastructure and mining development gives greater significance to the role that South Korean electricity entities, such as KEPCO and Hyosung, will play in mining operations in Africa. This could potentially open new prospects for the export of small modular reactors—a sector forming a growing share of South Korea's global technological exports. Lastly, the coordination of cross-border development aid and infrastructure projects across multiple governmental entities will benefit from decreased barriers to free trade and unified systems of payment. The Joint Declaration from the 2024 Korea-Africa Summit endorsed economic integration efforts created through the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), as well as the creation of a Pan-African Payment and Settlement System (PAPSS).<sup>63</sup> The consolidation of these systems across the continent has the potential to provide a unitary framework for regulation, transportation, and cross-border payments to assist Africa in reaching full capitalization over its resources. Other efforts, such as the "Tech4Africa Initiative," launched as part of the Summit, can also help to promote trained workforce development, capacity building, and technology adoption.

## Conclusion

Africa currently stands at a crossroads regarding its political future, development of its resources, and the rival global polities with which they may find themselves aligned. The introduction of private military companies, partisan conflicts, and new mineral extraction projects all present risks to the responsible oversight of the region's resources. Indeed, mineral wealth is beginning to share a larger part of the table in international negotiations. After the United States proposed a mineral deal with Ukraine in return for security guarantees, the DRC made a similar invitation to President Trump, offering mineral resources in return for military assistance against the region's M23 rebels.<sup>64</sup> With this

<sup>61</sup> *The Korea Times*, "Korea, African Nations to Hold 1<sup>st</sup> Talks on Critical Minerals Next Week," Jan. 31, 2025, [https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2025/02/120\\_391270.html](https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2025/02/120_391270.html)

<sup>62</sup> Tim Napier-Munn, "Is Progress in Energy—Efficient Comminution Doomed?" *Minerals Engineering*, 73 (March 15, 2015): 1-6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.mineng.2014.06.009>

<sup>63</sup> Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Joint Declaration 2024 Korea-Africa Summit," June 5, 2024, [https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m\\_5674/view.do?seq=321015](https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=321015)

<sup>64</sup> Gracelin Baskaran and Meredith Schwartz, "Breaking Down the US-Ukraine Minerals Deal," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Feb. 27, 2025, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/breaking-down-us-ukraine-minerals-deal>; Benoit Faucon, Nicholas Bariyo, and Alexander Ward,

in mind, the conditions surrounding future mineral engagements have the potential to develop into political balancing acts, which are subject to nationalization and other such measures. For example, following the US' announcement that it would halt foreign aid to South Africa as a response to a controversial land seizure bill, South Africa's Mineral and Petroleum Resources Minister threatened to withhold critical minerals from the US as a retaliatory response.<sup>65</sup> It's possible that South Korea could capitalize on its status as a "middle power" to navigate these highly politicized deal environments, and offer their own alternative to the rivalries of great power competition.

Accordingly, helping to lead the global electric vehicle transition and possessing an outsized geopolitical role of its own, South Korea is emerging as a reputable development partner for African countries seeking to capitalize on their mineral abundance. Maintaining a high level of expertise in its resource intensive industries, South Korean conglomerates specializing in extraction, processing, and management will form part of the backbone in infrastructure engagement abroad, especially as Seoul's development agencies cultivate opportunities to connect the region to global markets for minerals and other materials.

Korea's sustained investment and engagement in the Africa may, inadvertently or otherwise, allow it to fill a diplomatic leadership role to bring investment to the continent. Korea moreover maintains no FTA network in Africa. Institutional engagement with the

AfCFTA and other frameworks will be instrumental in facilitating trade and investment expansion where no process exists. Beyond this, more than engaging Korea as a global pivotal state, Korea's resource investments in Africa will be substantial in bringing critically needed infrastructure and economic development to the region while also transforming global critical mineral and battery supply chains.

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"War-Torn Congo Has a Deal for Trump: Kick Out Rebels, Get Minerals," *The Wall Street Journal*, March 19, 2025, <https://www.wsj.com/world/africa/war-torn-congo-has-a-deal-for-trump-kick-out-rebels-get-minerals-295acfb4>

<sup>65</sup> Nosmot Gbadamosi, "South Africa Takes on Trump," *Foreign Policy*, Feb. 5, 2025, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/02/05/south-africa-trump-ramaphosa-usaid-minerals/>



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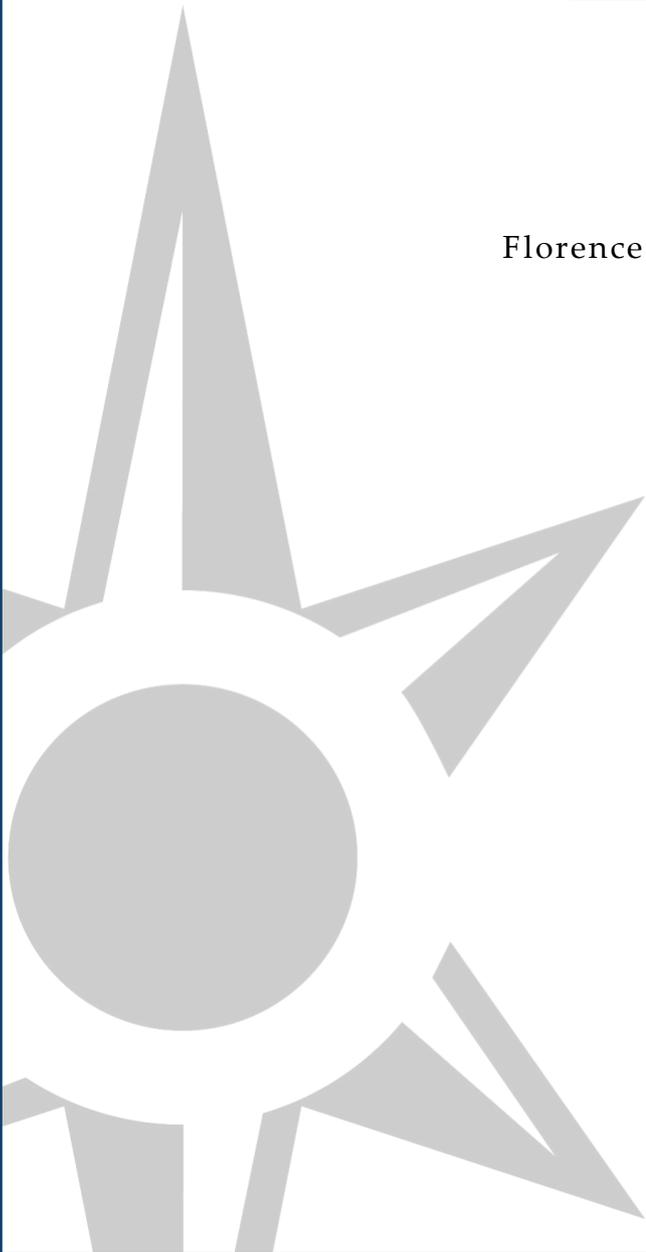
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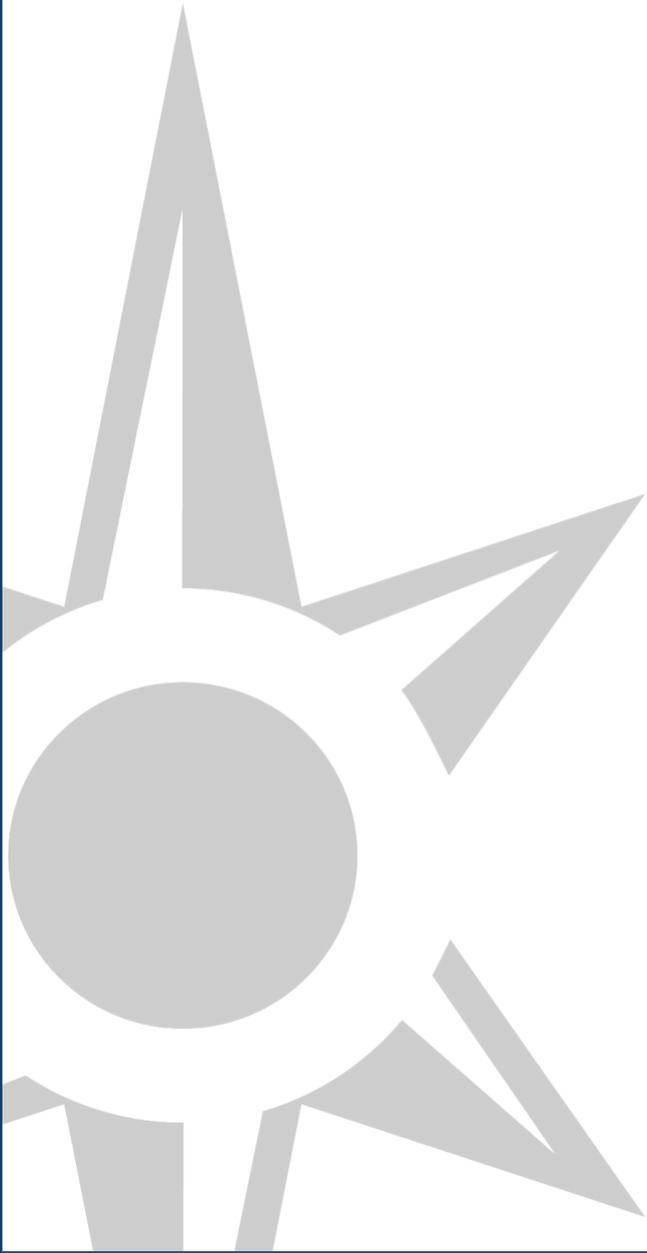
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# Prospects for Better Philippines-US Relations under Trump 2.0

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By  
Florence Principe Gamboa





# Executive Summary

*Florence Principe Gamboa*

President Donald Trump's return for a second term has forced the Philippines to reshuffle and reorganize how it conducts relations with the United States (US). The second Trump administration brings with it an unprecedented unpredictability and certain hurdles that the Philippines must navigate to properly manage its alliance with the US. The Trump approach to foreign policy is based on two key features: "America First" prioritizing and what some analysts call a "transactional nature" to relations. The former means that the US will act firmly in its interests and the latter means that allies and partners are expected to "do their fair share" to maintain the benefits of the alliance. These two concepts were present in the first Trump presidency but their return is now in a different context, specifically with the Philippines having a new direction in foreign relations. The Philippines of today must first understand the interrelated issues of the first Trump presidency, the policies of the preceding Duterte administration, and the actions of China. These key aspects take place from 2016 to 2022. The first Trump administration had friendly ties with the Duterte administration in the first few years until the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA) was abrogated and in danger of being permanently dissolved. While relations between presidents went cold, the institutional alliance was still maintained. Officials from both Trump and Duterte administrations worked hard to ensure that regular alliance activities and initiatives continued. An example of this is how Balikatan exercises were consistently held even when the VFA issue was still being negotiated. The alliance stayed in this state until the first Trump term ended and when the Duterte administration pivoted away from China. The Duterte administration made it clear from the beginning its desire to stay away from any kind of conflict in the South China Sea and sought to appease China. A notable example of this is in the dismissal of the 2016 Arbitration Award during most of President Duterte's term. Relations with China were predicated on peace in disputed territory and prosperity through economic deals. Neither of these bore any fruit, resulting in the Duterte administration's about-face and rekindling ties with the US in its latter years. China's rogue activities in disputed territory only increased in intensity and scope throughout this period. US-Philippine relations experienced a renewal when the VFA abrogation was cancelled and the issue resolved. Both states have since committed to deepen relations, resulting in many notable milestones from mid-2021 to the present day. Among these achievements is the most notable expansion of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) bases. This deepening alliance is but one aspect of the Marcos administration's push for a more credible and self-reliant defense. However, despite the Marcos administration's strong public pronouncements, it has instead prioritized other domestic issues and failed to capitalize on improving its security in any meaningful way outside of legislation. China's actions in the same period have only increased in their aggression, and the Philippines has little defense against them. The issue of today is how the Philippines can harmonize its internal policies and act in a consistent manner. President Trump has made clear he will prioritize American interests first and if any ally fails to "do its fair share", the US will move on and shift its policies accordingly. If the Philippines continues to act in a haphazard manner or fails to maintain its reputation as a reliable partner, there is a strong risk of being sidelined by the second Trump administration. However, this is the worst case scenario. There are promising signs to take note of. The second Trump administration (1) is adamantly anti-China and is expected to be less tolerant of Chinese actions; (2) has publicly expressed support for the Philippines and the alliance; (3) has acted around the world with the explicit goal of maintaining the rules-based international order and global peace. This paper argues that a proper understanding of this current context is what is key for achieving and sustaining better relations under Trump 2.0. It is inevitable that President Trump will act in an unpredictable manner. This only means that the Philippines must act consistently and faithfully when it comes to its security priorities and its role as a partner on the international stage.

## Introduction

The second term of Donald Trump as the President of the United States revives anxieties and qualms about US policies towards the Indo-Pacific region. The world's superpower, considered as a reliable ally for many small and middle powers, will be led by a President with an unpredictable and non-traditional approach towards foreign policy. President Trump has been criticized for his complicated "America First" <sup>1</sup> approach to security and his publicized desire to make US allies pay <sup>2</sup> for hosting US troops. These concerns have much to do with Trump's much highlighted unpredictability <sup>3</sup> as well as the steadily intensifying aggression from China. The first Trump administration understood <sup>4</sup> the latter concern well enough to provide reassurances in official statements and military assistance.

The first Trump presidency has been described as "reorienting" <sup>5</sup> its national security strategy to focus on China and Russia. This reorientation included "rebuilding" the US military, acknowledging of the strategic importance of partners in the Indo-Pacific, and the utilizing new technologies. All these are the basis of the long-term goal of ensuring US advantage in the security sphere, including the outer space. <sup>6</sup> However, Trump was highly critical of anything that was deemed detrimental to US interests. A notable example of this is when he reportedly dismissed the Cold War-era alliance of NATO as "dead" <sup>7</sup> and criticized the group for not paying its "fair share" <sup>8</sup>

relative to US funding. However, Trump's official record on foreign policy and defense <sup>9</sup> follows the Reagan-era mantra of "peace through strength," <sup>10</sup> which listed several attempts to deter Chinese coercion in the Indo-Pacific and to empower allies across the world in their own security strategies.

A key feature of Trump's foreign policy that is highly controversial is the so-called "transactional approach." Its critics condemn it for "eroding" <sup>11</sup> US alliances around the world as these long-standing security ties are built on historic confidence, and not monetary concerns. Its defenders argue that it is "natural" <sup>12</sup> as national and security interests change over time and need to be constantly reevaluated with partners. It was a common opinion <sup>13</sup> among US allies that this approach would be destabilizing and, at its most extreme, would resemble a protection racket. Yet Trump's history of prioritizing US benefits has come hand-in-hand with a strategic focus on deterrence <sup>14</sup> (the latter of which was notably continued by the Biden administration). This complicated approach to foreign policy is what US allies must contend with.

In an analysis by Victor Cha, the Philippines represents an ally that Trump can interpret to be not doing its fair share. <sup>15</sup> The analysis presents an interpretation of Trump's views through a prism, where the Philippines have a trade deficit with the US and does not allot enough of its GDP for military and defense. This paper, however, argues that despite being in the "danger zone" — the Philippines, with a

<sup>1</sup> Jasen J. Castillo et al., "Here's Why Trump's Foreign Policy Is Hard to Pin Down," *RAND*, Jan. 3, 2024,

<https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2025/01/heres-why-trumps-foreign-policy-is-hard-to-pin-down.html>

<sup>2</sup> Nick Wadhams and Jennifer Jacobs, "President Trump Reportedly Wants Allies to Pay Full Cost of Hosting US Troops Abroad 'Plus 50%,'" *TIME*, March 8, 2019, <https://time.com/5548013/trump-allies-pay-cost-plus-50-troops/>

<sup>3</sup> "CO25004 | Predicting the Unpredictable: Trump's Foreign Policy 2.0," *S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies*, Jan. 13, 2025, [https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/predicting-the-unpredictable-trumps-foreign-policy-2-0/?doing\\_wp\\_cron=1738659462.2195808887481689453125](https://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/rsis/predicting-the-unpredictable-trumps-foreign-policy-2-0/?doing_wp_cron=1738659462.2195808887481689453125)

<sup>4</sup> US Department of State, "China's Military Aggression in the Indo-Pacific Region," archived Jan. 20, 2021, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/chinas-military-aggression-in-the-indo-pacific-region/>

<sup>5</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Foreign Policy Priorities: Donald Trump's Positions," <https://www.cfr.org/election2024/candidate-tracker/donald-trump>

<sup>6</sup> Jim Garamone, "Trump Signs Law Establishing US Space Force," *US Department of Defense*, Dec. 20, 2019, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/article/article/2046035/trump-signs-law-establishing-us-space-force/>

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Gray and Charlotte Van Campenhout, "Trump told EU that US would never help Europe under attack — EU official," *Reuters*, Jan. 11, 2024, <https://www.reuters.com/world/we-will-never-help-europe-under-attack-eu-official-cites-trump-saying-2024-01-10/>

<sup>8</sup> ABC News, "Trump blasts NATO allies for not paying fair share," May 26, 2017, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/trump-blasts-nato-allies-paying-fair-share/story?id=47608155>

<sup>9</sup> "Foreign Policy," Trump White House Archives, archived Jan. 20, 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/issues/foreign-policy/>

<sup>10</sup> "Peace Through Strength," Ronald Reagan: Presidential Library & Museum, accessed Feb. 4, 2025,

<https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/permanent-exhibits/peace-through-strength/>

<sup>11</sup> Ivo Daalder, "Commentary: Trump's transactional approach is eroding global alliances,"

*Chicago Tribune*, June 18, 2020,

<https://www.chicagotribune.com/2020/06/18/commentary-trumps-transactional-approach-is-eroding-global-alliances/>

<sup>12</sup> Justin Logan, "Foreign Policy Is Supposed To Be Transactional," *Cato Institute*, Feb. 23, 2021, <https://www.cato.org/blog/foreign-policy-supposed-be-transactional>

<sup>13</sup> Mike Scrafton, "Doing business with Trump: the perils of a transactional approach to alliances," *Australian Strategic Policy Institute: The Strategist*, June 24, 2019, <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/doing-business-with-trump-the-perils-of-a-transactional-approach-to-alliances/>

<sup>14</sup> Daljit Singh, "Uncertainties Cloud Trump's Security Strategies to Asia," *Fulcrum*, Oct. 11, 2024, <https://fulcrum.sg/uncertainties-cloud-trumps-security-strategies-to-asia/>

<sup>15</sup> Victor Cha, "How Trump Sees Allies and Partners," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Nov. 18, 2024,

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-trump-sees-allies-and-partners>

careful approach, can still expect robust relations under President Trump's second term. This is demonstrated by the unchanged uptick of relations under then President Rodrigo Duterte, continued and intensified further under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr.

## Philippine Context

For the Philippine government to be able to properly respond to the second administration of President Trump, it must first acknowledge the changing context of its own security sphere in relation to Trump, to China, and its predecessor administration. The issues surrounding Trump and China were exacerbated under the presidency of Rodrigo Duterte (2016-2022) when policies and statements were issued to steer the Philippines away from armed conflict.

During Trump's first term (2017-2020), the Philippines had an equally unpredictable foreign policy due to President Duterte's desire to make a deal with China. It was a turbulent series of events<sup>16</sup> that began with Duterte denouncing the US, claiming that it had "lost" in October 2016,<sup>17</sup> and the Philippines would be aligning itself more with China. This policy pronouncement prioritized dialogue with China to uphold Duterte's commitment to the pillars of Philippine foreign policy—namely 1. Preservation and enhancement of national security 2. Promotion and attainment of economic security 3. Protection of the rights and promotion of the welfare and interest

of Filipinos overseas—and strong aversion to war.<sup>18</sup> Duterte seemingly complemented this aversion by his expression of support<sup>19</sup> for the 2016 Arbitration Award, yet he dismissed it as ineffective<sup>20</sup> in a "real life" interaction with China. His "appeasement" approach<sup>21</sup> reprioritized defense action to focus on internal concerns. In exchange for the underutilization of the Award, Duterte haggled for economic deals such as development assistance<sup>22</sup> for infrastructure to fund his "Build, Build, Build" program. One of his ambitions was to forge a golden age of infrastructure as part of China's Belt and Road Initiative.<sup>23</sup>

However, even when embracing China, relations with the US remained active under Duterte. This was most evidently seen in the support for the Modernization Program of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP)<sup>24</sup> and military exercises such as the *Balikatan* Exercises<sup>25</sup> (the only instance of the latter being cancelled was due to the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic<sup>26</sup>). Dialogue between the two allies continued consistently throughout Duterte's term. The seventh Bilateral Strategic Dialogue (BSD) was held in 2017 and saw an official reaffirmation of commitment to deepening relations.<sup>27</sup> Despite the refocus on internal defense, the US and the Philippines launched the inaugural Maritime Dialogue in early 2022<sup>28</sup>. This was agreed on in the ninth BSD, the same year as the 75th anniversary<sup>29</sup> of bilateral relations in 2021. Most notably, public opinion saw a high level of trust in the US and a low

<sup>16</sup> Reuters, "Philippine President Duterte's tumultuous term," Oct. 4, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippine-president-dutertes-tumultuous-term-2021-10-03/>

<sup>17</sup> Katie Hunt et al, "In China, Duterte announces split with US: 'America has lost,'" *CNN*, Oct. 20, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/10/20/asia/china-philippines-duterte-visit/index.html>

<sup>18</sup> Trisha Macas, "Duterte on sea dispute with China: I'm willing to fight, but let's talk first," *GMA News Online*, Nov. 30, 2015, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/546274/duterte-on-sea-dispute-with-china-i-m-willing-to-fight-but-let-s-talk-first/story/>

<sup>19</sup> Niña P. Calleja, "Duterte 'fully supports' PH arbitration case vs China in sea dispute," *Inquirer.net*, April 13, 2016, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/138567/duterte-fully-supports-ph-arbitration-case-vs-china-in-sea-dispute>

<sup>20</sup> Neil Arwin Mercado, "Duterte on PH court win over China: 'That's just paper; I'll throw that in the wastebasket,'" *Inquirer.net*, May 6, 2021, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1427860/duterte-on-ph-arbitral-win-over-china-papel-lang-yan-itatapon-ko-yan-sa-waste-basket>

<sup>21</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, *Maintaining Maritime Order in the Asia-Pacific* (National Institute for Defense Studies, 2017), ch. 3, <https://www.nids.mod.gov.ph/english/event/symposium/pdf/2017/e-03.pdf>

<sup>22</sup> Jovito Jose P. Katigbak, "Bridging the Infrastructure Investment Gap through Foreign Aid: A Briefer on Chinese ODA," *Center for International Relations & Strategic Studies: CIRSS Commentaries*, Vol. V, no. 11, June 2018, <https://fsi.gov.ph/bridging-the-infrastructure-investment-gap-through-foreign-aid-a-briefer-on-chinese-oda/>

<sup>23</sup> Department of Finance, "PHL to benefit from Belt and Road Initiative," June 20, 2017, <https://www.dof.gov.ph/phl-to-benefit-from-belt-and-road-initiative/>

<sup>24</sup> Jaime Laude, "Duterte to continue AFP modernization program," *The Philippine Star*, July 3, 2016, <https://web.archive.org/web/20160703113117/https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/07/03/1599050/duterte-continue-afp-modernization-program>

<sup>25</sup> US Marine Staff Sgt. Vanessa Atchley and Senior Airman Corey Pettis, *US Army*, "US, Philippine forces 'shoulder-to-shoulder' exercise strengthens interoperability," May 23, 2017, [https://www.army.mil/article/188233/us\\_philippine\\_forces\\_shoulder\\_to\\_shoulders\\_exercise\\_strengthens\\_interoperability](https://www.army.mil/article/188233/us_philippine_forces_shoulder_to_shoulders_exercise_strengthens_interoperability)

<sup>26</sup> Carla Babb, "Balikatan 2020 Exercise Cancelled Over Coronavirus Concerns," *Voice of America*, March 27, 2020, [https://www.voanews.com/a/science-health\\_coronavirus\\_outbreak\\_balikatan-2020-exercise-cancelled-over-coronavirus-concerns/6186499.html](https://www.voanews.com/a/science-health_coronavirus_outbreak_balikatan-2020-exercise-cancelled-over-coronavirus-concerns/6186499.html)

<sup>27</sup> US Department of State, *Joint Press Statement: US-Philippines Bilateral Strategic Dialogue 2017*, Dec. 1, 2017, <https://2017-2021.state.gov/joint-press-statement-u-s-philippines-bilateral-strategic-dialogue-2017/>

<sup>28</sup> US Embassy Manila, "The Philippines and the United States launch inaugural Maritime Dialogue," April 22, 2022, <https://ph.usembassy.gov/the-philippines-and-the-united-states-launch-inaugural-maritime-dialogue/>

<sup>29</sup> US Embassy Manila, "#USPHTHRIVINGAT75: Celebrating 75 years of US-Philippines diplomatic relations," June 9, 2021, <https://ph.usembassy.gov/usphthrivingat75/>

level of trust in China,<sup>30</sup> consistent throughout Duterte's term (as well as Trump's term).

China's frequent and increasing range of activities in the South China Sea continued to deteriorate relations with the Philippines. Duterte believed that China's promises of economic prosperity and mutual respect leading would lead to a decrease, if not a complete cessation, in incidents. However, this did not happen. China's promises mostly fell apart and incidents began ramping up in 2019.<sup>31</sup> On the onset of the pandemic lockdown in 2020, tensions reached a boiling point.<sup>32</sup> The Philippines faced unprecedented swarmings at and near Thitu Island<sup>33</sup> as China passed its controversial Coast Guard Law in 2021,<sup>34</sup> allowing its coast guard to fire at foreign vessels. Duterte's Foreign Affairs Secretary Teodoro Locsin made frequent condemnations of China's activities online<sup>35</sup>, and many official statements were available on social media<sup>36</sup>, which kept the public exposed to news of the incidents. Sec. Locsin sent several diplomatic notes concerning China, many of which in 2021 alone.<sup>37</sup>

By the latter years of Duterte's administration, it was clear that the "pivot to China" was a failure. He was forced to restore relations with the US and refocus defense to external concerns. Fortunately, ties with the US were not completely severed despite the

unorthodox approaches of President Duterte and of President Trump.

## Duterte-Trump relations

Donald Trump assumed office in 2017 and visited the Philippines.<sup>38</sup> In a joint statement both the Philippines and the US reaffirmed the alliance's dedication to, among others, promoting a free and open Indo-Pacific region and closer bilateral cooperation.<sup>39</sup> President Trump vowed US commitment to enhancing economic and security ties, which has come to fruition through the trilateral between the US, Philippines, and Japan.<sup>40</sup> Relations between the two administrations were largely friendly throughout, especially in 2017 when Trump invited Duterte to the White House.<sup>41</sup>

Duterte's pivot to China did not stop significant developments from occurring with the US. Despite making controversial statements during the Obama administration's final year<sup>42</sup>, Duterte approved an initial plan of five bases for the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA)<sup>43</sup> in March 2016. This plan was lauded by the Philippines as a new chapter<sup>44</sup> in Philippine-US relations and was, most notably, not discontinued by Trump. The alliance continued to complement the national interests of the two countries, covering evolving maritime and

<sup>30</sup> Social Weather Stations, "Third Quarter 2019 Social Weather Survey: Net trust for China falls to "Bad" -33; Net trust stays "Excellent" for the United States, "Good" for Australia and Japan, and "Moderate" for Singapore," Nov. 20, 2019, <https://www.sws.org.ph/swsmain/artcldisppage/?artcsyscode=ART-20191120154738>

<sup>31</sup> Derek Grossman, "Duterte's Dalliance with China Is Over," *RAND*, Nov. 2, 2021, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2021/11/dutertes-dalliance-with-china-is-over.html>

<sup>32</sup> Oriana Skylar Mastro, "Rising Tensions in the South China Sea," *Council on Foreign Relations*, May 20, 2020, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/rising-tensions-south-china-sea>

<sup>33</sup> Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, "The Long Patrol: Staredown at Thitu Island enters its sixteenth month," March 5, 2020, <https://amti.csis.org/the-long-patrol-staredown-at-thitu-island-enters-its-sixteenth-month/>

<sup>34</sup> Yew Lun Tian, "China authorises coast guard to fire on foreign vessels if needed," *Reuters*, Jan. 22, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-coastguard-law/china-authorises-coast-guard-to-fire-on-foreign-vessels-if-needed-idUSKBN29R1ER/>

<sup>35</sup> Reuters, "Philippines foreign minister issues expletive-laced tweet over China sea dispute," May 3, 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/philippines-foreign-minister-issues-expletive-laced-tweet-over-china-sea-dispute-2021-05-03/>

<sup>36</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, Republic of the Philippines, "#DFAStatement: On the Illegal Presence of the Chinese Coast Guard in Bajo de Masinloc, and their belligerent actions against the Philippine Coast Guard," Facebook, May 3, 2021, <https://www.facebook.com/dfaphl/posts/1946704948817663>

<sup>37</sup> Joyce Ann L. Rocamora, "72% of PRRD admin's diplomatic protests vs. China filed in 2021," *Philippine News Agency*, Oct. 22, 2021, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1157429>

<sup>38</sup> "President Donald J. Trump's Trip to the Philippines," Trump White House Archives, archived Jan. 20, 2021,

<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trumps-trip-philippines/>

<sup>39</sup> The Philippine Star, "FULL TEXT: Joint statement of the Philippines and the US," Nov. 14, 2017,

<https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2017/11/14/1758830/full-text-joint-statement-philippines-and-us>

<sup>40</sup> "Remarks by President Trump, Prime Minister Turnbull of Australia, and Prime Minister Abe of Japan Before Trilateral Meeting 1 Manila, Philippines," Trump White House Archives, archived Jan. 20, 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-turnbull-australia-prime-minister-abe-japan-trilateral-meeting-manila-philippines/>

<sup>41</sup> "Readout of President Donald J. Trump's Call with President Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines," Trump White House Archives, archived Jan. 20, 2021, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/readout-president-donald-j-trumps-call-president-rodrigo-duterte-philippines/>

<sup>42</sup> BBC News, "Philippine President Duterte curses Obama over human rights," Sept. 5, 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-37274594>

<sup>43</sup> Official Gazette, *Document: Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement between the Philippines and the United States*, April 29, 2014, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2014/04/29/document-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/>

<sup>44</sup> Official Gazette, *Statement: The Secretary of Foreign Affairs on the signing of the PH-US Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement*, April 28, 2014, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2014/04/28/statement-the-secretary-of-foreign-affairs-on-the-signing-of-the-ph-u-s-enhanced-defense-cooperation-agreement/>

evolving security challenges. When the Marawi Siege occurred in 2017, the US provided significant assistance<sup>45</sup> in military and civilian support. Most notably, US Special Forces<sup>46</sup> provided training and assistance for AFP operations during the campaign. The US also dedicated P3 billion<sup>47</sup> in funds for recovery and rebuilding. However, these are par the course for any US administration, whether Democrat or Republican.<sup>48</sup>

The most significant events under Trump's first term were US State Secretary Mike Pompeo's much needed clarification on the terms of the Mutual Defense Treaty (MDT) and the drama of the abrogation of the Visiting Forces Agreement (VFA). Secretary Pompeo assured the Philippines that the US would act on its obligations if China instigated an armed attack on any Filipino vessel or personnel.<sup>49</sup> This was a welcomed statement by the Philippines amid Trump's strong transactional approach to security ties. It was also the first instance that the US recognized Chinese activities as potentially triggering the MDT.

