

A Blueprint for U.S. Policy toward a Unified Korea

U nification of the Korean peninsula will occur on its own timetable. U.S. decisionmakers cannot wait for Korean unification, however, to develop strategies to address its aftermath and to ensure that U.S. security interests are protected in that environment. The creation of a new Korean nation-state, most likely through the demise of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and the ascension of the Republic of Korea (ROK), will generate more variables and uncertainties than any other contingency in East Asian affairs. Failure to anticipate how this catalytic event might affect U.S. interests and to develop and implement forward-looking policies for a postunification security environment threatens both U.S. and regional security in the long term.

The View from Washington

This article assumes that the outcome of unification will be primarily on South Korean terms and defines unification as the creation of a unified polity rather than unified societies or economic structures. The circumstances under which unification may occur—peaceful integration, the gradual or sudden collapse of the DPRK, or war—is an important if unpredictable variable in any policy-planning assessment of Korea's future. Nonetheless, however unification occurs, a number of fundamental U.S. strategic interests in postunification Korea, and postunification East Asia more broadly, will remain substantially similar to what they are today.

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Regional stability may become even more critical in the tenuous period of uncertainty and turmoil likely to characterize Korea's transition. Having fought three major wars in East Asia during the twentieth century, including one on the Korean peninsula that resulted in a substantial loss of American lives and resources, the United States understands well the importance of helping to maintain stability, prevent the emergence of regional rivalries, and promote the peaceful resolution of differences within and among regional nations. Nearly a half-million U.S. citizens live, work, and study in the

The new Korea will certainly seek a more equal bilateral relationship with the United States.

Asia-Pacific region. More than one-third of total U.S. trade is conducted with the region, with millions of U.S. jobs depending on its continued growth and development. Sustained regional economic growth through the promotion of market economies and open sea-lanes—essential to the free flow of resources and trade into and within the region—will remain just as much a core U.S. national security interest following unification as it is now.

Long-term U.S. active engagement in East Asia—whether political, diplomatic, economic, or military—has traditionally managed to promote a peaceful security environment by providing a buffer against tensions. To continue to safeguard its regional interests, even after change on the Korean peninsula, U.S. security strategy should preserve U.S. treaty alliances as the cornerstone of peace and stability in East Asia. It is unlikely that a multilateral institution akin to NATO will be possible in Asia for the foreseeable future. The U.S. alliance structure and regional military presence will remain the most viable guarantor of regional security in its absence. At the same time, Korean unification will not minimize the profound U.S. interest in strengthening U.S. engagement with other nonallied nations in the region, particularly China, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, and Vietnam. Multilateral dialogues to promote a common approach to regional affairs and to sustain broad regional support for the alliance structure will also be increasingly necessary and appropriate.

To give form to this ongoing commitment to regional security and to mitigate potential military rivalries, the United States will have to maintain a robust and credible military presence in the region. This presence will have to be altered to address the new domestic environment in Korea as well as the changed security environment in the region. The maintenance of a ready, balanced, and forward-deployed U.S. force would fulfill important U.S. interests in regional deterrence and burden sharing and would demonstrate political commitment that a fully remote posture off the peninsula

would preclude. Ideally, a unified Korea would maintain a capable, conventional, national military, prepared and trained to work with the United States not only to defend the Korean homeland but also to promote regional stability.

Finally, on the Korean peninsula itself, the United States will have a substantial interest in a stable, liberal-democratic, free-market-oriented nation, free of weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and allied with the United States. Stability will require strong Korean political and civil control over the entire territory, with functioning institutions operating under the rule of law with general popular support.

Postunification Korean Interests

Although U.S. national interests will obviously play the most important role in determining U.S. postunification policy toward the Korean peninsula, the interests and perspectives of Korea itself will clearly set parameters for U.S. policymakers. The full integration of the two Koreas will be extraordinarily challenging for many years following formal unification, but even in such an uncertain environment, certain national interests of a postunification Korea may be anticipated.

