

## **U.S. and Japan: New Policies for the New Korean Situations**

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### **Abstract**

The new national security leaders in Japan, the United States, China and the two Koreas have assumed office at a precarious time. Despite the recent relaxation of tensions, conditions are ripe for further conflict in Northeast Asia. The new DPRK leadership is as determined as its predecessor to possess nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles while resisting unification or reconciliation with South Korea and its allies. The new government in Tokyo is also augmenting its military capabilities. Meanwhile, despite Chinese efforts to restart the Six-Party Talks, the Obama administration has refused to engage with the DPRK until it demonstrates a willingness to end its nuclear weapons program and improving intra-Korean ties. But this policy of patiently waiting for verifiable changes in DPRK policies may be too passive in the face of North Korea's growing military capabilities, leading the new South Korean government, striving to maneuver between Beijing and Washington, to consider new initiatives to restart a dialogue with the North even while reinforcing its own military capabilities.

Keywords: Japan, Obama, ROK, DPRK, missile, nuclear, provocation, Tokyo, Washington, BMD

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has not fundamentally changed since the death of Kim Jong-il in December 2011 and his replacement by his young and inexperienced son, Kim Jong-un. Since then, we have seen the usual pattern of rising threats and tensions followed by an abrupt change of tone in Pyongyang towards a softer line, which never quite leads to enduring concessions or a resolution of key problems. The 2012-2013 crises likely resulted from Kim Jong-un's efforts to demonstrate his fitness to lead his country at a time when some of his father's colleagues, particularly the military leadership, might have felt uneasy placing the reins of power in such an unproven leader. If we are lucky, after consolidating his power, Kim will pursue a less

confrontationist policy. The fear is that he will take overly strong actions that lead to a major crisis.

Today on the Korean Peninsula are again in decline following the renewed DPRK peace offensive, which has seen resumed intra-Korean ties and a standing down of various DPRK nuclear and missile capabilities. Nevertheless, the on-again, off-again crises, termed by the Pentagon the “provocation pause,” remains disturbing due to recent changes in the regional security environment. First, North Korea has demonstrated a capacity to launch long-range missiles and detonate nuclear devices. Second, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has adopted a much sterner planned response toward future provocations. Third, the DPRK-Iran nexus is weighing more heavily on the minds of U.S. policy makers, who worry that a soft stand in Korea might encourage hardliners in Tehran, already emboldened by the U.S. back down in Syria.

A final complication is that the DPRK, Japan, China, and the ROK all have new leaders who have little or no experience playing these escalation games. They could easily miscalculate and precipitate a major conflict, as happened in 1950. Nobody in Washington expected North Korea to invade the South that summer, while the leaders in Pyongyang and Moscow were caught by surprise when the United States then intervened to defeat the invasion, even after the U.S. State Department had declared the Korean Peninsula outside the U.S. defensive perimeter in the Asia-Pacific region. Since then, the DPRK has repeatedly caught the United States and other countries off-guard by its bizarre but bold actions. It was almost one hundred years ago that Europe plunged into its First World War because its leaders could not contain a minor Balkan incident that rapidly escalated out of control. At the time, alliance dynamics and technology (railroad timetables) drove the escalatory process. Today, we still have allies fearful of abandonment, while nuclear weapons have their own technological imperatives favoring early use (especially the vulnerable systems in North Korea).

## **Japan**

### ***North Korea***

Despite fears of China’s growing military potential and threatening behavior, Japanese policy makers identify the DPRK as the most immediate military threat to Japan. They are concerned with Pyongyang’s continued development of ballistic missiles and nuclear weapons. North Korea possesses longer-range missiles like the

Taepodong and even the hundreds of shorter-range Nodong missiles that can reach Tokyo and other Japanese cities. They can carry carry nuclear warheads, though even conventional payloads could cause much damage. The DPRK can also threaten to send biological weapons into Japan simply by passing them on balloons and having them sail across the sea and deposit their dangerous agents when they land on Japanese territory.<sup>2</sup>