The Duterte administration's push to abrogate the VFA was an extended process<sup>50</sup> of dismissive statements, last minute postponements, and the eventual decision to retain the agreement. Trump's few public statements on the matter were dismissive<sup>51</sup> of Filipino interests, instead focusing on whatever benefits the US would get in cost. The announcement of the withdrawal was seen as the

"greatest crisis" in bilateral security ties in the last 25 years.<sup>52</sup> Yet despite Trump's public indifference and controversial statements from the two leaders, institutional interests won as his administration worked closely with officials within the Duterte administration to retain the VFA.

## The Situation Today

Trump's first term ended before the issue with the VFA was resolved. At the start of the Biden administration in mid-2021, Duterte unofficially ended his pivot to China with the official retraction of the VFA abrogation.<sup>53</sup> This development was greatly welcomed by both Filipino and US officials.<sup>54</sup> The strong reaffirmation of the alliance began a historic deepening of security ties.<sup>55</sup> This began late in Duterte's term and at the start of the Marcos administration.

Significant developments in Philippine-US security ties from 2021 to 2024 include the expansion of EDCA bases<sup>56</sup>, the clarifications by the Bilateral Defense Guidelines published in November 2023<sup>57</sup>, the growing number and scope of military exercises such as the largest *Balikatan* exercise in 2024<sup>58</sup>, the signing of the historic intelligence sharing General Security of Military Information Agreement in November 2024<sup>59</sup>, and the revelation of close US cooperation in the West

<sup>45</sup> USAID, "Marawi Assistance," archived Jan. 20, 2021, <https://2017-2020.usaid.gov/philippines/humanitarian-assistance/marawi-conflict>

<sup>46</sup> Reuters, "US Special Forces Helping Philippines Fight Militants in Marawi," Voice of America, June 10, 2017, <https://www.voanews.com/a/embassy-us-forces-help-fight-militants-in-marawi/3894841.html>

<sup>47</sup> Joyce Ann L. Rocamora, "US aid to Marawi reaches P3.2-B," Philippine News Agency, Oct. 18, 2018, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1051401>

<sup>48</sup> Eleanor Albert, "The US-Philippines Defense Alliance," Council on Foreign Affairs, Oct. 21, 2016, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/us-philippines-defense-alliance>

<sup>49</sup> John Bowden, "Pompeo assures Philippines of US protection in South China Sea," *The Hill*, March 1, 2019, <https://thehill.com/policy/defense/432154-pompeo-assures-philippines-of-protection-in-south-china-sea/>

<sup>50</sup> Reuters, "Philippines extends termination process of US troop deal, eyes long-term defence pact," Nov. 11, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-philippines-usa-defence/philippines-extends-termination-process-of-u-s-troop-deal-eyes-long-term-defence-pact-idUSKBN27R0RD/>

<sup>51</sup> Patsy Widakuswara, "Trump Downplays Philippines' Termination of Military Pact," *Voice of America*, Feb. 12, 2020, <https://www.voanews.com/a/usa-trump-downplays-philippines-termination-military-pact/6184172.html>

<sup>52</sup> Renato Cruz De Castro, "The Death of EDCA and Philippine-US Security Relations," *ISEAS Perspective* 2020, no. 42, (May 11, 2020), [https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ISEAS\\_Perspective\\_2020\\_42.pdf](https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_42.pdf)

<sup>53</sup> Joviland Rita, "Duterte ordered retraction of VFA termination — Lorenzana," *GMA News Online*, July 30, 2021,

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/797450/duterte-ordered-retraction-of-vfa-termination-lorenzana/story/>

<sup>54</sup> US Embassy Manila, "Statement of the US Embassy on Recall of VFA Abrogation," July 30, 2021, <https://ph.usembassy.gov/statement-of-the-us-embassy-on-recall-of-vfa-abrogation/>

<sup>55</sup> US Department of Defense, *Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III Phone Call With Philippines Secretary of National Defense Delfin Lorenzana*, April 10, 2021,

<https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2568085/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-j-austin-iii-phone-call-with-philippines/>

<sup>56</sup> CNN Philippines Staff, "Palace unveils 4 new EDCA sites," *CNN Philippines*, April 3, 2023, <https://web.archive.org/web/20230403160053/https://www.cnnphilippines.com/news/2023/4/3/palace-unveils-4-new-edca-sites.html>

<sup>57</sup> US Department of Defense, *The United States and the Republic of the Philippines Bilateral Defense Guidelines*, May 3, 2023, <https://media.defense.gov/2023/May/03/2003214357/-1/-1/0/THE-UNITED-STATES-AND-THE-REPUBLIC-OF-THE-PHILIPPINES-BILATERAL-DEFENSE-GUIDELINES.PDF>

<sup>58</sup> US Marine Corps Forces, Pacific, "Philippines and US conclude Balikatan Exercises, shoulder-to-shoulder," May 10, 2024,

<https://www.marforpac.marines.mil/Media-Room/Pacific-Marines-Stories/Article/Article/3771258/philippines-and-us-conclude-balikatan-exercises-shoulder-to-shoulder>

<sup>59</sup> Frances Mangosing, "PH, US seal intel-sharing pact during Austin visit," *Inquirer.net*, Nov. 19, 2024, <https://www.inquirer.net/421379/ph-us-seal-intel-sharing-pact-during-austin-visit/>

Philippine Sea in US Task Force Ayungin<sup>60</sup>. The continuation and expansion of EDCA was seen as the most notable step in the “rebirth” of US-Philippine security ties.<sup>61</sup>

The deepening of ties has been vital due to the pressing need for the Philippines to rely on its allies in the face of continuous and increasing Chinese aggression. The geopolitical landscape has changed much since Trump’s first term. Chinese foreign policy is influenced by the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the Western response against Russia<sup>62</sup>, and the speculated decreasing window<sup>63</sup> to successfully invade and assimilate Taiwan. While China’s exact motivations and plans are largely speculative, it is clear that Chinese aggression throughout the Indo-Pacific increased during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. A possible explanation for this is the adoption of the so-called Anaconda Strategy to “squeeze” Taiwan into submission rather than through direct invasion.<sup>64</sup> This tightening comes with China’s need to solidify its presence in the disputed territory. This strategy of military encirclement has the potential to spill over Taiwan’s immediate neighbors including the Philippines<sup>65</sup>.

2024 saw the most aggressive actions by China against the Philippines in recent history<sup>66</sup>, particularly at the Second Thomas Shoal (Ayungin Shoal) and Sabina Shoal (Escoda Shoal). Such actions include ship collisions<sup>67</sup>, acts of “piracy”<sup>68</sup>, use of water cannons<sup>69</sup>, ship swarmings<sup>70</sup>, and frequent interference in resupply missions which resulted in a bilateral deal<sup>71</sup> specifically to address it. These events occurred in close succession to each other and with increasing degrees of aggression<sup>72</sup>.

The Marcos administration made defense a top priority, stating that the Philippines would not yield “one inch” of territory.<sup>73</sup> He stated this repeatedly throughout his term, and most notably to Australian parliament, as the first Filipino leader to speak to the Australian legislature.<sup>74</sup> To support his statement, Marcos began leveraging the 2016 Arbitration Award<sup>75</sup> and later signed landmark legislation on maritime security in November 2024<sup>76</sup>. Republic Act No. 12064 or the Philippine Maritime Zones Act (MZA),<sup>77</sup> specifically is a “monumental step”<sup>78</sup> in securing the Philippine maritime domain as it

<sup>60</sup> Cristina Chi, “What we know so far: US Task Force Ayungin,” *The Philippine Star*, Nov. 21, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/11/21/2401918/what-we-know-so-far-us-task-force-ayungin>

<sup>61</sup> Gregory B. Poling, “The Transformation of the US-Philippines Alliance,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Feb. 2, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transformation-us-philippines-alliance>

<sup>62</sup> Center for Strategic and International Studies, “Ukraine and Taiwan: Parallels and Early Lessons Learned,” March 22, 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ukraine-and-taiwan-parallels-and-early-lessons-learned>

<sup>63</sup> Jeff Seldin, “Doubts cast China will be ready to invade Taiwan by 2027,” *Voice of America*, April 17, 2024, <https://www.voanews.com/a/doubts-cast-china-will-be-ready-to-invade-taiwan-by-2027/7574367.html>

<sup>64</sup> *The Economist*, “China is using an “anaconda strategy” to squeeze Taiwan,” Oct. 3, 2024, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2024/10/03/china-is-using-an-anaconda-strategy-to-squeeze-taiwan>

<sup>65</sup> Asia News Network, “China’s Military Encirclement of Taiwan: How China’s ‘Anaconda Strategy’ Aims to Slowly Strangle Taiwan’s Independence Without Firing a Shot,” *The Asia Live*, Oct. 8, 2024, <https://theasialive.com/chinas-military-encirclement-of-taiwan-how-chinas-anaconda-strategy-aims-to-slowly-strangle-taiwans-independence-without-firing-a-shot/2024/10/08>

<sup>66</sup> Aaron-Matthew Lariosa, “Top Stories 2024: South China Sea Flashpoints,” *USNI News*, Jan. 10, 2025, <https://news.usni.org/2025/01/10/top-stories-2024-south-china-sea-flashpoints>

<sup>67</sup> Simina Mistreanu and Jim Gomez, “China blames Philippines for ship collision in South China Sea. Manila calls the report deceptive,” *The Associated Press*, June 17, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/china-philippines-second-thomas-shoal-collision-navy-8c14b945066967189b01d701b17c10ae>

<sup>68</sup> Nectar Gan and Kathleen Magramo, “‘Only pirates do this’: Philippines accuses China of using bladed weapons in major South China Sea escalation,” *CNN*, June 20, 2024, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/20/asia/philippines-footage-south-china-sea-clash-china-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>69</sup> Presidential Communications Office, “PH will not use water cannons like what China does – PBBM,” May 6, 2024, [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/ph-will-not-use-water-cannons-like-what-china-does-pbbm/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/ph-will-not-use-water-cannons-like-what-china-does-pbbm/)

<sup>70</sup> Michael Punongbayan, “Chinese vessels swarm Pag-asa Island, Philippine Navy confirms,” *The Philippine Star*, Nov. 29, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/11/29/2403761/chinese-vessels-swarm-pag-asa-island-philippine-navy-confirms>

<sup>71</sup> Kathleen de Villa, “AFP: Ayungin resupply trip got thru; Chinese ‘posed no threat,’” *Inquirer.net*, September 28, 2024, <https://www.inquirer.net/414183/afp-ayungin-resupply-trip-got-thru-chinese-posed-no-threat/>

<sup>72</sup> David Rising, “Chinese and Philippine ship collision just the latest in a string of South China Sea confrontations,” *The Associated Press*, June 17, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/china-philippines-south-china-sea-ship-06e9fe0ef440aba09bc650d986d83377>

<sup>73</sup> Jean Mangaluz, “Marcos: Philippines will not lose one inch of its territory,” *Inquirer.net*, Feb. 18, 2023, <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1731684/marcos-vows-not-one-inch-of-ph-territory-to-be-lost>

<sup>74</sup> Presidential Communications Office, “We will not yield – PBBM,” Feb. 29, 2024, [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/we-will-not-yield-pbbm/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/we-will-not-yield-pbbm/)

<sup>75</sup> Presidential Communications Office, “PBBM leveraging on 2016 arbitral ruling favors PH on WPS issue, says expert,” April 19, 2023, [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/pbbm-leveraging-on-2016-arbitral-ruling-favors-ph-on-wps-issue-says-expert/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-leveraging-on-2016-arbitral-ruling-favors-ph-on-wps-issue-says-expert/)

<sup>76</sup> Presidential Communications Office, “PBBM to newly signed laws on maritime zones: It serves its purpose,” Nov. 11, 2024, [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/pbbm-to-newly-signed-laws-on-maritime-zones-it-serves-its-purpose/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-to-newly-signed-laws-on-maritime-zones-it-serves-its-purpose/)

<sup>77</sup> Official Gazette, Republic Act No. 12064, Nov. 7, 2024, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2024/11/07/republic-act-no-12064/>

<sup>78</sup> Jonalyn Villasante, “The Philippine Maritime Zones Act: Defining Boundaries, Securing the Nation,” *FACTS Asia*, Dec. 18, 2024, <https://www.factsasia.org/blog/the-philippine-maritime-zones-act-defining-boundaries-securing-the-nation>

clarified the claims and boundaries<sup>79</sup>. Republic Act No. 12065 or the Philippine Archipelagic Sea Lanes (ASL) Act,<sup>80</sup> effectively restricted passage to only three designated sea lanes and other routes are subject to innocent passage. The passage of ASL is meant to address Chinese incursions that stay within the Philippines' internal waters.<sup>81</sup> Not only did these pieces of legislation institutionalize aspects of the Philippines' security it also harmonized laws in accordance with UNCLOS. China condemned the acts, the MZA in particular, and responded by delimiting its own claim at Scarborough Shoal.<sup>82</sup>

## Defense Challenges

The Philippines faces a myriad of challenges in upholding its defense. Greatest of these challenges are the aggressive acts conducted by the Chinese in recent years.<sup>83</sup> China's actions, while not limited to Philippine territory alone, have immense ramifications on security. President Marcos has mentioned how it was "hard to imagine"<sup>84</sup> the country escaping a spillover in a potential conflict between China and Taiwan, given that Chinese actions to force Taiwan into submission takes place on a regional stage and adversely affects the Philippines.

This is coupled with China's overt actions in the West Philippine Sea. Recent aggression, particularly in 2024, has pushed the Philippines "to the wall."<sup>85</sup> National resolve to uphold Filipino sovereignty has only increased as a result. In its defense and foreign policy toolbox, the alliance with the US has been a steadfast and guaranteed deterrent against a full-on attack from China. Western allies, notwithstanding their own national agendas, are states closely aligned

to the international order, laws and values that the Philippines wishes to sustain and defend.

Contrary to statements naming Taiwan and reunification as the priority, Philippine envoy to the US, Ambassador Jose Manuel Romualdez, declared that the South China Sea was the true flashpoint with China.<sup>86</sup> Recent incidents, especially in 2024, have shown that for every action that the Philippines takes to bolster its defense, whether this be in bilateral military exercises or the passing of new legislation, China releases a strong condemnation and increases pressure through its maritime incursions. The situation in the South China Sea is projected to continue in its steady escalation.<sup>87</sup> Currently, the volatility of US policy under a second Trump administration is paired with uncertainty of China's response in anticipation of threats against its control over disputed territory.

Due to policy shifts within the Philippines and in the US, it has become apparent that the Philippines cannot solely rely on its alliances and partnerships for its defense. The natural conclusion is for the Philippines to become more self-reliant, and that necessarily begins with the modernization of its armed forces. President Marcos has emphasized the importance of the modernization effort, particularly in response to the growth and prevalence of unconventional threats concerning cybersecurity.<sup>88</sup> He has reiterated repeatedly his administration's commitment into turning the AFP into a world-class force.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, in line with this, Marcos signed in October 2024 the Self-Reliant Defense Posture Revitalization Law to jumpstart a renewed effort in

<sup>79</sup> Harrison Prétat and Gregory B. Poling, "Manila and Beijing Clarify Select South China Sea Claims," *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, Nov. 21, 2024, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/manila-and-beijing-clarify-select-south-china-sea-claims>

<sup>80</sup> Official Gazette, *Republic Act No. 12065*, Nov. 7, 2024, <https://www.officialgazette.gov.ph/2024/11/07/republic-act-no-12065/>

<sup>81</sup> Alex P. Dela Cruz, "Why the Philippines made a dramatic turnaround on the question of archipelagos in the law of the sea," *The Lowy Institute: The Interpreter*, Nov. 19, 2024, <https://www.loyyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/why-philippines-made-dramatic-turnaround-question-archipelagos-law-sea>

<sup>82</sup> The Associated Press, "China delimits a contested South China Sea shoal in a dispute with Philippines," Nov. 10, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/china-philippines-sea-scarborough-shoal-063d817379f1a5268e2061b9c2764afe>

<sup>83</sup> Sebastian Strangio, "76% of Filipinos View China as Country's 'Greatest Threat': Survey," *The Diplomat*, June 7, 2024, <https://thediplomat.com/2024/06/76-of-filipinos-view-china-as-countrys-greatest-threat-survey/>

<sup>84</sup> Cliff Venzon, "Marcos says 'hard to imagine' Philippines can avoid Taiwan conflict," *Nikkei Asia*, Feb. 12, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s>

[Picks/Interview/Marcos-says-hard-to-imagine-Philippines-can-avoid-Taiwan-conflict](https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/Marcos-says-hard-to-imagine-Philippines-can-avoid-Taiwan-conflict)

<sup>85</sup> Jim Gomez and Joael Calupitan, "China is pushing the Philippines 'to the wall' with aggression in the South China Sea, Manila says," *The Associated Press*, Jan. 14, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/south-china-sea-philippines-scarborough-shoal-0a5d18be6859c42895919f05d075c29d>

<sup>86</sup> Ryo Nakamura, "Flashpoint is South China Sea, not Taiwan, says Philippine envoy to US," *Nikkei Asia*, Dec. 13, 2023, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/International-relations/US-China-tensions/Flashpoint-is-South-China-Sea-not-Taiwan-says-Philippine-envoy-to-U.S>

<sup>87</sup> Ian Storey, "The South China Sea in 2025: More of the Same, Possibly Worse," *Fulcrum*, Jan. 2, 2025, <https://fulcrum.sg/the-south-china-sea-in-2025-more-of-the-same-possibly-worse/>

<sup>88</sup> Filane Mikee Cervantes, "Marcos puts spotlight on AFP modernization to combat cybercrime," *Philippine News Agency*, Dec. 20, 2024, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1240382>

<sup>89</sup> Presidential Communications Office, "PBBM renews vow to turn AFP into a world-class force," Dec 13, 2024, [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/pbbm-renews-vow-to-turn-afp-into-a-world-class-force/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/pbbm-renews-vow-to-turn-afp-into-a-world-class-force/)

developing a local defense industry.<sup>90</sup> However, despite the supposed utmost priority of this initiative, the national budget for 2025 saw the modernization fund briefly slashed before being restored.<sup>91</sup> It is indicative that the pronouncements of the administration do not necessarily entail unity in policy direction. In Cha's *Trump Prism on Allies*, this can be interpreted as a bad thing, with the Philippines not doing its fair share.<sup>92</sup>

Despite strong statements from Marcos Jr. and the government's assistance on external defense, modernization does not appear to be a consistent high priority. The reality is that Filipinos are more concerned with the government being able to fulfill promises and priorities on the economic rather than defense front. President Marcos has listed his priorities for the long-term growth and sustainability of the economy.<sup>93</sup> These are policies that can be felt by Filipinos on a day-to-day basis. The government budget's expenditure framework for 2024 was focused on socio-economic aspects.<sup>94</sup> The modernization fund in the 2025 General Appropriations Act has only P35 billion for available use and another P40 billion "in standby appropriations that require excess government revenue before release".<sup>95</sup> During a budget hearing for the Department of National Defense (DND), National Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro revealed that P10 billion from the previous budget was reallocated by Congress to unprogrammed funds<sup>96</sup>.

These issues are important to resolve given the return of Trump as president of the US and his unorthodox approach to foreign policy which will prioritize

American interests. This should not come as a surprise, because all countries and leaders are expected to put national interests above anything else – how these interests are interpreted is what makes the policy vary. To deepen and strengthen relations, the Philippines should plan and adjust for the supposed transactional approach of the Trump administration.

## Analysis

For the Philippines, a significant progress under Trump 2.0 was the confirmation of Senator Marco Rubio as the new Secretary of State. Sec. Rubio has a history of positive support for US security ties with the Philippines<sup>97</sup> and is one of many of Trump's Cabinet appointments described as strong "anti-China hawks."<sup>98</sup> Rubio, alongside his counterparts from Australia, India, and Japan (all of which are strong allies of the Philippines and key supporters of the modernization effort), released a joint statement essentially condemning Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>99</sup><sup>100</sup> Additionally, Rubio reaffirmed the "ironclad" commitment of the US to the Philippines<sup>101</sup> and discussed with Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique A. Manalo about the two presidents meeting in the future<sup>102</sup>. These are positive signs that the second Trump administration will continue to be a strong supporter of Philippine defense. As demonstrated by the developments under Duterte, institutional ties in security, defense, and foreign need to be further strengthened. Despite damaging statements from Duterte, these institutional links are what made VFA's reinstatement possible.

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<sup>90</sup> Darryl John Esguerra, "Marcos signs self-reliant defense posture law," Philippine News Agency, Oct. 8, 2024, <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1234986>

<sup>91</sup> Hannah L. Torregoza, "Senate to press for P50-B AFP Modernization Program in 2025 budget," *Manila Bulletin*, Dec. 2, 2024, <https://mb.com.ph/2024/12/2/senate-to-press-for-p50-b-afp-modernization-program-in-2025-budget>

<sup>92</sup> Cha, "How Trump Sees Allies and Partners,"

<https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-trump-sees-allies-and-partners>

<sup>93</sup> "Priorities," President: Republic of the Philippines, accessed Feb. 5, 2025, <https://pbpm.com.ph/priorities/>

<sup>94</sup> Department of Budget and Management, *Briefer on the 2024 Budget Priorities Framework (Expenditure Priorities)*, 2024, [https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/Our%20Budget/2024/2024-Budget-Priorities-Framework-\(Expenditure-Priorities\).pdf](https://www.dbm.gov.ph/wp-content/uploads/Our%20Budget/2024/2024-Budget-Priorities-Framework-(Expenditure-Priorities).pdf)

<sup>95</sup> Cristina Chi, "AFP Modernization: P40 billion of P75 billion in standby funds," *The Philippine Star*, Jan. 7, 2025, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2025/01/07/2412261/afp-modernization-p40-billion-p75-billion-standby-funds>

<sup>96</sup> Jean Mangaluz, "P10 billion for AFP modernization redirected to unprogrammed funds," *The Philippine Star*, September 25, 2024, <https://www.philstar.com/headlines/2024/09/25/2387921/p10-billion-afp-modernization-redirected-unprogrammed-funds>

<sup>97</sup> "S.4703—United States-Philippines Partnership Act of 2024," United States Congress, accessed Feb. 6, 2025,

<https://www.congress.gov/bill/118th-congress/senate-bill/4703/text>

<sup>98</sup> Amy Mackinnon, "Trump's China Hawks Are Also Uyghur Advocates," *Foreign Policy*, Nov. 15, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/11/15/rubio-waltz-china-xinjiang-uyghurs-human-rights/>

<sup>99</sup> US Department of State, *Joint Statement by the Quad Foreign Ministers*, Jan. 21, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/joint-statement-by-the-quad-foreign-ministers/>

<sup>100</sup> Nestor Corrales and Agence France-Presse, "US State department chief, on first day, warns China," *Inquirer.net*, Jan. 23, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/262072/us-state-department-chief-on-first-day-warns-china>

<sup>101</sup> Agence France-Presse, "Rubio affirms 'ironclad' US commitment to Philippines," *Inquirer.net*, Jan. 23, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/262097/rubio-affirms-ironclad-us-commitment-to-philippines>

<sup>102</sup> Department of Foreign Affairs, "SFA Manalo and US Secretary of State Marco Rubio Reaffirm Strength of PH-US Alliance in 22 January Phonecall," Jan. 23, 2025, <https://dfa.gov.ph/dfa-news/statements-and-advisories/update/36064-sfa-manalo-and-us-secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-reaffirm-strength-of-ph-us-alliance-in-22-january-phonecall>

However, the Philippines must also be prepared for the potential impacts of Trump's America First policy.<sup>103</sup> One of Trump's executive orders signed on his first day included a 90-day review of foreign aid assistance with the intention of ensuring that these initiatives further US national security.<sup>104</sup> How much US aid to the Philippines will be affected in the coming years remains uncertain. EDCA-related funding could be affected, which had an additional \$128 million in funds under the Biden administration.<sup>105</sup> This allocation is part of a larger \$500 million for defense assistance.<sup>106</sup> These funds were officially included in the joint statement from the fourth US-Philippine 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue in Manila on July 30, 2024.<sup>107</sup> There have also been qualms that the aid freeze could potentially mean that the US intends to use the Philippines as a bargaining chip in dealing with China.<sup>108</sup>

Philippine Ambassador Romualdez insisted that "America needs us" and that there was no risk of being forgotten or discarded by Trump.<sup>109</sup> This is further supported by other appointees in Trump's Cabinet. National Security Advisor Congressman Mike Waltz introduced a resolution in November 2023 to simultaneously reaffirm US alliance with the Philippines and condemn Chinese actions.<sup>110</sup> Most notably, US Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth, in a memo to the Defense Department on Jan. 25, 2025, stated that it aligned with US interests to work with

allies to specifically address Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>111</sup> That same memo also emphasized that the US would "stand by our allies — and our enemies are on notice".<sup>112</sup> Perhaps the most telling sign of US commitment lies in the updated description of a Defense Department fact sheet on Security Ties with the Philippines. The Defense Department names the Philippines as an "irreplaceable ally" and at the "forefront of preserving the free and open regional order."<sup>113</sup> This seemingly confirms Sec. Teodoro's confidence that the US would not pursue a transactional approach with the Philippines, given their shared history and the strategic importance in the Indo-Pacific.<sup>114</sup> Additionally, the US has demonstrated the importance of the Philippines as the first Asian country destination of Hegseth's first visit as defense chief in the region.<sup>115</sup>

However, doubts about Trump's commitment to alliances remain. These have been exacerbated by President Trump and Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky unprecedented argument and disagreement about the prospects of ending the Russo-Ukraine War broadcasted live.<sup>116</sup> The aftermath involved an immediate apology by President Zelensky<sup>117</sup> and the US officially halting additional aid to Ukraine for review<sup>118</sup>. Trump 2.0 has made its official policy to end the war in Ukraine with a peace deal between Ukraine and Russia.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>103</sup> Joseph Ching Velasco, "The impact of Trump 2.0 on the Philippines," *Think China*, Dec. 17, 2024, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/impact-trump-2-0-philippines>

<sup>104</sup> Melvin Gascon, "Marcos assures Trump on PH-US alliance," *Inquirer.net*, Jan. 22, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/261988/marcos-assures-trump-on-ph-us-alliance>

<sup>105</sup> Presidential Communications Office, "Biden seeks \$128-M budget for EDCA projects," April 12, 2024, [https://pco.gov.ph/news\\_releases/biden-seeks-128-m-budget-for-edca-projects/](https://pco.gov.ph/news_releases/biden-seeks-128-m-budget-for-edca-projects/)

<sup>106</sup> Mara Cepeda, "US to give Philippines \$672 million in military aid to counter China," *The Straits Times*, July 30, 2024, <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/us-to-give-philippines-us500-million-in-military-aid-to-counter-china>

<sup>107</sup> US Department of Defense, "Joint Statement on the Philippines-United States Fourth 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," US Indo-Pacific Command, July 30, 2024, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3856000/joint-statement-on-the-philippines-united-states-fourth-22-ministerial-dialogue/>

<sup>108</sup> Raissa Robles, "US aid freeze sparks fears Philippines will become 'bargaining chip' in Trump's China talks," *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 29, 2025, <https://www.scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3296675/us-aid-freeze-sparks-fears-philippines-will-become-bargaining-chip-trumps-china-talks>

<sup>109</sup> Charie Abarca, "America needs us, says PH Ambassador to US amid Trump presidency," *Inquirer.net*, Jan. 22, 2025, <https://globalnation.inquirer.net/262008/america-needs-us-says-ph-ambassador-to-us-amid-trump-presidency>

<sup>110</sup> Congressman Darrell Issa, "ICYMI – Issa, Bera, Waltz, Vargas Reaffirm US-Philippines Alliance, Condemn PRC Aggression in South China Sea," Nov. 6, 2023, <https://issa.house.gov/media/press-releases/icymi-issa-bera-waltz-vargas-reaffirm-us-philippines-alliance-condemn-prc>

<sup>111</sup> US Department of Defense, Secretary Hegseth's Message to the Force, Jan. 25, 2025, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/4040940/secretary-hegseths-message-to-the-force/>

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

<sup>113</sup> US Department of State, "US Security Cooperation with the Philippines," Jan. 20, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/u-s-security-cooperation-with-the-philippines/>

<sup>114</sup> Rod McGuirk, "Philippine defense secretary doesn't expect Trump will demand payment for protection," *The Associated Press*, Nov. 12, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/australia-philippines-marles-teodoro-china-trump-b53d5dde500ef042a363324fe432ce94>

<sup>115</sup> McArthy Simone, "US Defense Chief Hegseth vows to counter China aggression on first Asia visit," *CNN*, March 28, 2025, <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/03/27/asia/pete-hegseth-asia-tour-philippines-marcos-intl-hnk/index.html>

<sup>116</sup> "Full Meeting between President Trump, VP Vance and Ukrainian President Zelensky in Oval Office," posted March 1, 2025, by C-SPAN, YouTube, 49 min., 47 sec., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7pxbGjvcdyY>

<sup>117</sup> Lauren Irwin, "Witkoff says Zelensky apologized in letter to Trump," *The Hill*, March 10, 2025, <https://thehill.com/policy/international/5185950-witkoff-says-zelensky-apologized-in-letter-to-trump/>

<sup>118</sup> US Department of State, "US Security Cooperation with Ukraine," March 4, 2025, <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-political-military-affairs/releases/2025/01/u-s-security-cooperation-with-ukraine>

<sup>119</sup> Steve Holland, Gram Slattery and Daphne Psaedakis, "US to assess Ukraine's peace stance in Saudi Arabia meeting," *Reuters*, March 10, 2025, <https://www.reuters.com/world/us-assess-ukraines-peace-stance-saudi-arabia-meeting-2025-03-09/>

These developments, while unprecedented, do not indicate, much less prove, that Trump intends to backtrack on alliance commitments and the Philippines has many reasons to be optimistic.<sup>120</sup> Philippine priorities remain the same. These developments have only proven what the Philippines already knows: That Trump is unpredictable.<sup>121</sup> Yet Romualdez remains confident of US commitments and in the progression of the alliance going forward.<sup>122</sup> The Philippine military pointed out that US actions were directed toward Ukraine, not towards the Philippines, and echoed Romualdez's optimism.<sup>123</sup> Prior to these developments, the US's foreign aid freeze notably exempted the Philippines<sup>124</sup>, demonstrating how the US is clearly treating its allies and international issues on a case-to-case basis.

