

## Living with North Korea

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Another season of “March Madness” has ended without war on the Korean Peninsula. North Korea began 2016 by again ignoring the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and conducting another nuclear test (January 6, “N. Korea Conducts ‘H-bomb’ Test”) and launching another long range ballistic missile (February 7). Then in March, as the annual ROK-US military exercises began, Pyongyang’s leaders fired another salvo of provocative verbal threats at the governments in Seoul and Washington (“S. Korea, U.S. Start Biggest-Ever Joint Exercises,” and “N. Korea Warns against War Games ...”). Such conduct continues former North Korean leader Kim Jong-il’s “military first politics” (*seonggun jeongchi*) which Kim Jong-un’s father launched in 1998. How should we react? Fear would be foolish. Confidence and resolve are much more appropriate and this is why.

The people of South Korea have achieved awesome success since national division in 1945, but they have yet to deal with this most daunting challenge. They rebuilt their economy after nearly four decades of Japanese colonization and the tremendously destructive Korean War. Today South Korea is recognized as an astute player in the world economy. Their educational and health systems are envied around the world. South Korea’s military is well trained, disciplined, motivated and equipped. Arguably their most remarkable achievement has been forging a maturing democracy in a traditionally authoritarian society. These mile stones were accomplished in the face of North Korea’s hostility usually manifested verbally, but also recently with armed attacks, particularly in the Yellow Sea, and previously even using terrorism. Understandably, South Korea and its people have earned the international community’s respect as evident in the United Nations selection of a citizen of the Republic of Korea as its secretary general and the World Bank’s naming of an American of Korean ethnicity as its president. Ultimately, an inability to deal effectively with North Korea could undermine not only South Korea’s achievements, but also the region’s peace and prosperity (Quinones).

### **The Korean Peninsula and East Asia**

Three problems confront Northeast Asia’s peace and stability: a hostile and nuclear armed North Korea, China’s increasingly assertive military posture, and friction between Japan and its neighbors. These are interlocking problems in that each affects the extent to which any one problem can be resolved. North Korea is not South Korea’s challenge alone. Instability on the Korean Peninsula could adversely affect the interests not just of the two Korea’s, but also all four superpowers – China, Japan, Russia and the United States. In light of globalization, instability in Northeast Asia could also undermine global tranquility.

### **Goals and Methods**

Goals and priorities play critical roles in defining national policies. North Korea since the 1980s has made regime survival its foremost goal as reflected in the first sentence of an official position paper presented on March 7, 2016, at a conference in Kuala Lumpur. The sentence reads in part, “... the Korean people’s survival and development are seriously threatened.” (Jong Nam Hyok, 2) In Pyongyang’s eyes, the greatest threat to North Korea’s survival is the United States. Pyongyang’s response is assertive diplomacy backed by a nuclear deterrent capability. Clearly Pyongyang’s priority is to maintain a balance of military power on the Korean Peninsula, (Jong, 9) a position current leader Kim Jong Un perpetuates based on his father’s “military first politics” (*seonggun cheongji*). Such a strategy reflects the fundamental shift in North Korea’s priorities that occurred in the 1980s when it placed regime survival ahead of national unification. North Korea’s current diplomatic priority is to replace the Korean War Armistice with a peace treaty, (Jong, 2) a position first asserted in 1994. In other words, rejoining the Six Party Talks to resume negotiations about ending its nuclear weapon is not in Pyongyang’s interest. Obviously North Korea’s priorities are at odds with those of South Korea and the broader international community as represented by the UN Security Council’s permanent members, particularly China, Russia and the United States.

The priority for South Korea, the UNSC permanent members, particularly China, Russia and the United States, as well as Japan is to maintain peace and stability in Northeast Asia. This shared goal has convinced these nations to coordinate their efforts to end North Korea’s nuclear program through negotiations focused on the so-called Six Party Talks. These talks brought together for the first time in history the two Koreas, China, Japan, Russia and the United States. After a promising start, they floundered and ultimately proved inconclusive. Yet Pyongyang’s adversaries cling to the hope of convincing North Korea to rejoin the talks. Given Pyongyang’s

priorities as outlined above, this is unlikely at least for the foreseeable future. Meanwhile, Pyongyang's adversaries are pursuing other means to sustain peace and stability in Northeast Asia. These include conventional and nuclear deterrence, and multilateral and unilateral diplomacy. Diplomacy accents a "carrot and stick" approach that matches economic sanctions with incentives for cooperation.