The Japanese government has taken a number of steps to impede and reverse North Korea's nuclear ambitions short of launching its own nuclear weapons program. A favorite tool has been diplomacy. Japanese officials have repeatedly joined with their U.S. and South Korean counterparts to demand that North Korea dismantle its nuclear weapons program "in a prompt and verifiable manner."<sup>3</sup> Tokyo has stated that, "Japan cannot accept, by any means, any development, acquisition or possession, test and transfer of nuclear weapons by North Korea."<sup>4</sup> Japanese representatives have also participated since August 2003 in the Six Party Talks that have sought to achieve the denuclearization and security of the Korean Peninsula. Japanese officials launched their last genuine bilateral engagement initiative toward Pyongyang in the early 2000s. Its apogee occurred in September 2002, when then-Prime Minister Junichiro Koizumi visited North Korea. The so-called Pyongyang Declaration, signed during Koizumi's visit, established the requirements for a genuine Japanese-DPRK reconciliation.<sup>5</sup> However, the gesture backfired when DPRK leader Kim Jong-il admitted to Koizumi that Pyongyang had kidnapped more than a dozen Japanese citizens between 1977 and 1983 to serve as language instructors for the DPRK intelligence community. Although North Koreans attributed the seizures to overzealous secret agents, the acknowledgement, which followed years of DPRK denials, enraged the Japanese public, who demanded more information about the issue than the secretive North Korean leadership proved willing to provide.

Since the abduction issue arose in 2002, it has presented an insurmountable and resolving mutual disagreement between Japan and North Korea.<sup>6</sup> Japanese officials regularly lobby their U.S. counterparts not to make major concessions to the DPRK until North Korea clarifies the status of the abducted Japanese. For example, Tokyo and Washington required lengthy bilateral negotiations to resolve their differences over whether to remove the DPRK from the U.S. list of state sponsors of terrorism. More recently, Japanese legislators have pressed the United States not to provide substantial food aid to the DPRK until

the abductee issue is solved.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Japanese threats and pleas, North Korea resumed test-launching ballistic missiles over the Pacific Ocean in July 2006, ending the moratorium the DPRK had maintained regarding such tests since September 1999. North Korea's subsequent test of a nuclear explosive in October 2006 constituted the first technological step toward developing a nuclear warhead sufficiently small for delivery aboard a ballistic missile.<sup>8</sup> After North Korea test-fired several missiles in July 2006 and then a nuclear explosive device a few months later, the Japanese government progressively expanded its range of sanctions on North Korea and strongly supported punitive UN Security Council resolutions that condemned the actions and called for trade restrictions.<sup>9</sup> In addition, Japan adopted a "dialogue and pressure" approach by imposing unilateral sanctions that were more stringent than those found in UNSC resolutions, including a ban on all North Korean ships in Japanese ports, restrictions on imports and on most North Koreans entering Japan, and a freeze on bank remittances to North Korea from the ethnic Korean community in Japan.<sup>10</sup> In April 2007, Yuriko Koike, the first person appointed to the new post of national security adviser, called North Korea an "enormous" threat to Japan. Koike explained that Tokyo would insist that the DPRK take concrete action to end its nuclear program because its "missiles, with a nuclear warhead maybe, may reach the territory of Japan in about seven or eight minutes."<sup>11</sup> Following the DPRK's May 2009 nuclear test, Japan adopted additional sanctions and effectively ceased dealing with the regime in Pyongyang. Whereas Japan was one of North Korea's leading trading partners at the end of the Cold War, the waves of sanctions adopted by Tokyo have reduced economic ties to minimal levels.<sup>12</sup>

Besides diplomatic measures and economic sanctions against Pyongyang for its nuclear activities (including suspending heavy fuel oil shipments in November 2002), Japan has also participated in the Proliferation Security Initiative (PSI), which aims to prevent North Korea and other countries from importing or exporting materials related to weapons of mass destruction (WMD) or their means of delivery. Despite restrictive laws and regulations that limit Japan's direct engagement in WMD interdiction activities, the Japanese military has participated in several PSI exercises and has helped other Asian countries interdict illegal transfers of WMD and missile-related materials.<sup>13</sup>

North Korea's October 2006 detonation of a nuclear explosive device prompted the Japanese government to review once more its longstanding decision to refrain from developing an independent nuclear deterrent. Although the Cabinet reaffirmed the existing policy of nuclear weapons abstention, they insisted on their right and responsibility to discuss national nuclear operations in light of the transformation in Japan's security environment.<sup>14</sup> Experts note that younger Japanese also evince less innate aversion to acquiring nuclear weapons than their parents' generation, who better remember the traumas of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.<sup>15</sup> The 2010 nuclear accident at Fukushima may have reduced support for nuclear power, but its long-term impact on potential Japanese interest in nuclear weapons is unclear.

