

Chapter 3

The Korean Peninsula

ICBMs and the New South Korean Government's Alliance Politics

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The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK, or North Korea) has publicly declared its intention to threaten US cities and military bases with nuclear weapons. Besides carrying out nuclear tests for the purpose of warhead development, the country is believed to be developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) "targeting the heart of the US." In addition, it is also said to be developing maneuverable reentry vehicles (MaRVs) designed with a high accuracy for striking military targets. Meanwhile, the threats against US military bases, rather than representing a counterforce attack to destroy military capabilities, reflect North Korea's attempt to make US allies hesitate to cooperate with the United States by emphasizing that it reserves the option of targeting highly populated areas near military bases with nuclear weapons.

A few days before Pyongyang declared that it might launch the Hwasong-12 missile toward the seas surrounding Guam, China called upon the United States, during the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2371, to abide by its promise not to press the unification of the Korean Peninsula. The timing of North Korea's threat to the United States coincided with China's expression of concerns about the survival of the DPRK regime. Anxiety about unification through absorption into South Korea may be influencing the North. In order to solidify military control and eliminate any antiregime thinking, Pyongyang has focused on instilling "Kimilsungism-Kimjongilism" in the military amidst the tensions with the outside, forcing the military to follow the "monolithic leadership" of Kim Jong Un, chairman of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK) and chairman of the State Affairs Commission of the DPRK.

The Republic of Korea (ROK, or South Korea), after the impeachment of former President Park Geun-hye, has seen the launch of the Moon Jae-in administration, which is striving to develop its deterrent capability against the North. The new administration has inherited the policies of the previous Park administration which deployed the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system as well as develop the Korean three-axis system, maintaining the tenor of emphasizing the US-ROK alliance. At the same time, the Moon Jae-in administration has put forward the policy of "responsible national defense," building upon the "Self-Reliant National Defense" policy handed down from the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003-08). It is calling upon the United States to relax restrictions on warhead weight through revisions to ROK-US missile guidelines and to swiftly transfer wartime operational control (OPCON).

As far as South Korea's relations with Japan are concerned, the Moon Jae-in administration has inherited the previous administration's two-track strategy that has been in place since the signing of the so-called "comfort women agreement," keeping unchanged the country's stance of separating the problem of historical awareness from other issues. In August 2017, the Agreement between the Government of Japan and the Government of the Republic of Korea on the Protection of Classified Military Information (GSOMIA) was extended automatically for one year. Regarding its relations with China, the current ROK administration has declared that it would not deploy THAAD any further, before a summit being held between the two country's leaders. With respect to relations with North Korea, amid increasing international pressure Seoul made it clear that efforts toward leading Pyongyang on the path to denuclearization require both pressure and dialogue.

1. North Korea: Will It Complete Its Survival Strategy?

(1) Threats against Cities and Military Targets

On January 1, 2017, in his New Year Address of Juche 106 (2017), Chairman Kim Jong Un of the State Affairs Commission of the DPRK—serving concurrently as chairman of the WPK and supreme commander of the Korean People's Army (KPA)—said, "[We] entered the final stage of preparation for the test launch of [an] intercontinental ballistic missile."¹⁾ Since Kim Jong Un's hereditary succession to his post, North Korea, in contrast to the time of his father and predecessor, Supreme Leader Kim Jong Il, has only announced as successes those missile and warhead tests that have not conspicuously failed. North Korea would not be making such public declarations unless it were confident, leading to the possibility that it was able to develop, sometime during the past year, technology enabling it to avoid the obstacles plaguing previous launches.

In connection with that point, some people believe that North Korea either has been domestically producing the RD-250 line of engines that were used in the Russian SS-9 ICBM,²⁾ or has been procuring the engines themselves from areas of the former Soviet Union.³⁾ Meanwhile, it seems that it did not make launch tests in 2017 of the Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), which had repeatedly failed in 2016; those missiles make use of the 4D10 engine (used in Soviet SS-N-6 missiles) that Pyongyang had ever been utilizing. It has been

pointed out that that development may be connected to its acquisition of the new engine.⁴⁾

The DPRK, seen to have gained confidence through the acquisition of the RD-250 line of rockets and engines, has come to strongly indicate the nature of its nuclear strategy through its specific actions. The July 4 launch test of the Hwasong-14, believed to be an ICBM, is said to have been the result of the “strategic decision” by Chairman Kim Jong Un to “round off [an] intercontinental ballistic rocket targeting the heart of the US without fail and thus open up the straight course for the final victory.”⁵⁾ Meanwhile, a March 7 report by the Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on the drill being performed by the Hwasong artillery units of the KPA Strategic Force, as supervised by Chairman Kim Jong Un, explained that they were “tasked to strike the bases of the US imperialist aggressor forces in Japan in contingency.”⁶⁾

If North Korea is truly considering preparing for both a countervalue attack on “the heart of the US,” that is, on its cities, and a counterforce attack on such military targets as US bases, that would mean its adoption of a nuclear strategy close to that of the former Soviet Union. As far as the DPRK’s countervalue attack capacity is concerned, that could lead to a decoupling strategy on its part. Decoupling in that context means reducing the reliability of an extended deterrence based on the US threat to retaliate against North Korea as the country attacking South Korea. North Korea’s demonstration of its ability to strike the US mainland can be interpreted as forcing upon the United States the choice of having to endanger its own population should it intervene in fighting in the far-off Korean Peninsula.