## Deterrence

Armed deterrence aimed at preventing a second Korean War has been since 1950 and continues to be the primary pillar of US-South Korea strategy for dealing with North Korea. Japan is also a key player in this strategy. South Korea's motivated, well trained and modernly equipped armed forces stands at the front line of this strategy. It is sustained by a dynamic economy and a resolute United States' commitment to assist South Korea if attacked by North Korea. For its part, the U.S. maintains ground and air forces in South Korea, and additional ground (Marines) plus air and naval assets in Japan. South Korea and the United States annually demonstrate their alliance by staging massive war games ("S. Korea, U.S. to Practice Response ..."). Pyongyang responds each year with outrage and provocative threats against its two adversaries (N. Korea Warns against War Games ...). The war games excite "March Madness," a six week period when tensions spike on the Korean Peninsula. But because of deterrence, Pyongyang can be expected to calm itself by the end of April.

North Korea, after all, is no longer the formidable and aggressive threat it posed to South Korea on the eve of the Korean War. In the 1980s, South Korea's economic development and democratization reversed the balance of power on the Korean Peninsula in its favor. Seoul effectively used the 1988 Seoul Olympiad to diplomatically and commercially isolate North Korea by convincing Pyongyang's former allies to align themselves more closely with Seoul. At the same time, North Korea's economy collapsed as its primary allies the Soviet Union collapsed and China opened itself to capitalism and diplomatic and economic integration into the global community.

After a brief decade of considering integration into the international community, Pyongyang reverted to its former pattern of conduct which estranges it from the international community. North Korea has half the population of South Korea, and its people live in poverty and on the edge of famine. It is a small nation flanked on two sides by hard to defend coast lines, making it unlikely that North Korea could defend itself from simultaneous land, ballistic missile and air assaults. No longer can Pyongyang look to Moscow for military assistance. China might rush to its aid, but before it could make a difference, North Korea most certainly would have sustained extensive destruction, even defeat. A second Korean War is not in Pyongyang's interest. In short, deterrence continues to be very effective in managing North Korea's hostility.

Refinement of the alliance is a continuous need. One possible refinement might be the U.S. deployment of Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea to counter North Korea's improving ballistic missile capability (Elleman and Zagurek). U.S. intelligence estimates that North Korea has a formidable arsenal of short and medium range ballistic missiles ready to launch toward South Korea. These include: 500 *Hwasong-5* (Scud-B), and *Hwasong-6* (Scud-C) missiles with a range of 300 to 500 kilometers; and 200 *Nodong* missiles with a range of 1,000 kilometers. Newer ballistic missiles are under development such as the more accurate KN-02 (Soviet-era SS-21) with a range of 90 to 120 kilometers, the *Musudan* intermediate range missile that could be launched from a submarine, and a longer range KN-08 intercontinental ballistic missile but these latter missiles are not yet operational. Lacking bombers, North Korea appears determined to wed nuclear warheads to at least some of its ballistic missiles, but development of such a warhead is a daunting task.

THAAD would appear to be a significant improvement over South Korea's current anti-ballistic missile capability. Seoul currently has deployed Patriot PAC-2 and newer PAC-3 anti-ballistic missile batteries at airfields, ports, critical infrastructure (i.e. nuclear power plants), military command centers and key government facilities. But these systems have some disadvantages. The Patriot system has a limited range of 40 kilometers. They also knock down targets relatively low in the atmosphere (below 25 kilometers altitude). This means a single destroyed missile will break up into several projectiles which would not burn up in the atmosphere and could spread casualties and damage over a wide area.

THAAD has two significant disadvantages for South Korea. It does not create an impenetrable defense umbrella. A single THAAD battery can defend against a maximum of 50 incoming enemy missiles. North Korea has the ability to launch literally hundreds of short and medium range ballistic missiles. Some "leakage" of North Korean missiles into South Korea's defense zone is inevitable. Also, because South Korea is on the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, all its THAAD batteries would most likely be aimed northward. This would expose South Korea to submarine launched missile attacks on its east, south and west coasts. Pyongyang does not yet have this capability but is already working to develop it. Also, for THAAD to be effective, South Korea must have military-to-military cooperation with Japan because the US has installed THAAD related anti-ballistic missile radars in

northern and central Japan. Only close cooperation between Seoul and Tokyo can ensure the rapid exchange of information vital for effective anti-missile defense.

Ultimately South Korea's government will have to determine whether THAAD would be a significant improvement of its anti-ballistic missile defense. As of early 2016, the majority of South Koreans favor THAAD's deployment. But China and Russia resolutely oppose THAAD's deployment in South Korea ("Russia Opposes THAAD Deployment ..." and "Chinese Envoy Warns THAAD Deployment would 'Destroy' Ties"). Nevertheless on March 7, 2016, Seoul and Washington began official discussions about possible deployment ("Washington Firm on THAAD Deployment ..." and, "S. Korea, U.S. Official Start THAAD Talks").