The predominant domestic goal of a unified Korea likely will be to establish a stable, democratic government based on an open-market economy, akin to the ROK today. The temptation may exist for the South to impose a more restrictive, perhaps occupation-style control over the North or to curb full participation in unified Korean affairs during at least the transitional period. The challenge for the new government will be to balance what it views as internal security needs with an overall commitment to sustain democratic progress through the gradual development of transparent institutions, civil liberties, electoral processes, and the rule of law in the North.

A unified Korea also will continue to have vital interests in preserving stability and peace in the Asia-Pacific region to promote its economic and political goals. At present, South Korea conducts more than two-thirds of its trade within the region. The amount of current ROK trade through Asian sea-lanes accounts for more than 40 percent of its total trade, and about two-thirds of its energy supplies flow through the South China Sea. Unification will not substantially change these trends. The absence of a stable regional security environment, however, would inhibit Korea's ability to enjoy sustained economic progress or, worse, might challenge its ability to garner sufficient resources for reconstruction.

One of the first acts of a unified Korean state will be to reassess its long-term security strategy and orientation carefully. The Korean military will

**China and Russia
seek a unified
Korea more
independent of
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likely move toward a defense-oriented, crisis-management strategy and away from a war-fighting posture. Korea will be preoccupied for some time with internal instability as South Korean authorities focus on decommissioning the DPRK military and integrating its personnel productively into popular Korean society. The ROK military will need to safeguard and account for residual DPRK military equipment and material, particularly any weapons of mass destruction and the delivery systems or laboratories associated with them.

A unified Korea would be expected to have no interest in WMD development or deployment as such an act would likely spur a regional arms race and create tensions with the international community, especially the United States, over nonproliferation. This calculation will ultimately depend on the state of the regional security environment at the time of unification, including the status of Korea's alliance with the United States as well as its confidence in the U.S. nuclear umbrella, Korea's relationship with Russia and China, and whether or not Japan develops nuclear weapons.

Arguably, Korea's interest will continue to lie in the retention of its alliance with the United States following unification. Despite some frictions, the alliance has served to help preserve Korea's essential freedom of action and to facilitate its historic political and economic development over many decades. Maintaining an alliance with the United States will also help preserve the U.S.-led, alliance-based security structure in East Asia that has served as a stabilizing force in the region, hedged against the rise of an aggressive regional power, and protected Korea from becoming the political if not military battleground upon which the major Asian powers have historically sought regional advantage. Indeed, a unified Korea will need the stability and reassurance engendered by its alliance with the United States more than ever during the many years of transition following unification, particularly under collapse or war scenarios.

A unified Korea also will arguably have a substantial interest in accepting a U.S. military presence on the peninsula following unification. This presence would serve as a key component of continued alliance relations and the overall U.S. regional military presence to preserve stability throughout East Asia. Korea's continued hosting of U.S. forces would sustain the special relationship between the governments and armed forces of both sides, facilitate their coordination of regional strategy, and continue to serve as a deterrent to others seeking advantage on the peninsula.

Korea, however, will likely seek greater independence in its overall relationship with the United States. Unification may bring about a resurgence of Korean nationalism and self-confidence commensurate with its growing national strength and increased international prestige. As a result, the new Korea will likely seek a more equal bilateral relationship.

A united Korea will likely aim to avoid acting in any way that might give the impression that it is siding strategically with either the United States or China against the other. Korea's future development will depend greatly on good relations with and between its traditional ally and its sizable neighbor. Korea's substantial economic and security interests in the United States and China ensure that antagonizing either side would only be detrimental to Korean progress. Perhaps above all else, the United States can expect Korea to seek to retain maximum flexibility in its foreign policy and to avoid the appearance of being tied too closely with the policies or attitudes of either side in any U.S.-Chinese rivalry, including over Taiwan.

Finally, how unification is achieved, including the nature and degree of international involvement in the unification process, will shape the outlook of Korea toward its external environment and the context in which Korea ultimately will make its strategic choices. For instance, should North Korea collapse, the need for U.S. engagement and external security guarantees is likely to be greater than if unification comes through peaceful integration over time. Should the United States fight alongside the South in a war against the North, the fresh strategic and personal bonds created would likely tie the two sides closely together for many years thereafter. Alternatively, should unification occur under conditions in which Koreans view the United States as hindering rather than helping the process, resentment could build between the United States and the Korean people, poisoning postunification relations regardless of objective calculations of mutual national interests.