Right before North Korea’s nuclear test in September—its sixth ever—Chairman Kim Jong Un was reported to have directed the development of a “hydrogen bomb to mount on the newly produced ICBM rocket.”⁷⁾ On November 29, some three months since that date, the country announced the successful test launch of the Hwasong-15, an ICBM “capable of carrying super-heavy nuclear warhead and attacking the whole mainland of the US.” At the same time, Kim relayed the following message: “The day was a significant day when the historic cause of completing the state nuclear force, the cause of building a rocket power was realized.”⁸⁾

The nuclear warhead can also be detonated even at high altitudes, for a “super-power” electromagnetic pulse (EMP) attack over a broad area.⁹⁾ According to an

explanation given by the dean of North Korea's Kim Chaek University of Technology immediately after the test, low-altitude detonations are defined as those made 600 meters or less, while medium-high-altitude detonations refer to those between 600 meters and ten kilometers, and those above ten kilometers are known as high-altitude detonations, the latter being capable of destroying electronic devices, machinery and systems and power-cable stabilizers through powerful EMPs in nuclear explosions covering a radius of some thirty to one hundred kilometers.¹⁰⁾

At the same time, North Korea strongly implied the possibility of counterforce attacks using the IRBM-class Hwasong-12 against the Pacific theater. After the May 14, 2017, launch of a Hwasong-12 missile, Kim Jong Un hinted at countervalue attacks against the US mainland, expressing his belief that besides the United States, "the day when the DPRK uses the similar retaliatory means will come," adding that the "Pacific operation region [is] in the DPRK's sighting range for strike," demonstrating the DPRK's intention to possibly engage in counterforce attacks. On August 8, the KPA Strategic Force announced that it was "now carefully examining the operational plan for making an enveloping fire at the areas around Guam with [the] medium-to-long-range strategic ballistic rocket Hwasong-12 in order to contain the US major military bases on Guam, including the Andersen Air Force Base," and thus "send a serious warning signal to the US."¹¹⁾

After the May 14 launch of the Hwasong-12, Kim Jong Un is said to have ordered the scientists and technicians in the field of rocket research "to continuously develop more precise and diversified nukes, and nuclear striking means ... and make preparations for more tests."¹²⁾ Indeed, when making plans for attacks against military targets, it is necessary to develop "more precise" means of transport than those intended for the destruction of densely populated regions spread over a broad area. In the same month, North Korea also carried out missile warhead launches to test MaRVs, which can

guide missiles to their targets after reentry. The previous year, Kim reportedly ordered the development of missiles that could accurately hit targets at sea, such as maneuvering warships, and any fixed targets on land “like the eye of a needle.”¹³⁾ While some entertain doubts that US warships would ever approach North Korea so closely that it could detect their positions, others say that the threat of operational MaRVs should not be overlooked, as its capability of hitting a maneuvering ship at sea would make it “even more accurate against fixed targets on land,” allowing it to “possibly evade defending Patriot missiles.”¹⁴⁾

Counterforce attacks are actions in which nuclear weapons are used to minimize one’s own damage in warfare by destroying adversary’s military capacity. Unlike the strategy of countervalue attacks, which aims to deter war by demonstrating one’s retaliatory means, the strategy of counterforce attacks requires the prognosis that fighting can be continued by those surviving a nuclear war. Accordingly, if the DPRK does indeed have a counterforce attack strategy against the US military, then that would make it an outlier from the general trend of small countries, which would stand little chance of surviving a nuclear war. For instance, even if the DPRK successfully destroyed US military facilities and strategic bombers in Guam with IRBMs loaded with nuclear warheads, there is no conceivable reason to suppose that it would thereby gain confidence to survive a nuclear war with the United States.

In the released comments of its Foreign Ministry spokesman, North Korea has also said that while only US military bases in Japan have conventionally been within “the optical sight of the Strategic Force of the Korean People’s Army, the target of the DPRK will be changed” if Japan is “hostile toward the DPRK following the US.”¹⁵⁾ The expression of its intention to inflict nuclear attacks upon the US military in the Pacific theater demonstrates Pyongyang’s idea of forcing US allies to hesitate in assisting US forces by emphasizing that it retains the option of targeting densely populated areas. Thus, its strategy is not one of counterforce attack for warfighting, but more likely rather one of complementing the threat of countervalue attack to avoid a war that would lead to its obliteration.

The strategy of minimizing one’s own damage can be executed by nonnuclear warheads if the judgment is rendered that a nuclear war can be avoided. The DPRK is clearly quite interested in building a damage-limitation capability, with a “test of [a] new-type anti-aircraft guided weapon system organized by the Academy of National Defence Science” being conducted in May 2017, shooting

down an unmanned aircraft and rocket targets. The test is believed to have been one of a surface-to-air missile developed based on technology derived from either China's HQ-9 or Russia's S-300P,¹⁶⁾ and has already been deployed in the field, according to the *Rodong Sinmun*. With that test, Kim Jong Un underscored the need for the immediate development of a modern anti-aircraft guided weapon system.¹⁷⁾ There is a consistent logic in the aim of acquiring the capacity to attack US military facilities in Japan, logistics and arriving forces for the US-ROK combined operations in wartime, limiting the effect of retaliation by the combined forces against North Korea's aggression.

(2) International Politics for Regime Survival

The KPA Strategic Force declared its plan for an “enveloping fire around Guam” shortly after the UN Security Council passed Resolution 2371 on August 5 (August 6, JST). Conceivably that saber-rattling by North Korea was done with the awareness of the consultations between the United States and China leading to the adoption of the resolution.

First, in the resolution, which preceded the declaration by the KPA Strategic Force, the Chinese representative recalled the recent statements by the United States that it [the US] would neither seek “regime change” or “peninsular reunification,” and said that he hoped that the United States would also keep its promise not to advance troops past the thirty-eighth parallel north (near the North-South Military Demarcation Line).¹⁸⁾

Meanwhile, a few days before China made that statement, US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson reiterated—even more clearly than he did prior to the two launches of the Hwasong-14 rocket,¹⁹⁾ which had triggered the resolution—that “we do not seek the collapse of the regime; we do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula; we do not seek an excuse to send our military north of the thirty-eighth parallel.”²⁰⁾ Tillerson's affirmation was likely in response to China's demands in consideration of North Korea's interests, which were an important condition for getting China to agree to endorse the resolution. After the UN resolution, Chairman Kim Jong Un announced that, having threatened the United States, he “would watch a little more ... the conduct of the Yankees”²¹⁾ in response to the decision of the commander of the KPA Strategic Force for the plan on “enveloping fire around Guam.”

