

Introduction
East Asia in 2017—Growing Tensions
with North Korea

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1. North Korea's ICBM Development and the Moon Jae-in Administration's Alliance Politics

Not only has North Korea carried out nuclear tests for the purpose of warhead development, but the country is also believed to be developing intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) “targeting the heart of the US.” Some have also pointed out that it is developing maneuverable reentry vehicles (MaRV) designed with a high accuracy for striking military targets. In addition, 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). Meanwhile, in the Republic of Korea (ROK), the Moon Jae-in administration inaugurated after the impeachment of the former President Park Geun-hye is striving to develop the deterrent capability against the North. The new administration has inherited the policies of the previous 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. It has furthermore put forward the policy of “responsible national defense,” building upon the “Self-Reliant National Defense” policy handed down from the Roh Moo-hyun administration, 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).

2. The New National Security Strategy and North Korean Policies of the New Trump Administration

The Donald Trump administration’s Department of Defense inherited its predecessor’s threat perception formulated in its final days as the “four-plus-one,” and is in substance carrying on with concepts that had been advanced by the previous administration such as the Defense Innovation Initiative and Third Offset Strategy.

The *National Security Strategy* (NSS) released in December 2017 is positioned as one that “puts America First,” but it again raises the policies of previous

administrations: the leadership role of the United States in the international community, commitment toward its allies and partners, and support for various international institutions that have supported the post-war international order.

In addition, with regard to the threat of North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile development program, the administration is pursuing the policy of "strategic accountability," in which it increases diplomatic and economic pressure on North Korea under the pillars of additional economic sanctions, increased international pressure, and stronger efforts for nonproliferation. Meanwhile, in response to repeated provocations by North Korea, it has shown a policy of strengthening military pressure on the country, but at the same time, has also attempted to prevent inadvertent escalation or misconceptions.

3. The US-Japan Alliance and Japan's Role Amid Uncertainty

With the advent of the Trump administration in the United States, greater uncertainty was predicted for the security environment of the Asia-Pacific region, including the US-Japan alliance. However, after the inauguration of President Trump, the new administration has continued to emphasize the importance of the US-Japan alliance as previous administrations. By maintaining its close alliance relationship with the Trump administration, Japan is required to play the role of leading the United States toward a more constructive foreign policy. In response to North Korea increasing provocations, the United States and Japan have strengthened their deterrent capabilities through close and seamless coordination, including joint exercises and warning and surveillance activities, cooperation based on Japan's Legislation for Peace and Security, and coordination among Japan, the United States, and the Republic of Korea. To prepare for more provocations by North Korea, it is necessary to enhance deterrence and further strengthen response capabilities based on the Guidelines for Japan-US Defense Cooperation and on joint planning. The Trump administration has continued to strengthen the approach of promoting the security of the region, and Southeast Asia in particular, through the US-Japan alliance. At the Japan-US summit meeting in November 2017, the United States confirmed that it would cooperate in promoting the "Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy" advocated by Japan.

4. The Xi Jinping Administration Consolidates Its Power while the PLA Aims at a World-Class Military Force

At the Communist Party of China (CPC) Nineteenth National Congress held in October 2017, the CPC Constitution was modified to include new guidelines for action entitled “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” and a considerable number of important posts were filled by General Secretary Xi Jinping’s followers. In these and other ways, the congress represented a major enhancement of Xi’s political authority. China also sponsored the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation as well as a summit meeting of five emerging countries, advocating “major power diplomacy with Chinese characteristics” aimed toward achieving “a community with a shared future for mankind” and “a new form of international relations.” Despite such calls for commonality, however, China maintained some policy positions at odds with other leading powers, such as its differences with the United States over the Korean Peninsula and its confrontation with India in the Doklam highlands. At the Nineteenth CPC National Congress, it was set as the goal to accelerate informationization of the military and establish the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) as a world-class military force by the middle of the 21st century. The PLA continued moving forward with development of new equipment such as domestically built aircraft carriers and 10,000-ton class destroyers. In 2017, an aircraft carrier group sailed around Taiwan and bombers flew nearly to the Kii Peninsula in Japan.

5. Significance of the Freedom of Navigation in Maritime Security and Related Challenges

In recent years, the issue of maintaining the stability of a rules-based maritime order has gained attention as fundamental to the security of the sea, but different countries maintain different attitudes toward the freedom of navigation. Moreover, disputes among littoral countries over their maritime interests, triggered by the changes of the maritime regime, have also cast a shadow on the freedom of navigation as the risk to the operation of vessels diversifies. Such challenges are especially evident in the South China Sea, an important strategic area of the Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC, or sea lane). Found there is a normative

challenge related to maritime zones, such as the territorial sea and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ): namely, a lack of mutual understanding about how the maritime zones of the South China Sea ought to be divided in the first place as well as about the extent to which the vessels (particularly warships) of non-coastal states can operate in the each maritime zones where littoral states have jurisdiction. Moreover, China's large-scale and rapid reclamation and its militarization are leading to new physical challenges. Should the freedom of navigation as a fundamental principle become challenged, the rules-based maritime order will become unstable, perhaps ending up shaking the very foundations of the security of the sea. All the countries deriving benefits from the sea are called upon to embody the freedom of navigation and share its significance and benefits through practical operation consistent with international law of the sea. The South China Sea thus serves as a litmus test for that project.