Regional Views

Korea has long served as a strategic battleground for regional powers who desire to safeguard their security by providing a buffer zone against the aggression of others. Because Korea is a traditional pathway into China, Japan, and the Russian Far East, each surrounding actor perceives the strategic importance of the Korean landmass. China, Japan, and Russia can each point to moments in history in which their territory was threatened by vulnerabilities from the Korean periphery. That history will continue to inform their future strategic perspectives.

Residual tensions among the major East Asian powers due to history, overlapping territorial claims, border disputes, and continued mistrust and

uncertainty over the future trajectory of major powers—particularly China and Japan—will remain critical challenges for regional security. Even without the DPRK threat on the Korean peninsula after unification, in the absence of effective institutions to address conflicting interests and safeguard common security, such residual challenges mean that regional balance of power considerations will remain central to regional peace and stability.

Yet, the major powers in Northeast Asia—China, Japan, and Russia—share a common interest in a politically and socially stable, economically vibrant, capitalist Korea following unification, free of weapons of mass

destruction. Each of these nations has based its future development on a commitment to free trade and investment flows and will support the emergence of a unified Korea that conforms to such capitalist norms. Each prizes the free flow of shipping in the region and recognizes the essential links between its own economic health and that of its neighbors; Korea's economic development is included in this calculation.

Resurgent nationalism after unification could exacerbate anti-American attitudes.

In regional affairs, common interests in trade, stability, and the free flow of shipping reflect unified perspectives on fundamental issues. Each nation fears the potential flood of refugees as well as other social and monetary costs of reconstruction that may result from a difficult political, economic, and social transition on the peninsula. Most of these powers have committed themselves to liberal democracy and open societies as the most effective method of maintaining internal stability and external relations and will likewise support the emergence of liberal democracy and an open society in Korea—perhaps akin to the democratic tradition established by South Korea. Moreover, no East Asian power wants to see WMD proliferation on the peninsula, recognizing how such a development would destabilize regional strategic calculations and spur potential for an unproductive arms race.

East Asian perspectives on the future relationship between a unified Korea and the United States, however, will differ from state to state. Japan will likely seek to preserve the U.S.-ROK alliance and the U.S. military presence in Korea to guarantee that the unified state will be neither hostile to nor allied with unfriendly countries. Japan would also welcome a unified Korea that may share the burden of its regional security partnership with the United States. China and Russia, on the other hand, seek a unified Korea more independent of the United States. China, in particular, will strive to exert significant influence over political and security developments in the

new Korean state to help shape an immediate neighbor that is not too closely allied with the United States or Japan.

At a minimum, China and perhaps Russia will question the purpose and intent behind a continued U.S.-Korean alliance and U.S. military presence on the peninsula and suspect that the continuation of both over the long term will allow the United States to assert its power and pursue its interests in the region at their expense. The loss of its DPRK buffer is bound to leave China feeling exposed on its northeast flank and to create strategic uncertainties that a U.S. troop presence will exacerbate. Beijing also hopes that the establishment of a newly unified Korea outside the U.S. alliance system would weaken Washington's overall influence in the Asia-Pacific region, constrain U.S. freedom of action (particularly with respect to Taiwan), and reduce the potential of encirclement. More so than China, Russia's take on the U.S.-Korean alliance and U.S. military presence on the peninsula will ultimately depend on the state of its bilateral relations with Washington, as well as Moscow's relations with Beijing, at the time of unification, which cannot be anticipated with certainty today.

Roadblocks Ahead

Considering U.S. policy toward a unified Korea not only requires assessing future U.S. interests, but also anticipating what potential obstacles to the achievement of U.S. regional interests could arise. First, financial burdens inherent in the process of unification will likely constrain Korea's ability and possibly its inclination to support the U.S. troop presence and alliance obligations. Regardless of the method of unification, the financial and social cost of Korean unification on South Korean society will be enormous. In this environment, host-nation support for maintaining U.S. forces on the peninsula will be highly controversial, if not politically difficult to sustain. Similarly, the unified Korean military will focus on internal challenges such as civil defense and civil reconstruction, constricting for some time its ability to work with the United States on regional operations.