For a short period in early 2011, Japan's new left-wing coalition government relaxed the policies of past LDP administrations and expressed an interest in reaching a compromise with Pyongyang. Foreign Minister Seiji Maehara endorsed a direct dialogue with Pyongyang instead of relying on the Six-Party format or through U.S. or PRC mediation. In Maehara's view, it was "important to establish a situation where dialogue between the two countries is possible, rather than leaving North Korea issues for other countries to deal with or handling them through multilateral meetings."<sup>16</sup> In contrast with previous LDP policy, the eight-point guidelines issued by the new foreign minister omitted references to sanctions on North Korea and punishing those responsible for abducting Japanese citizens. Instead it stressed the need to ensure the "fulfillment of the August 2008 North Korea-Japan agreement" and "thorough investigations into victims of abductions," a move that drew some attention.<sup>17</sup> But Maehara and his South Korean counterpart, Kim Sung Hwan, agreed that before direct talks could take place between Tokyo and Pyongyang to address the North's past abductions of Japanese nationals, inter-Korean dialogue should be held to repair ties between Seoul and Pyongyang; and other steps should also be taken to defuse tensions and build confidence on the peninsula. "Generally speaking, I believe dialogue between Japan and North Korea can be held separately from the six-party talks" on denuclearizing the Korean Peninsula, Maehara said. "But at the same time, the timing of such bilateral talks should be based on movements related to the six-way dialogue and held under appropriate conditions."<sup>18</sup> But North Korea's failure to respond to these overtures, political infighting in Tokyo, and Japanese preoccupation with territorial disputes

with China, Russia and South Korea have since led the new Japanese government to resume Tokyo's traditional hardline policies towards the North.

Japanese leaders remain skeptical that the DPRK will ever relinquish its nuclear weapons program, even if all the parties remove the abductees issue from the negotiating table. If North Korea were to eliminate its nuclear arsenal to satisfy the United States, the DPRK would still possess hundreds of shorter-range Nodong-1 missiles that could strike Japan's major cities with conventional warheads. Japanese intelligence concluded from the July 2006 Nodong launch series that the DPRK had developed the capacity to employ these mobile missiles with considerable accuracy against potential targets in Japan.<sup>19</sup> Japanese officials have complained to their U.S. counterparts that the United States and the other parties to the Six-Party Talks do not pay sufficient attention to the DPRK's missile capabilities. Yet, Japanese leaders have not offered new initiatives to address these issues or break the current stalemate in the talks, which have remained in abeyance since December 2008. Since Tokyo has ceased formally engaging in direct talks with Pyongyang, Japan depends on the talks to have influence on the outcome; without them, Japan risks having its interests regarding the DPRK, and related regional security issues, ignored. Since the Koreans are a key element in the security balance between China and Japan, it is important for both Tokyo and Beijing to have their interests in any Korea settlement respected or the Korean Peninsula could again exacerbate their overall relationship, something it has not done recently only because the two countries have been focused on other more contentious issues. Thus far, the DPRK's confrontational negotiating stance, its provocations against all three governments, and its generally belligerent policies have helped paper over potential divisions between Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul regarding the North Korean issue. Nonetheless, one cannot forever count on inept DPRK diplomacy to hold the three countries together, especially given the widening rift between Tokyo and Seoul on other matters.

During his successful election campaign for prime minister, Shinzo Abe emphasized economic recovery in an attempt to end Japan's deflation-driven long-term recession. Even so, the LDP promised to strengthen Japan's military capabilities, to revise Japan's pacifist constitution to enable Japan to participate in collective self-defense, and to make fewer apologies regarding war atrocities such as the "comfort

women.” These stated intentions have raised concerns over a shift of Japan to the right. Considering intensive criticism from other countries, Abe has toned down his nationalistic rhetoric so far, but his stance on amending the pacifist clause in Japan’s constitution worries many foreigner countries, especially South Korea and China. On the other hand, Abe may launch a diplomatic initiative regarding North Korea, following the path established by his mentor, former Prime Minister Koizumi. In May, Abe sent one of his closest political aides, Isao Iijima, on an unannounced mission to Pyongyang. Abe’s government did not inform the Obama or Park administrations in advance of the trip.<sup>20</sup> Although nothing came of the initiative, the special envoy’s visit suggests the two governments’ interest in resuming formal talks, suspended since the December 2002 missile test, over resuming diplomatic relations.<sup>21</sup> Abe’s government might take additional initiatives to strengthen Tokyo’s leverage vis-à-vis the other major players, including China, Russia, South Korea, and the United States. Toward the same end, Abe also may be introducing additional flexibility in Japan’s policy toward Russia regarding their disputed island (Northern Territories/Southern Kuriles). Abe made a high-profile visit to Moscow soon after his inauguration, one of several indications of renewed interest in Tokyo and Russia settling the issue.