Whatever Seoul decides, US-South Korea defense ties are certain to remain robust and most likely will continue as such into the future. Their defense treaty gives South Korea access to the US nuclear umbrella without burdening its economy with the enormous cost of developing nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. Seoul also benefits from access to the superior US military technology and weapons, again at marginal cost. If needed, Seoul can quickly reinforce its armed forces with US military assets forward deployed in South Korea, Japan and Guam. The U.S. benefits from having a reliable ally like South Korea which contributes to the US global defense posture by hosting US forces and paying a substantial portion of their non-personnel costs. Additionally, Seoul contributes to UN peace keeping forces and the UN's global humanitarian program.

### **Multilateral Diplomacy**

Reinforcing deterrence is increasingly effective multilateral diplomacy. Born in the 1990s, today this diplomacy is centered in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). While deterrence aims to prevent war, multilateral diplomacy's goal is to reduce the risk of war by diminishing North Korea's hostility. The UNSC members share with Seoul and Tokyo the common goal of peacefully ending Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile programs. China, South Korea, Japan and the United States are coordinating their own trilateral and unilateral diplomacy with the UNSC effort. All share the common goal of achieving North Korea's nuclear disarmament through negotiations, but each has somewhat different priorities and methods (Quinones).

Nevertheless, since 2008, Pyongyang's reluctance to engage in negotiations has focused the UNSC and parallel efforts on coercive diplomacy, i.e. economic sanctions. Beginning in 1993, the UNSC has imposed increasingly rigorous economic sanctions on Pyongyang: 1993 (UNSC Resolution 825), 2006 (UNSCR 1695 and 1718), 2009 (UNSCR 1874), 2013 (UNSCR 2087 and 2013) and again in 2016 (UNSCR 2270). (KOO Kap-woo, LEE Jae Hoon, and KIM Heung-kyu). All these resolutions are aimed at convincing North Korea to forego the development of weapons of mass destruction.

Until recently, the effectiveness of trilateral diplomacy has been blunted by discord between Seoul, Beijing and Tokyo (Sohn, Soeya, Sneider). Although the three capitals shared the same goal regarding Pyongyang's nuclear program, disputes over historical issues undermined their cooperation until November 2015, when President Park Geun Hye and Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo agreed to resolve their dispute over historical issues. An accord worked out in December 2015, opened the way for the resumption of trilateral cooperation regarding North Korea. This is important since it prevents Pyongyang from playing Seoul, Tokyo and Beijing against one another, thus improving the effectiveness of multilateral diplomacy and the enforcement of UNSC sanctions.

Unilateral diplomacy is yet another tool being employed to manage North Korea's hostile impulses. President Park was reluctant to shut down the Kaesong Industrial Complex until she did so in February 2016 ("S. Korea to shut Down Kaesong Industrial Complex"). This was a major blow to North Korea's economy. Between the complex's opening in 2005 and the end of 2015, the zone hosted some 124 South Korean companies which employed 54,000 North Korean workers. Annual production was valued at \$515.5 million in 2015 "(Production Volume at Kaesong Complex ...)". During its decade of operation, the zone produced goods valued at \$3 billion, obviously a major source of revenue for the Pyongyang government.

Similarly, the United States and Japan responded to Pyongyang's January nuclear test by reinforcing their economic sanctions on North Korea ("Japan to Take Independent Sanctions ..." and, "U.S. Imposes New Sanctions ..."). The United States has essentially restored all the sanctions it had previously removed as inducements for Pyongyang to phase out its nuclear and ballistic missile programs. In Japan, cash remittances to North Korea cannot exceed Yen 100,000, and Japanese ships cannot stop in North Korean ports. Previously imposed sanctions have virtually ended direct bilateral trade, bar bilateral commercial flights and exclude North Korean vessels from docking in Japanese ports.

### **The Effectiveness of Economic Sanctions**

The combined impact of multilateral and unilateral sanctions is certain to magnify the impact of economic sanctions on North Korea, but sanctions alone are not likely to alter Pyongyang's hostile conduct and to end its

nuclear program (Kang, Babson). Seoul and Washington call UNSC 2270 sanctions “the strongest and most effective” to be adopted. But they concurred with Beijing that the sanctions not have “a negative impact on the (North Korean) public or humanitarian needs ...” (Koo, p. 8). The compromise was necessary to gain Beijing’s UNSC vote, but will limit the sanctions’ effectiveness. China’s uneven implementation of the sanctions is certain to continue impeding the effectiveness of sanctions.

