



**Respond and Restrain:  
Deterrence and Reassurance in Northeast Asia**

**A Conference Report from the  
US-ROK-Japan Trilateral Workshop and Simulation**

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## **Pacific Forum CSIS**

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## Key Findings/Recommendations

The Pacific Forum CSIS, with the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, and with support from the Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD (PASCC) and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), held a US-ROK-Japan Extended Deterrence Trilateral Dialogue on July 23-24, 2014. Forty-one US, ROK, and Japanese experts, officials, military officers, and observers, along with 17 Pacific Forum Young Leaders, attended in their private capacities.

Key findings include:

Security and foreign policy professionals in all three countries appreciate the importance of trilateral security cooperation, particularly to deal with a Korean Peninsula contingency. While all are dissatisfied with the current level and intensity of trilateral security cooperation, powerful political and emotional obstacles continue to hinder deeper cooperation.

The chief obstacle is ill will between Seoul and Tokyo. Trust and confidence are lacking. Even efforts to open official communication channels were faulted for being informative, not consultative.

The US stake in Northeast Asia obliges Washington to work to facilitate trilateral cooperation. Japanese and Koreans both agree that the US plays the key role in this effort and look to Washington to be more energetic. US efforts to facilitate communication are often seen as taking sides by one of the parties, however, and could prompt intensified “lobbying.”

Exchanges in our meeting helped reduce misunderstanding and provided an information baseline for policies that was lacking. Nonetheless, Koreans remain apprehensive over Japan’s move toward exercising the right of collective self-defense and sought clarification of what it entails, to include the potential development of new offensive capabilities. Track-two and other non-governmental efforts can play an important role in providing clarification.

The most problematic deterrence challenges today concern “gray zone” provocations that, by definition, differ from thresholds of the past. Going forward, the North Korean “theory of victory” is likely to employ nuclear blackmail in combination with shows of strength and resolve to stop the US and its allies from using their superior capabilities in response to provocations. Japanese showed more concern than South Koreans about North Korean capabilities being able to “de-couple” the US from the region.

A looming concern beyond forging a coordinated response in a North Korean contingency is the gap in preferred diplomatic strategies between Tokyo and Seoul when it comes to dealing with regional security issues involving China.

Missile defense (MD) systems are critical elements of trilateral security cooperation. They do not guarantee absolute security but are effective tools that provide allies with partial protection, giving them critical advantages in war. At a minimum, the US, Japan, and South Korea need MD sensor integration. Interceptor integration is less critical.

The US currently does not have conventional prompt global strike capability (CPGS), which some see as a critical component to extended deterrence in Northeast Asia. Allies can develop their own conventional strike capabilities, filling this gap in alliance arrangements. Track-two can aid this process by producing authoritative needs assessments of MD and CPGS capabilities, and providing recommendations on appropriate trilateral responses.

In addition to substantive dialogue, participants took part in a two-stage table top exercise (TTX). Step one began with a North Korean sinking of a Japanese vessel amid increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Stage two included a US/Japan strike against a North Korean naval base, which was followed by a North Korean artillery barrage against an isolated South Korean farmland (with several civilian casualties) and a North Korean nuclear detonation over the Sea of Japan/East Sea (no casualties). TTX observations include:

During stage one, Japanese emphasized that Tokyo had no capability to strike North Korea to retaliate for the sinking of the Japanese naval vessel. They strongly insisted the US take action against North Korea on Japan's behalf, stating that failure to do so would risk alliance credibility. Koreans urged caution out of concern for escalation on the Peninsula.

In step two, most Japanese were surprised by the strength and speed of the follow-on proposed US and ROK responses. All saw the North Korean nuclear demonstration as a signal or warning and not a military action per se. Americans and Koreans saw it as "nuclear blackmail" which demanded a strong response. Japanese were more cautious; they believed that they are uniquely exposed and vulnerable to a North Korean nuclear strike in a Northeast Asian contingency.