A recent example of this is US airstrikes on Houthi rebels in Yemen mid-March 2025. The Houthis have conducted several pirate raids in the trade routes passing through the Suez Canal with over 40 attacks on commercial ships.<sup>125</sup> The US conducted airstrikes on the Houthi-controlled coast and vowed that it would not stop until the threat was removed.<sup>126</sup> Some of the key reasons that Trump cited for the airstrikes were the (1) safety and interests of American shipping, (2) navigational freedom, and (3) deterring Iran from acting through its proxies.<sup>127</sup> The first reason aligns with Trump's priorities and the latter two reasons correspond with US assurances of safeguarding the international system. Additionally, State Secretary Marco Rubio explicitly stated one of the reasons was to remove the threat to global shipping in that area.<sup>128</sup> This may have also been a strike on China as reports have revealed that the Chinese supplied the Houthi pirates with arms in exchange for safe passage.<sup>129</sup>

The Philippines should anticipate that security relations with the second Trump administration will have its challenges. For now, the relationship under Trump 2.0 is promising, albeit unreliable. While there are strong indications that it need not worry about the alliance, the Philippines must do its fair share. This means continuing to pursue the development of its own defense, upholding shared values, and proving that it is a reliable partner. Thus, it is in the collective interests of the Philippines, the US, and the Indo-Pacific region for clarifications to be made and commitments reaffirmed.

The Philippines remains to be an important actor in terms of location and influence in the region. It must present to the US that there is a convergence in terms of national interests. Trump's insistence on American values need not be detrimental to the Philippines so long as cooperation remains a win-win situation for the two countries. Therefore, the Philippines must convince Trump that reaffirming US commitment to the 2023 Bilateral Guidelines and the stipulations of the Mutual Defense Treaty, continuous funding for that policies and programs established under the Biden administration, and involving the Philippines in any actions or policy directives that will affect the Indo-Pacific region is in line with American interest.

It will be difficult for the Philippines to proceed further in deepening security ties with the US without these assurances of commitment and participation. Nevertheless, the Philippines must work to be a consistent and stable partner for the US and its other allies. It can do so by continuing the work the Marcos administration is already doing, and institutionalizing the mechanisms of close cooperation. The Philippines must persist in its

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<sup>120</sup> Julio Amador III, "Trump 2.0 and the US-Philippines Alliance: Consistency and Change," *Fulcrum*, Feb. 14, 2025,

<https://fulcrum.sg/trump-2-0-and-the-us-philippines-alliance-consistency-and-change/>

<sup>121</sup> Katrina Domingo, "Marcos should be careful in dealing with Trump after heated Zelensky meeting: analyst," ABS-CBN News, March 2, 2025, <https://www.abs-cbn.com/news/world/2025/3/2/marcos-should-be-careful-in-dealing-with-trump-after-heated-zelensky-meeting-analyst-1601>

<sup>122</sup> Jim Gomez, "Philippines confident Trump will continue military patrols to keep China in check in disputed sea," *The Associated Press*, March 3, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/philippines-united-states-alliance-ambassador-jose-romualdez-98377c83b6e4484bd8f1a9a24abe6e6c>

<sup>123</sup> Joviland Rita, "PH military says ties with US still 'strong' after Trump pauses aid to Ukraine," *GMA News Online*, March 4, 2025, <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/938141/ph-military-says-ties-with-us-still-strong-after-trump-pauses-aid-to-ukraine/story/>

<sup>124</sup> Anna Felicia Bajo, "US gov't exempted \$336M assistance to PH from aid freeze — Amb. Romualdez," *GMA News Online*, Feb. 24, 2025,

<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/topstories/nation/937201/us-gov-t-exempted-336m-assistance-to-ph-from-aid-freeze-amb-romualdez/story/>

<sup>125</sup> BBC, "Who are the Houthis and why are they attacking Red Sea ships?," March 15, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67614911>

<sup>126</sup> Malu Cursino, "US launches wave of air strikes on Yemen's Houthis," BBC, March 16, 2025, <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c05mvr3j3yro>

<sup>127</sup> Michelle L. Price, Lolita C. Baldor & Samy Magdy, "Trump orders strikes on Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen and issues new warning," Associated Press, March 16, 2025, <https://apnews.com/article/trump-yemen-houthis-rebels-attack-airstrike-11b0e080b3982542dd621338a7b18afd>

<sup>128</sup> CBS News, "Transcript: Secretary of State Marco Rubio on "Face the Nation with Margaret Brennan," March 16, 2025,"

<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/marco-rubio-secretary-of-state-face-the-nation-transcript-03-16-2025/>

<sup>129</sup> China Arming Houthi Rebels in Yemen in Exchange For Unimpeded Red Sea Passage," Jan. 2, 2025,

<https://www.fdd.org/analysis/2025/01/02/china-arming-houthi-rebels-in-yemen-in-exchange-for-unimpeded-red-sea-passage/>

unyielding resistance to Chinese abuse, aggression, harassment, and condemnations.

President Marcos, in a recent interview with the press, said that he will remove the US Typhon missile system from the country if China stopped all coercive activities and rescinded its territorial claims.<sup>130</sup> This must be a nationwide attitude: the goal must be to end all illegal Chinese actions in Philippine territory. It is in the interest of the whole region, and the US, that China adheres to agreed upon international laws. The main mechanisms toward that goal are in resilience and deterrence. The Marcos administration has many fronts to secure. On the economic front, it must forge stronger economic ties that can mitigate/avoid the pitfalls of a potential new trade war. Defense-wise, it must prioritize and secure permanent funding for external defense matters (AFP Modernization, local defense industry, etc.). Moving beyond heavy reliance on the US, it must also continue to diversify and increase bilateral and multilateral military exercises with like-minded partners. Diplomatically, it should not discount the power of dialogue with China. Despite complaints and noise for keeping face,<sup>131</sup> dialogue has materialized in a deal regarding Ayungin Shoal resupply missions.<sup>132</sup>

The Philippines is an “irreplaceable” ally of the United States. The second Trump administration cannot deny the Philippines' strategic value in the Indo-Pacific nor can it question its reliability as a partner that both advances its own national security while contributing to the interests of its allies. However, the Marcos administration can easily lose US support if it repeats the mistakes of its predecessor or acts erratically as President Zelensky has. It is in times like these that officials prove their statesmanship.

Philippine foreign policy has often been described as a pendulum, always with the need to take sides. There is no need to view major power relations as a

binary choice. While China relations remain uncertain, the Marcos administration must continue to nourish Manila's steadfast alliance with the US. This means that the Philippines continues to present itself as an ally willing to support the US in as much as it is of equal benefit for both states and for the security of the region.

Donald Trump is the president of the US once again. He brings with him an unpredictable flair to foreign policy and a desire to prioritize American interests. The Philippines has a history of aligning with US national security concerns and, if the Marcos administration continues on its path, it should have no fear that it will be set aside by the returning US president. If the Philippines plays its cards right, the US can continue to be its greatest supporter and the alliance can continue to flourish.

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<sup>130</sup> Argyll Cyrus Geducos, “Marcos offers deal to China: ‘Stop claiming our territory, I’ll send back the Typhon missiles,’” *Manila Bulletin*, Jan. 30, 2025, <https://mb.com.ph/2025/01/30/marcos-china-stop-harassment-typhon>

<sup>131</sup> Reuters, “China complains after Philippines sends provisions to warship at disputed atoll,” *Baird Maritime*, Jan. 25, 2025, <https://www.bairdmaritime.com/security/non-naval-security/china-complains-after-philippines-sends-provisions-to-warship-at-disputed-atoll>

<sup>132</sup> Sam Beltran, “‘It’s a win’: Philippines, China uphold South China Sea deal on resupply missions,” *South China Morning Post*, Jan. 21, 2025, <https://scmp.com/week-asia/politics/article/3295543/its-win-philippines-china-uphold-south-china-sea-deal-resupply-missions>



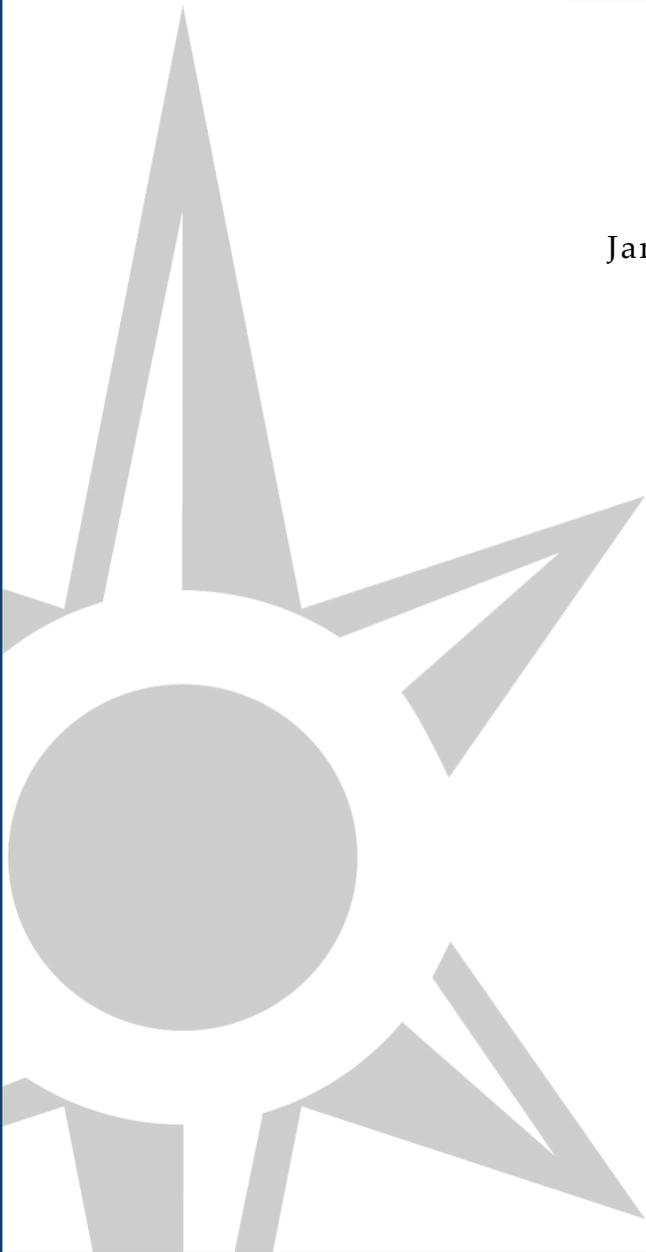
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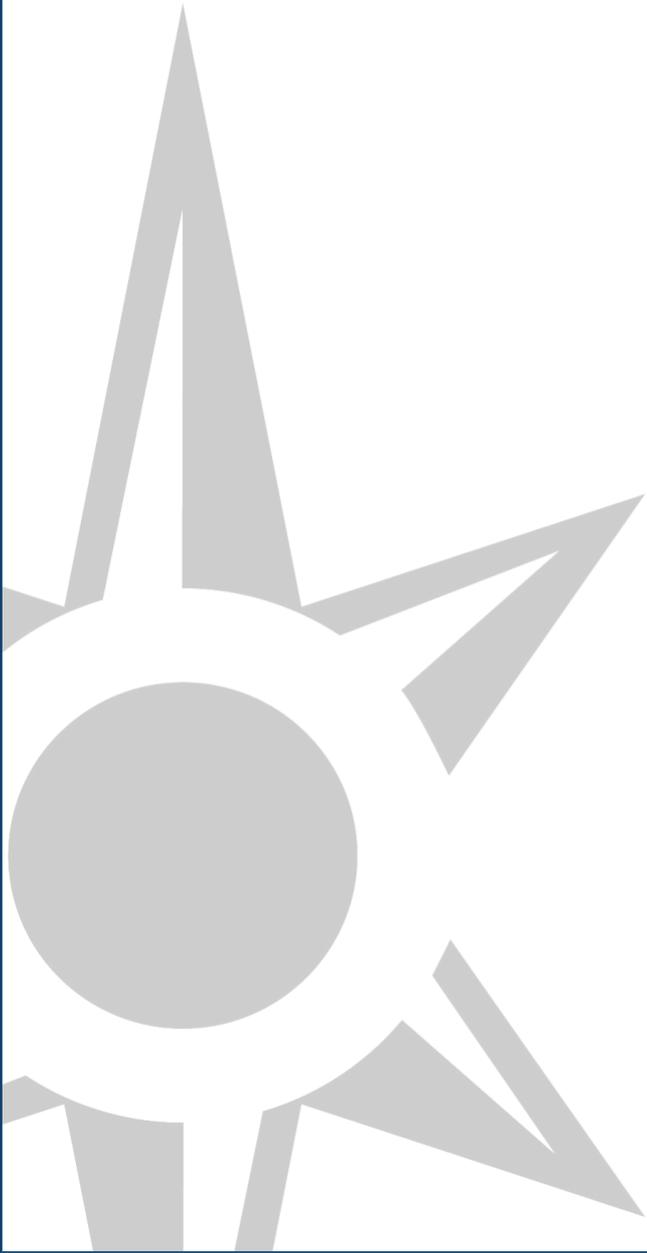
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# The Revitalization of the United Nations Command: Why It is Possible

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By  
James JB Park





# Executive Summary

*James JB Park*

The Republic of Korea (ROK) is facing an unprecedented population crisis. The birth rate is 0.7 per woman, one of the lowest in the entire world, and the rest of the population is thus aging in an unhinged fashion. This pace is the fastest among OECD members, and by 2050, its "old-age dependency ratio" is projected to exceed 70%, approximately 20% higher than that of average OECD nations. Although the potential introduction of Artificial Intelligence based machines and bots and other automated service systems may alleviate labor shortage concerns, the demographic projection of ROK poses a serious question regarding the interrelationship between the said old-age dependency ratio and ROK's economy. ROK's extensive pensions and government subsidies for the older generation, funded by tax-related contributions from the younger generation, would hinder the national economic vitality and purchasing power. Against this backdrop, any economic crisis stemming from external factors can be a fatal blow to ROK's enervated economy.

However, if the ROK economy failed to sustain itself due to the impending demographic crisis, and if ROK's security allies, also potentially entangled in their own economic and social problems, could not provide ROK a surprising set of economic assistance, no ally can actively dissuade ROK from resuming the now-severed cooperation with DPRK. After all, this collaboration is undeniably in line with ROK's search for relatively untapped natural resources and cheap labor force, which can also engender a degree of economic vitality and confidence that can boost the market confidence.

It is important to note, however, that the resumption of either the defunct Kaesong Complex or a new substitute entity for the revamping of the inter-Korean economic cooperation cannot proceed without the consent and cooperation of the United Nations Command (UNC).

One of the ROK's nicknames is "the land of morning calm." Surprisingly, after the end of the Korean War, the UNC served its mission much like the quiet environment in which it was stationed. Unlike the ROK-US Combined Forces Command, whose importance and power as the "first-responder" against any authoritarian aggression in Northeast Asia are well-understood by many, the UNC and its role remain veiled to the public. Thus, it is vital to understand the UNC's birth and legal justifications, development, current status, and evolving scenarios to further investigate the feasibility of its revitalization and multilateralization amidst the impending "New Cold War" between the US and China.

This paper argues that despite some room for contention, the legal basis and foundation of the UNC is solid and beyond reproach. The current status has some questionable elements due to the ROK-US Operation Control transition issues, the already-established UNC and CFC operation plan to project a huge number of UN troops to ROK and East Asia would prevent the entity from being scrapped, however unorthodox the US foreign policy would be. Lastly, comparing the Sending States' level of democratic maturity from the 1950s to today, the Sending States did not change ideologically, which reinforces the projection that they would be likely to demonstrate firm commitments to protect a fellow democratic nation from authoritarian attacks.

## Introduction

The Republic of Korea (ROK) is facing unprecedented population crisis. The birth rate is 0.7 per woman, one of the lowest in the entire world, and the rest of the population is thus aging in an unhinged fashion. This pace is the fastest among OECD members, and by 2050, its “old-age dependency ratio” is projected to exceed 70%, approximately 20% higher than that of average OECD nations.<sup>1</sup> Although the potential introduction of Artificial Intelligence based machines and bots and other automated service systems may alleviate labor shortage concerns, the demographic projection of ROK poses a serious question regarding the interrelationship between the said old-age dependency ratio and ROK’s economy. ROK’s extensive pensions and government subsidies for the older generation, funded by tax-related contributions from the younger generation, would hinder the national economic vitality and purchasing power. Against this backdrop, any economic crisis stemming from external factors can be a fatal blow to ROK’s enervated economy. Despite the fact that ROK resides comfortably within the upper echelons of the world’s GDP rankings, typically ranging from the top 10 to 13 economies worldwide, ROK’s economy has traditionally struggled from a lopsided economic structure; that is, it harbors an extremely export-oriented economic style, led only by a handful of conglomerates, with a relatively weak domestic market. To make matters worse, ROK has meager critical natural resources—oil, natural gas, and rare earth—that define the vitality and sustainability of any nation’s economy.

The first Trump presidency has been described as Perhaps, the economy’s such fragile nature can explain why in the future, if all the aforesaid economic concerns and projections are actually materialized, the long-halted inter-Korean economic cooperation might return as a new growth engine, an elixir for ROK’s economy. This is especially possible considering the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK)’s rich, untapped raw materials and cheap labor force. In the mid-2000s, when the former ROK president Kim Dae Jung adopted his ever-

famous “Sunshine Policy” as ROK’s prevailing attitude towards DPRK, the Kaesong Industrial Complex located in Kaesong, DPRK, served as a bridge between the two Koreas by manufacturing cheap, light-industry articles for ROK via DPRK’s labor force.<sup>2</sup>

The Sunshine-led cooperation has its challenges, though. DPRK’s shelling of Yeon-Pyeong Islands in 2010 caused the ROK government to enact subsequent countermeasures and sanctions, freezing the inter-Korean economic cooperation. However, considering the benefits DPRK gained from the cooperation a decade ago, this dormant economic arrangement can return to normalcy in the event that the two countries agree.

The Kaesong Complex served as the venue for natural conduit of both government-led and private humanitarian assistance to DPRK. In the mid 2000s, for instance, the ROK government provided approximately 300,000 to 500,000 metric tons of food and fertilizers to DPRK. More importantly, DPRK exploited the hard-currency from the Kaesong Complex to balance out its trade deficit with China.<sup>3</sup> The Granger Causality Tests, which assesses the interrelationship between trilateral trade relationships in the mid-2000s, serve as proof for this Assertion.

Through data-driven evidence, the tests demonstrate that Kaesong was indeed a treasure trove for DPRK to offset its financial struggles elsewhere.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Jaejoon Lee. (2019). "Population Aging and Economic Growth: Impact and Policy Implications." *KDI Policy Forum* (No. 273 (2019-02), eng.).

<sup>2</sup> Chun, Hongtack; Rhee, Yeong-seop. (2014). "Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation and Economic Cooperation in Northeast Asia." *KDI Policy Forum*, No. 257, Korea Development Institute (KDI), Sejong, <https://doi.org/10.22740/kdi.forum.e.2014.257>.

<sup>3</sup> Lee, Suk. (2012). "ROK Policy on North Korea and Inter-Korean Economic Cooperation: Prospects and Analyses." *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 1-31.

<sup>4</sup> Suk Lee, Change of Inter-Korean Trade and Economic Background of Worsening Inter-Korean Relation (Seoul: KDI, 2009).

Table 4. Granger Causality Tests, DPRK Surplus from Inter-Korean Trade vs. its Trade with China

Lag (Months)	DPRK-ROK Trade Surplus VS. Imports from China			DPRK-ROK Trade Surplus VS. DPRK-China Total Trade		
	F-statistics		Causal Relationship	F-statistics		Causal Relationship
	ROK-DPRK (A)	DPRK-China (B)		ROK-DPRK (A)	DPRK-China (B)	
1	0.41755 (0.5198)	5.19904 (0.0249)	A → B	0.82342 (0.3666)	2.81161 (0.0970)	A → B
2	0.43555 (0.6483)	4.13769 (0.0191)	A → B	0.76568 (0.4681)	6.95842 (0.0016)	A ⇒ B
3	0.86297 (0.4636)	5.40623 (0.0019)	A ⇒ B	0.96303 (0.4140)	5.48750 (0.0017)	A ⇒ B
4	0.57144 (0.6841)	4.48671 (0.0025)	A ⇒ B	0.38082 (0.8218)	4.53846 (0.0023)	A ⇒ B
5	0.42772 (0.8281)	3.45542 (0.0070)	A ⇒ B	0.30779 (0.9069)	3.78739 (0.0040)	A ⇒ B
6	0.55750 (0.7627)	2.80793 (0.0159)	A → B	0.39050 (0.8830)	3.35051 (0.0055)	A ⇒ B

Source: Suk Lee, *Change of Inter-Korean Trade and Economic Background of Worsening Inter-Korean Relation* (Seoul: KDI, 2009).

Of course, considering DPRK's current ambitions to develop its own nuclear weapons, which has resulted in subsequent UN and United States (US) sanctions and international admonitions, the resumption of inter-Korean cooperation seems distant. However, if the ROK economy failed to sustain itself due to the impending demographic crisis, and if ROK's security allies, also potentially entangled in their own economic and social problems, could not provide ROK a surprising set of economic assistance, no ally can actively dissuade ROK from resuming the now-severed cooperation with DPRK. After all, this collaboration is undeniably in line with ROK's search for relatively untapped natural resources and cheap labor force, which can also engender a degree of economic vitality and confidence that can boost the market confidence. It is important to note, however, that the resumption of either the defunct Kaesong Complex or a new substitute entity for the revamping of the inter-Korean economic cooperation cannot proceed without the consent and cooperation of the United Nations Command (UNC). According to the 1953 Korean War Armistice Agreement signed by the then UNC commander Mark W. Clark, Korean People's Army's (KPA) General Nam Il, and the Chinese People's Volunteer Army's General Peng

Dehuai, the UNC has full legal purview to directly oversee any inter-border activities. Accordingly, since 1953, the UNC has upheld the Armistice Agreement by controlling any border-related issues as well as maintaining the security of the Truce Village area (at least the ROK side) and some UNC guard-posts inside the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). This paper thus seeks to investigate how and why the UNC must be revitalized, both in manpower and influence, in preparation for an enhanced inter-Korean economic cooperation as well as for potential US isolationism.

### **The Overview of United Nations Command**

One of the ROK's nicknames is "the land of morning calm." Surprisingly, after the end of the Korean War, the UNC served its mission much like the quiet environment in which it was stationed. Unlike the ROK-US Combined Forces Command, whose importance and power as the "first-responder" against any authoritarian aggression in Northeast Asia are well-understood by many, the UNC and its role remain veiled to the public. Thus, it is vital to understand the UNC's birth and legal justifications, development, current status, and evolving scenarios to further investigate the feasibility of its revitalization and multilateralization amidst the impending "New Cold War" between the US and China.

### **The Birth and Legal Justifications**

On June 25, 1950, DPRK and its KPA invaded ROK. The UN Secretary General invoked his lawful right, using Article 99 of the UN Charter to bring the outbreak of hostilities to the attention of the UN Security Council (UNSC).<sup>5</sup> Article 99 of the UN Charter states that "the Secretary-General may bring to the attention of the Security Council any matter which in his opinion may threaten the maintenance of international peace and security." The enactment of this law unequivocally attributes DPRK's aggression as a threatening force to the global order.<sup>6</sup> It was no accident that the UNSC swiftly passed Resolution 83, clearly stating that there was a "breach of the peace" and "implicitly" invoking Chapter VII: Action with Respect to Threats to the Peace, Breaches of the Peace, and Acts of Aggression. Containing articles relevant to self-defense and multinational

<sup>5</sup> Trygve Lie, *In the Cause of Peace*, New York, 1954, p. 323-330

<sup>6</sup> "Charter of the United Nations." *Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs*, 2024, [legal.un.org/repertory/art99.shtml](https://legal.un.org/repertory/art99.shtml). Accessed April 2, 2024.

coalitions, Chapter VII served an integral rationale behind the formation of the UNC.

On July 7, UNSC Resolution 84 was passed with fifty-two out of fifty-nine UN member states showing their support; thirty states even officially declared their offer of assistance to ROK. Most importantly, Resolution 84 requested that member nations' military forces dispatched to ROK be assigned to the multinational coalition command led by the US. A few days after the UN Flag that had been "used by the United Nations Mediator in Palestine" was handed to General MacArthur on the 14th, the US government formally activated the UNC on July 24, 1950 to save a burgeoning democracy and its bewildered people on the verge of death.<sup>7</sup>

In 1953, when the Armistice Agreement was signed, the UNC consisted of approximately nine-hundred thousand soldiers, 61 air squadrons, and over 250 naval vessels—of which the US contributed over 50% of the ground forces, ninety-four% of the air squadrons, and 86% of the surface vessels.<sup>8</sup> It must be noted that because the rest of the UN Sending States constituted only about 10% of the total forces, the decision to assign them under the US command leadership was proven apposite.<sup>9</sup>

### Current Status

Unless the Armistice Agreement is annulled by either signatories or replaced by a potential ROK-DPRK peace agreement, the UNC's mission must be carried out without any legal and political hindrances as the only legal authority and concerned signatory.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the official mission of the UNC is to uphold the Armistice Agreement, execute the operational control of the UN forces in ROK, if any, and conduct such functions as directed by the US Joint Chiefs of Staff for the US government acting on behalf of the UNSC.

<sup>11</sup>

Currently, the UNC no longer has the 1 million servicemen it once had, but rather is composed of three pillars: a small staff organization, fifteen UN Sending States' liaison officers offering counsels to the commander of the UNC (CDRUNC), and the UNC Rear Command in Japan.

However, an interesting overlap occurs and needs to be clarified to correctly understand the complex interrelationship between the UNC and the ROK-US Combined Forces Command (CFC). In response to the understandable withdrawal of some three-quarters of a million UNC forces from the ROK in the 1970s, President Park Chung-hee recognized the need to bifurcate the UNC command structure, enabling ROK and US forces—as well as the UNC itself—to maintain separate but watertight combat readiness postures. The ROK government subsequently activated the ROK-US CFC, which is under the chain of command of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Pentagon, as well as their ROK counterparts. Comprising ROK and US servicemen, the CFC is the lawful war-time authority to repel any future DPRK attacks, while the UNC would invite the UN Sending States Forces back in.

This bicameral system, however, is further complicated by the "dual hat," a common military jargon familiar to any US servicemen in ROK. To explain, the Commander of the UNC (CDRUNC) and the Commander of CFC (CDRCFC) are in fact the same four-star general, metaphorically wearing two "hats" to flexibly function in both peacetime and wartime against possible DPRK invasions. Thus, the CDRUNC has the authority to direct the CDRCFC regarding any grave problems related to the Armistice, including to request combat forces since some CFC servicemen serve concurrently in the UNC as well. However, this jurisdictional power does not work vice-versa; the CDRCFC can only control ROK and US servicemen, not forces from the UN Sending States. Thus, the UNC is the only legal military command controlling non-US and non-ROK UN Sending States forces under the UN flag, were there to be a renewal of the armed attack by DPRK.<sup>12</sup> Interestingly though, since the CDRUNC and the CDRCFC are commanded by the same general, the new UN Forces that would be deployed to ROK in the future would be organically orchestrated by said general overseeing both commands. The venn diagram below explains the complex interrelationship between the UNC and the CFC, with United States Forces-Korea Command as the US servicemen inside the CFC, making the commander

<sup>7</sup> Smith, Ray (2006) "Peacekeeping without the Secretary General: The Korean Armistice Arrangements," Peace Operations Training Institute

<sup>8</sup> Jung, Won-II (2004) "The Future of the United Nations Command in the Republic of Korea," USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT, 1-35.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

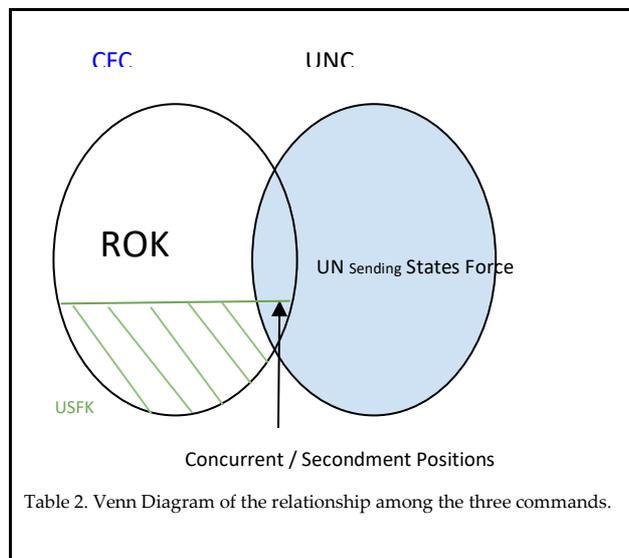
<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

wear three hats; the CDRUNC, CDRCFC, and CDRUSFK.

### UNC Rear Command



Although the UNC can be a relatively cloaked entity considering the passage of time, 70-some years since the Armistice, the UNC Rear Command in Japan is even less known despite its tremendous importance. Estimating the potential delay of force projection into ROK, should any armed conflict arise, the UNC sought to provide UN Armed Forces to the ROK through the UNC Rear Command in Japan. The Status of Forces Agreement (SOFA) was arranged between the UNC and Japan in 1954, allowing UN Forces to use UNC bases in Japan as the staging area for defending ROK without prior approvals from Japan. The UNC Rear Command, dispersed in seven different US Bases in Japan, serves as not only an important institutional mechanism that guarantees the UNC's force projection, but also an iron-clad commitment to defend a free, democratic country against unlawful authoritarian aggression.<sup>13</sup> Having established both legal and organizational capabilities to project a large number of UN forces, materiels, and arms into ROK and thereby East Asia, the UNC and its Rear Command would stay unscathed from any fluctuations of US foreign policy.

### Evolving Scenarios

Hosted by both the Korea Foundation and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), the 2023 ROK-US Strategic Forum invited top-notch experts, generals, and bureaucrats familiar with security concerns surrounding ROK. While many invaluable opinions and situational assessments were shared by notable figures, former CDRUNC, CFC, and USFK (Ret) General Vincent K. Brooks mentioned a rather audacious suggestion. Acknowledging the importance of interoperability among separate US Forces in the region, Brooks highlighted the potential need for reviving the "Far-East Command" to streamline and deconflict the complex chain of command against the backdrop of evolving trilateral security partnerships and cooperation among the ROK, the US, and Japan. Another alternative mentioned was to use and revitalize the UNC, which already has the necessary assets and an established commanding structure.<sup>14</sup>

Surprisingly, in April 2024, Japan seems to prefer the Far East Command scenario over the UNC-Rear Command combination one, as the CDRUNC will be stationed in ROK and therefore, exposed to more ROK influence compared to that of Japanese. Japan is pushing for a more airtight integration of the upcoming three SDF branches joint operational headquarter by activating the Japan-US combined headquarters to ameliorate the interoperability between the SDF and USFJ against the Chinese assertiveness in the region. Here, Japan is using the same rank-related trick that ROK once used to guarantee that the US would always appoint not a three-star, but a four-star general as the CDRCFC and CDRUSFK. The ROK military always nominates a four-star counterpart as the Deputy CDRCFC to force the Pentagon to prioritize a four-star echelon to be in charge of asset allocations.<sup>15</sup>

As such, the imminent appointment of a four-star SDF general to the SDF Joint Operational Headquarter would require the US to appoint not a three-star,, but a four-star general to the CDRUSFJ. This is because the SDF cannot (and should not) command USFJ, but the disparities of rank might blur the chain of command. This upgrade is more crucial than one might expect in terms of US Forces' reshuffling and rotations. If USFJ remained a three-

<sup>13</sup> Seo, Chang-Won. "COMPREHENSIVE SECURITY ANALYSIS OF THE UNITED NATIONS COMMAND'S IMPACT ON THE SECURITY OF THE REPUBLIC OF KOREA." *NAVAL POSTGRADUATE SCHOOL*, no. No. 0704-0188, 2020.