While the stage has expanded greatly from the Korean Peninsula to the Pacific

region, North Korea's saber-rattling actions in its demands to the United States resemble those of the past.²²⁾ It likely carried out its latest such actions this time to match the timing of China's pressing on the United States its demands for the survival of the DPRK regime. In consideration of that, North Korea, which deplored China's stance toward the United States, saying such things as "Are You Good at Dancing to Tune of Others?"²³⁾ may have been pinning its expectations on China while pressing those demands on the United States. In fact, as shown below, the direction of China's proposed resolution of the nuclear problem may not only reflect its criticism of North Korea's nuclear weapons program, but also reflects its negative awareness of the US-ROK alliance.

In February 2017, immediately after Donald Trump's inauguration as US president, Chinese State Councilor Yang Jiechi, in a phone conversation with Secretary of State Tillerson, proposed a dual-track approach for breaking the vicious cycle on the Korean Peninsula.²⁴⁾ That was practically synonymous with the announcement made the previous year by Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi, whose position was to promote the parallel resolution to the nuclear problem and the replacement of the armistice agreement mechanism.²⁵⁾ Wang had originally stated that position one day after the China-ROK vice foreign ministerial Strategic Dialogue was held on February 16, 2016, which itself followed the announcement by the United States and South Korea on February 7 of their initiation of talks on the deployment of the THAAD system. China's critical stance toward the THAAD deployment probably had effect on its proposal for a peace pact. On July 9, 2016, one day after the US-ROK talks produced an agreement concerning the THAAD deployment, Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Liu Zhenmin cited THAAD as an issue when noting that "the relevant bilateral military alliances are a product of a bygone era." Following these remarks, he asserted that the "parallel-track approach of advancing the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and replacing the armistice agreement with a peace treaty" should be supported.²⁶⁾ While referring to the US-ROK alliance as "product of a bygone era," China's proposal of a dual-track approach shares logical similarities with North Korea's position that the signing of a peace pact would make the US-ROK alliance a "leftover."²⁷⁾

Shortly after the visit to the United States by State Councilor Yang Jiechi and his meeting with President Trump on February 27, 2017, China received a visit from DPRK Vice Foreign Minister Ri Kil Song. At his meeting with the North Korean foreign minister, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang reiterated China's

position on the Korean Peninsula issue, calling upon all relevant parties to make new efforts in realizing the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and building a peace mechanism on the Korean Peninsula.²⁸⁾ Wang started calling for a “suspension for suspension (double freeze)” —namely, the suspension of the DPRK’s missile and nuclear activities in exchange for a halt of the large-scale US-ROK exercises—just a few days after his meeting with the DPRK vice foreign minister.²⁹⁾

As seen above, China’s position, combining the dual-track approach with the double-freeze plan, took shape by the time the April summit was held between the United States and China, sharing the same concerns expressed by North Korea about the US-ROK alliance. Before long, Russia also presented a similar plan of its own, calling for both the United States and North Korea—as they moved toward negotiations—to restrain their use of arms and any threat to use arms.³⁰⁾ In July, the Chinese and Russian foreign ministries released a joint statement on the Korean Peninsula’s problems promoting a “joint initiative” based on the dual-track approach, the double-freeze proposal, and the Russian-proposed stage-by-stage Korean settlement plan. According to that declaration, the DPRK’s “justified concerns” need to be respected.³¹⁾

At the same time, shortly after the US-China summit, Chinese media warned that if North Korea’s sixth nuclear test contaminated northeastern China with radiation, “any reaction from Beijing could be possible,” adding that even if Washington launched a surgical or pinpoint attack on North Korea, “Beijing should oppose the move by diplomatic channels, rather than get involved through military action.” The *Global Times* editorial conveying that statement simultaneously developed an argument similar to that of the comments of the Chinese representative, mentioned earlier, concerning UN Security Council Resolution 2371. Based on that argument, if ROK and US military forces were to cross the thirty-eighth parallel in a ground invasion “for the direct purpose of annihilating the Pyongyang regime,” China would “ramp up [its] military immediately.” It added that “Beijing would never sit back and watch foreign military forces overthrow the Pyongyang regime” so as to realize a reunified Korea.³²⁾ While the *Global Times* is a subsidiary of the *People’s Daily*, the *Global Times* does not directly represent the official position. Yet, the editorial resembles the demands made to the United States by the Chinese representative at the time of the UN resolution’s adoption, namely, not to pursue regime change or

the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, nor to let US forces cross the thirty-eighth parallel.

Secretary of State Tillerson also voiced that position publicly, saying, “We do not seek a collapse of the regime. We do not seek an accelerated reunification of the peninsula.”³³⁾ He first made that statement on April 27, 2017, five days after the argument appeared in the *Global Times*. One can assume that when that argument appeared, the Chinese government was conveying the same sort of demands to the United States. As stated above, China reconfirmed through Tillerson’s statement that no military action would be taken across the thirty-eighth parallel, and did the same again with the Security Council resolution in August and Security Council Resolution 2375 on September 11 (September 12, JST).³⁴⁾

Indeed, the reaction of North Korea to Chinese media strongly intimated at a showdown between the two countries concerning the former’s nuclear development. After the editorial in the *Global Times*, the KCNA portrayed it as “urging the DPRK to choose one among [the] options ... whether to break Sino-DPRK friendship or to dismantle its nukes,” and strongly criticized it as “an undisguised threat to an honest-minded neighboring country which has a long history and tradition of friendship.” However, the KCNA editorial also stated that the view that DPRK was “waging a hard fight in the frontline of the showdown with the US” and its “strategy for dominating [the] Asia-Pacific,” and that China and the DPRK were facing a common threat.³⁵⁾ North Korea was also demonstrating its understanding that China could share its concerns about the ROK-US alliance over the medium and long term.