In addition, growing anti-American sentiment within Korea's body politic may serve as one of the greatest dangers to U.S. interests on the peninsula following unification. Public opinion polls and anecdotal evidence in South Korea today reveal that, despite residual good will toward the United States for its commitment to Korean security and admiration for U.S. culture, resentment toward the United States within Korean society is growing. The nature, depth, and sustainability of this sentiment over time is not clear, but leaders in the United States and Korea should not lightly dismiss the potential for this sentiment to become an impediment to future bilateral relations.

Resurgent nationalism resulting from unification could direct greater attention to perceived grievances and humiliations inflicted on Korea in recent history and exacerbate anti-American attitudes.

Growth in the scope and intensity of anti-Japanese sentiment following unification is an obvious corollary and may also complicate future coordination of U.S. alliance policies. Likewise, potential growth in popular attraction to China for ethnic and cultural reasons, of which there is evidence today, may further develop, complicating Korean relations with Beijing's likely future rivals.

Without the binding DPRK threat, cooperation between Korea and Japan may founder.

Furthermore, the United States should be keenly aware of how effects of Korean unification on the U.S. strategic position on the peninsula will have concurrent, ripple effects on the U.S. position in Japan and in the region as a whole. Japan and Korea both closely watch U.S. alliance relations with the other and seek as much parity in their arrangements as possible. Concessions or alterations in host-nation support, the Status of Forces Agreement, and

troop presence in Korea are likely to be used as ammunition for critics or reformers of the U.S. presence in Japan, potentially leading to a destructive spiral throughout Asia. A sustainable burden-sharing arrangement will be critical to preventing this contingency and will require close consultation between Japan and Korea.

A final wildcard is the continued commitment of the U.S. populace, including Congress, to sustaining its role as security guarantor in East Asia and to expending the economic, political, and military resources necessary to maintain its presence. Currently, no evidence exists that the United States will attenuate its commitments to East Asia in the future, following Korean unification or otherwise. Given the nature of democracy, however, U.S. domestic politics or public opinion could complicate U.S. international policy. The state of the region, the world, and the U.S. domestic environment at the time of unification is impossible to predict. Variables include developments in the war on terrorism; the U.S. fiscal situation; U.S. relations with other regional states; and the political, military, and financial support of regional allies and friends to help meet U.S. interests. Nonetheless, given the tremendous interest the United States will retain in the peace and stability of East Asia following unification, as indicated above, the U.S. regional security strategy of alliances, military presence, and sustained diplomatic engagement will likely endure regardless of such potential complications.

Pillars for Postunification Strategy

To best meet U.S., Korean, and regional interests following Korean unification, as outlined above, the United States should construct a U.S. policy toward a unified Korea based on the following approach.

- *Reaffirm U.S. commitment to the terms of the 1954 U.S.-ROK Mutual Defense Treaty and expand its scope to encompass a postunification alliance focused on maintaining regional peace and stability.*

Broadening the U.S.-Korean alliance to encompass regional rather than merely peninsular security will require that the United States remain comprehensively engaged in the political, diplomatic, economic, and military affairs of the entire region. Reaffirming the U.S.-Korean alliance will reassure the region that the U.S. commitment to its alliance-based regional security strategy will continue and will promote investment in U.S. power as a regional security guarantor. The alliance must become a more equal partnership, involving regular, close consultation on regional security matters in coordination with other U.S. regional allies. Both sides should be transparent about the purpose and nature of the alliance, which should serve as an overall hedge against regional instability. The alliance should guard against being defined or perceived as being directed against any particular third country.