<sup>14</sup> "ROK-US Strategic Forum 2023." Center for Strategic and International Studies, September 2023, [www.csis.org/events/rok-us-strategic-forum-2023](http://www.csis.org/events/rok-us-strategic-forum-2023)  
<sup>15</sup> Asia Times. "High time for real US-Japan defense cooperation." *Asia Times*, [www.asiatimes.com/2024/04/high-time-for-real-us-japan-defense-cooperation](http://www.asiatimes.com/2024/04/high-time-for-real-us-japan-defense-cooperation).

star echelon, without its independent operational control of the CDRUSFJ, then the potential integration of USFK and USFJ might be facilitated by, as general Brooks mentioned, the UNC in Korea and Rear Command in Japan, with the subtle bureaucratic dominance shaped in favor of ROK. The already-solid structure, regulations, and systems governing the UNC and its Rear Command suggest the path of least resistance.

However, Japan is basically removing the last yoke that has so far undervalued USFJ to USFK by seeking CDRUSFJ's autonomous operational control. Approximately fifty-thousand strong, USFJ and its capabilities exceed those of the USFK in almost all aspects, with about 28,000 servicemen in Korea. Although ROK's proximity to immediate DPRK ground provocations and threats made Washington send a higher-ranked CDR as well as the CDRFCFC's and CDRUSFK's autonomous operational control—a historical evidence of ROK-US blood forged alliance, as some argued—the current Japanese move is a game-changer. Appreciation of the USFJ makes more theoretical sense especially considering that the USFJ can better address Chinese naval and air aggression with its naval and air components, and that the USFK is largely a ground force, in charge of keeping the 1.2 million DPRK Army in check.

However, the true upshot of the proposed and anticipated changes would de facto be decided by the 2024 US presidential election. To be specific, it is whether the Biden administration's value-laden approach, orchestrating the allies' coherent movement, would remain the main tenet of US foreign policy or be replaced by more cost-efficient, unorthodox strategies under Trump. Either way, it seems that for the US to more organically fight potential conflicts and wars against authoritarian and revisionist countries in the region, various types and combinations of military and diplomatic assistance from its allies are crucial. In this case, the enhancement of the USFJ's class and eminence would not overlap with that of the UNC because from the US's standpoint, strengthening the UNC's hand and thereby inviting UN Forces and assets can relieve the US military burden in the region.

### **The United Nations Command's Legal Concerns.**

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<sup>16</sup> Lendon, Richard Roth, Catherine Nicholls, Brad. "Russia Protects North Korea in the UN with Veto of Resolution to Investigate Sanction Violations." CNN, March 29, 2024,

The combination of both scenarios, a potential need for the resumption of inter-Korean economic cooperation and the cloud of conflict looming large in the region, warrants the anticipation that the revitalization of the UNC is required to protect the Armistice and the normative and inclusive international order. However, Russia's recent veto in the UNSC regarding the continuation of the UN-led investigation into DPRK's sanction violation in March and April 2024, foreshadow a prevalence of fierce political machinations in the UN and the UNSC surrounding the issuance of sanctions and condemnations to potential DPRK provocations, missile, military satellite, and nuclear aggression.<sup>16</sup>

However, a more serious ramification of these new dynamics hinted by Russia (and potentially China soon) is the possibility of stalls in any UNSC conversations regarding the revitalization of the UNC in the near future. Together with the traditional DPRK rhetoric to dismantle the UNC, the new landscape of Russian ruse warrants much caution. Thus, to address them in the UNSC as we encounter new challenges, it is necessary to review and challenge the legal and textual nature of past DPRK claims to dismantle the UNC. While not entirely wrong and illogical, the DPRK's legal claims should be legally and logically rebutted for reasons on display.

To briefly explain the history, Russia (The Soviet Union then) was absent from both the UN and the UNSC in 1950 due to its own boycotting of the UN's very existence. Thus, when DPRK invaded ROK, the Soviet Union was unable to either utilize its power to veto or object to the passage of the UN charters that activated the UNC and sent UN Forces off to ROK. Again, a loose interpretation of Articles and Charters by the West to expedite the troop-sending process gave birth to scholarly debates; consequently, it fueled DPRK's argument that the birth and deployment of UN Forces under the UNC was not legal as one of the Permanent Fives, the Soviet Union, was absent. However, the US beautifully navigated through the argument by using the regulations regarding UNSC voting listed in Article 27, which stated that the activation of the UNC required only the concurrence of "the" permanent members, not of "all" permanent members, at the time of the passage of the pertinent charters.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Pollack, Samuel (1987) "Self Doubts on Approaching Forty: The United Nations' Oldest and Only Collective Security Enforcement Army, the

It is intriguing to note that DPRK's line of argument also extends to Article 42 which allows the UNSC to use armed force to restore international peace and security; however, as envisaged by the Charter, the use of force "by" the UNSC did not happen in the Korean War, a point thoroughly pursued by DPRK.<sup>18</sup> However, Article 42 states that the UNSC's action to safeguard peace may include "demonstrations, blockade, and other operations by air, sea, or land forces of Members of the United Nations."<sup>19</sup> In fact, the paragraph validates the "creative" use of Article 42, a result of Council practice in great urgency where innocent lives were at stake, further validating its legal relevance.<sup>20</sup>

### Serving as legal precedents

Once again, extremely strict, literal interpretations of the UN Charters and Articles may have influenced the DPRK to view the very activation of the UNC as groundless despite the unspeakable atrocities they committed. However, the legal interrelationship between ROK and the UNC and its forces, bolstered by the creative use of Article 42 as part of "Council Practice," has served as legal precedents and foundations. The cases of the British Royal Navy carrying out a UN-authorized blockade of Southern Rhodesia during the 1960s for Rhodesia's violation of UN sanctions, and UN member states being authorized to utilize force in ensuring the withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait are undeniable historic examples of "Council Practice."<sup>21</sup> Thus, post-Korean war authorizations to use force via Council Practice in areas of Somalia, Kuwait, Haiti, and the former Yugoslavia lent considerable legitimacy to these "coalition of the willing" operations backed by tacit UN support.<sup>22</sup> Consequently, future UNSC resolutions containing Article 42 and the UN member states' willingness to carry out the "coalition of the willing" operations would guarantee legally relevant and defensible rationale for such use of force. Such future UNSC enforcement actions are certain to accumulate more legitimacy for the UNSC's creative activation of the UNC in 1950 as well as the structuring of the UN-led force.<sup>23</sup>

Furthermore, the 1962 International Court of Justice (ICJ) opinion, which stipulated that the UNSC may act "even in the absence of armed forces furnished to it and may utilize other means and articles to accompany its purposes," clearly strengthens the standpoint that the creation of the UNC in 1950 was in accordance with the UNSC's power. As an ad-hoc force under Articles 39 and 42, the UNC adorned its birth with full ICJ legal support and endorsement.<sup>24</sup>

### Command and Control Issues

While the majority of legal scholars, professionals, and experts claim that the legal battle surrounding the birth of the UNC is currently no longer controversial, the unprecedented nature of the UNC command structure is considered the last area requiring final legal contemplation. There is no doubt that Article 43, which names the UNSC as the main entity responsible for authorizing UN-led enforcement operations, has numerous times been used by the detractors of the UNC as their legal basis to assail excessive US presence in the command.<sup>25</sup> However, the activation of the UNC marked the first deployment of an international military force to restore broken peace, compelling UN leadership to adopt unprecedented measures to ensure the survival of its troops and fulfill the higher purpose of restoring peace.<sup>26</sup> However, the Soviet Union's return to the UNSC in August 1950 to cast a veto stalled the UNC's follow-up measures. Thus, the "Uniting for Peace" resolution came as a decisive aid.<sup>27</sup>

Passed via the UN General Assembly because of the UNSC's paralysis in executing its core responsibility of restoring peace "promptly and effectively," the "Uniting for Peace" resolution was an effective countermeasure to promote such actions in matters surrounding Korea. It circumvents the rock-solid legal power of the UNSC if the UNSC is rendered

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United Nations Command in Korea," Penn State International Law Review, Vol. 6, No. 1, Article 2

<sup>18</sup> Smith, Ray (2006) "Peacekeeping without the Secretary General: The Korean Armistice Arrangements," Peace Operations Training Institute.

<sup>19</sup> "Charter of the United Nations." Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs, 2024, [legal.un.org/repertory/art42.shtml](https://legal.un.org/repertory/art42.shtml). Accessed April 20, 2024.

<sup>20</sup> Thomas M. Frank, "Recourse to Force: State Action Against Threats and Armed Attacks, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, pp. 24-28.

<sup>21</sup> Smith, Ray (2006) "Peacekeeping without the Secretary General: The Korean Armistice Arrangements," Peace Operations Training Institute.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Pollack, Samuel (1987) "Self Doubts on Approaching Forty: The United Nations' Oldest and Only Collective Security Enforcement Army, the United Nations Command in Korea," Penn State International Law Review, Vol. 6, No. 1, Article 2

<sup>25</sup> "Charter of the United Nations." Repertory of Practice of United Nations Organs, 2024, [legal.un.org/repertory/art43.shtml](https://legal.un.org/repertory/art43.shtml). Accessed June, 26, 2024.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

incapable for a specific duration.<sup>28</sup> Unsurprisingly, the “Uniting for Peace” resolution became the legal basis for subsequent UN military operations, backed by the General Assembly Special Emergency Sessions due to UNSC inactions: the establishment of the first United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) and the extension of the mandate of the Operation des Nations Unies au Congo (ONUC).<sup>29</sup>

## Legal Conclusion

The UNC, its birth, and activation were certainly not perfect. However, while highlighting a very specific time period in order to denounce the overall history of a command is not without logical tricks, the more-than-sufficient accumulated cases of UN-led military operations rooting their legal basis on the activation of the UNC render such criticisms rather powerless. In today’s world—where moral and ethical considerations often outweigh traditional diplomatic objectives—the UNC and its legal foundation stand as noble precedents for UN operations that have saved countless lives and helped prevent further military escalation. Thus, any further discussions involving whether the UNC was, is, and will be a legally backed entity are no longer relevant.

## The UNC as a humanitarian action conduit

The settling of legal concerns highlights, once again, of the relatively latent capabilities of the UNC: its ability to carry out humanitarian assistance in the event of natural disasters. While the Korean Peninsula has not experienced any large-scale natural calamity in recent years, the UNC and the UNC-Rear have demonstrated that they are more than capable of providing assistance when needed, such as during the 2011 Japanese Tohoku earthquake. At that time, the command executed disaster relief operations, namely the Operation Tomodachi, wherein the command coordinated the transit of aircraft, vessels, equipment, and forces.<sup>30</sup> Hypothetically, the UNC would serve as an effective hub for the ROK to acquire humanitarian assistance from the international community by leveraging existing C2

systems and Japan UNC bases for the influx of incoming international humanitarian assistance materials.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to their rescue and humanitarian operations capabilities, the UNC is also seasoned with inter-border or cross-DMZ passages of humanitarian materials, whether from the UN or other countries without direct access to DPRK. Only the UNC has these ample experiences of dealing with cross-border interactions, especially considering that 1 million active DPRK servicemen are pointing guns at the ROK. It is thus obvious that the UNC’s past and potential humanitarian operations and experiences are in line with maintaining the Armistice enforcement since “the two [aforesaid] conditions involve ensuring peace and stability on the Peninsula.”<sup>32</sup>

## Towards a multinational security framework.

November 2023 was an important milestone for the UNC and its revitalization effort. It is no surprise that the UNC initiated this project in preparation in mid 2010s for possible changes of Operation Control (OPCON) concerns from the current CFC structure, with the upending role and rank between the US four-star CDRCFC to the ROK four star deputy CDRCFC. Due to the thawing period of inter-Korean relations during the Moon presidency (2017-2021), the revitalization move did not resurface until 14 November, 2023, when ROK held a ministerial level meeting of the UNC Sending States. This milestone reaffirmed both ROK’s and the UN Sending States’ commitments to be “united upon any renewal of hostilities or armed attack on the Korean Peninsula challenging the principles of the United Nations and the security of the Republic of Korea.”<sup>33</sup> While the statement was noble as it is, what was especially noteworthy was ROK’s follow-up attempt to formally join the UNC. This move demonstrates Seoul’s firm desire to voice more of its concerns, and perhaps striving to play a bigger role, in the revitalization of the UNC in view of the imminent serious security challenges posed by regional authoritarian regimes.

<sup>28</sup> Smith, Ray (2006) “Peacekeeping without the Secretary General: The Korean Armistice Arrangements,” Peace Operations Training Institute.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Joe, Hyunkwon. United Nations Command Armistice Roles on the Korean Peninsula: Is December 2015 the End? Master’s thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College, 2013. Defense Technical Information Center, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/pdfs/ADA589750.pdf>. Accessed June 29, 2024.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> US Department of Defense. “Republic of Korea and United Nations Command Member States Defense Min.” United States Department of Defense, [www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3587434/republic-of-korea-and-united-nations-command-member-states-defense-ministerial](https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3587434/republic-of-korea-and-united-nations-command-member-states-defense-ministerial).

However, would this revitalization, one that could possibly evolve into a more agile and staffed multinational security framework, sail without difficulties amid objections by regional authoritarian powers? How strong are the commitments of the UN Sending States in protecting ROK if they themselves are entangled in their own security challenges? Lastly, would their commitment to defend democracy and freedom, the very principles that motivated the assembling of servicemen from such nations, still stand true as it once did? Although projecting the exact course of development and upgrade of the UNC is difficult, assessing the Sending States' current rate of freedom and democracy can indirectly provide us with reliable estimates about how strong their motivations are.

Freedom House is a renowned NGO specializing in assessing nations' level of appreciation of democracy and freedom with reliably collected data. Examining the UNC member states' Freedom House Freedom Index can provide us with a robust indicator of their future course of action in regards to the UNC, its revitalization movement, and potential development into an active military and security framework. Before delving into the examination of the Sending States' freedom index, the Sending States and current UNC members include the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, France, New Zealand, Turkey, Philippines, Thailand, South Africa, Greece, Belgium, Colombia, Holland, Denmark, Norway, and Italy. The list could expand to Ethiopia, Sweden, Germany, Luxembourg, and India as countries in consideration of applying for the Sending State membership due to their history of sending non-combatant support units. For this specific research purpose, dividing the freedom index of such nations seems necessary to effectively demonstrate their current conditions using the following metrics : Strong, Moderate, and Weak democratic nations.

### **Strong Democracies**

Ranging from scores of 99 to 95/100, New Zealand (99), Norway (98), Canada (97), Holland (97), Denmark (97), Belgium(96), and Australia (95) are considered the strongest democracies in the world.<sup>34</sup> Combining two subscores, political rights and civil liberties, each weighing 40 and 60 respectively,

allows the index to assess the countries' measure of freedom out of 100. Extremely high scores above 95, scored contemporarily, explains their decision to send troops to Korea in 1950, and their extremely strong likelihood of repeating such deployment should an armed conflict break out in the Korean Peninsula again.

### **Moderate Democracies**

The word moderate might sound a misnomer since the member states that fall within this category are well-known for their democratic principles and commitments and sacrifices to uphold democracy. Simultaneously, the "strong" member states' extremely democratic and free forms of governments should not overshadow the potential that moderate states would also be willing to welcome the revitalization of the United Nations Command. Ranging from 91 to 81, in the descending order, the moderate sending states are the United Kingdom (91), Italy (90), France (89), Greece (85), and the United States (83).<sup>35</sup> It is important, however, to note that the US's seemingly inadequate Freedom Index score warrants no substantial concern. The score of 83 is not only well above the global average, but also a result of domestic events—such as COVID-19 misinformation, Jan. 6 attack on the Hill, and so forth—that do not directly affect the overall architecture of US foreign policy or the liberal international order.<sup>36</sup> The rest of Sending States mentioned-above also demonstrate recent pieces of evidence in upholding the liberal international order, signifying the high-likelihood of their support towards both the UNC and its revitalization.

### **Weak Democracies**

The last group of the Sending States, the "weak" democracies ranging from 79 to 33 in the descending order, includes South Africa (79), Colombia (70), Philippines (58), Thailand(36), and Turkey (33).<sup>37</sup> While at the borderline of being "free" nations, South Africa and Colombia boast their more-than-decent democratic governments and free atmosphere. The Philippines' and Thailand's weak scores, however, do not warrant a serious concern since the Philippines, in light of its historical and recent disputes and conflicts with China, would welcome a

<sup>34</sup> Freedom House. (n.d.). Explore the map. In Freedom House. <https://www.freedomhouse.org/explore-the-map?type=fiw&year=2024>

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> The quadrilateral security dialogue - a viable international alliance in the Indo-Pacific region? (2021). AALBORG UNIVERSITET, 20191661.

<https://projekter.aau.dk/projekter/files/414939115/Thesis.pdf>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

strong multinational security framework situated west of China. On the other hand, Thailand's low score largely results from its traditional monarch system. Conversely, Turkey is a particularly concerning case, since President Erdogan has a multifaceted relationship with Russia due to Turkey-Russia's economic and energy cooperation, despite Turkey's NATO seat and ROK-Turkey's long friendship as brother nations.<sup>38</sup>

### Takeaways

With a few exceptions, including Turkey, the absolute majority of the Sending States still maintain a competitive level of democracy compared to their older selves in the 1950s. This relative lack of volatility assures that the said nations would likely respond favorably to both the revitalization of the UNC as well as sending troops to Korea. While the complex, convoluted foreign affairs today could curb the number of troops and intensity of commitments, the recent Ukraine War has demonstrated democratic nations' firm stance to protect another democracy from brute authoritarianism.

### Conclusion

Against the backdrop of the newly enhanced Russia-DPRK alliance that knows no limit, the revitalization of the United Nations Command is extremely recommended. Most of the member states' governmental structure, respect of democracy and freedom, and active participation in minilateral and multilateral engagements warrant our assumption that their participation in newly charging the dormant United Nations Command would be possible without significant hurdles. Of course, the extent to which would be up for further debate, especially considering the US 47th President-elect Donald Trump's traditional aversion to multilateralism and the recent political instability

caused by President Yoon. However, against the mushrooming of the Chinese People's Liberation Army-Navy's surface vessels and the faltering US ship-making capabilities, it would be wise to provide room to call in other naval capabilities in East Asia for better interoperability. Assets such as the air-craft carriers of the United Kingdom, France, and Italy, could be called into rotation in the Indo-Pacific to fill in any power vacuum, be it real or hypothetical, to maintain our readiness posture. An effective answer to establish that space would be the revitalization of the United Nations Command as a multinational security framework that requires no new fanfare that would cause adversaries' backlashes and countermeasures.

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<sup>38</sup> Relations between Türkiye and South Korea / Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. (n.d.). Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs. <https://www.mfa.gov.tr/reasons-between-turkey-and-the-republic-of-korea.en.mfa>



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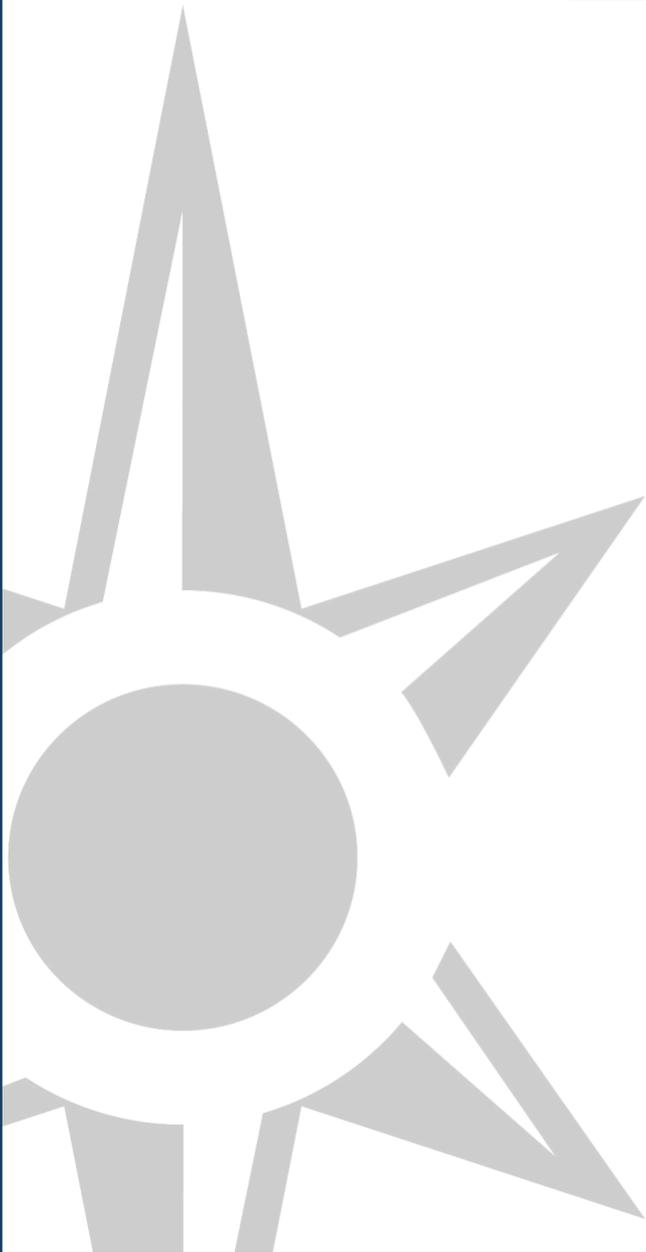
Captain began his public service as an interpreting officer stationed in the Korea-U.S. Combined Forces Command, liaising between the two great nations' servicemen. He was awarded several commendations from the Eighth United States Army and the Combined Forces Command.

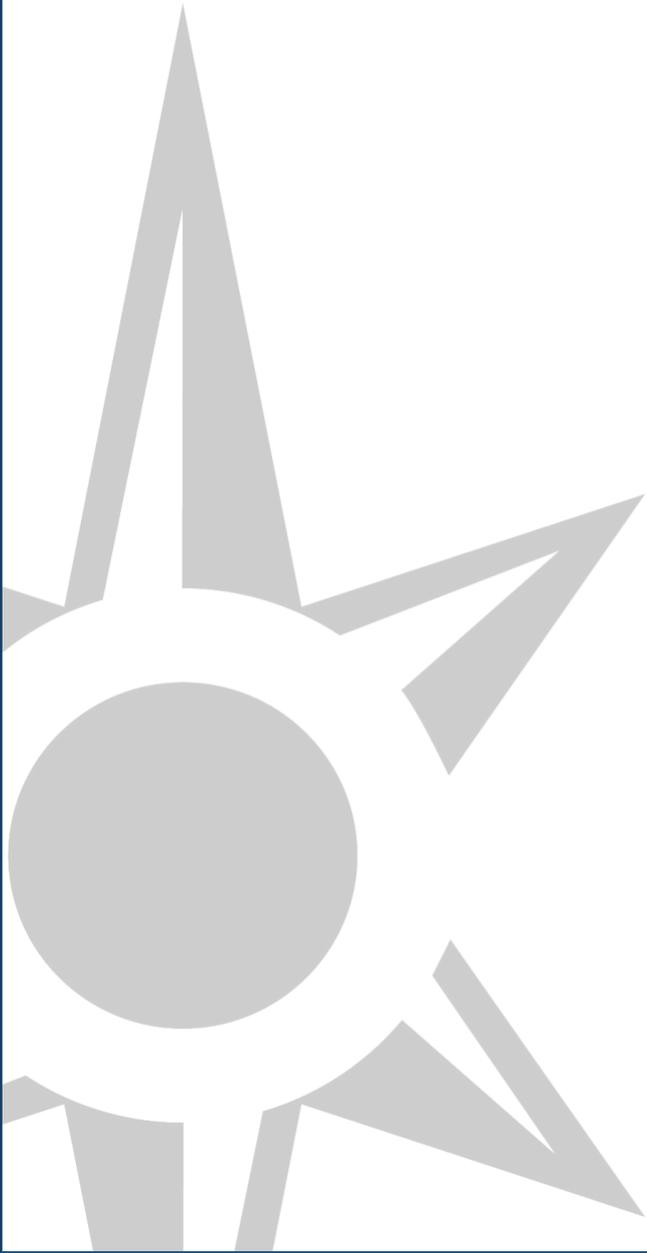
Beyond his recent media presence, including the Wall Street Journal, the Diplomat, and Asia Times, Captain Park is a Young Leader of the Pacific Forum and a NextGen member of the Royal United Service Institute. He holds a BA in politics from New York University.

# Strategic Culture and FDI Regulation for National Security: Comparison between Japan and Australia

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By  
Rei Koga





# Executive Summary

*Rei Koga*

The heightened strategic rivalry between the United States and China has led to the securitization of various economic policies, including the development of dual-use technologies and the restructuring of global supply chains. One area that remains understudied, despite its growing importance, is the screening of foreign investments on national security grounds. The current international regime lacks standardized norms for defining national security concerns in the context of mergers and acquisitions, leaving individual states with broad discretion in interpreting and enforcing such concerns. This research explores why and how different countries perceive and interpret national security risks by conducting a comparative case study of Japan and Australia. Using the analytical lens of strategic culture, it examines how historical experiences and domestic intelligence structures shape each country's security perceptions in response to proposed Chinese mergers and acquisitions. The study finds that variations in attitudes stem from differing definitions of national security within policymaking communities, influenced in part by bureaucratic structures, particularly the role of intelligence agencies. The application of strategic culture also demonstrates its value as an intervening variable that helps set standards for what is deemed acceptable in light of perceived national security threats.

## Introduction

The weaponization of economic interdependence by China has made many countries keenly aware of the importance of economic autonomy. In response, many countries including Western like-minded countries launched or modified their economic security strategies. Yet their formulation was neither standardized nor coordinated. Australia and Japan are a good contrast. Australia preceded the US in strengthening Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) regulation in 2018, particularly in critical infrastructure industries such as water supply, gas, electricity, and telecommunications with the introduction of the Security of Critical Infrastructure Act 2018 (the SOCI Act). Japan followed this trend by amending the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Law (FEFTA) in 2019. This act was the only contemporary regulation that protected critical infrastructure from foreign acquisitions. The problem lies in the fact that the Japanese regulation, as well as its implementation, seemed to still be lacking in terms of strictness and comprehensiveness compared to that of Australia. For instance, in 2021 China's tech giant Tencent announced that it bought a 3.6% stake in Japanese internet giant Rakuten.<sup>1</sup> Media reports have raised concerns over the effective implementation of the Act.<sup>2</sup>

Japan and Australia, while having different legal structures and implementation practices, share a national interest: mitigating economic dependence on China. Both having suffered from Chinese economic statecraft since the 2010s, they seem to have regarded massive Chinese FDI inflow, at least partly, politically motivated. Hence, the question to be explored is *what makes like-minded countries' responses different in the field of FDI regulation.*

This research will seek to answer the above question by examining the attitudes of relevant ministries/organizations on the FDI regulation-making process in Japan and Australia through the lens of strategic culture. Sharing a similar strategic culture forms the basis for security cooperation and

when they do so they are better able to cooperate.<sup>3</sup> Even if sharing the same strategic culture is not realistic, it is still important to deepen the understanding of their strategic culture among like-minded countries on the nexus between security and economic policy to deepen the understanding on their different approaches to economic security policy. The objective of this research is to analyze how strategic culture in Japan and Australia affects their responses against foreign economic statecraft. The research is twofold. Firstly, it explores the strategic culture of the two countries. This will be done by discussing their respective national experiences and analyzing their domestic institutional structures. Delving into the sources of strategic culture, the focus will be on the role of intelligence agencies in economic security policymaking. The policy response against China's economic statecraft oftentimes necessitates the government utilizing risk assessments provided by intelligence agencies. In fact, many contemporary economic security policies require the involvement of intelligence agencies. In the case of Australia, former PM Turnbull noted that the then Australian Security Intelligence Organization (ASIO) Director Duncan Lewis played a significant role in introducing the SOCI Act.<sup>4</sup> Thus, it is vital to consider the relationship between intelligence agencies and economic security legislation. This research then moves on to examine how such a relationship is projected on actual FDI national security regulation-making. This paper ultimately argues that their relationship and strategic culture are nurtured by their domestic political structures and the norms on national security strategy shared within the government.

### 1. Analytical framework: strategic culture

Strategic culture was introduced by Jack Snyder in 1977 to interpret Soviet nuclear doctrine. Since then, it has sprung over four generations of discussions. Despite the criticism of having inconsistent methodology, more attention has been given to the study of this concept. While it has transformed through the discussions, strategic culture can generally be defined as a shared and distinctive set of

<sup>1</sup> Smith William, "Tencent buys Rakuten stake; regulator fears fuel share fall," *Technology Magazine*, accessed April 1, 2024, <https://technologymagazine.com/digital-transformation/tencent-buys-rakuten-stake-regulator-fears-fuel-share-fall>; Kyodo News, "Japan, U.S. plan to keep watch on Rakuten after Tencent investment," April 20, 2021, <https://english.kyodonews.net/news/2021/04/5e07341231bc-japan-us-plan-to-keep-watch-on-rakuten-after-tencent-investment.html>

<sup>2</sup> "Kaisei Gaitamehou, Zizen Shinsa Nogare: Chuugoku Tencent no Rakuten Shusshi (Exempted from the revised Foreign Exchange Law and prior examination, Rakuten's investment in China's Tencent)," *Nikkei*, accessed Feb. 20, 2024, <https://www.nikkei.com/article/DGXZQOUA0781S0X00C21A4000000/>

<sup>3</sup> Rynning, Sten. "The European Union: towards a strategic culture?" *Security Dialogue* 34, no. 4 (2003): 479-496.

<sup>4</sup> Malcolm Turnbull, *A Bigger Picture*, (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Books, 2020).

beliefs, values, and habits regarding the threat and use of force which have their roots in fundamental influences such as geopolitical setting, history, and political culture.<sup>5</sup> Although strategic culture has mostly been applied to conventional strategy involving the use of armed force and nuclear policy, this paper attempts to apply it in an unconventional one: the nexus of security and economic policy. Many recent scholarly work on the national security implications of FDI focuses on its strategic implications. For instance, Ashley Thomas Lenihan (2018) examines why states intervene in cross-border M&A both within and outside their alliances.<sup>6</sup> She captures such intervention policy as non-military internal balancing and one of her conceptual features is that the states do so to secure and enhance relative power for long-term gain. This understanding of power in the context of relative gains aligns with a state's security policy as a strategic behavior. Thus, as far as national security is concerned, FDI regulation policy can be considered within the scope of the strategic culture.