Meanwhile, given that the United States is not a direct party to the reunification of the Korean Peninsula, China may have continued to demand that unification be avoided because of the DPRK’s view that the ROK’s guarantee of preserving the Pyongyang regime lacks credibility. North Korea has been strongly concerned with avoiding a situation that would repeat, on the Korean Peninsula, the same kind of “unification through absorption” that happened between West and East Germany. On July 6, 2017, on a visit to Berlin, ROK President Moon Jae-in gave a speech, in which he said, “The experience of Germany’s unification gives hope for unification and, at the same time, shows us the path that we should follow.”³⁶⁾ Reporting on that, the North Korean *Rodong Sinmun* pointed out that the reunification of Germany was “unification through absorption,” and criticized Moon Jae-in’s statement as a public declaration of his intent to “achieve unification

of social systems under liberal democracy.”³⁷⁾

What enabled North Korea to accept the first North-South summit was the speech delivered in Berlin by then-President Kim Dae-Jung of South Korea in March 9, 2000, in which he said that it would be difficult to reproduce German unification on the Korean Peninsula.³⁸⁾ That was why North Korea did not overlook President Moon Jae-in’s mention of German reunification as “the path we should follow,” even though he did not refer to “unification through absorption” explicitly. Despite the Moon Jae-in administration’s being the first progressive South Korean government since 2008, after a hiatus of two administrations, the DPRK cannot rid itself of its anxiety over unification through absorption.

(3) Purges and the Control of the Military

The North Korean regime, with its fears of being absorbed by the South, has continued to reinforce the system of “the single-minded unity” under the Kim Jong Un leadership, with the KPA following “the one and only” leader. When Chairman Kim Jong Un rendered his guidance, mentioned above, for drills to be conducted by the Strategic Force Hwasong artillery units, as well as when he visited the Strategic Force command after that the threat to Guam was delivered, he stated that both “the monolithic leadership system” and the “command and management system of the Supreme Commander” needed to be made firm and unshakable. The latter phrase will be a concept imposing the monolithic leadership system—in the sense of removing any persons who could potentially replace the existing leader, as with liberal democracies or alternative leaders in socialist systems—on the command and management system of the KPA.

In regimes that value bloodlines, what is likely to threaten the maintenance of the monolithic leadership system is the existence of a family of leaders that the military potentially could follow. The DPRK does not parade the family of the leader before the national populace as if it were a royal family, making it impossible to visualize the existence of anyone else with a comparable standing. Jang Song Thaek, an uncle of Kim Jong Un, was executed on December 12, 2013, about one year after an exceptional photograph of his was released (on November 19, 2012) portraying him to have essentially the same rank as Kim Jong Un, who then held the post of chairman of the National Defence Commission.³⁹⁾

According to the verdict statement against Jang Song Thaek at the time, one of the direct reasons cited for his purge was his attempt to be a “‘reformist’ known

to the outside world” who would use that to “help his ‘new government’ get ‘recognized’ by foreign countries.”⁴⁰⁾ Originally, shortly after Kim Jong Un, then chairman of the National Defence Commission, was awarded the title of “Marshal of the DPRK” on July 17, 2012, North Korea clearly rejected any of the hopes for “reform and opening” that were then mounting in South Korea toward the new leader, saying that they were a hidden ambition for “unification through absorption.”⁴¹⁾ Having a relative of the leader with potentially comparable rank expressing the intent for regime “reform” would likely create the awareness among the military leadership and others that an alternative to the regime existed, and that there were other options for who could become leader. Kim Jong Nam, Chairman Kim Jong Un’s older half-brother (same father, different mother) who was assassinated in February 2017, also expressed the view that “reform and opening” was necessary, and had demonstrated an affinity for the freedoms of the West.⁴²⁾ The fact that he was killed before becoming widely known domestically is consistent with the survival strategy of a regime of maintaining the monolithic leadership system, and doubts remain as to whether his killing was merely attributable to a misunderstanding or personal factors.

Exceptionally, at the Second Plenum of the Seventh Central Committee of the WPK in October 2017, Kim Jong Un’s younger sister, Kim Yo Jong, was made an alternate member of the Politburo of the WPK. However, the fact that it was possible for a relative of Kim Jong Un to be promoted to such a prominent position—which would normally be highly problematic in maintaining the monolithic leadership system—demonstrates that no tradition exists in the DPRK for a woman to become Supreme Leader.

One slogan emphasized during Kim Jong Un’s guidance, and which was given to both the dropping and target-striking contest of KPA Special Operation Forces as well as the combat flight contest among commanding officers of the KPA Air and Anti-Air Force, was “Safeguard the Party Central Committee headed by the great Comrade Kim Jong Un at the cost of our lives.”⁴³⁾ That slogan, repeated many times after the power succession, aims to make military personal identify the defense of the nation with safeguarding Kim Jong Un as WPK chairman. As long as the concept is instilled in the KPA, the military would never accept the prerogatives of any other Party Central Committee members besides Kim Jong Un.

The primary organizations of the KPA Youth League, which are positioned at

the “company” level within the KPA, have drawn attention as an attempt to reinforce the system of imbuing the military with the viewpoint of following “one and only one” leader. At the fourth conference of active secretaries of those organizations in 2017, Chairman Kim Jong Un said that the primary organizations of the Youth League of the army must be turned into elite vanguard ranks for the purpose of “modeling the whole army on Kimilsungism/Kimjongilism.”⁴⁴⁾ That statement was made by referring to the Youth League as active defenders of “the Workers’ Party of Korea’s idea of prioritizing the youth.” On May 8, 2016, the clear expression by the decree of the Seventh Congress of the WPK of “prioritizing the youth”⁴⁵⁾ probably signified an emphasis on imbuing “Kimilsungism/Kimjongilism” throughout the KPA Youth League as a strategy toward regime survival. In fact, at the ninth Congress of the Kim Il Sung Socialist Youth League that followed the Seventh Congress of the WPK, the organizations were renamed the “Kimilsungism/Kimjongilism Youth League,” in a way consistent with the attainment of that goal. At that time, Kim Jong Un “underscored the need for the youth league to strengthen its organizations ... to usher in the greatest heyday of the Kimilsungist-Kimjongilist youth movement.”⁴⁶⁾