- *Maintain a military presence on the peninsula as a symbol and guarantor of continued U.S. security commitments to the peninsula and the region.*

The United States should be flexible about the structure of its presence on the peninsula but firm about maintaining some form of presence after unification. During a difficult transition, a continued U.S. presence on the peninsula will allow a unified Korea to focus on the challenges of domestic development, including the long process of reconciliation, rather than on its external security. The United States should consult closely with Korean authorities concerning an appropriate structure according to regional security needs and domestic Korean sensitivities.

Given the absence of a North Korean threat, U.S. capabilities should evolve from a heavy, dug-in force focused on peninsular security to a light, mobile, expeditionary presence that can deploy quickly and effectively elsewhere in the region. After unification, the United Nations (UN) Command should dissolve. The Combined Forces Command should also be disbanded in favor of a parallel command structure under which independent U.S. and Korean forces may cooperate and coordinate activities, akin to the arrangement under which U.S. and Japanese armed forces operate. Independent parallel forces provide both sides with maximum flexibility and

plausible deniability should either side deploy for operations the other may find undesirable, either for political or military reasons. Nonetheless, both sides should immediately establish guidelines for future cooperation to allow for joint training and operations, which should prove relatively smooth given their long experience as a combined force. U.S. forces on the peninsula, meanwhile, should be fully integrated into the operations of other U.S. defense assets in the region.

The United States should be prepared to consider a combination of basing and access arrangements to sustain its presence and enable U.S. and

A sustainable burden-sharing arrangement will be critical post-unification.

Korean forces to continue close personal contact and joint/combined training. The United States should seek to maintain pre-positioned equipment to facilitate regional operations and training. Such training should be oriented toward both fighting and peacetime regional operations such as search and rescue, antipiracy patrols, counterterrorism, sea-lane security, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, and peacekeeping/peace enforcement. The two sides should enact any reductions in numbers or changes in ar-

rangements for U.S. military personnel on Korean soil (e.g., Status of Forces Agreement and host-nation support) in close cooperation with Japan. This consultation would ensure an appropriate balance and mix of U.S. capabilities in the region and help to alleviate potential domestic pressures on U.S. forces in Japan induced by changes on the peninsula.

- *Maintain its nuclear umbrella over a unified Korea (and Japan) to solidify the U.S.-Korean security alliance and prevent a regional arms race.*

The U.S. nuclear umbrella over South Korea and Japan during the past 50 years has been an essential element of the bilateral security alliance and has been effective in maintaining ROK security. The U.S. commitment has enabled the ROK to renounce the development, stockpiling, or deployment of nuclear weapons and has prevented emergence of a regional arms race. Encouraging a unified Korea to renounce WMD because of the U.S. retention of its nuclear umbrella will serve this end and further solidify the basis of a postunification security alliance.

- *Encourage a unified Korea to join an integrated, regional missile defense network to protect allied assets as an essential element of the postunification alliance.*

Over time, missile defense will become an increasingly important element of U.S. defense doctrine and posture and conceptions of international security.

The United States has committed itself to developing and deploying such defense capability in East Asia to protect its allies, friends, and forward-deployed personnel from future missile attack by rogue nations or others with hostile intent. As a key regional ally, Korea should be encouraged to participate in a regional missile defense network to support this goal. At the same time, a unified Korea should be part of a broader regional and international dialogue among responsible nations concerning a strategic doctrine that incorporates missile defense to prevent such deployments from becoming a rationale for a destabilizing regional arms race.

- *Fill gaps in logistics support and other domestic functions for Korea during its transitional period.*

The Korean people must handle the process of unification on the peninsula themselves. Particularly in a war or collapse scenario, however, the challenges to domestic security in the aftermath of unification may be substantial. Despite the high quality of Korean personnel, such turmoil may prove overwhelming for Korean capabilities. The United States will have substantial interests in ensuring that the peninsula is stable and under sufficient police control to prevent the emergence of a haven for transnational crime including terrorism, narcotics trafficking, counterfeiting, and WMD proliferation. The United States should be prepared to organize and provide assistance to Korean civil authorities as requested by the Korean government, perhaps in conjunction with regional or UN forces. Such assistance might take the form of transport, construction, engineering, refugee repatriation, or other public safety initiatives.