To articulate this point, it is essential to go back to the original definition of strategy. While the word strategy is used differently even within scholarly work in international relations, Lawrence Freedman puts it in his seminal work as "about maintaining a balance between ends, ways, and means; about identifying objectives; and about the resources and methods available for meeting such objectives."<sup>7</sup> While there are concepts similar to strategic culture, such as security culture, what makes strategic culture distinct is its focus on the relative distribution of power and its long-term consequences, both materialistically and ideationally. Furthermore, while the policy tools to which the strategic culture concept is generally applied centers on military tools, the basic concept of national strategy is not confined to it and the economic aspects need to be paid attention to, although oftentimes overlooked.<sup>8</sup> Early and Preble map out categories of economic statecraft and place FDI restrictions as strategic commercial policy, which enables governments to either directly or indirectly intervene in their markets to shape

commercial flows. According to them, restrictions on FDI can be effective in balancing against external threats. We can see here the confluence between the ideas of Early and Preble and Thomas Lenihan. They both believe that by controlling foreign influence, often from adversary states, a state adopts a balancing strategy against external threats, which also constitutes a part of a state's grand strategy.<sup>9</sup> FDI regulations can help maintain military or economic superiority over other states and ensure uninterrupted operation of critical infrastructure which are vital for the stability of domestic life. Thus, as far as national security risks on FDI are concerned, the basic policy objective has much compatibility with national security strategy. Japan, for example, created its national security strategy in 2014 and alongside the conventional two approaches: defense and diplomacy, newly added the economic aspect, as an area vital in protecting national security. This leads to the establishment of an economic unit in the National Security Secretariat. The 2023 National Security Strategy was drastically different from its previous 2014 iteration as it not only was a departure from being weary of protectionism but was fully embracing economic security by referring to it as a means to achieve autonomous economic prosperity.<sup>10</sup> Hence, it is appropriate to assume that the FDI national security screening mechanism falls within the scope of national strategy. Indeed, it is important to expand the usage of this concept. This is in large part due to the fact that the boundaries between traditional and non-traditional security policy have become increasingly vague, resulting in further involvement of security in economic policy.

## 2. Operationalizing strategic culture

The source of strategic culture, including both material and ideational factors, is debated with no scholarly consensus. While geography such as proximity to great powers, can play a vital role in shaping a state's strategic culture.<sup>11</sup> Historical experiences are also key to understanding why countries adopt different strategies over varying

<sup>5</sup> McCraw, David. "Change and Continuity in Strategic Culture; Macmillan, Alan, Ken Booth and Russell Trood, 1999. "Strategic culture."

<sup>6</sup> Lenihan, Ashley Thomas, *Balancing Power without Weapons: State Intervention into Cross-Border Mergers and Acquisitions*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018) <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316855430>.

<sup>7</sup> Freedman, Lawrence. *Strategy: A History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015); Posen, Barry R., and Andrew L. Ross. "Competing visions for US grand strategy." *International Security* 21, no. 3 (1996): 5-53, xi.

<sup>8</sup> Early, Bryan R., and Keith Preble. "Grand Strategy and the Tools of Economic Statecraft." *In The Oxford Handbook of Grand Strategy*, edited by

Thierry Balzacq and Ronald R. Krebs, 1st ed., 370-88. (Oxford University Press, 2021); Posen, Barry R., and Andrew L. Ross. "Competing visions for US grand strategy." <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780198840299.013.24>.

<sup>9</sup> Early and Preble.

<sup>10</sup> Cabinet Secretariat of Japan, *National Security Strategy of Japan*, December 2022, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryoku/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Jeffrey, S. Lantis and Darryl, Howlett, "Strategic Culture," *In Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 6<sup>th</sup> edn, edited by John, Baylis, James, J. Wirtz and Colin, A. Gray, pp. 89-107, (Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press, 2019).

periods.<sup>12</sup> This research relies on the third generation's way of observing it, exemplified by Alastair Iain Johnston from a positivist standpoint. This standpoint criticized earlier work for being deterministic and tries to capture the strategic culture through symbols and expressions through written and unwritten records. This paper applies this position by examining how the historical experiences in these two countries, namely for Japan, the inappropriate handling of intelligence in the post-war period and for Australia, a long history of refining the intelligence system in since post-war period, are projected in the records in the discussion of national security considerations of FDI screening mechanism. The way this paper applies the concept of strategic culture is not to be as a determining factor as an independent variable, but rather as an intervening variable to shape the policy options available to decision makers. Furthermore, bureaucratic structure is also considered as a factor to form the strategic culture through the approved practices. More specifically the role of intelligence agencies in policymaking will be focused on. The reason why these two sources are the most appropriate choice for this paper is that, as the focus is on each government's reactions to Chinese FDI, the factors that shape and constrain policy options in the minds of the policy-makers are what matters most, which makes the two sufficient in explaining that. This research regards the relationship between the two as shown in the Figure 1. Firstly, historical events and their relationship with the US as their common ally create a basic understanding of what their security interests are. This basic understanding is projected onto government practices by relevant government agencies. These agencies, while acting on their basic understandings of what national security interests are on a daily basis, also over time self-reinforce their strategic understandings through optimization of their organizational structures and standard operation procedures. In short, the relationship between strategic culture, formed by historical experiences, and the bureaucratic structure is a constantly self-reinforced cycle.

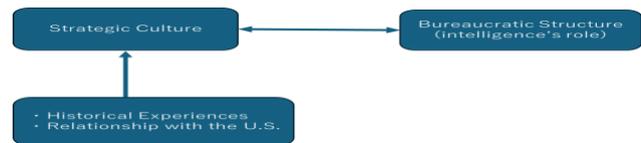


Figure 1. Analytical framework in influencing factors of strategic culture (figure by author)

Another point to note is that the intelligence agency's role constitutes an important part of national strategy formulation. The task of intelligence agencies is to assess the domestic and international environment and sometimes intelligence can be the driving force for strategy formulation.<sup>13</sup> National security policy consists of two different but mutually complementing sections: intelligence and policy planning.<sup>14</sup> Thus, it makes sense to assume that intelligence organizational culture can affect a country's strategic culture. Yet, it is debatable whether or not intelligence plays a positive role in strategic culture creation. In general, opinions toward this are divided into two groups: optimists and pessimists.<sup>15</sup> The former, such as Sun Tzu, argues that to know the enemy and know yourself and in a hundred battles you shall never be in peril.<sup>16</sup> The latter, including Carl von Clausewitz, while understanding its importance, is doubtful of the value intelligence provides in strategy formulation and execution.<sup>17</sup> Despite this disagreement on the evaluation of intelligence's role, they seem to agree that it does play an important part in the development and execution of national strategies. Thus, it would be worth considering the intelligence role in how strategic culture represents it and the other way around. Another point to argue is that scholarly work on the role of intelligence in strategy-making as well as strategic culture generally examines the external security policy and oftentimes overlooks the internal. This is due to the tendency of strategy studies to focus on external policy. Yet, to reflect the reality where influence operations targeting domestic politics and economy weaponization has increased worldwide and where an increasing number of states have begun to include internal security in their strategy, it is essential to extend the study on intelligence and strategy to national security policy in the domestic sphere.

<sup>12</sup> David C. Kang, *American Grand Strategy and East Asian Security in the Twenty-First Century*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

<sup>13</sup> Roger Z. George, "Intelligence and Strategy," In *Strategy in the Contemporary World: An Introduction to Strategic Studies*, 6th edn, edited by Baylis, J., Wirtz, J. J., and Gray, S. C. eds, pp. 144-164, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>14</sup> Yoshiki Kobayashi, "Intelligence Community ni Taisuru Minshuteki Tousei no Seido (Institutions of Democratic Control over the Intelligence Community)" *International Politics*, 2012(167), pp.167\_57-71.

<sup>15</sup> Roger Z. George, "Intelligence and Strategy."

<sup>16</sup> Sun, Tzu, and Ralph D Sawyer. *The Art of War*. 1st ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1994).

<sup>17</sup> Clausewitz, C. von, Howard, M., Paret, P., & Heuser, B., *On war*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p.64.

It should also be acknowledged that these two do not provide a comprehensive understanding of the reasons for using FDI regulations as an internal balancing strategy. For instance, the differences in the respective country's industrial features and composition are important elements to be factored into. If a country's primary industry of energy and raw materials receives FDI, it would be more likely for a country to adopt a regulatory policy on such acquisition than against its tourism industry, due to the sensitivity the foreign ownership of such industries. However, examining the industrial factors requires looking into the relationship between the government and business interest groups. This paper will not risk diving too deeply into such factors in order to keep the research focused and concise.

#### 4. Strategic culture: Australia

##### *Historical background and its US relations*

Political scientist Michael Wesley argues that since European colonization, "Australia has always been a rich, isolated, status quo state. This has fostered a particular attitude towards the outside world, and imbued Australians' thinking about the world and their place in it with a distinctive character."<sup>18</sup> Australia's strategic culture can be summarized into two features: the tradition of the Anglo-American alliance and its cultural alienation from the rest of Asia. At least until the 1940s, most Australians regarded themselves as unquestionably British and loyally subjects to the crown.<sup>19</sup> Prime Minister Robert Menzies believed that the outbreak of war in Europe in September 1939 required Australian involvement, and later led to the government supporting British commitments in Asia and Europe. Yet, the fall of Singapore in February 1942 was a catalyst which highlighted Australian strategic vulnerability without a powerful naval ally in the region. Australia shifted its dependence ally from the UK to the US in and around 1942, which is shown by then PM John Curtin's speech on America, where he tried to encourage further US commitment to the war in the Pacific.<sup>20</sup> After the war, PM Menzies formalized the alliance with the United States through the Australia,

New Zealand, United States Security Treaty (ANZUS Treaty), which came into effect in 1952.

Rich in both mineral and agricultural products, as well as geographically distant from any potential threats, and with the only major regional conflict within the Cold War being the Vietnam War, Australia has had a more relaxed attitude towards outside competition during this time compared to its Anglo-American allies. Post-Cold War, Australia found its position radically shifting from its European centered past. Its largest trading partners are in the Asia-Pacific (China, Japan, Korea, India, and the US), its largest immigrant groups are from Asia (India and China), and its primary adversary has shifted from Moscow to Beijing. While there is still debate whether the threat perception has been exaggerated, Australia's traditional threat perception was derived from its geographic proximity to and cultural alienation from Asia.<sup>21</sup> The 21st century, through the rapid increase of immigrants as well as the increased connectivity through trade, transport and technology, made it clear to Australia that geographical distance, the thing that Australia relied on for protection since its foundation as a state, was no longer a perfect barrier against being involved in political and strategic challenges coming from Asia. The Australians themselves have come to realize that they need to be committed to regional stability in order to maintain their values and ways of life, which is evident in the government white papers from 2017. This way, Australian threat perception has become a permanent fixture in its foreign policymaking, which has resulted in its focus on balancing towards Anglo-Saxon great powers.

The Anglo-American security cooperation architecture including Australia evolved throughout the Cold War. Commitments towards the alliance have helped shape Australian strategic culture, with the signals intelligence operations at Joint Defense Facility Pine Gap which even became a Netflix series,<sup>22</sup> helps strengthen communication and coordination between Australia and the US, while Australia's participation in the war in Afghanistan (2001-2014, 2015-2021) and Iraq (2003-2009) along with the casualties that it suffered (41 deaths in Afghanistan alone) showed its allies Australia's

<sup>18</sup> Michael Wesley, "The Rich Tradition of Australian Realism," *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (2009), p. 325.

<sup>19</sup> Burns, Alex, and Ben Eltham. "Australia's Strategic Culture: Constraints and Opportunities in Security Policymaking." In *Strategic Cultures and Security Policies in the Asia-Pacific*, edited by Jeffrey S. Lantis, pp. 22-45. (London: Routledge, 2016).

<sup>20</sup> "John Curtin's speech to America," March 14, 1942, Accessed April 4, 2024, <https://john.curtin.edu.au/audio/00434.html>

<sup>21</sup> Michael O'Keef, *Australian Foreign Policy: Relationships, Issues, and Strategic Culture*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2023),

<sup>22</sup> Pine Gap, Netflix, 2018.

resolve not just to share intelligence but also to bear the human costs. From a national security perspective, Australia has also been part of the UK-US Agreement, also known as the Five Eyes, since 1956, and shares intelligence data with the US, UK, New Zealand, and Canada. This intelligence sharing arrangement is the cornerstone of the English-speaking democracies, and Australia's well-established involvement has firmly cemented its connection both in the physical, informational and normative aspects.

The Australian federal government has an interesting national intelligence community, which consists of 10 national organizations such as the Office of National Intelligence (ONI), ASIO, Australia Secret Intelligence Service (ASIS) and the Defense Intelligence Organization in the Department of Defense (DoD).<sup>23</sup> Although the Australian intelligence architecture has been refined throughout its postwar history and Australia was the first among Australia, the UK and the US, to solidify its postwar intelligence agencies,<sup>24</sup> it did not start smoothly at first. While each intelligence agency attempted to build up its capabilities, the most deficient function was inter-governmental coordination.<sup>25</sup> Following Justice Robert's Hope first Royal Commission into Intelligence and Security, the Office of National Assessments was established and the existence of ASIS and ASD (then known as DSD) was publicly acknowledged in 1978 and 1979 respectively. Subsequently, the Office of National Assessments (ONA) was established to perform national all-source assessment and coordination for foreign intelligence.<sup>26</sup> This enabled the Australian intelligence community to organize inter-governmental information sharing and improve the quality of their reports to the prime minister.<sup>27</sup> This structural reform coincided with the abolition of the White Australia policy and the expansion of immigration to Australia. Australia also started noticing shifts in the international power structure, as the Yom Kippur War and Iranian Revolution sent oil

prices soaring, as well as the Sino-Soviet Split and the end of the Cultural Revolution allowing China to enter the world stage as a major trading partner and military power. It can be assumed that the volatile international climate as well as domestic risks coming from immigration pushed the Australian government to step up its intelligence efforts. In addition to the coordination scheme, the Intelligence Services Act 2001 established the Australian parliament created Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) to review the administration and expenditure of intelligence agencies and make recommendations to the relevant ministries, while the original variation of the PJCI was established in August 1988. Although most democratic countries with intelligence agencies have similar parliamentary oversight systems, the feature of PJCIS is that it is strongly linked with legislation making. This way, intelligence agencies have a formalized channel to take initiatives in formulating policy, which some scholars point out is a monopoly on intelligence relevant legislation.<sup>28</sup>

Australia published its first National Security Strategy document in January 2013 titled "Strong and Secure: A Strategy for Australia's National Security."

<sup>29</sup> It projects the government's view on what Australia should prioritize in its national security and how they think they can address the issue through policy action. The 2013 NSS document defines Australia's key national security risks as including espionage and foreign interference, instability in developing countries, malicious cyber activity, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, terrorism and violent extremism, among other factors.<sup>30</sup> These areas are not limited to the so-called traditional security agendas and also includes economic aspects. The feature of the Australian way of putting the economy in this context is to ensure the integrity and wellbeing of its domestic economy. They also conveyed that this can be achieved through domestic and international policy as well as by good

<sup>23</sup> "National Intelligence Community Agencies," Office of National Intelligence, accessed April 19, 2024, <https://www.oni.gov.au/national-intelligence-community/about-the-NIC/agencies>

<sup>24</sup> Andrew, Christopher. "The growth of the Australian intelligence community and the Anglo-American connection." *Intelligence and National Security* 4, no. 2 (1989): 213-256.

<sup>25</sup> Brunatti, Andrew D. "The Architecture of Community: Intelligence Community Management in Australia, Canada and New Zealand." *Public Policy and Administration* 28, no. 2 (April 1, 2013): 119-43. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0952076712458110>.

<sup>26</sup> "History," The Office of National Assessment, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.oni.gov.au/history>

<sup>27</sup> Walsh, Patrick F. "Transforming the Australian intelligence community: mapping change, impact and challenges." *Intelligence and National Security* 36, no. 2 (2021): 243-259.

<sup>28</sup> Carne, Greg. "Sharpening the Learning Curve: Lessons from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Joint Committee of Intelligence and Security Review Experience of Five Important Aspects of Terrorism Laws." *University of Western Australia Law Review* 41, no. 1 (Dec. 24, 2020): 1-47. <https://doi.org/10.3316/ielapa.221967344634399>.

<sup>29</sup> "Strong and Secure: A Strategy for Australia's National Security," Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2013-01/apo-nid33996.pdf>.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

governance and social cohesion.<sup>31</sup> Thus we can see that the Australian definition of national security is broad and evolving.

In the NSS document, there are several mentions of intelligence agencies. In the context of counterterrorism, it mentions that intelligence agencies and other relevant organizations help in pursuing the policy objective. Furthermore, the cooperation between national security agencies and non-national security agencies, such as the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism, or the Department of Health and Ageing is also mentioned. The 2014 NSS did acknowledge that these ministries are tasked with different policy aspects, yet it did highlight their combined effort in enhancing national security.<sup>32</sup> While this sounds natural, the formation of such strategic policy documents usually requires each ministry to examine the choice of words and phrases to match their reality and what they wish for the audience's interpretations to be. Thus, we can say that at least these ministries both share the awareness to act in a united way with the security agencies, while there may be more ministries that are unwilling to be listed together with them. This way, we can see that the Australian national security policymaking and implementation strategy is broadly shared and coordinated among different sections of the government.

## 5. Strategic culture: Japan

Much study on Japanese security policy follows Japan's antimilitarist culture as their research subject. As discussed above, strategic culture can be formed through historical experiences. This section argues that the core of the postwar Japanese strategic culture can be summarized as a national security idea with a narrow focus on hard power with deficiencies in the economics spectrum. This will be discussed separately from both a security and economic policy perspective.

## Security policy perspective

Tomas Berger argues that the origin of Japan's antimilitarism as its defeat in World War 2 and argues that such Japanese antimilitarism culture is sustained by the US security guarantee and other international factors.<sup>33</sup> Scholars argue that this pacifism is not only the product of the historical experience and external environment but as time passes, Japanese people themselves have begun to embrace such pacifism as part of their national identity as a result of education and media focus.<sup>34</sup> In a sense, this could be understood as the American occupation policy's success beyond its initial aim to instill hatred in the Japanese people against military adventurism.<sup>35</sup> Another scholar shares a similar view on the roots of Japanese antimilitarist attitudes. Lawrence Beer interprets Japan's widespread adoption of pacifism as a reaction to a historic national tragedy.<sup>36</sup> Whichever interpretations, these analyses altogether give the impression that the defeat in WW2 created the foundation of Japan's long standing strategic culture.

Putting aside the origins of such antimilitarist culture, it is generally argued that the postwar Japanese security culture of antimilitarism has affected the way in which Japan defines security interests.<sup>37</sup> Past prime ministers have adopted this policy and tried to minimize military commitments and expenditure after the war. Nakanishi (2005) argues that it was Yoshida Shigeru, the third postwar prime minister who served as both prime minister and foreign minister, who established the basic framework of Japan's postwar diplomacy.<sup>38</sup> Yoshida's approach can be summarized as putting aside, but not abandoning entirely, the rebuilding of Japanese military power in favor of economic reconstruction, which was carried out under the security umbrella of its ally the US.<sup>39</sup> This approach was later coined the Yoshida Doctrine by Nagai in 1985.<sup>40</sup> In July 1950, soon after the outbreak of the Korean War, the National Police Reserve (NPR), a lightly armed

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas, U. Berger, "From sword to chrysanthemum: Japan's culture of anti-militarism." *International Security* 17, no. 4 (1993): 119-150.

<sup>34</sup> Fisher, Robert A. "The Erosion of Japanese Pacifism: The Constitutionality of the 1997 US-Japan Defense Guidelines." *Cornell International Law Journal* 32 (1999): 393.

<sup>35</sup> Middlebrooks Jr, William C. *Beyond Pacifism: Why Japan Must Become a Normal Nation*, (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008).

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence E. Beer, "Peace in Theory and Practice Under Article 9 of Japan's Constitution," *Marquette Law Review*, Vol. 81, Issue 3 (Spring 1998), pp. 815-830.

<sup>37</sup> Akitoshi, Miyashita, "Where Do Norms Come From? Foundation of Japan's Postwar Pacifism," In *Norms, Interests, and Power in Japanese Foreign Policy*, edited by Yoichiro Sato and Keiko Hirata, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), pp.21-46.

<sup>38</sup> Hiroshi, Nakanishi, "Haisen Koku no Gaikou Senryaku (Strategy of a Defeated Nation)," In *Nichibei Senryaku Shisou Shi (History of U.S.-Japan Strategic Thought)* edited by Tomoyuki Ishizu and Murray, Williamson, (Tokyo: Seiryu Sha, 2005)

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Sneider, "Evolution or New Doctrine? Japanese New Security Policy in the Era of Collective Self-Defence," In *Japan's Foreign Relations in Asia*, edited by James, D. J. Brown, and Jef Kingston, pp. 35-48, (London: Routledge, 2017)

<sup>40</sup> Yonosuke, Nagai, *Gendai to Senryaku*, (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 1985).

ostensive national police force, was established to supplement the vacuum of internal security provided with the US army in Japan.<sup>41</sup> NPR later became the Japan Ground Self-Defense Force in 1954. While Yoshida agreed to the establishment of NPR, he was reluctant about the proposed figure for the rearmament by the US, leading to prioritizing economy over rearmament.<sup>42</sup> This basic policy later became Japan's core and basic foreign policy framework with all of his successors following his approach. This strategy continued through the Cold War. The reason for its longevity can be reasonably explained by Cold War events. One factor is the balance of power based on mutual nuclear deterrence between the United States and the Soviet Union. While the power balance shifted through the years due to the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Sino-Soviet split, the Vietnam War, and the Afghan War, the US generally held the advantage in both the technological and tactical field. This put less pressure on the Japan Self-Defense Force (JSDF) to expand its capabilities in the Cold War era than its strategic environment should have required, but requiring enough presence to deter the Soviet Union that Japan was exempt from participating in other theaters such as the Vietnam War, which enabled Japan to invest more of its resources and manpower into industry and production, becoming the second largest economy in as early as 1968.

Turning our eyes to intelligence agencies, it took a different path from JSDF, which has faced significant constraints by article 9 of the constitution, but similar in the sense that both had to deal with institutionalized pacifism. The General Headquarters of the Supreme Commander for the Allied Powers (GHQ) deconstructed the Japanese intelligence community composed of the Imperial Japanese Army, the Imperial Japanese Navy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), and the Home Ministry.<sup>43</sup> Although the Home Ministry was dismantled, it had in its place the Public Security Intelligence Agency (PSIA) and the Public Security Police established to monitor the communist forces and right-wing extremists in the country, which helped preserve its organizational culture. In this way, the postwar intelligence community in Japan was built mainly by bureaucrats

handling internal affairs and the police. Having experienced multiple terrorist attacks between 1960 and 1980, Japanese counterterrorism capability was built up. For instance, in 1952 the PISA was established chiefly to counter international terrorism with a mandate of the Subversive Activities Prevention Act. In 1992 after the Tokyo sarin attack by Aum Shinrikyo, the Act on the Control of Organizations reinforced PSIA's original mandate. Japan's internal security agencies center on counterterrorism and other tangible violence. While strengthening the authority's intervening power can cause controversy in Japan, these organizations developed a strong need for domestic security against terrorism.<sup>44</sup> However, these organizations, while active in the implementation role, could not gain a definitive status on the national security strategy making process itself. While they are indeed members of the National Security Council and Intelligence Community, their opinions on international structural changes were not prioritized, especially in relation to Chinese economic statecraft. This relatively marginalized role in national strategy making is in part relevant to the absence of a strong central intelligence agency, such as the US's Office of the Director of National Intelligence (ODNI), which integrates the intelligence collected from different agencies for better strategy and decision making. Japan does have an organization with a similar expected role, the Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office, but its legal status is a far cry from ODNI and cannot overcome the sectionalism in the Japanese intelligence community, which comprises of the Ministry of Defence (MOD), MOFA, the National Police Agency (NPA), PISA, and Cabinet Intelligence and Research Office (CIRO). Also, the underdeveloped and domestic-focused intelligence mandate can also be attributed to their subordination to Washington. In addition to the lack of a strong central intelligence organization, Japanese intelligence agencies have engaged in harsh and sometimes petty jurisdictional competition, captive in silos inhibiting coordination.<sup>45</sup> Samuels (2019) argues that during the occupation and even after Japan regained its sovereignty, its intelligence function did not develop comprehensively, and the larger strategic landscape and changes were

<sup>41</sup> Kazumi, Kuzuhara, "The Korean War and the National Police Reserve of Japan: Impact of the US Army's Far East Command on Japan's Defence Capability," [https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin\\_e2006\\_5\\_Kuzuhara.pdf](https://www.nids.mod.go.jp/english/publication/kiyo/pdf/bulletin_e2006_5_Kuzuhara.pdf)

<sup>42</sup> Makoto, Iokibe, *Sengo Nihon Gaikoushi (The Diplomatic History of Postwar Japan)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., Tokyo: Yuhikaku, 2014), p. 73.

<sup>43</sup> Ken, Kotani, *Nihon Intelligence Shi (The History of Japanese Intelligence)*, (Tokyo: Chuuou Kouron Shinsha, 2022)

<sup>44</sup> Peter, J. Katzenstein, *The Culture of National Security*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

<sup>45</sup> Richard, J. Samuels, *Special Duty: A History of the Japanese Intelligence Community*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2019).

monitored and shaped by its ally. This situation persisted to this day.<sup>46</sup> As a result, the intelligence agency's opinions are not well connected to or accepted by the policy side.

### Economic policy perspective

Postwar Japan during the late 1940s and '50s had enough time for American influence to reflect on its pre-war foreign policy failures, when memories of how imperialism and expansionism and lack of resources within Japanese territories led to tensions with the US were still fresh. The ensuing economic sanctions that pushed the Japanese government to choose either relinquishing its hard-earned territories in China or declare war on the US, eventually led not just to the loss of its territories in China anyway, but also an enormous amount of men, material, sovereign wealth, national trust, and sovereignty itself. After the war, this lesson was reflected in the establishment of the Ministry of International Trade and Industry (MITI) in 1949, which was modified from the Ministry of Commerce and Industry, but also crucially, incorporated responsibilities on international trade that were previously under the MOFA. This way the MITI (reorganized into the current METI in 2001) was able to act independently, on economic policy, of security ministries such as the Cabinet Office, MOFA, and MOD, the latter not even becoming a full ministry until 2007. METI even has its own seat in the APEC, where while all other countries have single representatives, Japan's delegation is represented by both MOFA and METI. In relation to China and Japan's insistence on focusing on economic gains versus economic security, we can refer to Japan's 1980s trauma of trade frictions and sanctions with the US as a reason. In the early 1980s, Japan's economic boom had come under pressure from various American attempts at curbing Japanese influence, which culminated in the Plaza Agreement in 1985. This resulted in a recession which saw a brief bounce back with the Bubble economy which ultimately crashed in 1991. The lesson many Japanese bureaucrats learned from this was that it was not worthwhile antagonizing an economic superpower and that Japan must keep good business relations with such powers at all costs. This lesson

was applied to the rising Chinese market throughout the 2000s up to the emergence of the second Abe administration in 2012.

The growth of the Japanese economy as well as the end of the Cold War created a stark and disproportionate contrast between small security roles and big economic scale in the international arena, which has drawn scholarly attention.<sup>47</sup> While the Yoshida doctrine is widely regarded to have come to an end in the 1990s, the bureaucratic structure rebuilt after the war remained largely unchanged as long as internal security authorities were concerned. For instance, the MOD was not an independent ministry until 2007, before that it was subject to the Cabinet Office. Another is the marginalization of security agencies. Due to the segmented structure, Japan's intelligence capability has often been evaluated as ineffective. While some past governments did try to enhance their intelligence capabilities, an organizational level improvement never materialized. This is in large part due to the fact that the government is concerned about the reactions of the citizens. Pre-war intelligence agencies were notorious for their ruthlessness and disregard of the human rights of its citizens and their inhumane operations still linger in the public mindset.

This ultimately leads to the Japanese bureaucratic feature of Postwar Japanese strategic culture. Japan's postwar defense policy has a stark division between economic ministries and security authorities. They have little confluence in terms of FDI regulations except only with a division dealing with export control in METI<sup>48</sup>, despite the FEFTA specifying inter-ministerial cooperation. While the Japanese government did try to incorporate the economic dependency on raw materials and energy into the security agenda by publishing the comprehensive security strategy under the Ohira administration in 1980, they did not touch on the security risks of the FDI coming into Japan. In that strategy, economic national security was to be secured through "(1) self-reliant efforts, (2) efforts to turn the overall international environment into a favorable one, and (3) efforts to turn the overall international environment within a limited scope."<sup>49</sup> The document's mindset on economic security is, except

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Yohiki, Kobayashi, "The Intelligence Community in Japan: Small Intelligence of Economic Superpower - Reform in Progress," In *Intelligence Communities and Cultures in Asia and the Middle East: A Comprehensive Reference*, edited by Bob de Graaff, pp.149-162. (Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2020)

<sup>48</sup> Nobukatsu, Kanehara, *Kokka Anzen Hoshou Senryaku (National Security Strategy)*, (Tokyo: Nikkei Business Publications, 2021)

<sup>49</sup> "Report on Comprehensive National Security," July 2 198, accessed March 30 2024, <https://worldjpn.net/documents/texts/JPSC/19800702.O1E.html>

for (3), foreign policy and not domestic policy. This reflects Japan's long tradition on the way they see natural resources and raw materials as part of its national security policy, which is based on its foreign policy. It also reflects the era when the US and other democratic countries were major investors in Japan, whereas it is not the case today. China's weaponization of economic dependency is something that Japan just did not face in the era.

## 6. Projection to FDI regulation making

Next, we will examine how these different strategic cultures are projected onto FDI restriction-making, through researching the background of thoughts by policy elites and organizations represented in parliamentary discussions, white papers, memoirs, and other public materials. One caveat is that, due to the nebulous nature of strategic culture, it is not easy to assess how much culture can be deduced from any particular government policy or behavior. It is true that government papers or official statements can express a country's strategic culture as such speech acts represent their beliefs.<sup>50</sup> However, those materials still need to be triangulated by other sources such as testimonies, news articles, and behavior of policy elites.<sup>51</sup> To this end, this research relies on official documents available on the internet, information disclosure requests to the government, as well as memoirs of retired officials.

### 6.1 Australia's FDI Regulation in 2018-2020

Australian FDI regulation policy has much to do with its over-dependence on the Chinese economy. China's massive FDI inflow into Australia began in 2008 and at that time such investment was focused on the energy and mining sectors, resulting in increased production capacity in those industries.<sup>52</sup> Australia benefited from its energy export to China and the impact of the 2008 global financial crisis was limited partly because of this.<sup>53</sup> After 2013, Chinese investment shifted into other sectors, particularly

towards large-scale real estate and infrastructure projects, and a shift away from state-owned (or partly state-owned) corporations towards the private sector.<sup>54</sup> The connections between Chinese companies and the Chinese Communist Party sometimes caused discussion on potential security risks, as exemplified by banning Huawei's entry into the 5G network in 2012<sup>55</sup> and discussions on restricting Landbridge's proposed deal for the 99-year lease of Port Darwin with the Northern Territories in 2015, which is still pending. Still, in the initial stages, Australia welcomed Chinese investments and the views seeing Chinese investments as economic statecraft or a way to influence Australia were not dominant. In fact, these two countries agreed on a free trade agreement called ChAFTA in 2015. Yet, the government took a policy U-turn from its honeymoon period in 2018. The Australian government introduced the SOCI Act in 2018 and tightened the existing Foreign Acquisitions and Takeovers Act in 2020. While the official website does not specify whether its main target is China or not, this section focuses on the Sino-Australian relations context as Chinese influence was often mentioned in the parliamentary discussions. These legislations were in sequence with the key discussions on Australian intelligence reform and the introduction of the National Security Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Act 2018 (EFI Act, which criminalizes foreign interference and strengthens the Australian government's ability to successfully prosecute acts of espionage. From this fact, this section explores how ties between intelligence officials and the political elite enabled the drastic policy change.