In 2017, the DPRK, while stepping up its nuclear and missile threats against Japan, the United States, and South Korea, steadily carried out efforts to eliminate all anti-regime concepts from the military. During his inspection of KPA Large Combined Unit 966, a corps-level unit invested with the duty of defending the capital,⁴⁷⁾ Chairman Kim Jong Un emphasized the need to promote educational programs among the military. As if to respond to that goal, the officers and soldiers of the unit all shouted out the slogan, “Safeguard Kim Jong Un at the cost of our lives!” as they welcomed him.⁴⁸⁾ The unit’s duties are believed to include dealing with insurrection by the military.⁴⁹⁾

Kim Jong Un’s inspection of KPA Large Combined Unit 966 was announced in conjunction with the start of the Foal Eagle ROK-US joint military exercise on March 1, 2017. During his inspection of the Security Force after the declaration of the threat against Guam as well, he made a stop at the Kimilsungism/Kimjongilism Study Hall and watched a performance by the art squad of the large combined unit. He mentioned to the members of the Hwasong Artillery Unit that they must be “more loyal than anyone else to the Party” and be thoroughly grounded in thought and belief, also instructing them to devote their energies to reinforcing the “five-point education set” (Kim Jong Il’s patriotism, and so

forth).⁵⁰⁾ The DPRK regime seems to believe that the military confrontation with the liberal democracies contributes to the elimination of thought that would upset military control.

Additionally, during a speech delivered on December 23, 2017, before the Fifth Conference of Cell Chairpersons, Kim Jong Un, speaking as WPK chairman, stressed that the party cell chairpersons ought to treat the “five-point education set” as an important activity for transforming party members into “Kimilsungists/Kimjongilists” (party cells are the smallest and lowest-ranking units of the party, placed within the military as well as corporate offices and the like). In the speech, delivered immediately after the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 2397 against the Hwasong-15 missile launch (early in the morning of December 23 by DPRK time, and December 22 by local New York time), he placed unprecedented emphasis on “the US imperialists and their sanctions” as promoting an “anti-socialist phenomenon,” and condemned the aim of the sanctions as being the “destruction of our socialism,” thus demonstrating his strong threat awareness against liberal democratic thought.⁵¹⁾

2. South Korea: Security and Diplomacy of the New Administration

(1) President Moon Jae-in’s Alliance Policies

In South Korea, starting in October 2016, a scandal was ignited over actions by then-President Park Geun-hye’s confidant to meddle in national policies and wield improper influence, leading to giant candlelight rallies being held every weekend calling for the president to step down. On December 9, she was impeached by a vote of more than two-thirds of the legislators of the National Assembly, with her powers then transferred to the prime minister as the acting president until the inauguration of the next elected president. On March 10, 2017, the Constitutional Court endorsed the impeachment, which was put into effect the same day.⁵²⁾

Normally, South Korean presidential elections are carried out once every five years, and the next one had been scheduled for December 2017, but a successor must be elected within sixty days “in case a vacancy occurs in the office of the President ... or is disqualified by a court ruling or for any other reason,” according to the ROK Constitution, so the presidential election was instead held on May 9, 2017. During the election campaign, the issues discussed in the diplomatic and

security fields focused on the deployment of THAAD to the US forces in South Korea, as well on the policy toward Pyongyang. Still, the debate of those issues during the campaign lacked much substance, as they were not delved into deeply, with attention instead revolving around the problem of Park's confidant's meddling in national policies, along with the slurs and counter-slurs made by the candidates themselves against each other.

In the May 9 presidential election, the progressive candidate Moon Jae-in captured 41.1 percent of the vote, decisively defeating the conservative candidate, who got only 24.0 percent.⁵³⁾ In South Korean presidential by-elections, unlike ordinary presidential elections, there is no presidency handover period of some two months, so the candidate Moon Jae-in was sworn in as president the next day. His victory represented a return to power by the progressives after a hiatus of approximately nine years, following the two administrations of Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye.

South Korea's new president, Moon Jae-in, is a lawyer by trade, with a background of engaging in human-rights issues. He had previously held such posts as chief presidential secretary in the Roh Moo-hyun administration that had lasted from 2003 to 2008, serving as his aide. During the election campaign, Moon Jae-in had lodged criticisms against the diplomatic and security policies of both the Lee Myung-bak and Park Geun-hye administrations, calling for a change in both the policies toward the DPRK as well as the US-ROK alliance.⁵⁴⁾ Although those positions created the potential problem of how to square off against the US Trump administration that was launched in January 2017, significant discord between the two was largely avoided thanks to later adjustments made by the new administrations on both sides of the alliance.

In the first place, President Trump, who had hinted at reductions in US involvement in East Asia—including the withdrawal of US forces from South Korea—during his presidential campaign, talked with Prime Minister Hwang Kyo-ahn (who had served as acting president until Moon Jae-in was inaugurated) over the phone shortly after his own inauguration so as to allay those concerns.

The phone call, which took place on January 30, 2017 (JST), reaffirmed the US commitment to the US-ROK alliance and its involvement in the defense of South Korea through the “nuclear umbrella.”⁵⁵⁾

After his inauguration, President Moon Jae-in outlined a conciliatory posture toward the North amidst the mounting pressure by the United States toward that country. Moon Chung-in, the special advisor for unification, diplomacy and national security affairs for the president, announced a position approaching China’s “double-freeze” proposal, saying that if North Korea suspended its nuclear and missile development, then the US-ROK military exercises could be drawn down, leading to concerns of friction between the United States and South Korea.⁵⁶⁾

However, during his first visit to the United States, which took place in June 2017, President Moon Jae-in firmly declared that there could be no interchange of the illegal North Korean development of nuclear weapons for lawful US-ROK military exercises.⁵⁷⁾ Also, at his first-ever summit with President Trump, the two leaders agreed to apply maximum pressure against the DPRK, so situation in which differences of opinion surfaced between the two sides was avoided for the time being. After the summit, the two countries released a joint statement reaffirming the strengthening of the alliance and the provision of extended deterrence by the United States to South Korea.⁵⁸⁾