- *Provide extensive material support for political and economic reconstruction of a unified Korea, potentially playing a leadership role in any international effort, as appropriate.*

The political, economic, and social challenges of unification will impose enormous financial and social costs on the Korean people. The United States should lead, through its own efforts and through the UN and international financial institutions, the provision of political and material assistance to promote the development of a stable, prosperous liberal democracy on the peninsula, even as it takes care not to usurp the sovereign rights and responsibilities of the Korean government. U.S. aid agencies should provide resources for official and nongovernmental U.S. organizations to take common U.S. and ROK political values of democracy, free enterprise, civil liberty, and rule of law to the then-former North Korea through education and other services. The agencies should, at the same time, maintain vigilance against retreat from such values in South Korea due to the stresses of man-

aging the unification process. By seeing the task of reconstruction through to the end, the United States would affirm its abiding ties with the Korean people and fulfill a solemn security commitment to a close ally.

- *Prioritize the accounting and responsible control of the former North Korea's nuclear, biochemical, missile, and conventional capabilities, as well as the decommissioning of DPRK forces.*

The DPRK's admission in October 2002 of a clandestine uranium enrichment capability and separate evidence that North Korea has developed and stockpiled chemical and biological (if not nuclear) weapons suggest that the North's military arsenal will remain a potential threat to international security, particularly in the area of nonproliferation, even after unification. An

U.S. alliances, military presence, and sustained diplomatic engagement will endure.

immediate task for the United States and the international community following (if not before) Korean unification, particularly under a collapse or war scenario, would be ensuring that Korea be free of WMD. The United States and Korea must work with the International Atomic Energy Agency and regional nations through existing treaties in this endeavor. To ensure Korea's continued commitment to the abjuration of the development, stockpiling, or deployment of nuclear

weapons, the United States should reaffirm its regional nonproliferation strategy, including support for Japan's Three Nonnuclear Principles, because developments in nations such as Japan will affect key political and military calculations of unified Korea.

The United States must also work closely with Korea to ensure that no rogue elements on the peninsula are able to engage in illicit activities involving WMD amidst the turmoil of a postunification environment. In the United States' own interest and as Korea's ally and security guarantor, the decommissioning of DPRK soldiers and their weapons will be an immediate and central U.S. concern following unification.

- *Facilitate the development of minilateral dialogues among Northeast Asian nations following Korean unification to ensure regional confidence in the trajectory of a united Korea.*

The security environment in Northeast Asia following Korean unification will change substantially as Korea may once again assume its traditional status as a strategic buffer for Japan, China, and Russia. Although the United States should remain committed to alliances as the core of its security ap-

proach to East Asia, the United States should help establish trilateral, quadrilateral, or other such “minilateral” dialogues to address peninsular and regional security issues.

Such dialogues may serve to promote trust and transparency about the orientation and trajectory of a united Korea and provide strategic reassurance necessary to maintain a stable regional security environment. How the United States handles Asia-Pacific affairs on a regional basis, particularly with Japan and China, may affect Korea’s desire to remain closely affiliated with the United States over the long term. Building on cooperation established within the Four Party process among the United States, China, North Korea, and South Korea to establish an official Northeast Asian Security Dialogue process, adding Japan, Russia, and perhaps Mongolia as well as a unified Korea, could serve such a function.

What Can Be Done Now?

The United States should also consider pursuing the following policy initiatives today to prepare for and shape a positive postunification environment for U.S. interests.

- *Cooperate with Korean leaders to address conditions that promote anti-American sentiment within the Korean body politic to garner public support in Korea for a continued U.S. alliance and military presence following unification.*

The proud and emotional nature of Korean society makes many Korean citizens sensitive to any kind of U.S. interference in intra-Korean affairs. In particular, Koreans often feel humiliated for being treated less than equally in the alliance or being casually disregarded on issues of their own national well-being and sovereignty, including the impact of U.S. military presence. Although some of this sentiment cannot be avoided due to the nature of the relationship and the power imbalance between the two sides, the United States should nonetheless take greater care in its initiatives and rhetoric concerning peninsular affairs to avoid the appearance of arrogance or other perceived affronts to Korean national pride and sovereignty.