### ***South Korea***

Japan’s policy towards South Korea ebbs and flows, depending on which administrations are in charge in both countries. For example, the previous ROK government of President Roh Moo-hyun, who was president from 2002 to 2008, declined to support Japan’s position on the abductee issue. Although the DPRK has apparently kidnapped many more South Korean than Japanese citizens, Roh strove to improve ties with the DPRK and resisted Japanese and American efforts to add conditions to any settlement. Chinese and Russian representatives openly criticized Tokyo’s stern posture on the abductee issue. Koizumi’s annual visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, which honors some 2.5 million of Japan’s fallen soldiers but also enshrines the remains of several prominent war criminals, outraged Asian countries that were invaded and occupied by Japan. Responding to intensive criticism from other countries, Abe has not visited the controversial shrine since taking office, but some of his cabinet members have. Koreans and Chinese see the visits as a Japanese refusal to atone for past crimes. Abe has made

equivocal statements about whether Japan engaged in aggression in the 1930s and 1940s against its Asian neighbors. Koreans retain bitter memories of Japan's invasion and occupation of their peninsula during the first half of the 20th century and anti-Japanese sentiment has become a part of Korean nationalism in the South as well as the North.

The Obama administration has sought to reconcile Tokyo and Seoul. Japan sent observers to the February-April 2011 Foal Eagle exercises to watch ROK land and naval operations.<sup>22</sup> The January 2011 summit between ROK and Japanese defense ministers saw the exchange of bilateral views on the dangers posed by North Korea's nuclear weapons program and worked out details for a planned pact to exchange military goods and services during peacetime.<sup>23</sup> South Korea was one of the leading contributors of humanitarian aid to Japan after the March 2011 Tohoku earthquake and tsunami. South Korea's one-hundred strong search-and-rescue unit also represented one of the largest international contributions to relief efforts in Japan.<sup>24</sup> However, long-held historical suspicions and resentments were evident when South Koreans protested the venting of radioactive water into the ocean from the crippled Fukushima power plant.<sup>25</sup> They also expressed fears about the safety of all Japanese seafood, including those from the unaffected west coast.<sup>26</sup>

Less than a month after the accident, Japan released a textbook again laying claim to the Takeshima Islets. On April 7, 2011, ROK Prime Minister Kim Hwang-sik suggested that South Korea station troops on the disputed Dokdo Islands to supplement the existing police force.<sup>27</sup> South Korea is also building an ocean station there. The United States played a positive role in inducing Japan and the ROK to participate in trilateral naval drills in June 2012. But the revival of ROK-Japanese tensions over the islands have scuttled attempts to implement planned defense agreements such as the General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which would permit Seoul and Tokyo to share more intelligence regarding North Korea, and the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), which would enhance the sharing of military supplies. President Lee, who previously had helped dampen bilateral tensions, unhelpfully escalated the conflict by visiting the contested islets before leaving office.

If Seoul and Tokyo continue to vie for the islands, it will hurt their cooperation and leverage on issues such as North Korean denuclearization. Unfortunately, there is little Washington or outsiders can do to end such tensions. At best, U.S. diplomats can help manage



them by stressing the importance of these countries' focusing on their common challenges and discouraging their leaders from engaging in provocative actions, such as visiting controversial shrines or the disputed Dokdo/Takeshima islands.

### **The United States**

ROK-U.S. differences could arise regarding Seoul's need for Beijing's backing against North Korea, differences over the ROK's civilian nuclear policies and host nation support of U.S. troops, and U.S. efforts under the Asian Pivot to shape China's overall foreign policy toward many high-priority issues, including Iran and contested maritime boundaries.