Scholars point out that the driving force was intelligence agencies with support from then PM Turnbull.<sup>56</sup> A close examination of ASIO's annual report and Turnbull's memoir affirm this point. In addition, the 2014 NSS shows that the Australian government was keen on the policy issues relevant to FDI regulation. For instance, protecting intellectual

<sup>50</sup> Eidenfalk, Joakim, and Fredrik, Doerer. "Integrating Strategic Culture and the Operational Code in Foreign Policy Analysis." *Foreign Policy Analysis* 19, no. 1 (2023), 1-20.

<sup>51</sup> Hirotaka, Watanabe, "Anzen Hoshou · Senryaku Bunka no Hikaku Kenkyuu (Comparative Study of Security and Strategic Culture)," *International Politics*, No.167 (2012), 1-13.

<sup>52</sup> "Demystifying Chinese Investment in Australia," 20<sup>th</sup> edition, The University of Sydney and KPMG, April 2024, accessed April 29, 2024, <https://assets.kpmg.com/content/dam/kpmg/au/pdf/2024/demystifying-chinese-investment-in-australia-april-2024.pdf>

<sup>53</sup> Reserve Bank of Australia, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.rba.gov.au/education/resources/explainers/the-global-financial-crisis.html>

<sup>54</sup> Reserve Bank of Australia, accessed March 20, 2024, <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/smp/2017/nov/box-b-chinese-direct-investment-in-australia.html>

<sup>55</sup> Colin Packham, "Australia prepares to ban Huawei from 5G project over security fears," Reuters, July 11, 2018, <https://jp.reuters.com/article/us-australia-china-huawei-tech-idUSKBN1K1110/>

<sup>56</sup> Chubb, Andrew. "The Securitization of 'Chinese Influence' in Australia." *Journal of Contemporary China* 32, no. 139 (January 2, 2023): 17-34. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2022.2052437>.

property and securing information technologies are listed as national security objectives. These counter-intelligence roles are primarily handled by ASIO. ASIO kept warning political leaders of China's infiltration, although such warnings had had less impact until the Dastyari scandal in 2016.<sup>57</sup> In response to the scandal, the Turnbull government introduced the EFI together with the SOCI. In his speech introducing this former bill in the parliament, he cited ASIO's report that:

The harm caused by hostile intelligence activity can undermine Australia's national security and sovereignty. It can damage Australia's international reputation and degrade our diplomatic and trade relations, inflict economic damage, degrade or compromise nationally vital assets and critical infrastructure, and threaten the safety of Australians.<sup>58</sup>

At first, his remark could be interpreted as suggesting that ASIO raised its security level evaluation in response to the scandal. However, close examination reveals that this phrase is used in ASIO's annual report every year at least since the 2015-2016 report.<sup>59</sup> Thus, the cited expression in Turnbull's remark alone does not necessarily indicate an increase in awareness against China's influence. Instead, it suggests that by 2017, the subjective perception of the Australian government towards Chinese influence had become more serious than ever before. In his speech, Turnbull said:

When I initiated a report into this in August last year, through my department, the Australian Security Intelligence Organization had made significant investigative breakthroughs and delivered a series of very grave warnings.<sup>60</sup>

There is one case, which shows how Turnbull recognized the importance of intelligence in national security policymaking. The Australian intelligence reform was conducted in 2017 under the Turnbull administration and thus is a good example for assessing his dedication to the intelligence reform. There are several other sources to observe this. For instance, he recalls in his memoir that such intelligence reform was necessary to tackle the

changing security environment that Australia faced and thus he ordered its completion.<sup>61</sup> While his account is useful, it needs to be assessed from another perspective for a fairer evaluation. This can be achieved by looking at the remarks of an executive of the Australian intelligence agencies. A former member of the PJCIS commented in 2017 that the discussion for the current Australian intelligence reform had been around years before, and it was Turnbull's choice to materialize it that made this policy change when it did.<sup>62</sup> From this remark, the importance of political conditions to actualize certain security policies can be seen.

## 6.2 Japan's FDI regulation in 2019

MOF and METI revised the FEFTA in 2019, which lowered the threshold of FDI projects that are required to register with the Japanese government to 1 percent as well as exemptions that no access to sensitive information should be given to the investing party. The revision aims at balancing both national security concerns and encouraging inbound FDI. However, although it tightened the regulations in 2019, its effectiveness through implementation is still questionable. In fact, in 2021, shares of up to 3.65% of the Japanese mega tech company Rakuten were allowed to be bought by Chinese internet giant Tencent. This raised serious concerns not just from the Japanese government but also the US side which did not want Rakuten's US customer information to be shared with Tencent. In response to this, the two governments announced they would continue to oversee but not interfere in Rakuten's operation.

This buyout was made possible through the use of an exception clause which states that if the proposed buyout doesn't have access to sensitive information, it will be exempted from the national security assessment. Protecting sensitive information from cross-border M&A is definitely an important criterion for national security assessment, but it does not mean that other information is out of the scope of national security. For instance, customer information obtained through credit cards can be used for intelligence analysis to locate and identify a target's

<sup>57</sup> Hamilton, Clive. *Silent invasion: China's influence in Australia*, (Melbourne: Hardie Grant Publishing, 2018).

<sup>58</sup> "Speech introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill 2017," Dec. 7, 2017, <https://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/speech-introducing-the-national-security-legislation-amendment-espionage-an>

<sup>59</sup> "ASIO Annual Report 2015-16," accessed April 20, 2024, <https://www.asio.gov.au/sites/default/files/2016%20ASIO%20Annual%20Report%20UNCLASSIFIED.pdf>, p.23

<sup>60</sup> "Speech introducing the National Security Legislation Amendment (Espionage and Foreign Interference) Bill," Dec. 7, 2017. <https://pmtranscripts.pmc.gov.au/release/transcript-41372>

<sup>61</sup> Malcolm, Turnbull, (2021) "A Bigger Picture."

<sup>62</sup> Report of the Board of Oversight and Review of Specially Designated Secret, 2017, viewed May 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2024.

behavior.<sup>63</sup> An internet retail company can technically monitor any individual customer's IP address, access location and time, bank details, transactions, preferences and other information. As articulated above, strategic culture defines what matters to national security. In the case of Japan, it overlooked the security implications of ostensibly non-sensitive information and didn't attach security implications to such data. While not entirely avoidable through intelligence gathering activities, the dangers could have been highlighted in advance through better understanding of economic espionage as well as better communication with the US side. This is often criticized as the failure of Japanese intelligence through its lack of culture to utilize intelligence from various economic sources as well as its inability to influence policy.<sup>64</sup> Thus, this distinct bureaucratic structure and strategic culture can contribute to its laxer implementation. The 2019 OECD report also points out that technological developments and digitalization have turned personal data into potentially sensitive information valuable for national security interest purposes.<sup>65</sup> Citing this report, the MOF mentioned this point in their document used to explain the outline of the revision of the legislation to its directors, where they introduced a new clause for personal information protection. However, at the implementation level, they did not pursue cases to the legislation's limits, as exemplified by Rakuten case. This practice could be a result of path dependency of assessment practices with a mindset less focused on intelligence.

Looking deeper into the intelligence side, during the 2010s, some retired senior intelligence officials were not content with the speed at which the Japanese government moved to FDI restrictions as well as the current regulatory system. Shigeru Kitamura, former Director of Cabinet Intelligence as well as former Secretary General of the National Security Secretariat (Defacto National Security Advisor) recalls that in the early 2010s, awareness against Chinese economic statecraft was generally shared with Japan and Five Eyes members, but not with European countries, citing a Japanese telecom giant Soft Bank's proposed

buyout of a US telecom giant Sprint Nextel.<sup>66</sup> In this buyout, the Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States (CFIUS) raised concerns that SoftBank used devices procured from Huawei which may have information security risks. This deal was ultimately closed on the condition that SoftBank did not use Huawei devices as well as that US agencies would have the right to review and approve certain network equipment vendors and managed services providers of Sprint.<sup>67</sup> Kitamura also highlights the difficulties of explaining the national security risks to those who do not see it. He attributes this to the inherent difficulty of providing any tangible or concrete evidence for potential risks. While he supposedly pushed hard in trying to persuade his German counterparts on the risks Chinese devices had, the risks seem to be understood only after his retirement. This difficulty of risk communication is also applicable in the domestic arena, where he mentions the importance of politicians' determination to tackle this issue.

The bar for this to happen could be high. Firstly, because economic ministries do not share the same security awareness as security authorities. Kanehara, a former Deputy Director of NSS wrote that economic ministries seem to have lacked national security mindsets due to Japan's long-standing policy separation between economy and security.<sup>68</sup> It may also be the case that while security related agencies handle top-secret and secret information on a daily basis, the lack of such daily reminders of security in economic agencies are a contributing factor. Kanehara also touches on the Export Control Division at METI as an exception. Yet, MOF, another economic ministry, could have a less security mindset than METI as its security-relevant divisions were put out as the Financial Services Agency in 2000, which oversees money laundering and illegal money transfers. Secondly, the domestic bureaucracy operates with organizational inertia and without clear and obvious circumstantial change, their operation often remains unchanged. Kitamura recalls that it took as long as ten years before the Japanese government finally tackled this problem in a

<sup>63</sup> Tadayoshi Shigeta and Michio Ezaki "Shiginto, Saikyoku no Intelligence (SIGINT The Most Powerful Intelligence)," (Tokyo: Wani Books, 2024).

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> OECD, "Acquisition and Ownership Related Policies to Safeguard Essential Security Interests: New Policies to Manage New Threats," March 12, 2019, accessed March 18, 2024, <https://web-archiver.oecd.org/2019-04-10/506410-Current-and-emerging-trends-2019.pdf>, p.4

<sup>66</sup> Shigeru Kitamura, Gaiji Keisatsu Hiroku (Secret Notes of the Police Foreign Division), (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2023).

<sup>67</sup> Adam Jeffery, Sprint, SoftBank Reach Deal With US Over Security Concerns, CNBC, May 29, 2013, Accessed April 28, 2024, <https://www.cnbc.com/amp/2013/05/29/sprint-softbank-reach-deal-with-us-over-security-concerns.html>; "Softbank-Sprint Deal Clears CFIUS Review, Leaving FCC as Last Major Regulatory Hurdle," May 30, 2013, Bloomberg Law, accessed April 28, 2024, <https://news.bloomberglaw.com/tech-and-telecom-law/softbank-sprint-deal-clears-cfius-review-leaving-fcc-as-last-major-regulatory-hurdle>

<sup>68</sup> Nobukatsu, Kanehara, Kokka Anzen Hoshou Senryaku (National Security Strategy), (Tokyo: Nikkei Business Publications, 2021).

government-wide manner, though it needs further improvements.

Despite the efforts on the intelligence side, the MOF side's attitude to FDI regulation has been underwhelming. Consequently, it failed to recognize the threat of cross-border mergers and acquisitions from China. MOF's role is particularly important as it is the ministry responsible for the FDI regulation act and the act cannot be revised without its initiative. From the official documents used to explain the senior MOF officials, the mention of the increasingly severe national security environment was mentioned less prominently. The FEFTA is under MOF, and the assessment committee all consist of civilians. This is in direct contrast with that of Australia. The composition represents Japan's underdeveloped understanding of the connection between FDI and national security. Furthermore, several former intelligence officials mentioned that Japan lacks the culture to utilize intelligence resources.<sup>69</sup> This culture can also be observed in the member selection of the committee. Members of the Japanese foreign investment review board all consist of individuals outside of the government, without a single person with any intelligence background. This is a stark contrast with that in Australia, where a former intelligence official was appointed as a member. It might be the case that the national security assessment is done at intra ministerial level. Kanehara points out that there is little cooperation between economic and security agencies in terms of economic security strategy.<sup>70</sup> The 2019 revision of the FEFTA did stipulate a clause to encourage information exchange for national security assessments both within the government and foreign governments. Still, if this is the case, the efficacy of information cooperation is suspicious without a more detailed standard operation procedure, which could not be publicly accessible. Furthermore, raising the bar of FDI regulation is at odds with MOF's general investment policy. Since 2003 under the Koizumi administration, the Japanese government has adopted an "Invest Japan" policy to promote FDI inflow in Japan. This aims at getting out of long-lasting deflation, while it is hard to say it was successful so far. While investments obliged to security assessment is only a part of it, simply raising

the bar negatively signals industrial groups. MOF could be concerned with this and introduced the exceptions in the 2019 revision.

## 7. Discussion

The empirical section touched on how different strategic culture affects FDI policymaking and discussions surrounding it. In Australia, two features were observed: higher trust in the intelligence side from a wider policymaking community and parliamentary backup for policymaking agendas. In Japan, unlike Australia, intelligence agencies play a smaller role in FDI policymaking and the sectionalism among ministries has been a hurdle for intelligence agencies to play a united role in FDI policymaking. The degree of trust among the government in the intelligence side is in sharp contrast between these two countries. This could be attributed to the respective strategic culture and its structural underpinnings. In Japan, due to the embedded pacifism, the intelligence role has been concentrated on counterterrorism. In addition, it relied on the US for the external threat assessment. Japanese intelligence could have done such an assessment on its own, but the intelligence agencies have less impact on policymaking except for counterterrorism. As for Australia, it does not have the embedded pacifism as Japan and has fewer constraints on the intelligence role. Furthermore, the intelligence's role is well recognized in its national security policy as exemplified in the 2014 NSS document. In addition, ASIO is expected to give security briefings to both the ruling and opposition parties, which could make the consensus building on the political side easier. Japanese internal intelligence agencies, NPA and PSIA, are not specified or required to do so at a legal level. Furthermore, the sectionalism in the Japanese government was also a huge hurdle to consensus building on the importance of tighter FDI regulation. One event that shows this is Japan's failed attempt to create an open-source portal in the intelligence community. Kanehara recalls that when he was the Deputy Director of CIRO in 2012, there was an attempt inside the CIRO to create an open-source portal which collects information gathered by other intelligence agencies, NPA, PSIA, MOFA, and MOD. However, he

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<sup>69</sup> Nobukatsu, Kanehara, *Kokka Anzen Hoshou Senryaku (National Security Strategy)*, (Tokyo: Nikkei Business Publications, 2021); Tadayoshi Shigeta and Michio Ezaki, *Shiginto, Saikyou no Intelligence (SIGINT The Most Powerful Intelligence)*, (Tokyo: Wani Books, 2024); Yoshio Omori, *Nihon no Intelligence Kikan (Intelligence Agencies in Japan)*, (Tokyo: Bungei Shunju, 2005).

<sup>70</sup> Nobukatsu, Kanehara, *Kokka Anzen Hoshou Senryaku (National Security Strategy)*

encountered a strong opposition, and it did not materialize.<sup>71</sup> On the other hand, the Australian intelligence community has one. The Office of National Intelligence, the successor of ONA, has such an information-sharing portal called Open Source Portal. This could signify how much the intelligence agencies are open to cooperation with each other.

Another point is why this unsatisfactory cooperation has persisted in Japan. While Japan's bitter pre-war experience and the domestic political structure played a major role in creating hesitation in connecting economic policy and security agendas, these two cannot be sufficient to explain why such a tradition has not changed for over 70 years. With the national security reform in 2014 under the second Abe administration, such a culture could change, or may already be in transition. There should be more to the reason why it has persisted. A possible background is Japan's public opinion mindset. Public opinion seems to be left unchanged and still eyeing intelligence agencies as inherently evil, possibly influenced by postwar US propaganda about the Japanese Army's conspiracies in Manchuria. For instance, the poll shows that the public tolerance of intervention by a state power is significantly lower in Japan than in Western industrialized countries.<sup>72</sup> Another background lies in the politicians' mindsets. Politicians as well have had dubious eyes on intelligence agencies. For instance, Katsuei Hirasawa, a former member of LDP as well as a NPA official, questioned an Australian counterpart about what kind of legal action could PJCIS take if intelligence agencies hid the documents which the parliament ordered them to submit for committee discussion.<sup>73</sup> The wording "hide" he used demonstrates he sees intelligence agencies could possibly be uncooperative with parliament. In contrast, the Australian counterpart answered that they are on good terms with intelligence agencies consulting with parliament, thus they are not likely to do that. While it is questionable to what extent the Australian counterpart's remark reflects reality, it is still reasonable to regard neutral for its attitudes toward intelligence agencies. Foreign counterparts are not intimate people to discuss intelligence secrets with each other, and the fact that the Japanese politician of the ruling party asked the question to its Australian

counterpart exemplifies how much intelligence agencies lack trust from politicians.

## 8. Conclusion

This paper compared Australian and Japanese strategic cultures and how they are projected on their respective state's FDI regulation making. It made two contributions. The study first attempted to incorporate FDI regulations into national security strategy and treated it as a research object for strategic culture framework. This will clarify in what sense economic security policy can be treated as a national strategy in a broad sense. As for the case study of Australia and Japan, this paper found a feature that makes each country's FDI regulation making process divergent. Each country's strategic culture was projected onto how foreign ownership of certain industries or companies can become national security concerns. The difference in their attitudes derives from what is considered national security in the policymaking community. This is in part shaped by the bureaucratic structure. The different strengths of intelligence role in such a policy community resulted in the divergent FDI regulations on national security assessments.

Despite the above contributions, this research entails several limitations. Firstly, from the methodological perspective, the limited information available due to the nature of intelligence organizations cannot be ignored. While this paper gathers information from various secondary sources, the true motivation for the change in attitude towards FDI is difficult to discern without conducting direct interviews. This will be done in future works. Secondly, while it is meaningful to examine strategic culture and the way it influences FDI policymaking, it should be noted that strategic culture is not static but rather dynamic. In the case of Japan, the Kishida administration has shown an unprecedented willingness to enact economic security legislation from 2020 onwards. The question remains whether this can be considered as a change in Japan's strategic culture in the policy field between economy and security or as a unique feature of the administration. This ultimately decides whether or not the Japanese conception on security expanded as much as that of Australia. To do this

<sup>71</sup> "Nihon no Intelligence ha Beikoku no Shuukai Okure (Japan's Intelligence is One Lap Behind the US)," *Mainichi Shimbun*, Jan. 13, 2022, accessed June 18, 2024, <https://mainichi.jp/articles/20220112/k00/00m/010/123000c>

<sup>72</sup> World Values Survey Wave 7: 2017-2022, Q45.- Future changes: Greater respect for authority, accessed May 15, 2024, <https://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/WVSONline.jsp>.

<sup>73</sup> Report of the Board of Oversight and Review of Specially Designated Secret, 2017, viewed May 22, 2024.

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requires paying attention in a long span and future work will address this point.



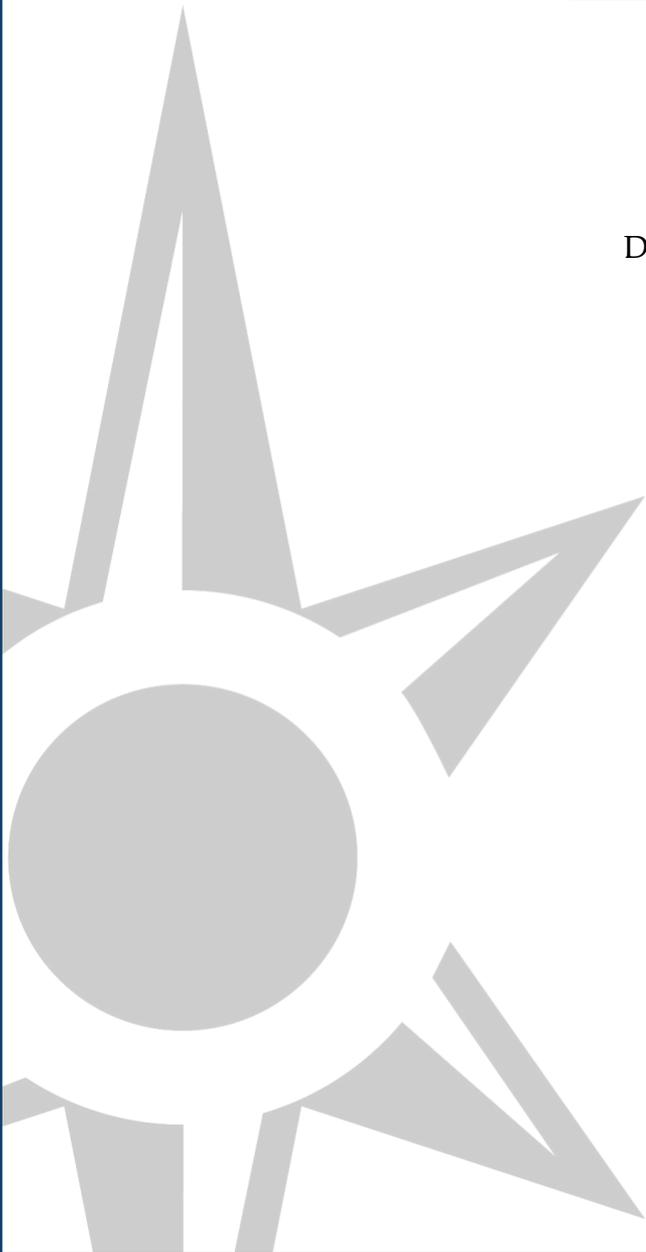
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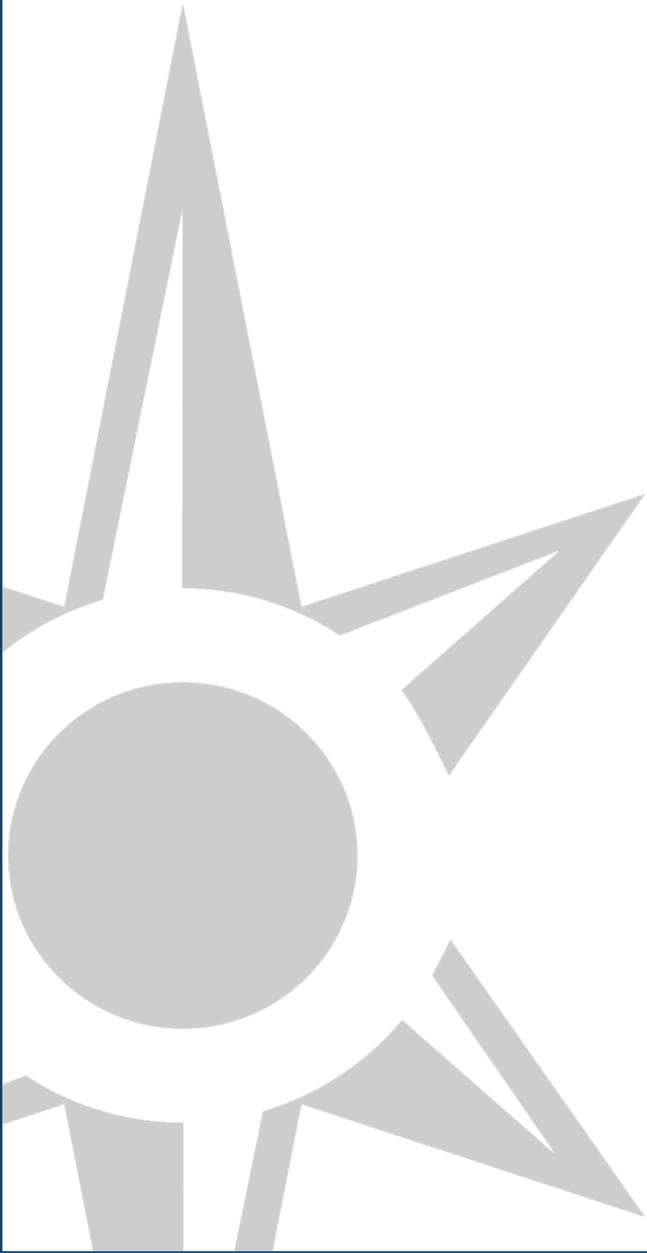
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# A Study on Nuclear Strategies in the Kim Jong Un Era

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By  
Daeun Choi





# Executive Summary

*Daeun Choi*

North Korea's nuclear strategy has evolved significantly under Kim Jong Un's leadership, reflecting a transition towards a more assertive and preemptive stance. This paper explores the rationale behind North Korea's nuclear weapons program and its transformation across three generations of leadership: Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, and Kim Jong Un. While earlier strategies emphasized regime survival through nuclear deterrence and negotiation leverage, Kim Jong Un's approach includes internal consolidation of power and constitutionalization of nuclear weapons policy. Key findings highlight that North Korea's shift from strategic to tactical nuclear weapons, targeting South Korea rather than the United States, represents a recalibration of its nuclear posture. This is driven by perceived technological limitations, economic constraints, and the desire to leverage nuclear threats for regional and international recognition. The policy implications are profound. South Korea and the United States must reassess their approaches to deterrence and dialogue, balancing military preparedness with opportunities for engagement. Addressing North Korea's economic challenges and offering pathways for regional cooperation could serve as entry points for reducing tensions. By constitutionalizing its nuclear policy, North Korea has institutionalized its reliance on nuclear weapons, complicating efforts toward denuclearization. This paper recommends a comprehensive strategy involving robust alliance coordination, economic incentives, and nuanced diplomacy to manage the escalating security dynamics on the Korean Peninsula.

## Introduction

*"I expressed our serious concerns on these matters and raised the implications of North Korean conduct for regional and global peace and stability, for the North's relations with the United States, and also its neighbors, and for its future." - James Kelly*

In early October 2002, during a visit to Pyongyang by US Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs (and former Pacific Forum President) James Kelly, North Korea's nuclear ambitions became a subject of international concern.<sup>1 2</sup> Shortly after this visit, North Korea expelled IAEA inspectors and announced its withdrawal from the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in January 2003. This marked the beginning of a series of developments in North Korea's nuclear strategy.

Twenty years later, in 2024, the National Intelligence Service (NIS) of South Korea reported that North Korea had dispatched troops to Russia as part of a mutual military support agreement. This action sparked condemnation from South Korea and the broader international community, citing increased regional tensions and violations of international law. These developments underscore North Korea's evolving nuclear strategy, which has shifted to prioritize tactical applications and an aggressive stance under Kim Jong Un.

This paper seeks to answer the critical question: Why has North Korea's nuclear strategy evolved in this manner, and what are the broader implications for regional and global security? By examining the historical trajectory and recent shifts in policy under Kim Jong Un, the study aims to provide insights into the motivations behind North Korea's nuclear developments and their potential impact on inter-Korean relations and international peace.

### (1) North Korea's nuclear weapon to secure the regime

This paper looks at the reasons for the initial development of nuclear weapons to understand the change in North Korea's nuclear strategy. North Korea's history of nuclear development is quite long, and its interest began with influence from the Soviet Union. In 1949, under the order of Soviet Leader Joseph Stalin, who sought to break America's nuclear hegemony after the war, the Soviet Union successfully tested a plutonium bomb. In 1953, the Soviet Union successfully tested a hydrogen bomb for the first time in the world.<sup>3 4</sup> The Soviet Union's successful nuclear test had a significant impact on North Korea and made Kim Il Sung interested in nuclear weapons. Beginning in the late 1950s, North Korea started to send engineers and scientists who majored in physics to Russia and efforts to legally and illegally obtain information about nuclear weapon technology through the Soviet Union.<sup>5</sup> During the Korean War, Kim Il Sung witnessed Gen. MacArthur hinting at the use of nuclear weapons. This was an incident that brought about North Korea's fear of nuclear weapons and at the same time became another motivation. In the 1960s, North Korea established several research institutes and organizations to advance nuclear programs. In 1961, North Korea organized the Atomic Energy Commission, a central organization related to nuclear energy, and established nuclear research institutes in Yongbyun and Bakcheon in 1962 respectively.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, North Korea faced an incident called "the Cuban Missile Crisis" in 1962. It served as an opportunity for North Korea to begin its nuclear development path in earnest because, at the time, North Korea felt that the Soviet Union had betrayed Cuba due to pressure from the Kennedy administration.<sup>7</sup> As soon as the Cuban Missile Crisis occurred, Kim Il Sung met with the Soviet Ambassador to North Korea and requested military support such as MIG-21s and submarines in preparation for a possible attack by the United States,

<sup>1</sup> The Associated Press, "US envoy in North Korea discusses nations' weapons," *The Gainesville Sun*, Oct. 6, 2002, <https://www.gainesville.com/story/news/2002/10/06/us-envoy-in-north-korea-discusses-nations-weapons/31616244007/>

<sup>2</sup> "US Envoy Discusses N. Korea's Weapon Programs During Pyongyang Visit-2002-10-05," *Voice of America*, Oct. 6, 2002, <https://www.voanews.com/a/a-13-a-2002-10-05-15-us-66456282/551350.html>

<sup>3</sup> Bomi Kim (2019) *The Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons: The Beginning and Growth of North Korea's Nuclear Program in the 1950's and 1960's*, *Unification Policy Research*, Vol. 28, No. 1, 183-208, [https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti\\_id=ART002480701](https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti_id=ART002480701)

<sup>4</sup> "Joseph Stalin," Atomic Heritage Foundation, Oct. 22, 2024, <https://ahf.nuclearmuseum.org/ahf/profile/joseph-stalin/>

<sup>5</sup> Bomi Kim (2019) *The Pursuit of Nuclear Weapons: The Beginning and Growth of North Korea's Nuclear Program in the 1950's and 1960's*, *Unification Policy Research*, Vol. 28, no.1, 183-208, [https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti\\_id=ART002480701](https://www.kci.go.kr/kciportal/landing/article.kci?arti_id=ART002480701)

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> James Person "The Cuban Missile Crisis and the Origin of North Korea's Policy of Self-Reliance in National Defense," *Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars*, October 2024, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/north-korea-and-the-cuban-missile-crisis>

but the Soviet Ambassador Vasily Moskovsky refused.<sup>8</sup> Ultimately, due to the withdrawal of missiles deployed in Cuba and distrust of the Soviet Union, North Korea came to recognize that only nuclear weapons could guarantee the security of its regime. From a realist perspective, it is interpreted that North Korea chose to possess nuclear weapons because its security could not be guaranteed due to distrust of the Soviet Union, threats from the United States, and aggressive relations with South Korea. Therefore, it can be sure that North Korea's nuclear development in the 1960s was largely motivated by security measures. So, what does nuclear mean to North Korea today?

### 1. Additional strategic Uses of Nuclear Weapons

The author summarizes the strategic uses of nuclear weapons by era. The strategic uses of nuclear weapons vary depending on the leader's era, and it is worth noting that the most recent era, the Kim Jong Un era, is the only one that possesses nuclear weapons for three strategic purposes.