Also, the deployment of the THAAD to the United States Forces Korea (USFK), which had been a bone of contention for quite a while, came to be executed at a fast clip. The Park Geun-hye administration had already announced that THAAD would be completely deployed by the end of 2017, but opposition by residents near the slated deployment sites, along with the increasing calls for important decisions to wait for the next administration after the impeachment of President Park Geun-hye, had spawned doubts whether the deployment would actually play out as planned. However, President Moon Jae-in gradually changed his position concerning the deployment, moving away from his original opposition to the plan, expressed during the fluid political situation surrounding the impeachment, toward a more neutral position maintained during the election campaign. For example, when armament corresponding to a THAAD battery—two THAAD interceptor missile launchers out of six, and an AN/TPY-2 radar—was installed in March 2017 under the watch of Acting President Hwang Kyo-ahn, Moon Jae-in, then a leading candidate for president, limited his reference to the matter by saying that it would not be in the national interest to hastily promote something

that otherwise could be used by the next administration as leverage in diplomacy.⁵⁹⁾

In the period leading up to the summit with President Trump, President Moon Jae-in came to increasingly solidify his position of accepting the THAAD deployment. Immediately after his inauguration, he adopted a posture of postponing the official deployment of the missile system as much as possible, taking such actions as announcing a policy of having strict environmental impact assessments (EIAs) carried out in potential THAAD deployment candidate sites for up to one year, and ordering a fact-finding investigation into the failure of the Ministry of National Defense to report that the four remaining missile launchers of one THAAD battery had already been brought into South Korea.⁶⁰⁾ After the repeated indirect statements of displeasure from the United States in the run-up to President Moon's first summit with President Trump,⁶¹⁾ however, Chung Eui-yong, director of the National Security Office, stated that "we have no intention of fundamentally changing promises made in the context of the South Korea-US alliance,"⁶²⁾ and President Moon Jae-in also commented that the EIAs "did not signify that the decision to deploy [THAAD] would be undone or reversed."⁶³⁾

After the DPRK launched what was believed to be an ICBM-class ballistic missile on July 28, 2017, following the previous one of July 4, President Moon Jae-in totally reversed his passive stance and directed the immediate deployment of the four remaining missile launchers of the THAAD battery.⁶⁴⁾ While he insisted that it was a temporary deployment pending the completion of the EIAs,⁶⁵⁾ he did push through the deployment of the four THAAD missile launchers at the appointed sites despite the opposition of local residents.

At the beginning of his term, President Moon Jae-in strongly indicated that "we will be in the driver's seat ... in dealing with inter-Korean affairs," that is to say, that South Korea would aim to pursue autonomy from the United States.⁶⁶⁾ That was also a reflection of his pre-inauguration stance of wanting to eliminate any fear that the United States and other major powers were simply "passing by South Korea"⁶⁷⁾ as they made decisions about the Korean Peninsula, as had been suggested during the interim period when the prime minister was serving as acting president. However, owing to the repeated provocations by Pyongyang, President Moon Jae-in seems to have inclined toward the judgment that substantive shifts could not be made away from the policy line laid down by previous administrations toward the US-ROK alliance. At a Cabinet meeting explaining the results of the G20 (Group of Twenty) summit held in Hamburg in July 2017,

the president said, “We must bear in mind that despite the highly pressing nature of the Korean Peninsula situation for us, we do not have the power, in reality, to solve it on our own, nor do we have the power to extract an agreement,”⁶⁸⁾ thereby admitting the limitations to South Korea’s ability to “be in the driver’s seat” as far as affairs on the Korean Peninsula were concerned.

North Korea continued its ballistic missile launch tests after that as well, and once it carried out its sixth nuclear test on September 3, the United States and South Korea decided to bolster their cooperation toward a reinforcement of deterrence capabilities. On September 4, the day after the sixth North Korean nuclear test, a telephone summit between Trump and Moon led to an agreement to lift warhead weight restrictions for missiles that the ROK possessed as prescribed by the “ROK-US missile guidelines.” That agreement was reconfirmed in the joint communiqué released by the forty-ninth ROK-US Security Consultative Meeting (SCM) held on October 28.⁶⁹⁾ The guidelines, first issued in 1979, were revised in 2001 and 2012, gradually expanding the range and weight of missiles that South Korea could possess.⁷⁰⁾ The latest agreement maintains the maximum range of 800 kilometers for such missiles, but is likely to lift any restrictions on the weight of the warheads.

Furthermore, there have been discussions—even more lively than those conducted in 2016—concerning both the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons to the USFK and the deployment of nuclear submarines in the context of the need to enhance the deterrence against further improvements in the DPRK’s nuclear and missile capabilities. In August 2017, South Korea’s main opposition party, the conservative Liberty Korea Party (formerly the Saenuri Party), adopted an official stance in support of the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons, with a party delegation visiting the United States in the following month to appeal to Congress members to redeploy tactical nuclear weapons to the USFK. Also, when it was reported that Minister of National Defense Song Young-moo had told the National Assembly of his discussions of the redeployment of tactical nuclear weapons during his visit to the United States in August, the Blue House swiftly stepped in and amended the statements.⁷¹⁾ Needless to say, there does not seem to be a change in the ROK government’s position, with President Moon Jae-in declaring in an interview with the US media that “I do not agree that South Korea needs to develop our own nuclear weapons or relocate tactical nuclear weapons in the face of North Korea’s nuclear threat.”⁷²⁾ As far as the introduction of nuclear

submarines is concerned, moreover, which would be an important step in South Korea's acquisition of a second-strike capability against the North, it has been reported that Minister of National Defense Song Young-moo had requested such in his August visit to the United States, as mentioned above, as did President Moon Jae-in during his September visit to that country.⁷³⁾ Nonetheless, there are many issues yet to be resolved in the introduction of such submarines, such as technical problems and the need for revisions to the US-ROK Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation.