### **North Korea**

All U.S. administrations have refused to accept North Korea as a legitimate nuclear weapons state. The new U.S. Secretary of Defense, Chuck Hagel, reaffirmed this position at the annual Shangri-la regional security forum, run by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, telling the audience that, "The United States has been committed to ensuring peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula for sixty years. That means deterring North Korean aggression and protecting our allies, and achieving the complete denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula. The United States will not stand by while North Korea seeks to develop a nuclear-armed missile that can target the United States." Elaborating, Hagel added that, "The United States has been clear that we will take all necessary steps to protect our homeland and our allies from dangerous provocations, including significantly bolstering our missile defense throughout the Pacific. No country should conduct "business as usual" with a North Korea that threatens its neighbors. We are working closely with our ROK and Japanese allies to strengthen our posture and ability to respond to threats from North Korea. The prospects for a peaceful resolution also will require close U.S. coordination with China."<sup>28</sup>

Hagel's comments were not idle chatter. The Pentagon has bolstered U.S. ballistic missile defense (BMD) capabilities, reaffirmed the U.S. extended nuclear guarantees, and increased funding for other Asia-centered capabilities in its FY14 Defense Department budget request. Following North Korea's surprisingly successful long-range missile test in December 2012 and its detonation of a third nuclear device in February, Hagel announced on March 15 a major restructuring in the

Obama administration's ballistic missile defense (BMD) program. First, the Pentagon deployed a mobile, land-based BMD system Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) to Guam.<sup>29</sup> Second, the United States and Japan accelerated bilateral research and development of advanced BMD capabilities in the Asia-Pacific region, while at the same time deploying additional Patriot-Missile batteries in Japan. Third, the deployment of a SBX-1 sea-based X-band radar extends the immediate capability of tracking and potentially intercepting a potential missile launched from the DPRK.<sup>30</sup> The U.S. Defense Department also announced that it would be deploying an additional 14 Ground-Based Mid-Course Interceptors in Alaska to hit any long-range DPRK missiles launched toward the continental United States.<sup>31</sup> As part of the Asia rebalance ("Pivot"), the Pentagon is expanding military ties and cooperation with the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia. The Defense Department FY2014 budget proposal further develops U.S. BMD capabilities, adds rotary-wing aircraft in the ROK, and expands U.S. intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets in the Asia-Pacific region. Furthermore, the budget provides development funding for a long-range bomber and conventional strike systems to counter emerging threats (primarily from the DPRK as well as China) and investing in base modernization programs in Guam, Australia and the Philippines.<sup>32</sup>

The reason for this comprehensive response is that U.S. policy makers worry that North Korea's growing nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities could soon threaten the continental United States with direct strikes.<sup>33</sup> No U.S. government would accept a mutual deterrent relationship with an aggressive, congenitally anti-American and unpredictable DPRK regime. Furthermore, many American experts fear that Tehran is watching and weighing how the new U.S. administration is responding to the DPRK's overt challenge when determining its own nuclear policies. U.S. policy makers want to avoid making such generous concessions to Pyongyang as to encourage Tehran and other countries to seek WMD primarily as a means to pry similar rewards from Washington. Another consideration affecting U.S. policy toward the DPRK nuclear issue is that U.S. policy makers also do not want U.S. allies in the Pacific to perceive Washington is neglecting their security interests. The DPRK's improving nuclear weapons and ballistic missile capacities have already affected East Asian regional security across many dimensions, calling into question U.S. security guarantees to Japan and South Korea. The United States still demands the complete

denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

The main problem confronting the United States is that, while Americans believe that enduring peace requires a Korean Peninsula free of nuclear weapons, North Korean leaders believe they need nuclear weapons to deter U.S. threats and achieve political and strategic autonomy from China and other states. Even under its new leadership, North Korea has made clear its desire to achieve the same status as India, Israel, and Pakistan—having a nuclear deterrent that is accepted, if reluctantly, by the outside community, even though these countries are not recognized by the NPT as legitimate nuclear weapons powers. In return, the DPRK might refrain from transferring nuclear technologies to other countries—at least for a while. The DPRK has crossed the Obama administration's earlier Red Lines of no further nuclear weapons or ballistic missile testing, and may not be held back by the Red Line against transferring nuclear weapons or materials and technologies to other countries or even terrorists in return for enough cash.

Under its policy of “strategic patience,” designed not to reward the DPRK for bad behavior, the Obama administration has demanded that the DPRK give some concrete indication, before Washington agrees to resume the Six-Party Talks, that the DPRK is committed to making progress toward ending North Korea's nuclear weapons program, including its newly confirmed uranium enrichment program, and improving intra-Korean ties. Washington has been willing to negotiate nuclear and other issues directly with the DPRK, but only within the Six-Party framework. The administration has pledged not to negotiate bilateral deals with Pyongyang without the consent of U.S. allies, namely South Korea and Japan, though it has affirmed its willingness to offer Pyongyang generous substantive terms for abandoning its nuclear program.<sup>34</sup> This policy of patiently waiting for verifiable changes in DPRK policies entails several risks. For one, it provides North Koreans with additional time to develop nuclear and missile programs and risks allowing a minor incident to escalate.