In Pyongyang, North Korea’s generals point to economic sanctions, whether internationally or unilaterally imposed, to assert their conviction that nuclear weapons are needed to prevent North Korea’s foes from “strangling” its economy and attacking it. Similarly the Pyongyang government blames foreign “imperialists” and their economic sanctions for North Korea’s poverty and shortages of food and medicine. Actually the primary causes are Pyongyang’s failed economic policies and self-imposed estrangement from the international economy. Trilateral cooperation with Seoul and Tokyo, combined with diplomatic pressure from UNSC members, appears to be nudging Beijing toward more vigorously enforcing UN sanctions on Pyongyang.

Nor are economic sanctions likely to compel Pyongyang to return to the negotiating table. North Korea’s foremost priority since the 1980s has shifted from national unification to regime survival. Kim Il Sung’s son and successor changed the domestic political matrix by declaring “Military First Politics” (*Seonggun jeongchi*) in 1998. Ever since the military’s priorities have monopolized the nation’s priorities and resources. Alas, the efforts of the “neo-cons” in the second Bush Administration to discard the 1994 US-North Korea Agreed Framework accomplished nothing more than to clear the way for North Korea’s military to rush ahead with the development of weapons of mass destruction. Similarly President Lee Myung-bak’s efforts to end the engagement policies of his predecessors Kim Dae-jung and Roh Moo-hyun only played into the hands of Pyongyang’s advocates of building a formidable nuclear deterrent capability.

Now North Korea’s priorities are regime survival which it believes requires retaining its “nuclear deterrent capability,” a position it has resolutely maintained since the Six Party Talks faltered in 2008. Earlier this year North Korean foreign ministry official Jong Nam Hyok reiterated his government’s position at a conference in Kuala Lumpur. Reading from a prepared paper, he said, “It is utter nonsense for the United State to demand the DPRK (sic) of its denuclearization while constantly imposing nuclear threats upon the DPRK by military provocations such as large scale joint military drills involving nuclear strike means.” (Jong, p. 8) He repeated Pyongyang’s position that either the United States agree to conclude a peace treaty or North Korea “... will have to make the inevitable choice to deter the war by means of force and protect peace.” In other words, Pyongyang insists that it be able to set the agenda for any future negotiations with Washington and that any such talks not discuss North Korea’s nuclear weapons program (Jong, p. 9). While Pyongyang claims it remains open to unilateral negotiations with Washington, it continues to reject international pressure, even from China and Russia, to return to multilateral negotiations such as the Six Party Talks. Even then neither bilateral nor multilateral negotiations are likely to forge a diplomatic end to North Korea’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile programs. For Pyongyang, regime survival requires maintaining a resolute defense anchored in the maintenance of its nuclear deterrent capability.

### **South Korea’s Goal Regarding North Korea**

South Korea, the United States, Japan, China and Russia must review their strategies and policy goals before any re-engagement of North Korea in negotiations. Discord between over how to deal with North Korea has enabled Pyongyang to play one capital off against the other, eroding the effectiveness of multilateral negotiations. Their choice is between regime change, that is dismantling and replacing the current government in Pyongyang, or living with the Kim Jong Un regime, i.e. peaceful co-existence. There must also be a rigorous review of strategies. Here too the choices are limited to confrontation, engagement or peaceful co-existence.

Regime change can be accomplished only through a clash of arms or internal collapse. Many in South Korea, Japan and the United States had hoped that North Korea’s economic woes and pervasive food shortages in the 1990s would result in regime collapse. Clearly it has not. Others hoped that engagement could bring about the regime’s gradual transformation, a so-called “soft-landing” similar to China’s experience. But prospects of a “soft-landing” in North Korea continue to fade. It would appear that the current regime is likely to survive into the foreseeable future. As for strategy, none of the nations concerned about North Korea want war on the Korean Peninsula. War would severely damage their prosperity and might even trigger a nuclear conflict. Nearly 25 years of engagement and offering of various diplomatic and economic inducements have not yielded enduring change in North Korea’s hostile posture and nuclear ambitions. In the final analyst, our best option for dealing with North Korea may well be to live with it, i.e. peaceful co-existence, while maintaining a resolute defense posture and the continuation of multilateral diplomacy aimed at convincing North Korea that its best option is to learn to live peacefully with its neighbors. This may sound quaint, but given the history of the Korean Peninsula since its division in 1945, peaceful co-existence may be the only option that best accommodates all the concerned parties,

including North Korea, preferences until Pyongyang's leaders realize that they are their own worst enemy when it comes to achieving regime survival which requires peace and prosperity.

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