In addition, moves have been carried out to confirm the reliability of the US policy of extended deterrence to counter the DPRK's decoupling strategy of aiming to split South Korea from the United States, as described in the previous section. Besides the dispatch by the US military of strategic assets of various types to the vicinity of the Korean Peninsula, as could be expected, joint ROK-US military exercises were held immediately after the July 4 and July 28 launches by North Korea of what was believed to be ICBM-class ballistic missiles, with ROK forces launching the ballistic missile Hyeonmu-2A, with a range of 300 kilometers, and the US forces launching the Army Tactical Missile System (ATACMS).⁷⁴⁾

(2) Military Reform for a “Responsible National Defense”

The Moon Jae-in administration has put forward the policy of “responsible national defense,” building upon the “Self-Reliant National Defense” policy handed down from the Roh Moo-hyun administration (2003-08). That concept has been explained as including the following items, among others: (1) The swift transition of wartime OPCON (operational control) from the current ROK-US Combined Forces Command to the ROK military, (2) the development of the ROK military's own response capability against the North Korean nuclear and missile threat through the “Korean three-axis system” composed of the Kill Chain, the Korean Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) system, and the Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation (KMPR), (3) revisions to the command structure, (4) a reduction in troop strength from the 520,000 level of the Lee Myung-bak administration to 500,000 troops, and (5) assignment of civilian officials to key posts in the national defense organization.⁷⁵⁾

As for the development of the KMPR⁷⁶⁾—in fact, the only one of the three axes involving direct retaliation targeting the DPRK leadership—the new Moon Jae-in

administration had not yet made any clear statement before inauguration regarding its continuation.⁷⁷⁾ However, after the inauguration, the promotion of the Korea three-axis system, including the KMPR, was explicitly included in the Five-year Plan for the Administration of State Affairs, drawn up by the Presidential Advisory Commission on Planning State Affairs—corresponding to the presidency handover commission that is normally created after regular presidential elections—and released in July 2017.⁷⁸⁾ Faced with North Korea’s ramped-up nuclear and missile capabilities, the Moon Jae-in administration maintained the policies of the previous administration.

Meanwhile, what clearly differs from the Park Geun-hye administration is the current administration’s call for the swift transfer of wartime OPCON. Defense Minister Song Young-moo, in his first visit to the United States in August 2017, proposed wartime OPCON transition to the US side.⁷⁹⁾ Also, President Moon Jae-in, speaking at the sixty-ninth Armed Forces Day on September 28, 2017—the first time for the event to be held at a naval base—said, “The handover on the basis of our independent defense capabilities will ultimately lead to a remarkable advancement in the fundamentals and abilities of our military,” adding that “when the South has wartime operational control, the North will fear us more,” thus asserting that it would boost the deterrence against the DPRK.⁸⁰⁾ Additionally, the document lays forth the roadmap of realizing, during the term of the Moon Jae-in administration, the transfer of wartime OPCON, as well as transferring the command and control capabilities of the ROK-US Combined Forces Command and the Joint Chiefs of Staff in the early 2020’s to what is called the “Future Combined Forces Command.”⁸¹⁾ However, the ROK’s plan was not approved by the forty-ninth SCM, so the conclusion has been postponed until the fiftieth SCM slated for 2018.⁸²⁾

On the personnel side, the Moon Jae-in administration brought about innovative reforms by actively recruiting people who were not graduates of the Korea Military Academy—who had traditionally filled most of the important defense posts—by broadening the net to include members of other military services, as well as army staff who did not graduate from the academy. Symbolic of that move were the appointments of former Chief of Naval Operations Song Young-moo to the post of minister of national defense, and former Chief of Staff of the Air Force Jeong Kyeong-doo to the post of chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

Regarding the increased civilian control of the national defense organization,

Table 3.1. Developments concerning the timing of the transfer of wartime OPCON

Date	South Korean Government	Event
February 2007	Roh Moo-hyun	Agreement by the United States and ROK to transfer wartime OPCON in April 2012
June 2010	Lee Myung-bak	Transfer of wartime OPCON postponed to 2015
October 2014	Park Geun-hye	Further postponement of the transfer of wartime OPCON conditional on the ROK military developing the necessary military response capability
June 2017	Moon Jae-in	Agreement at the US-ROK summit for the early transfer of wartime OPCON

Source: Compiled by the author.

Moon Jae-in had pledged during his campaign to boost the ratio of civilians in the workforce of the Ministry of National Defense and the Defense Acquisition Program Administration to 70 percent at the earliest opportunity, as well to appoint—as a symbolic measure—a civilian to the post of defense minister during his administration. However, the Five-year Plan for the Administration of State Affairs contains no numerical goals for the effective promotion of increased civilian control.

Furthermore, the plan is to improve the service conditions for military personnel across the board in the future, by carrying out such actions as shortening the length of the tour of duty for drafted servicemen from the current twenty-one months to eighteen months (in the case of the army, which is the most typical case), incrementally raising pay levels, strengthening the protection of human rights within the military, and boosting, as part of a larger effort to increase the number of public service jobs, the number of career military personnel hired for those positions.⁸³⁾

Another pledge made during the presidential campaign that was described as the most crucial issue to tackle was “rooting out long-accumulated ills”⁸⁴⁾ that had built up through the previous administration, including those in the defense area. The current administration is working in full swing to crack down on fraudulence within the defense industry—something that previous administrations had pledged to root out but were unable to do so fully—as well as to make a renewed investigation of those responsible for allowing the shooting of civilians during the

Gwangju Democratic Uprising of May 1980, which the military quashed.⁸⁵⁾

(3) Continuations and Changes in East Asian Policy

The policy of the Moon Jae-in administration toward East Asia has been characterized partially by a mixture of policy line and legacy inherited from the previous administration, along with those elements it has been actively endeavoring to change.

As far as the ROK's relations with Japan is concerned, it has inherited the so-called "two-track strategy" of the previous administration put in place since the comfort women agreement of December 2015, leaving unchanged the stance of separating historical issues from other ones. Regarding the comfort women agreement, while Moon Jae-in had made reference to its re-negotiation during the presidential campaign, he never mentioned it as an official position of the entire government after winning the election, saying just that "the victims and the South Korean people would seek a means of resolution that they can agree on."⁸⁶⁾ In July 2017, a task force was set up within the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs to review the process of negotiation and the contents of the agreement, with a report released on December 27.