North Korea was a major topic of conversation at the June 7-8, 2013, informal summit between President Obama and Chinese President Xi in California. Then NSC Advisor Thomas Donilon told the media that the Chinese were forthcoming about their fears surrounding the DPRK's nuclear activities and that both leaders “agreed that North Korea has to denuclearize, that neither country will accept North Korea as a nuclear-armed state and that we work together to deepen cooperation and

dialogue to achieve denuclearization.”<sup>35</sup> PRC State Councilor Yang Jiechi confirmed that China and the United States were "the same in their positions and objectives" on the North Korean nuclear issue.<sup>36</sup> Park then went on her own very successful visits to China. She impressed her Chinese hosts with her knowledge of their language and culture and managed to secure greater access to China's western regions for South Korean investors. While China is South Korea's leading trade partner, their mutual investment remains lower than that between South Korea and the United States. Although China has tempered UN sanctions targeting North Korea, over fears all-out economic collapse could threaten its own security, Beijing has grown increasingly impatient with Pyongyang's erratic behavior and nuclear threats and has voted for additional UN sanctions against the DPRK and ended DPRK banks access to the state-owned Bank of China.<sup>37</sup> However, it remains to be seen whether China will incentivize or press Kim's regime hard enough to cooperate with international expectations, since many Chinese still fear that the DPRK regime's collapse will leave China in a worst-off security situation. Although Chinese scholars and media continue to debate the wisdom of supporting Pyongyang, Beijing's official policies towards North Korea have changed a lot less than its rhetoric.

### ***South Korea***

Although South Korea and the United States have reaffirmed their intent to continue restructuring their command relationships, with the ROK gaining operational control (OPCON) of ROK forces in wartime as well as peacetime, South Korea's new government has stated it prefers to delay the transition beyond the scheduled December 2015 handover. During his October visit to Seoul, Secretary Hagel said that the United States would work with South Korea to develop an acceptable solution. The two governments have established a special panel to investigate the issue. The United States has reaffirmed its commitment to defend South Korea with all its capabilities while the ROK armed forces continue to acquire new capabilities and, to include longer-range strike weapons such as ballistic missiles and stealth fighter planes. Whatever the new arrangement, both sides have stressed the importance of keeping their forces interoperable, including any missile defense systems. Furthermore, the parties have agreed to create a working group to develop plans for a new joint command structure within the structure of the ROK Joint Chiefs of Staff to ensure military efficiency after a "strong

and seamless” transition. The United States and South Korea are contemplating how to extend their security partnership into even newer realms, such as cyber and outer space.<sup>38</sup>

The ROK-U.S. alliance remains focused on defending South Korea from external attack, but the alliance has also evolved to address broader geographic and functional issues shared by the two countries. Their June 2009 Joint Vision statement expressed support for expanding the global role of the ROK-U.S. alliance and partnering in economic development, democratization, and other non-defense issues. The new vision aligns well with the Asian Pivot and reflects the 21<sup>st</sup> century reality that South Korea has become a global player. Despite her rhetoric of seeking greater engagement with Beijing, President Park’s foreign policy is at least equally focused on sustaining a strong U.S.-South Korean alliance. Indeed, strengthening the Washington-Seoul alliance is a key aspect of Park’s strategy of promoting progress on the North Korea issue and enhancing regional security by building trilateral trust and cooperation between China, the United States, and South Korea. Her 2013 visit to Washington demonstrated unity and strength in the face of Pyongyang’s recent threats and provocations and sent a signal of resolve to the North Korean regime and other parties, including the Chinese government. U.S. officials have made clear that they support Park’s goal of re-engaging with the North as long as Pyongyang reciprocates by curbing its provocations. Meanwhile, Park has reciprocated by demanding an end to North Korea’s nuclear weapons and ballistic missile testing. Washington has been willing to negotiate nuclear and other issues directly with the DPRK, but only within the Six-Party framework. The DPRK has been unable to use a detained U.S. citizen, Kenneth Bae, who worked as a Christian missionary in North Korea, as a hostage to force the U.S. government to begin bartering with it in direct bilateral talks.<sup>39</sup> The DPRK was hoping to repeat the same scenario it used in 2009, when former president Bill Clinton met Kim Jong-il in Pyongyang to secure the release of two American hostages.