U.S. forces in Korea and their political/military leaders should similarly pay substantial attention to any measures that will reduce the footprint of U.S. military personnel based or stationed on the peninsula. These measures could include consolidating and reducing bases where possible, good-neighbor initiatives to promote understanding and good will between base personnel and local communities, and heightened sensitivity to the environmental (including noise) and other hazards that the U.S. military presence poses to local populations. The United States should also consider reforms in the

combined military command structure that will provide greater responsibility and authority to Korean leaders.

In the process, the United States should do a better job of promoting a general knowledge of its good works and other alliance benefits as part of an active public diplomacy campaign. For instance, the United States might promote greater exchanges between members of Congress and the ROK National Assembly to develop personal relationships and comprehensive understanding of U.S. policies and perspectives.

Korea should be encouraged to participate in a regional missile defense network.

The United States might provide Seoul greater face by enhancing the stature of its ambassadors to Seoul, along the lines of the elder statesman model the United States follows in Japan. The United States should also ensure that senior foreign policy defense and economic leadership, including the president, travel regularly to Seoul for consultation and to coordinate the most critical role in shaping public perceptions and attitudes toward the bilateral relationship.

Perhaps most important, the United States should lean heavily on the Korean leadership itself to promote better understanding of the U.S. role in Korean security and development and aggressively counter misperceptions that fester through the media concerning U.S. policies, presence, and the overall alliance.

- *Continue to strongly support reconciliation between Japanese and Korean societies as a key component of future security in East Asia.*

Historical enmity rooted in Japan's colonial domination of Korea earlier in the century and the inability of Japan to account adequately for the raw emotions that remain in Korean society concerning the period have led to deep divisions and recurring tensions between Japanese and Korean societies. Such lingering resentment prevents full reconciliation between the two sides and threatens any U.S. effort to sustain trilateral coordination in the long term. Today, South Korea and Japan are brought together by a common concern over the DPRK threat. Without this common threat, cooperation may founder in the face of resurgent Korean nationalism, leading to severe bilateral tensions if unchecked.

The United States should elevate positive Japanese-Korean relations to the status of a key strategic concern. Current official and unofficial trilateral dialogues help this process. The United States might promote interaction and exchanges at the legislative level, aimed perhaps at the younger generation, to facilitate personal bonds further. Ultimately, however, the United States cannot and should not seek to mediate such a sensitive divide be-

tween these two nations, whose resolution necessarily resides in national good faith efforts by both sides.

- *Consult strategic planners and key policymakers in Japan and Korea to discuss the outlines of a postunification security structure.*

Although Korean unification is unlikely to occur in the near term, the United States and its two Northeast Asian allies must begin the critical process of talking seriously about their respective visions of a postunification security environment in East Asia. Changes in the U.S. relationship with one ally will affect U.S. relations with the other. This dynamic requires that the three nations consult with each other and coordinate their visions to ensure stability and control of the postunification security environment.

Issues the parties should address during such consultations include the structure and nature of the U.S. military presence, the roles and missions of the three forces in safeguarding regional security, and anticipated complications to their respective visions. Either the current Defense Trilateral process (among the U.S., Korean, and Japanese defense ministries) may be used or an entirely new forum may be developed to serve as the vehicle for such talks. These discussions should not, however, occur within the Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group process, which should remain focused on common approaches to the current North Korean threat. The three sides should eventually engage in consultation and dialogue with other allies and friends who may serve as partners in regional security.

Anticipate, Don't React

Korean unification will fulfill a commitment to an ally that the United States has expended tremendous national resources to protect and develop for more than fifty years. Yet, with the elimination of the North Korean threat following unification, the United States will find that the original reason for both its presence on the peninsula and its bilateral alliance with Korea will vanish even as challenges to stability in Northeast Asia are likely to increase. No one can predict when unification will occur, but the last 15 years have shown that dramatic international change is often swift and unexpected. On the Korean peninsula, the United States must act today to plan for this contingency to ensure that it can safeguard its interests in the Asia-Pacific region even after the region's strategic environment radically transforms.