Another new problem causing potential friction between Japan and South Korea was the issue of requisitioned civilians from the Korean Peninsula, but it is reported President Moon Jae-in spoke with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe concerning the matter over the phone, with confirmation being made during the call that it was "resolved in accordance with the 1965 Agreement on the Settlement of Problems Concerning Property and Claims and on Economic Co-operation between Japan and the Republic of Korea."⁸⁷⁾ Given the urgent need for cooperation among the ROK, the United States and Japan in response to the nuclear and missile threat from the DPRK, that was believed to be an effort to prevent the Japan-ROK side of the ROK-US-Japan triangular relationship—the weakest of the three sides—from weakening further, and to domesticize the debate of historical issues between Japan and the ROK.⁸⁸⁾

Cooperation between Japan and South Korea in defense matters is also progressing steadily. While opposition from progressives in the South is still deeply rooted, the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA) that was signed between the two countries in November 2016⁸⁹⁾ was automatically extended for one year in August 2017. During his presidential

campaign, Moon Jae-in had referred to the need to revise the GSOMIA with the view of not extending it, but Defense Minister Song Young-moo explained why it was extended again, saying that it was too early to decide upon a revision less than one year after the agreement has been in effect.⁹⁰⁾

There have been developments elsewhere illustrating a certain amount of progress in the trilateral defense cooperation among the Japan, the ROK and the United States, given the background of the amplified threat of nuclear weapons and missiles from the North. Those include the first joint antisubmarine exercise by the three countries in April 2017, and a missile warning exercise conducted in December 2017, the sixth to be held since June 2016.

Meanwhile, the relationship between China and South Korea has deteriorated on account of bad feelings over the deployment of THAAD to the USFK, with a significant reduction in the number of Chinese tourists traveling to South Korea, a boycott of South Korean-owned large-scale retail chain stores in China, as well as the exit of such stores from China owing to management difficulties stemming from the strict application of inspection standards by Chinese officials.⁹¹⁾ However, signs of the easing of tensions in the ROK-China relationship were evident at the October 2017 G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting in Washington, DC, where the two sides announced an extension of a currency swap agreement between the two to have access to large amounts of each other's currency.⁹²⁾

After the Nineteenth Chinese Communist Party Congress was held that same month, the ROK announced that it was not considering additional THAAD deployment, nor would it participate in the US missile defense system or let the trilateral security cooperation among the United States, the ROK, and Japan develop into a military alliance.⁹³⁾ In response, China shelved the issue of THAAD deployment, ratifying the current status, and South Korea and China agreed to develop a "strategic cooperative partnership" henceforth.⁹⁴⁾ Additionally, at the summit taking place during President Moon Jae-in's visit to China in December 2017, four principles were agreed upon: not to tolerate war on the Korean Peninsula, to resolve the North Korean issue through dialogue, to adhere to the principle of peninsular denuclearization, and to let the improvement of North-South relations contribute to the resolution of the Korean Peninsula issue.⁹⁵⁾ Still, as can be understood by the fact that China made reference to THAAD during the summit, and that neither a joint declaration nor a joint press conference were

made, it is difficult to conclude that the sour relationship between South Korea and China has fully recovered.

As for the relations with the North, President Moon Jae-in, during the election campaign, had criticized the hardline position of the two previous conservative administrations that was predicated on unification with the DPRK through absorption, and instead asserted an active appeasement policy toward the North. In July 2017, while participating in the G20 Summit in Germany, the president announced his “Vision for Inter-Korean Peace,” channeling the spirit of the speech delivered by President Kim Dae-Jung in 2000 at the Free University of Berlin. In contrast to the tenor of the previous Park Geun-hye administration, which actively used expressions suggesting that its goal was the collapse of the North Korean regime,⁹⁶⁾ the Vision for Inter-Korean Peace clearly states that it aims neither for the collapse of the DPRK nor for “absorbing the North,” while emphasizing the need to avoid war on the Korean Peninsula and to apply pressure and carry out dialogue that would lead to denuclearization.⁹⁷⁾ As subsequent measures, the ROK Defense Ministry proposed inter-Korean military talks to take place in Panmunjom, with the Korean Red Cross calling for inter-Korean Red Cross talks for the reunion of families separated by the Korean War to take place during the October Mid-Autumn Festival (*Chuseok*), but no response was made from the North Korean side as of the year-end.

Since then, despite North Korea’s repeated ballistic missile tests and its sixth nuclear test, the ROK government has continued to look for ways to realize dialogue through reconciliation—despite the mounting pressure from the international community—such as officially announcing on September 21, 2017, that it would extend humanitarian assistance to the North through international organizations.⁹⁸⁾ In addition, a document released by the Moon Jae-in administration in November containing the main thrust of its policies toward the North, cited “peace” as “the value we should uphold with the highest priority,” as well as a “Korean Peninsula of co-prosperity,” adding that the resolution of the DPRK nuclear issue would be pursued in a complementary fashion with the improvement of North-South relations, while also proposing the formation of a “new economic community” fusing the markets of both sides into one economically.⁹⁹⁾ However, no specific measures were outlined for the realization of those ideas.

Besides those moves, the Moon Jae-in administration has also hammered out a position emphasizing multilateral diplomacy, including diplomatic relations with

Southeast Asia, South Asia and the European Union in addition to the traditional diplomacy centered on its relationships with the “Big Four” neighbors of Japan, the United States, China, and Russia. An example of that was the dispatch of a Presidential Special Envoy to South Asia at the launch of the Moon Jae-in administration, something that had never been done before at the beginning of any of his predecessors’ administrations. Also, in connection with the previously mentioned North Korean policy, the goal has been announced of a “new *Nordpolitik*” linking both North and South Korea with Russia to the north, deepening the economic relationship among the three.¹⁰⁰⁾

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