Still, there are sources of tension in the alliance. The Obama administration, faced with sequestration at home and the need to diversify its Asia-Pacific security programs beyond Northeast Asia, is pressing South Korea on the cost-sharing negotiations over the Special Measures Agreement (SMA) between the two sides. Facing its own budgetary problems, the Park administration is resisting increasing its share of the cost to 50% and wants the USFK to cover the costs of its

relocation plans to bases further south in the Peninsula. ROK-U.S. disagreements also persist regarding missile defense. The South Koreans insist on going their own way and building architecture independent of the broader missile dense network that the Pentagon is constructing with Japan and other Asian partners. Although Chinese opposition plays a role, the main reason for ROK reluctance to spend more on missile defense is that ROK commanders face more serious threats in the form of ROK artillery and conventional forces and are seeking to develop preemptive options to destroy DPRK missiles before they can even be launched.

Beyond defense issues, South Korea has shown little interest in joining the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), since the recently negotiated KORUS FTA has only recently begun to take effect. There is little enthusiasm in Seoul to negotiate and ratify another major trade deal within such a short time frame, especially given domestic opposition to further trade liberalization and the hostility of China, South Korea's major trading partner, toward the TPP.

Another divisive issue that remains unresolved is the U.S.-South Korean disagreement over what kinds of civil nuclear activities South Korea can undertake—which both sides are treating as a strategic, economic, and even mutual trust issue. The existing ROK-U.S. nuclear cooperation agreement, also known as a 123 agreement (based on section 123 of the 1974 Atomic Energy Act), is expiring and the two sides cannot agree on an acceptable replacement. South Koreans are pressing for advanced consent to enrich uranium for use in light-water reactors and to reprocess spent nuclear fuel of U.S. origin, specifically to pursue a new pyro-processing reprocessing technology that South Koreans claim is less proliferation-prone than other means of separating plutonium from spent fuel. The United States is reluctant to grant such permission on non-proliferation grounds, fearing that other countries will also demand the right to sensitive nuclear technologies, which can be used to make nuclear weapons. Fears about justifying North Korea's nuclear weapons program also worry U.S. lawmakers, who can veto any new agreement through congressional action. One complicating factor is that the United States has already granted the Japanese many of the same privileges that the South Koreans are now demanding—leading many Koreans to ask why the United States trusts them less than Tokyo as a nonproliferation partner.<sup>40</sup>

During her visit to Washington, Park and Obama probably discussed behind the scenes how to dampen South Korea-Japan tensions, inflamed by recent visits of Japanese cabinet members to the controversial Yasukuni Shrine. The sharp deterioration in their bilateral ties, which began more than a year ago, has been extremely unwelcome in Washington. Not only does it make it harder to present a united trilateral front against Pyongyang's provocations, but the poor relations between the two most important U.S allies in East Asia pose a major obstacle to U.S. efforts to transform Washington's traditional hub-and-spokes alliance network into a more flexible multilateral structure. Park has indicated that she will not repeat Lee's visit to the islands that South Korea disputes with Japan, but expects Tokyo to make the first diplomatic move toward reconciliation.<sup>41</sup> Neither Park nor Abe seems prepared to make important concessions on their disputed islands anytime soon. However, since Park and Abe are strong leaders who will likely remain in office for years, possibilities exist for a compromise on their territorial dispute and selling it domestically.

#### Notes:

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<sup>2</sup> Bruce W. Bennett, "The Challenge of North Korean Biological Weapons," testimony presented before the House Armed Services Subcommittee on Intelligence, Emerging Threats and Capabilities on October 11, 2013, RAND Office of External Affairs, October 2013, <http://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS26/20131011/101394/HHRG-113-AS26-Wstate-BennettB-20131011.pdf>.

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<sup>4</sup> "Speech by Minister for Foreign Affairs Yoriko Kawaguchi to the Conference on Disarmament," Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. September 4, 2003, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/un/disarmament/conference/speech0309.html>.

<sup>5</sup> Hiramatsu Kenji, "Lead up to the Signing of the Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration," *Gaiko Forum* (Winter 2003), pp. 1- 30, <http://www.gaikoforum>.

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