Strategic Uses of Nuclear weapon

	Kim Il-sung	Kim Jong-il	Kim Jong-un
For Negotiation	○	○	○
For the internal Accomplishment		○	○
For Taking power itself			○

Compiled by author

① For Negotiation: Kim Il Sung, Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un

North Korea's foreign policy over the past 70 years has several characteristics. One of them is that North Korea's foreign policy prioritizes regime survival,

and to this end, it has shown a realistic tendency. In the 1990s, as the socialist bloc collapsed and South Korea established diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and China, North Korea faced diplomatic isolation.<sup>9</sup> In particular, the United States served as the biggest variable for North Korea. In the process, North Korea began to build a foundation for national survival through nuclear negotiations.<sup>10</sup> From Kim Il Sung to Kim Jong Un, the North Korean regime has continuously negotiated the "nuclear issue" through dialogue with the United States, South Korea, and China. However, North Korea's nuclear negotiations continued to be difficult for over 20 years, with repeated "agreements" and "breaks." Amid repeated failure and successes in talks, North Korea immediately after the test launch of the Hwasong-15 long-range missile, which took place about three months, after the six nuclear tests, the so-called 'completion of the national nuclear force' was declared in 2017.<sup>11</sup> However, North Korea once again negotiated to guarantee the regime's survival through a summit with the United States in 2018, the following year. Just before the 2018 US-North Korea summit was held, James Kelly, who attended the six-party talks in 2003 and 2004 and visited Pyongyang as a special envoy for President George W. Bush in 2002, said in a media interview that this summit was a good opportunity to improve relations between the two countries and lead to a discussion on denuclearization. Still, he noted that one should not be overly optimistic, adding that he was personally negative about the talk.<sup>12 13</sup> The 2018 US-North Korea summit ended successfully, but the Hanoi summit ended in no deal and the relationship between the two countries began to deteriorate. Looking at North Korea's history of talks, it can be seen that nuclear

<sup>8</sup> Eun-jeong Jo, "North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons dates back to the Korean War," *Voice of America*, June 25, 2020, [https://www.voakorea.com/a/korea\\_korea-politics\\_korea-war/6032351.html](https://www.voakorea.com/a/korea_korea-politics_korea-war/6032351.html)

<sup>9</sup> "The relations with US," *North Korea informational Portal, Ministry of Unification*, Oct. 30, 2024, [https://nkinfo.unikorea.go.kr/nkp/pge/view.do?jsessionid=2hKxF415EqLjyly\\_MMG2Hp-CYsPzkS4Pz0x0vdfr.ins22?menuId=MENU\\_29](https://nkinfo.unikorea.go.kr/nkp/pge/view.do?jsessionid=2hKxF415EqLjyly_MMG2Hp-CYsPzkS4Pz0x0vdfr.ins22?menuId=MENU_29)

<sup>10</sup> Longfan Jiang, "Alliance and North Korea nuclear issue in North Korea-China relations: China's perspective," *Sejong Policy Brief*, Oct. 11, 2024, <https://sejong.org/web/board/1/egoread.php?bd=3&seq=11887>

<sup>11</sup> Young-kwon Kim, "North Korea successfully launches Hwasong-15, claiming completion of national nuclear force," *Voice of America*, Nov. 30, 2017, <https://www.voakorea.com/a/4141392.html>

<sup>12</sup> Soyoung Kim, "[Advice from someone with experience in North Korea nuclear negotiations②]," *Radio Free Asia*, May 10, 2018, [https://www.rfa.org/korean/in\\_focus/nk\\_nuclear\\_talks/ne-sk-05102018153900.html](https://www.rfa.org/korean/in_focus/nk_nuclear_talks/ne-sk-05102018153900.html)

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

weapons were used as a tool to ensure talks were held. North Korea’s foreign policy only prioritizes regime survival and expands its interests by gaining diplomatic benefits. It means that North Korea’s goal is not to denuclearize itself, but to be recognized as a normal country and ensure the stability of its regime through nuclear negotiations.

② For the internal accomplishment: Kim Jong Il, Kim Jong Un

Ryu Hyun Woo, a former North Korean diplomat who served as the chargé d'affaires at the North Korean Embassy in Kuwait, said in an interview with the media that the Kim family is obsessed with nuclear development due to internal achievements.<sup>14</sup> He emphasized that North Korea is inferior to South Korea in all aspects, such as culture, military, economy, and politics. He noted that not only does it have a democratic political system, but its economic power is only about 1/60 that of South Korea.<sup>15</sup> In the end, he emphasized the Kim family believes that nuclear weapons and missiles are the best way to maintain the Kim family’s absolute power. He also stressed that North Korea concludes that if the Kim family has nuclear weapons, countries such as the US and China will not be able to change North Korea’s regime. And this means that it becomes a justification for speaking out to North Korean residents as well. This paper believes that North Korea’s *Rodong Sinmun* is a means through which North Korean authorities can convey to North Korean residents because, unlike other countries’ media, North Korean *Rodong Sinmun* only focuses on promoting the Kim family’s activities and achievements to North Korean residents. Due to national security law reasons, the author complied reporting patterns of *Rodong Sinmun*-related articles praising the Kim family in addition to promoting nuclear development, using data from the Ministry of Unification and South Korea’s domestic news media.<sup>16 17 18 19 20</sup>

Compiled by the author

<sup>14</sup> Yongjae-Mok, “[Ryu Hyun-woo’s Black 北] North Korea forces ‘prosperity data collection’ for nuclear development,” *Radio Free Asia*, Oct. 16, 2024

[https://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly\\_program/b958d604c6b0c758-be14b7995317c2a4/nk-nuclear-10162024092520.html](https://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly_program/b958d604c6b0c758-be14b7995317c2a4/nk-nuclear-10162024092520.html)

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> “North Korea praises Kim Jong Il’s 10 years of leadership,” *SBS News*, Oct. 9, 2007,

[https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news\\_id=N1000321129](https://news.sbs.co.kr/news/endPage.do?news_id=N1000321129)

<sup>17</sup> Young-Jong Lee, “North Korea praises Kim Jong Un as ‘leader of the revolution’ on the 5th anniversary of completion of nuclear force,” *Newspim*, Nov. 29, 2022,

<https://www.newspim.com/news/view/20221129000507>

There were no reports during the Kim Il Sung era because Kim Il Sung died in 1994 but the number of reports has increased from the Kim Jong Il era to the

-Rodong Sinmun’s reporting pattern -  
promotion of nuclear weapons and praise of the Kim family.

Kim Jong-il era	
October 8, 2007	“Since Chairman Kim Jong-il was appointed as general secretary, he has achieved unprecedented achievements, including the launch of the artificial satellite Kwangmyeongseong-1, the June 15 North-South Joint Declaration, and even the nuclear test.”
Kim Jong-un era	
February 14, 2018	Kim Jong-il is described as “a military prodigy and a leader of steel who built his country into a world-class military power.”
November 29, 2022	Reporting that Kim Jong-un observed the test launch of the Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), he praised him as “a peerless patriot and an eternal hero who raised the national prestige of our Republic to the highest level.”
January 30, 2023	“The absolute authority of an outstanding leader is the highest dignity of our people and the national prestige of the Republic”, and “We have achieved a series of miraculous achievements in strengthening our self-defense capabilities with nuclear forces as the backbone”
January 6, 2024	“With the declaration of the parallel policy of economic construction and nuclear force construction, a new milestone has been set that will dramatically transform 50,000 years of national history, and the great project of building a national nuclear force, which others could not achieve even if it took decades, was completed in a short period.”
January 23, 2024	(The constitutionalization of the Kim Jong-un regime’s nuclear policy is) “An exceptional achievement that enshrines another section of the legendary era in glory.”

Kim Jong Un era. Since North Korea declared its possession of nuclear weapons on Feb. 10, 2005, the *Rodong Sinmun*’s nuclear-related reports have been in the form of praising the Kim family, touting their achievements in nuclear weapons. *Rodong Sinmun* has recently praised these achievements, and Kim Jong Un conveys that we should persevere and overcome difficult difficulties since we have achieved this much in difficult economic circumstances. A former North Korean diplomat Ryu Hyun-woo, said in an interview with the media that possession of nuclear weapons was to unite the people for the Kim family. At the same time, it was explained that the Kim family’s political hack was being put forward to prevent residents’ dissatisfaction built up due to long-term sanctions against North Korea. Nuclear

<sup>18</sup> Sung-won Yang & Hyun-woong Lee, “[Rewatch Rodong Sinmun] North Korea praises Kim Jong un’s nuclear weapons politics,” *Radio Free Asia*, Jan. 8, 2024, [https://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly\\_program/review-rodong/rodongnews-01082024093743.html](https://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly_program/review-rodong/rodongnews-01082024093743.html)

<sup>19</sup> Sung-won Yang & Hyun-woong Lee, “[Rewatch Rodong Sinmun] North Korea praises Kim Jong un’s activities for 2023,” *Radio Free Asia*, Feb. 5, 2024, [https://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly\\_program/review-rodong/rodongnews-02052024095116.html](https://www.rfa.org/korean/weekly_program/review-rodong/rodongnews-02052024095116.html)

<sup>20</sup> “North Korean newspaper promotes ‘achievement of possessing nuclear weapon’s ahead of Kim Jong Il’s birthday,” *KBS News*, Feb. 14, 2018, <https://news.kbs.co.kr/news/pc/view/view.do?ncd=3606172>

weapons used for internal accomplishment can demand absolute obedience from the North Korean people, and it can be seen that this is a strategy that can offset the dissatisfaction of North Korean people due to sanctions. A noticeable point is that during the Kim Jong Un era, the number of reports praising the results of nuclear tests and the Kim family was more frequent than during the Kim Jong Il era. This can be seen as the fact that Kim Jong Un has put more effort into perfecting nuclear weapons than his predecessors and is reaching completion.

③ For taking power itself: Kim Jong Un

This paper emphasizes that Kim Jong Un's nuclear strategy lies in his rule itself, which differentiates him from his predecessors. By legislating Kim Jong Un's nuclear force, North Korea's status as a nuclear state was solidified and the use of nuclear force was specified in detail. North Korea abolished the old law Self-defense Nuclear Possession Law enacted in April 2013. Still, it enacted the Nuclear Forces Policy Act in 2022 and further established new legal guidelines for nuclear force. While the old law of 2013 aimed to use nuclear weapons only for defensive purposes, the new law of 2022 specifies that nuclear weapons will be used not only for existing defensive purposes but also for repelling and retaliating against enemy invasions and attacks.

Comparison of new and old laws related to North Korea's nuclear weapons

	Nuclear Forces Policy Act in 2022	Self-Defense Nuclear Possession Law in 2013
The goal	Territorial perfection, national sovereignty, war deterrence	Legitimate means of defense
Command and Control	The sole command of the Chairman of the State Affairs Commission and The Assistant to the National Nuclear Forces Command Organization	Final order of the Supreme Commander of the Korean People's Army
Terms of use	When a nuclear weapon attack on North Korea is imminent or when a military attack on important strategic targets is imminent	Deter and repel invasion attacks and strike devastating retaliatory strikes against invasion bases.
Composition of nuclear forces	Various nuclear bombs, means of transportation, command and control system	None
Enforcement of Usage decision	Immediate execution of order to use nuclear weapons	None

Compiled by author

As shown in the table above, the new law specifically contains major contents such as the goals, composition, and command and control of nuclear forces. The key point is that North Korea has legally made the preemptive use of nuclear weapons possible through the new law, North Korea's nuclear doctrine has changed from deterrence to preemptive strike. At the Supreme People's Assembly held on Sept. 26-27, 2023, North Korea upgraded the legislation of nuclear weapons to constitutionalization, and Kim Jong Un said, "Article 58 of Chapter 4 of the Socialist Constitution will advance the development of nuclear weapons to guarantee the country's right to survival and development, suppress war, and protect regional and global peace and stability." North Korea legislated its nuclear force policy and specified it in its constitution in 2023, one year later, strongly declaring that it would not give up nuclear weapons. The background for this can be the escalation of the Korean Peninsula and the Ukraine-Russia War, however, through legislation by an individual named Kim Jong Un, no one within the North Korean leadership opposed his nuclear policy. It can be inferred that it is a governance method that prevents this. The constitutionalization of North Korea's nuclear force, which no one can resist, is a brand that can symbolize Kim Jong Un, differentiating him from his predecessors and, at the same time, is his rule itself, so the nuclear threat within the Korean Peninsula is bound to become stronger

(2) North Korean Nuclear Advancement

North Korea politically declared itself a nuclear-armed state after successfully test-firing the Hwasong-15 Intercontinental Ballistic Missile (ICBM) on Nov. 29, 2017.<sup>21</sup> Four years later, at the 8<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 2021, North Korea announced the "Five Key Goals for Defense Development," including the development of the nuclear submarine, underwater-launched nuclear strategic weapons, and hypersonic missiles.<sup>22</sup> In 2017, while the existing nuclear strategy was to secure the ability to "retaliate" against the United States with ICBMs, the changed nuclear strategy focused on increasing the completeness of nuclear forces.<sup>23</sup> Starting with attending the 2018

<sup>21</sup> In-hwan Jeong, "5 years since North Korea declared 'complete nuclear force.'... Shifting focus from 'US retaliatory strike' to 'completeness,'" *Hankyoreh*, Nov. 27, 2022, [https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics\\_general/1069067.html](https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/1069067.html)

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Bong-geun Jeon "Comparative evaluation of North Korea's Nuclear Armed States Act' and 'Nuclear Forces Policy Act' and South Korea's

search for countermeasures,'" *Analysis of Major International Issues - IFANS*, Oct. 24, 2022, <https://www.ifans.go.kr/knda/ifans/kor/pblct/PblctView.do?csrfPreventionSalt=null&sn=&bbsSn=&mvpSn=&searchMvpSe=&koreanEngSe=KOR&ctgrySe=&menuCl=P01&pblctDtaSn=14070&clCode=P01&boardSe>

Pyeongchang Winter Olympics, North Korea participated in the inter-Korean Summit on April 27. Before the inter-Korean summit, North Korea held the 3<sup>rd</sup> plenary session of the 7<sup>th</sup> Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea to meet the demands of a new, higher stage of revolutionary development.<sup>24</sup> He announced that he would "focus on all his efforts on socialist economic construction." This meant that North Korea would focus on building a socialist economy based on the completion of its nuclear force.<sup>25</sup> However, North Korea changed its national strategy once again due to the 2019 Hanoi no-deal summit. From building a socialist economy to a policy of parallel development of nuclear and economic development, this can be interpreted to mean that, unlike before, nuclear development will not be stopped to develop the economy.<sup>26</sup> Another thing to note is that North Korea, which worked hard to develop Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles aimed at striking the US mainland, has focused on developing low-yield nuclear weapons targeting South Korea since 2019.<sup>27</sup> North Korea changed its strategic use of nuclear weapons to tactical use, and in May 2019, began development of the KN-23, which has a range of less than 1,000 km and can carry low-yield nuclear warheads.<sup>28</sup> This change in North Korea's nuclear strategy can be seen as an attempt to lower the threshold for escalating low-yield nuclear engagement.

As previously stated, North Korea reaffirmed its status as a "nuclear-armed state" by enacting the Nuclear Forces Policy Act (2022), which replaced the existing Self-Defense Nuclear Possession Law (2013). In his speech at the Supreme People's Assembly, Kim Jong Un emphasized that the reason for nuclear armament is a historical necessity stemming from the struggle between socialism and imperialism, and the United States is trying to push for the collapse of North Korea.<sup>29</sup>

He eventually secured legitimacy and institutional support for nuclear development by legislating a nuclear force policy, however, this paper notes that North Korea specified the conditions for preemptive nuclear attack and the use of nuclear weapons through the legislation of nuclear weapons and emphasized the operability in actual warfare using tactical nuclear weapons. Unlike his predecessors, Kim Jong Un was a person who perfected nuclear weapons. The confidence that came from completing nuclear weapons made him relaxed enough to make an important announcement to Kim Yo-jong, Vice Director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of North Korea and also led to the disclosure of his daughter Kim Joo-ae, who can symbolize the next generation of North Korea.

### (3) Changes in Kim Jong Un's Nuclear Obsession.

In December 2023, Kim Jong Un defined inter-Korean relations as a relationship between two hostile countries at the 9<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the 8<sup>th</sup> Workers' Party and stated that there was no possibility of unification.<sup>30</sup> In February 2024, Kim defined South Korea as the number one hostile country and reaffirmed territorial pacification in case of emergency.<sup>31</sup> In December that year, Kim Jong Un eventually revised the constitution to include provisions defining South Korea as a hostile country, providing legal support for the theory of two hostile countries.

Kim Jong Un has defined South Korea as an enemy since 2023 and has openly shown hostility. This was also revealed in North Korea's nuclear threat, which changed from the existing nuclear strategy of striking the US mainland with a strategic nuclear ICBM. North Korea is reducing the number of ICBM launches targeting the US, which it regards as its enemy. Instead, since last 2023, it has defined South Korea as a hostile country and increased the number

<sup>24</sup> "The economic Policy," *North Korea informational Portal, Ministry of Unification*, August 2024, [https://nkinfo.unikorea.go.kr/nkp/pge/view.do?jsessionid=Lgfx9NqJznrED\\_0Ozi0M6vHiNFismqGNKgyJMdyR.ins12?menuId=EC201](https://nkinfo.unikorea.go.kr/nkp/pge/view.do?jsessionid=Lgfx9NqJznrED_0Ozi0M6vHiNFismqGNKgyJMdyR.ins12?menuId=EC201)

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Bong-geun Jeon, "Urgency and plans for resumption of North Korea-US nuclear negotiations," *IFANS Focus*, July 19, 2021, <https://www.ifans.go.kr/knda/ifans/kor/pblct/PblctView.do?clCode=P07&pblctDtaSn=13824&koreanEngSe=KOR>

<sup>27</sup> Hyeok-cheol Kwon, "Have North Korean nuclear weapons changed from a 'means of deterrence' to a 'means of preemptive strike'?" *Hankyoreh*, Nov. 27, 2022, [https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics\\_general/1069072.html](https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/politics_general/1069072.html)

<sup>28</sup> Bomi Kim, "North Korea's short-range missile test launch's background and implications," *INSS Strategic report*, Sept. 22, 2020, [https://www.inss.re.kr/publication/bbs/js\\_view.do?ntfId=409720&bbsId=js](https://www.inss.re.kr/publication/bbs/js_view.do?ntfId=409720&bbsId=js)

&page=1&searchCnd=97&searchWrd=%EB%B6%81%ED%95%9C+%EB%8B%A8%EA%B1%B0%EB%A6%AC

<sup>29</sup> Bong-geun Jeon "Comparative evaluation of North Korea's Nuclear Armed States Act' and 'Nuclear Forces Policy Act' and South Korea's search for countermeasures'," *Analysis of major international issues*, Oct. 24, 2022,

<https://www.ifans.go.kr/knda/ifans/kor/pblct/PblctView.do?csrfPreventionSalt=null&sn=&bbsSn=&mvpSn=&searchMvpSe=&koreanEngSe=KOR&ctgrySe=&menuCl=P01&pblctDtaSn=14070&clCode=P01&boardSe>

<sup>30</sup> "Kim Jong Un calls North and South Korea 'hostile relations between two countries' and 'no possibility of unification'," *BBC News Korea*, Dec. 31, 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/korean/articles/c4nyjy718590>

<sup>31</sup> Seung-hyeon Lee, "Chairman Kim Jong Un reaffirms that 'South Korea is the number one hostile country and territorial peace in case of emergency,'" *Tongil News*, Feb. 9, 2024, <https://www.tongilnews.com/news/articleView.html?idxno=210014>

of launches of tactical nuclear Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missiles (SLBM) that can put South Korea at range at the same time. This paper believes that there are two main reasons for the change in Kim Jong Un's nuclear strategy: (1) Feeling the limit of North Korea's nuclear missile utility (2) Strategic target change from US to South Korea.

① North Korea's Feeling the limit of its nuclear missile utility.

Kim Jong Un, who is on track to complete nuclear weapons, has shown different behavior from before since 2024. North Korea has focused solely on developing nuclear weapons from the Kim Il Sung era to the present. However, North Korea has recently fallen into a dilemma of 'path dependency' and limited options.<sup>32</sup> The policy of focusing only on the development of nuclear weapons ultimately limited the flexibility of the policy and weakened the ability to adapt to changing conditions. The recent economic difficulties and starvation problems within the North Korea are closely seen as a side effect of North Korea's obsession with nuclear weapons and path dependency. Considering the nature of North Korea's economic structure, where cash and goods are invested in the military industry and technology is invested in the civilian sector, North Korea's people's livelihood problems are expected to become more serious with the addition of sanctions. In other words, North Korea's continued nuclear development to keep the US-ROK alliance in check ultimately accelerated the economic difficulties of the North Korean people, so it can be assumed that North Korea internally felt the limits of the utility of nuclear missiles.

North Korea has recently felt its limitations in terms of technology and strategy while focusing on developing nuclear missile. In terms of technical limitation, North Korea developed the Hwasong-17, an intercontinental ballistic missile that uses liquid fuel, but the problem was revealed that it was unsuitable for mobile launch due to its large size and weight. As a result, attempt were made to change direction to the development of solid fuel ICBMs, but

<sup>32</sup> Du-Hyeogn Cha, "Analysis of North Korean trends in 2023: Continuation of nuclear obsession and path dependence," *Issue Brief*, Oct. 13, 2023, <https://www.asaninst.org/contents/2023%EB%85%84-%EB%B6%81%ED%95%9C-%EB%8F%99%ED%96%A5-%EB%B6%84%EC%84%9D-%ED%95%B5%EC%A7%91%EC%B0%A9%EC%9D%98-%EC%A7%80%EC%86%8D%EA%B3%BC-%EA%B2%BD%EB%A1%9C%EC%A2%85%EC%86%8D%EC%84%B1/>

<sup>33</sup> Uk Yang, "Current status of North Korea's nuclear weapons development: North Korea's attempt at cognitive warfare casting a nuclear

technical difficulties still exist in the development process.<sup>33</sup> Strategic limitation can largely be seen as deepening international isolation and sparking an arms race. In terms of deepening international isolation, the development of nuclear missiles has further isolated North Korea from the international community and economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure have intensified. This is having a negative impact on economic development and residents' lives. In terms of triggering an arms race, North Korea's nuclear development is causing neighboring countries to increase their military capabilities, increasing military tensions in the region. This resulted in an increase in the military power of neighboring countries, contrary to North Korea's intended security strengthening. North Korea, which focused on developing nuclear missiles to respond to the US-ROK alliance and simultaneously felt its technological and strategic limitations, eventually changed Kim Jong Un's nuclear policy of advancing nuclear weapons to developing conventional weapons.

② Strategic target change from US to South Korea.



Kim Jong Un test-fires a North Korean-made sniper rifle in September 2024: Yonhap News

North Korea has recently been intentionally showing Kim Jong Un holding a rifle. For example, a test firing during an inspection of a local military factory from Aug. 3-5, 2023.<sup>34</sup> There was an image of Kim Jong Un pointing a gun while inspecting the People's Army Special Operations Forces Training Base on Sept. 11,

shadow," *Issue Brief*, June 29, 2023,

[https://www.asaninst.org/contents/%EB%B6%81%ED%95%9C%EC%9D%98-%EC%B5%9C%EC%8B%A0%ED%95%B5%EB%AC%B4%EA%B8%B0-%EA%B0%9C%EB%B0%9C-%ED%98%84%ED%99%A9%ED%95%B5%EA%B7%B8%EB%A6%BC%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC-%EB%93%9C%EB%A6%AC%EC%9A%B0%EB%8A%94/?utm\\_source=chatgpt.com](https://www.asaninst.org/contents/%EB%B6%81%ED%95%9C%EC%9D%98-%EC%B5%9C%EC%8B%A0%ED%95%B5%EB%AC%B4%EA%B8%B0-%EA%B0%9C%EB%B0%9C-%ED%98%84%ED%99%A9%ED%95%B5%EA%B7%B8%EB%A6%BC%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC-%EB%93%9C%EB%A6%AC%EC%9A%B0%EB%8A%94/?utm_source=chatgpt.com)

<sup>34</sup> Sae-seul Yoo, "Tour of a military factory and test fire a rifle...Kim Jong Un's 'weapons sales' for Russia," *Kyunghyang Shinmun*, Aug. 6, 2023, <https://www.khan.co.kr/article/202308062121005>

2024.<sup>35</sup>North Korea also reported that Kim Jong Un led a performance test of suicide attack drones produced by research institutes and enterprises under the Aircraft Technology Union on Nov. 14.<sup>36</sup>

North Korea has recently been deliberately exposing images related to conventional weapons, and this is a contrast to its previous focus on developing nuclear weapons, so this paper should pay close attention. North Korea is currently developing tactical and strategic nuclear weapons while simultaneously developing conventional weapons and the reason for this is a change in strategic targets from US to South Korea. In fact, this change in North Korea's strategic target can be seen as having been gradual for quite some time, because North Korea's nuclear strategy changed around 2017. In September 2017, North Korea declared the completion of its nuclear force after completing its sixth nuclear test and the test launch of Hwasong-15 intercontinental ballistic missile in November. Before 2017, when it declared nuclear force, North Korea's nuclear posture was 'assured retaliation'<sup>37</sup> which refers a strategy to annihilate the enemy country by mobilizing nuclear power in response to the other party's attack with nuclear weapons. For example, in 2016, North Korea stated at the 7th Congress of the Workers' Party that it would focus on using nuclear weapons to strike the US mainland if the US violates its North Korea's sovereignty.<sup>38</sup> In other words, North Korea's ICBM is a strategic nuclear weapons and a representative example of 'assured retaliation.' However, after declaring the completion of nuclear weapons in 2017, North Korea attempted to force provocateurs to give up provocations by determining that the costs of provocations outweigh the benefits. The strategy was changed to 'denial deterrence' strategy,<sup>39</sup> which can be seen as an example of announcement of the strategic military firepower strike plan in 2017 and

the mention of airports and ports facilities, which are passageways for the deployment of Gyeryongdae and US military forces in the announcement of the South Korean occupation training in 2023.<sup>40</sup> Also weapons used for denial deterrence can be seen as Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile (SLBM) and Kill Chains. North Korea, which has adopted a denial and deterrence strategy since 2017, is once again changing its nuclear strategy starting in 2022, accelerating the combination of denial deterrence based on tactical nuclear weapons with an emphasis on preemptive strikes and an assured retaliation strategy. Looking at North Korea's recent provocations, this is evidenced by the fact that the number of SLBM launches for deterrence purposes has increased compared to the number of ICBM launches for assured retaliation. This change in North Korea's strategy can actually avoid nuclear retaliation from the United States and furthermore, it can enjoy a nuclear shadow effect within the Korean Peninsula by selectively strengthening its power with SLBMs rather than investing all resources into technologically unsafe ICBMs. From early 2024, North Korea's change in strategic target became more evident. The Kim Jong Un regime defined inter-Korean relations are those of belligerents and adopted a strategy of escalating military tensions on the Korean Peninsula. The purpose of this transition is to increase military tension on the Korean Peninsula and elicit concessions from the United States and South Korea. In particular, North Korea intends to turn the Northern Limit Line (NLL) area in the West Sea into a disputed area. The background to this strategic shift is North Korea's intention to gain recognition for its status as a nuclear state. The goal is to increase military tensions on the Korean Peninsula and induce the United States and South Korea to accept North Korea's claims of nuclear disarmament. In addition, there are complains within

<sup>35</sup> Je-hoon Lee & Hyeong-cheol Shin, "Missile launch, nuclear facility revealed...North Korea continues armed protests before US presidential election," *Hankyoreh*, Sept. 18, 2024, <https://www.hani.co.kr/arti/politics/defense/1158694.html>

<sup>36</sup> Hwangyoung Kim, "North Korea's Kim Jong Un also provides local guidance on the performance tests of a suicide drone...mass production," *Hankyoreh*, Nov. 15, 2024, <https://www.voakorea.com/a/7864906.html>

<sup>37</sup> Jeong-sup Kim, " (Essay) Duality of North Korea military satellites and security risks on the Korean Peninsula," *NewsTomato*, Dec. 20, 2023, [https://www.newstomato.com/ReadNews.aspx?no=1212697#:~:text=%ED%95%B5%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%20%EC%9C%A0%ED%98%95%EC%97%90%EC%84%9C%EB%8A%94%20%EC%A0%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%ED%99%95%EC%A6%9D%20%EB%B3%B4%EB%B3%B5'\(assured%20retaliation\)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%2C%20%ED%9B%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%EB%B9%84%EB%8C%80%EC%B9%AD%20%ED%99%95%EC%A0%84'\(asymmetric%20escalation\)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%EB%9D%BC%EA%B3%A0%20%EB%B6%80%EB%A5%B8%EB%8B%A4.](https://www.newstomato.com/ReadNews.aspx?no=1212697#:~:text=%ED%95%B5%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%20%EC%9C%A0%ED%98%95%EC%97%90%EC%84%9C%EB%8A%94%20%EC%A0%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%ED%99%95%EC%A6%9D%20%EB%B3%B4%EB%B3%B5'(assured%20retaliation)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%2C%20%ED%9B%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%EB%B9%84%EB%8C%80%EC%B9%AD%20%ED%99%95%EC%A0%84'(asymmetric%20escalation)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%EB%9D%BC%EA%B3%A0%20%EB%B6%80%EB%A5%B8%EB%8B%A4.)

<sup>38</sup> Dong-yeop Kim, "Military policy and nuclear strategy of the Kim Jong Un regime," *Korea Focus*, July 2016, <https://ifes.kyungnam.ac.kr/material/ifes/6445/cnDownload.do>

<sup>39</sup> Jeong-sup Kim, " (Essay) Duality of North Korea military satellites and security risks on the Korean Peninsula," *NewsTomato*, Dec. 20, 2023, [https://www.newstomato.com/ReadNews.aspx?no=1212697#:~:text=%ED%95%B5%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%20%EC%9C%A0%ED%98%95%EC%97%90%EC%84%9C%EB%8A%94%20%EC%A0%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%ED%99%95%EC%A6%9D%20%EB%B3%B4%EB%B3%B5'\(assured%20retaliation\)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%2C%20%ED%9B%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%EB%B9%84%EB%8C%80%EC%B9%AD%20%ED%99%95%EC%A0%84'\(asymmetric%20escalation\)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%EB%9D%BC%EA%B3%A0%20%EB%B6%80%EB%A5%B8%EB%8B%A4.](https://www.newstomato.com/ReadNews.aspx?no=1212697#:~:text=%ED%95%B5%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%20%EC%9C%A0%ED%98%95%EC%97%90%EC%84%9C%EB%8A%94%20%EC%A0%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%ED%99%95%EC%A6%9D%20%EB%B3%B4%EB%B3%B5'(assured%20retaliation)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%2C%20%ED%9B%84%EC%9E%90%EB%A5%BC%20%EB%B9%84%EB%8C%80%EC%B9%AD%20%ED%99%95%EC%A0%84'(asymmetric%20escalation)%20%ED%83%9C%EC%84%B8%EB%9D%BC%EA%B3%A0%20%EB%B6%80%EB%A5%B8%EB%8B%A4.)

<sup>40</sup> Sung-hoon Lee & Geon-shik Hong, "Trends and implications of strengthening nuclear power in neighboring countries and North Korea," *Strategic Report*, Oct. 25, 2023, [https://www.inss.re.kr/publication/bbs/js\\_view.do?ntfId=41036980&bbsId=j&searchCnd=0&searchWrd=#](https://www.inss.re.kr/publication/bbs/js_view.do?ntfId=41036980&bbsId=j&searchCnd=0&searchWrd=#)

North Korea about economic and food shortages, and there is an intention to receive external economic cooperation and technical support to resolve these problems. Therefore, it is analyzed North Korea's change of strategic target from the United States to South Korea has a complex purpose of increasing military tension on the Korean Peninsula, gaining recognition for its status as a nuclear state, and resolving economic difficulties. Considering these complex factors, South Korea needs to establish a comprehensive security strategy that responds to North Korea's strategic intentions based on the US-ROK alliance.

### **Conclusion**

North Korea's nuclear strategy, especially under Kim Jong Un's leadership, reflects a shift towards a more assertive and preemptive posture. This strategy not

only aims to safeguard the regime but also seeks to recalibrate its regional and global standing. By constitutionalizing nuclear policy and emphasizing tactical over strategic nuclear weapons, Kim Jong Un has demonstrated an approach distinct from his predecessors. While this ensures internal regime security and international leverage, it also escalates regional tensions and complicates denuclearization efforts. The international community, particularly South Korea and the United States, must navigate these complexities with strategies that balance deterrence and dialogue. Addressing economic and humanitarian concerns in North Korea, alongside firm security measures, it may provide pathways to reduce tensions and encourage meaningful engagement.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

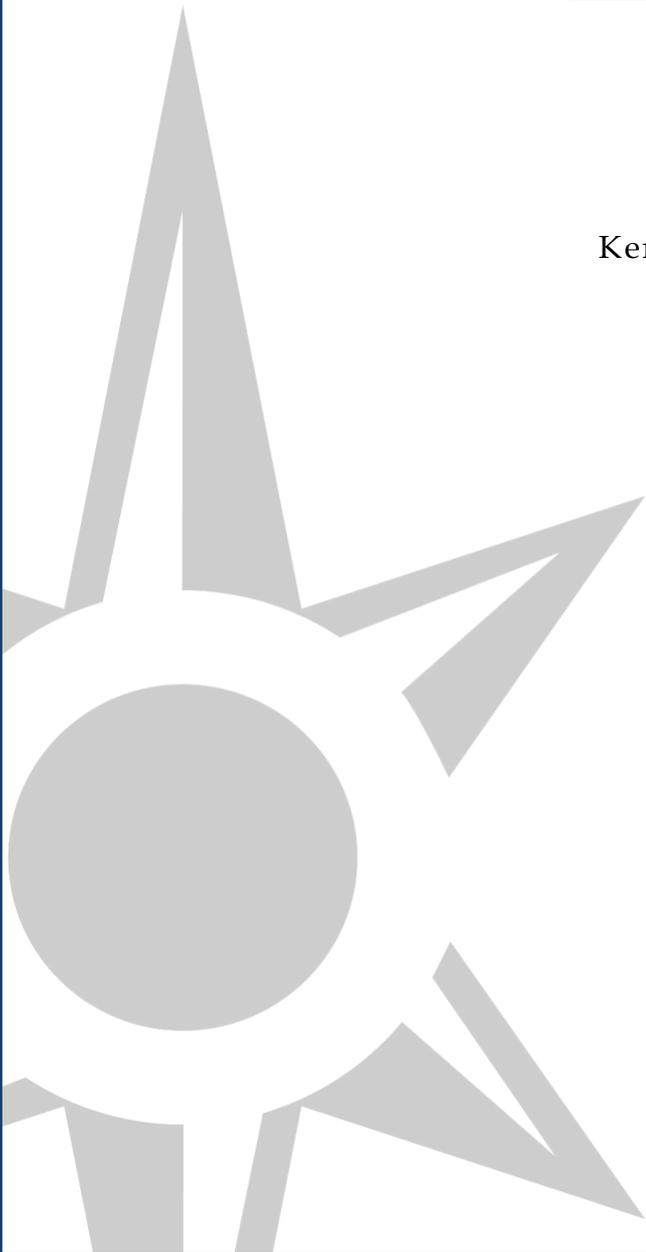
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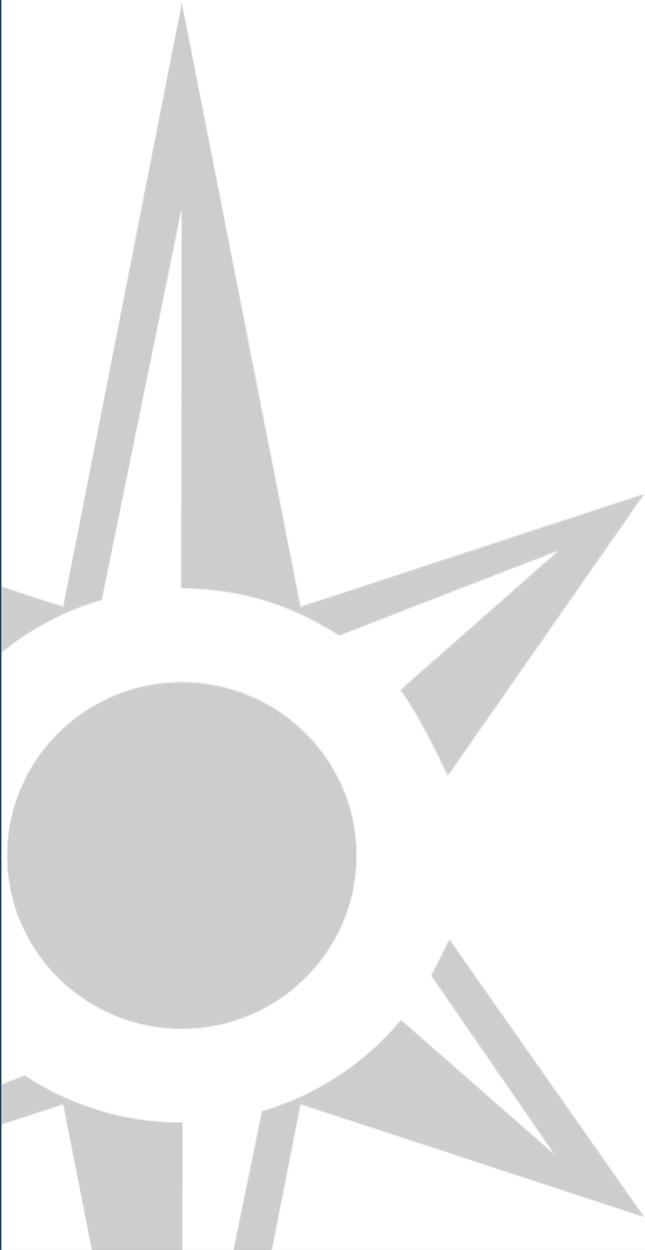
**Email:** daunchoi.0705@gmail.com

# How South Korea Can Protect Its Dual Status as a US Ally and Semiconductor Power

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By  
Kendrick Farm





# Executive Summary

## *Kendrick Farm*

ROK (Republic of Korea) should avoid direct actions in the event of a kinetic conflict involving the US and the People's Republic of China (PRC), relying instead upon indirect, even covert or unofficial, supportive roles in the US-ROK alliance and with US allies and partners.

Historically, the ROK is engaged in one of the world's longest conflicts, between itself and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). On the other hand, ROK possesses the manpower and technical ability to create a robust semiconductor industry that changes the direction in the global economy.

ROK's semiconductor industry is one of the top three in the world. As impressive as the ROK's semiconductor industry is, there is a constant vulnerability. The ROK has no domestic supply of Rare Earth Elements (REEs) and relies upon the sea lines of communication (SLOC) for raw materials as an integral part of its supply chain.

ROK should seek partners such as India. With all that said, we should not forget about the REEs, especially cobalt, required in the production of semiconductors. With emerging technologies such as AI, there might be better ways of either importing or recycling critical REEs. Courses of Action include Diversification of the current supply chain and REE Recycling.

## Introduction

It is in the Republic of Korea's (ROK's) interest to avoid entanglement in security situations or conflict between the US and the People's Republic of China (PRC), because the ROK's semiconductor industry relies upon the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) for raw materials, for its economy, and because the ROK's primary concern is defense against the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The ROK would do well to maintain its alliance with the US by continuing to collaborate with US defense companies on weapon systems intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) systems before any crisis or kinetic conflict.<sup>1</sup> However, the ROK has not done enough to secure its supply of rare earth elements (REEs), especially cobalt, and should do so as soon as possible. The ROK should avoid policies and actions that would lead to direct involvement in such a conflict and instead work on securing its supply of cobalt and other REEs through mutually beneficial arrangements with the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and other countries.

This article aims to provide a different perspective on the situation in the South China Sea and, by extension, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Area of Responsibility (ASEAN AOR). The current non-kinetic conflict presented in the media and other outlets reduces the conflict to just the United States and the PRC. However, there are more nations involved, and as we start to look beyond the great power competition, we can see other dynamics at play.

According to *The Korea Herald* in 2022,<sup>2</sup> since 1992 Korean exports to China have multiplied by more than 162 times over. Furthermore, the article states: Last year [2021], South Korea was China's No. 4 export destination, with the latter's shipments reaching \$150.5 billion, or [4.5%] of its total exports, according to [the Korea International Trade Association].

These business ties have created massive levels of economic activity which increases ROK national revenue and GDP. In addition, these dynamics have a positive effect on the ROK's bond rating. Therefore,

we can safely infer that the ROK would be hard-pressed to sever those deep economic ties that exist with China. The ROK's proximity to the PRC also means higher profit margins due to the speed of goods to the market between Korea's goods to Chinese ports and vice versa. Geographically speaking this means less travel and a reduction in complicated logistics which could affect the timing of products from shipping to market.

The majority of ROK exports rely on a free and open maritime supply route. Historically, countries with the ability to bring their goods to market and access to ports, rather than merely land-based supply routes, could diversify whom they traded with and protect their goods from interference by hostile actors. We have evidence of this in areas of the world other than in Asia. The number and weight of goods that could be transported by ships as time developed outstretch the capabilities of land-based shipping.

With all that said, the ROK should avoid direct actions in the event of a kinetic conflict involving the US military and rely upon indirect, even covert or unofficial supportive roles in the US-ROK alliance and with US allies and partners. Yet, this position with plausible deniability is not without political difficulties. An apparent passive role in an event of kinetic conflict will sow disfavor with the US and may lead to loss of support in the event of the DPRK's adventurism which could threaten ROK's territory and security.

The following sections will highlight this point in the following areas. There are as follows:

### Overall Operating Conditions

- Maritime operating environment
- Advanced semiconductor industry
- Policy considerations for Korean involvement in potential kinetic conflict

### Courses of Action

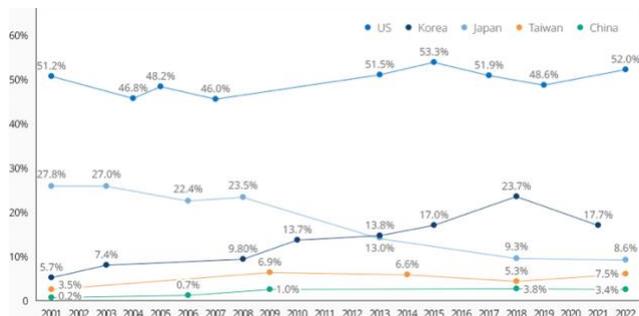
- Diversification of current supply chain
- Possible Korean political posture
- Possible Korean national security posture

As previously mentioned, Korea is a large exporter of semiconductors to China. Consequently, according to

<sup>1</sup> "Korea's defense industry now proposes new approaches we can learn from," says Lockheed Martin. Nov. 17, 2024, *The Chosun Daily*. <https://www.chosun.com/english/industry-en/2024/11/17/RP4AUR2E5ZHU5LAZSECJ3X3CQM/>

<sup>2</sup> Min-Kyung, J. (Aug. 23, 2022b). South Korea's exports to China jump 162-fold over 30 years. *The Korea Herald*. <https://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20220823000680>

the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency <sup>3</sup> (KOTRA) via InvestKorea.org, Korea in 2022 held a global semiconductor market share of 17.7% and continued to rank No. 2 globally.



Source: OMDIA 2023<sup>4</sup>

### Overall Operating Conditions

#### Maritime Operating Environment

Image 1 denotes the common operating picture (COP) of the ROK home waters. The COP is comprised of the Sea of Japan, the Yellow Sea, and the East China Sea. Within this operating environment, there are over-lapping exclusive economic zones (EEZs) with Japan.<sup>5</sup> Image 1 also denotes that Japan is to the right of the ROK at the southern tip of the Korean Peninsula is the major port of Busan is approximately 120 miles; to the left is the Yellow Sea with the PRC and the coastal cities of Shanghai, Qingdao, Ningbo, and others as indicated in image 2. Image 3 indicates the current established maritime supply routes. The majority of REEs are transported from Africa, especially Lagos, Nigeria, and though not displayed Nigeria has deep business dealing with the Democratic Republic of Congo due to having some of the world's largest deposits of particular REEs essential in the manufacturing of advanced semiconductors. Other such ports in Africa ship raw materials to countries such as Korea. However, this is a topic beyond the scope of this article and deserves further scholarship.

This situation is further highlighted in image 4 which displays the amount of traffic activity in selected ports. As indicated in image 4, more than 16 million TEUs of shipments are transacted in the port of Busan.

<sup>3</sup> Semiconductor | InvestKOREA(ENG). (n.d.-b). <https://www.investkorea.org/ik-en/cntnts/i-312/web.do>  
Note: KOTRA is a State-funded trade and foreign investment promotion organization.

<sup>4</sup> Semiconductors | Omdia. (n.d.-b). Omdia. <https://omdia.tech.informa.com/advance-your-business/semiconductors>

Busan is the largest port in the ROK with established shipping lanes to Chinese ports such as Shanghai, Tianjin, and Qingdao.

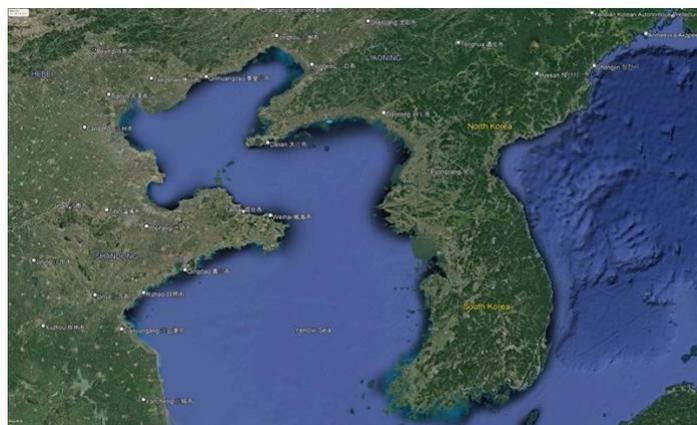
In basic terms, Korea is heavily reliant on its port systems as the main means of supplying the ROK with raw materials in their manufacturing industries, then using the same ports to export finished products to the greater global marketplace as indicated in image 4.

An article from *Ocean Development and International Law* states:

South Korea is also concerned about the security of the sea-lanes of communication (SLOC) because its economy is overwhelmingly dependent on ocean trade and commerce with other countries.<sup>6</sup>

Therefore, the importance and protection of the Yellow Sea and South China Sea concentrating on the free flow of commerce through major ports such as Busan and along the western side of Korea cannot be overstated.

#### Common Operating Picture



Image<sup>7</sup> (COP) 1: Image: 2

<sup>5</sup> The areas that overlap the EEZs of Korea and Japan is known as the Joint Development Zone. For additional information please refer to <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/LIS-75.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> Suk Kyoon Kim (2010) Korean Peninsula Maritime Issues, *Ocean Development & International Law*, 41:2, 166-185, DOI: 10.1080/00908321003733162

<sup>7</sup> Image 1, 2 Source: File:Bohaiseamap2.png - Wikimedia Commons. (2007, June 27). <https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Bohaiseamap2.png>

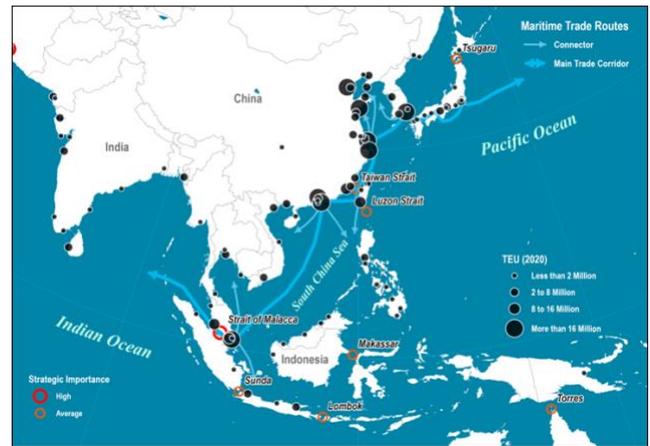


Image 3



Shipping routes from South Korea's Busan port to points around Asia and Africa Source: Business Korea<sup>8</sup>

Image 4



Source: Port Economics, Management, and Policy (PEMP) 2020<sup>9</sup>

### Advanced Semiconductor Industry

Almost all technologies of our modern era rely on semiconductors. Without semiconductors modern computers, phones, medical equipment, etc, would cease to function. Our modern world would grind to a screeching halt, economies would plummet, and standards of living across the globe would diminish. “Semiconductors are now considered as valuable as oil due to their widespread use in both consumer and military applications.”<sup>10</sup> According to Pat Gelsinger, the former CEO of Intel he likened the importance of semiconductors value to oil reserves if not more valuable.<sup>11</sup>

Semiconductors are a critical area of exports for the ROK, according to the Korean Economic Daily Edition 2021.<sup>12</sup> The ROK’s total exports to China from 2000 to 2021 increased three-fold. Additional comments by the Korea Chamber of Commerce and Industry reported that 39.7% of ROK exports are from the semiconductor industry. This trend of semiconductor exports is likely to either grow or remain level even with growing tensions in the US Indo-Pacific Command area of responsibility.

As more products are innovated and developed, and the more electronic components are coupled with artificial intelligence, the greater the need for

<sup>8</sup> Herh, M. (2023b, December 27). Cape of Good Hope Route Costs Korean Shipping Companies up to US\$2 Million More than Suez. Businesskorea. <https://www.businesskorea.co.kr/news/articleView.html?idxno=208584>

<sup>9</sup> Shipping Lanes and Strategic Passages in Pacific Asia | Port Economics, Management and Policy. (April 1, 2022b). Port Economics, Management and Policy | A Comprehensive Analysis of the Port Industry. <https://portecomonomicsmanagement.org/pemp/contents/part1/interoceanic-passages/shipping-lanes-strategic-passages-pacific-asia/> Note: A TEU (20-foot equivalent unit) is a measure of volume in units of twenty-foot-long containers. This is a standard unit of measurement used in the maritime industry.

<sup>10</sup> The US-China Chip War and Prospects for South Korea-India Semiconductor Cooperation  
RAJIV KUMAR, *The Journal of Indian and Asian Studies* 2023 04:02

<sup>11</sup> Stankiewicz, K. (March 23, 2022b). Intel CEO says semiconductors are like oil — making more in U.S. can avoid global crises. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2022/03/23/intel-ceo-making-semiconductors-in-us-is-more-important-than-oil-reserves.htm>

<sup>12</sup> Jeong, J. (Aug. 22, 2022c). Korean chip exports to China rise thirteenfold in 21 years. KED Global. <https://www.kedglobal.com/economy/newsView/ked202208220014>

advanced semiconductors and the production capacity.

Yet the business sectors of Korea are like any others seeking to make a profit and will adjust their practices to do so. However, what is good for business may not necessarily be virtuous in the eyes of the Korean national security community.

For example, some Korean companies have tried to maximize profits by shifting some of their semiconductor production from Korea to areas within China.<sup>13</sup> Some of these companies have cooperative business agreements with the PRC which further strengthens economic ties thus increasing the complexity of Korean national security.

### **Policy Considerations for Korean Involvement in Potential Kinetic Conflict**

Korea should not be naïve in believing that kinetic conflict is either far off or will not happen. The adage “hope for the best yet plan for the worst,” applies here more than any other time in modern conflict. Should kinetic conflict occur, the ROK should avoid publicly declared direct actions in the event of a kinetic conflict.

On the issue of whether the ROK would be considered “neutral,” surprisingly the terms “neutral” or “neutrality” are not found within the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea of 1982 (UNCLOS).

However, guidance on neutrality in essence comes from the 1907 Convention (XIII) Concerning the Rights and Duties of Neutral Powers in Naval War. The language of this act was then codified at the Second Hague Peace Conference. The convention was signed on Oct. 18, 1907, and went into effect on Jan. 26, 1910.<sup>14 15</sup>

Consequently, we must remember that these are simply guidelines and there are no practical means of enforcing provisions specified in the UNCLOS. Yet, what the ROK can do is sustain and increase the public narrative that they are not going to engage in any kinetic conflict and that all countries designated

as belligerents should respect “the will of the ROK people.” This narrative needs to make its way into every avenue of media that it can exploit, from social media, print and foreign media sources.

Video campaigns need to be created showing South Korean-flagged container ships that are carrying goods out for the world to “enjoy Korea’s contributions to the world” whether it be phones, electronics, cultural clothing, or cosmetics, etc.; ensuring in the world of information technology that the world should respect Korea’s position. In the meantime, ROK vessels could supply the US and its allies for their defense.

The ROK should flood all media with this narrative, using actions including bypassing the PRC firewall and inundating Weibo, WeChat, and TikTok, with a narrative of peace and harmony and seeking peace through commerce. The intent of this messaging campaign would be so that should a Korean-flagged vessel be attacked, that world opinion would put the PRC in a negative light and reduce their justification of direct actions. Images of damaged ship(s), memorial services, etc., should be posted constantly on the social media platforms as mentioned.

The use of optics and public opinion cannot be overstated. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in its own articles refers to the importance of information warfare. Thus, this avenue of proxy conflict should be part of the ROK’s strategy to win the war of narratives. Posting such images and videos to the world and particularly the PRC might have the added benefit of shifting the Chinese population’s sentiments against the CPC and protest in opposition to kinetic conflict.

The following issue should be part of Korea’s proactive political calculus: Should there be a scenario in which a kinetic response would be justified if the ROK’s merchant or commercial shipping is attacked?

<sup>13</sup> Samsung recovers operation rate of Xian chip fab to 70 percent. (March 12, 2024b). THE ELEC, Korea Electronics Industry Media. <https://www.thelec.net/news/articleView.html?idxno=4757>

<sup>14</sup>ICRC, “The International Humanitarian Law Databases: Article 6”. <https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/en/ihl-treaties/hague-conv-xiii-1907/article-6?activeTab=undefined>

<sup>15</sup> The International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) is an independent judicial body established by the 1982 United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea

## Recommended Courses of Action

### *Diversification of Current Supply Chain*

As mentioned in previous areas of this article, the ROK must gain access to REEs along with other materials essential in the manufacturing of advanced semiconductors. The ROK must realize both in a business sense and national consciousness that it must diversify its supply chain. The term diversify is used in many areas and has become the subject of ridicule almost having no meaning or at worst becoming a platitude unto itself.

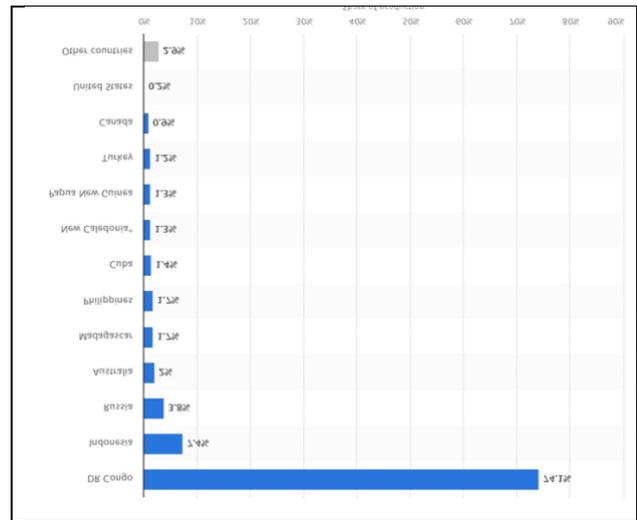
Korea finds itself in a position that is not of its own making. Some areas of the world were more fortunate than others having more natural resources and, in some cases, essential resources critical in the development of advanced semiconductors that dominate the modern world.

One possibility which has been explored is a partnership with India. India is another country with capacity and is looking to develop their own semiconductor manufacturing. India has the capacity in terms of manpower, and technical know-how but lacks experience in the creation of such sophisticated hardware.

However, a possible Achilles heel of production this writer has discovered is the requirement of all semiconductors. Cobalt, in particular, seems to be overlooked but its importance surpasses virtually all others. Cobalt, as mentioned, is required in the development of advanced semiconductors.

This brings up importance of the Congo region in Korea's supply chain. As of late 2022, the importance of this REE has not been recognized. This is evident in a report published in 2024 in the Institute for Defense Analysis *Rare Earth Elements in Africa: Implications for U.S. National and Economic Security*, there was no mention of cobalt nor its importance.<sup>16</sup>

### Image 5



Leading countries based on cobalt mine production worldwide in 2023 (in metric tons). Source: Statista 2024

Cobalt is found all around the world, but this does not mean that there are ample opportunities for cobalt acquisition. To put this situation in perspective, Image 5 displays the immense position that the DRC has in this marketplace. Minus the DRC, the world extraction levels of cobalt globally total 52,700 metric tons. The DRC accounts for 170,000 metric tons, or over three times, the extraction numbers by the rest of the sources combined. Consequently, the ROK should strongly consider this aspect.

This author suggests that the ROK should consider devoting national-level resources to cooperative business ventures with the DRC and joining groups where those opportunities can flourish. For example, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), an agency used in Korea's soft diplomacy, would foster progress toward shared global development goals.

Prudently, the ROK has made it a national priority to have stockpiles of REEs including cobalt. An article published in the *Dong-A Ilbo* in July 2023<sup>17</sup> indicates that the ROK government's goal is to have a 100 days' worth of REEs. The article mentions: "The reserve of cobalt, which is used for electric vehicles' batteries, is only for 12.4 days of use, while the government's target is 180 days. The article also states: "If China, the biggest cobalt exporter, decides to control its export, the South Korean battery industry

<sup>16</sup>Dorina A. Bekoe, Sarah A. Daly, Stephanie M. Burchard, Sydney N. Deatherage and Erin L. Sindle, "Rare Earth Elements in Africa: Implications for U.S. National and Economic Security," Feb, 2022, <https://apps.dtic.mil/sti/trecms/pdf/AD1204908.pdf>  
 Note: The author of this article is not criticizing the IDA, the author is simply putting out within the national security comment the

understanding of manufacturing and the intersection of raw materials focus on larger areas of REEs but neglects to see the relevance of cobalt within the manufacturing process.  
<sup>17</sup>"S. Korea targets stockpiling 100 days' worth of rare metals", The Dong-A ILBO, July 25, 2023, <https://www.donga.com/en/article/all/20230725/4311880/1>

may experience issues in production for over two months.” Therefore, the ROK should stockpile reserves for more than 180 days in case of an emergency.

### *REE Recycling*

In emerging scholarship, REE recycling has become more viable and has the potential to reduce the amount of REEs needed for Korea’s semiconductor manufacturing. An article referring to the recycling of REEs states: “The reverse supply of rare earth resources represents a pivotal avenue for diversifying the sources of rare earth supply, thereby bolstering supply stability and sufficiency.”<sup>18</sup> This area of research is beyond the scope of this article. Yet, this topic deserves further research.

The article also states that currently there are strong developments of this technology in the REE’s required for magnets used in the high-level technologies. It is still open to debate about how this technology can support the needs of advanced semiconductor manufacturers.

### *Korean Political Posture*

Korea should recognize that as tension grows in the Indo-Pacific (region, the United States will ask more from Korea by supporting the sanctions the United States has implemented with other US allies.<sup>19</sup> From a US political perspective, this seems to be a bipartisan policy. For example, under the first Trump administration<sup>20</sup> there were various actions taken that were not lifted when Biden administration took office, and subsequent legislation and executive orders have been implemented.<sup>21</sup>

The Blue House<sup>22</sup> will do its best to balance the need to show solidarity with US and other allies. However, Korea still wants to maintain access to Chinese markets along with open sea lines of communication

which provides sustained access to REEs. Korea can have all the advanced manufacturing in the world, however, that is only part of manufacturing and bringing goods to the marketplace.

An area in which the ROK has engaged in the understanding of diversifying their supply chains is through the Minerals Security Partnership (MSP). MSP is a partnership developed by the United States State Department in 2022. The intent of the MSP is to have constructive dialogue with key REE-rich countries and consumer nations to discover each other’s priorities, challenges, and opportunities in responsible REE extraction and recycling of REEs.<sup>23 24</sup> These discussions are under the framework of green energies and international cooperation to combat climate change.

Even if this US initiative ends, the ROK should lead a similar international partnership. The writer of this article sees no downside for the ROK to be a partner in the MSP or a similar group.

### **Conclusion: Protecting Interests as a US Ally and Semiconductor Power**

In summation, tensions in the Indo-Pacific will only increase. More nations within that area of INDOPACOM will need to devise their own plans for how they would proceed should tensions increase. The ROK is in a unique position. It is a US ally that is engaged in one of the world’s longest conflicts, between itself and the DPRK. On the other hand, it has the manpower and technical ability to create in-demand products globally. Korea should avoid direct action in any US-PRC conflict but still support the US and its allies in creative, even covert, ways.

The imperative of the Korean commercial interests is to not lose access to the valuable nearby Chinese market and to not lose access to the raw material required to create advanced semiconductors.

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<sup>18</sup> Unleashing the Power of Closed-Loop Supply Chains: A Stackelberg Game Analysis of Rare Earth Resources Recycling June 2024 Sustainability 16(12):4899, Chenghao LaiChenghao LaiXiuli WangHengkai LiYanbing Zhou DOI: 10.3390/su16124899

<sup>19</sup> Mackenzie Hawkins, Sam Kim and Bloomberg, “U.S. pushes South Korea to follow its lead and tighten export controls on chips for China,” Fortune, April 2, 2024, <https://fortune.com/asia/2024/04/02/us-pushes-south-korea-tighten-export-controls-chips-china/>

<sup>20</sup> Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian, “Special report: Trump’s U.S.-China transformation,” AXIOS, Jan 19, 2021, <https://www.axios.com/2021/01/19/trump-china-policy-special-report>

<sup>21</sup> The White House, “Fact Sheet: President Biden takes action to protect American workers and Businesses from China’s unfair trade practices,”

May 14, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/05/14/fact-sheet-president-biden-takes-action-to-protect-american-workers-and-businesses-from-chinas-unfair-trade-practices/>

<sup>22</sup> The official resident for the President of the Republic of South Korea  
<sup>23</sup> U.S. Department of State, “Minerals Security Partnership Convening Supports Robust Supply Chains for Clean Energy Technologies,” Sept 22, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/minerals-security-partnership-convening-supports-robust-supply-chains-for-clean-energy-technologies/#:~:text=The%20United%20States%20convened%20Minerals,and%20recycling%20of%20critical%20minerals>

<sup>24</sup> For further information on a Korean perspective on the MSP <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20230227003351320>

In the diversification of its supply chain, the ROK will have to seek partners such as India. With all that said, we should not forget about the REEs, especially cobalt, required in the production of semiconductors. With emerging technologies such as AI, there might be better ways of either importing or recycling critical REEs.



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