There was almost no attempt to communicate directly with North Korea throughout the simulation. At best China was used as a channel to Pyongyang. Participants felt they had little understanding of Kim Jung Un's motivations and thinking. Neither was their agreement among participants about North Korean capabilities, nor how to assess them.

All participants felt there was a lack of clarity about the point at which deterrence of North Korea or the response to a provocation could evolve into an effort to bring about regime change and/or reunification of the Korean Peninsula.

There was confusion about the amount of time a government could take to respond to an attack and still claim to exercise the right of self-defense.

The discussion appeared to undervalue the significance of the first use of a nuclear weapon and its impact on international rules and norms. The US response was at least partly driven by these considerations, however.

All participants worried about military action to which they were not a party and sought consultation and other mechanisms that could slow responses and prevent escalation that they had no control over. Japanese urged caution over expecting “automatic” support for combat operations on the Peninsula (beyond use of UN-designated bases); any Japanese Prime Minister would want to have a say, given the risks associated with direct Japanese involvement.

There were significant differences among participants about the definition and implications of “inaction.” Koreans assumed automatic retaliation to the artillery barrage against them. Americans seemed the most inclined to act against North Korea to dissuade it from escalating.

There was no agreement on what constituted the appropriate end state after step 2. There was consensus – but not unanimity – on removal of North Korea’s known nuclear arsenal and delivery systems as a condition for the end of hostilities.

Korean participants emphasized the economic impact of such a contingency on the ROK economy – and noted that they were the only group to worry about that dimension.

Korean participants asserted that the absence of a GSOMIA agreement would not hinder information exchanges with Japan during an emergency.

Korean participants emphasized the “dual tracks” throughout the exercise: the first track consisted of the particular provocation by North Korea and the second consisted of seeming preparations for war. Since most of the fighting and the majority of damage would occur on the Korean Peninsula, Koreans were understandably sensitive to and focused on the prospect of wider war. Nonetheless, they endorsed the need for immediate response to conventional attacks, even in a remote area, and saw the need for nuclear signaling by the US in step two.

There is a potential disconnect in US-ROK preferred responses to North Korea provocations. After Yeonpyongdo, Americans worried about an overly robust ROK response; the robust US response to the second step nuclear detonation seemed at cross-purposes with US concerns expressed in counter-provocation planning.





## Conference Report

The US extended deterrent in Northeast Asia is strong. US alliances with Japan and South Korea are each arguably in the best shape in years, with alliance modernization efforts proceeding in tandem with domestic adjustments to security policy that strengthen the foundation for cooperative action. Policy toward North Korea, historically a wedge between Washington and allied governments in the region, is largely aligned, and serving as a glue rather than a source of discord.

This otherwise sunny outlook is darkened by the difficulties in the Seoul-Tokyo relationship. The (from a US perspective) obvious convergence of interests among the three governments is overshadowed by a lengthy and depressingly well-rehearsed list of problems. The second US-ROK-Japan Trilateral Extended Deterrence Dialogue, hosted by Pacific Forum CSIS and the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, with indirect support from the Project on Advanced Systems and Concepts for Countering WMD (PASCC) and the Defense Threat Reduction Agency (DTRA), explored ways to overcome those obstacles to enhanced cooperation. In an attempt to push the envelope, the 43 senior participants from the three countries joined 17 Pacific Forum Young Leaders (all attending in their private capacities) in discussions and a tabletop exercise that was designed to explore reactions to a nuclear contingency on the Korean Peninsula. The results were sobering and underscored the need for increased coordination and planning among the three governments to prepare for such a crisis in Northeast Asia.

### **The Japan-ROK security relationship**

Discussion began with US assessment of the Japan-ROK security relationship. As our US presenter observed, the security relationship is “problematic largely because it is compelled to operate in the shadow of an overall bilateral relationship deeply troubled, dysfunctional, and in the worst shape in a number of years.” These problems undermine longstanding US efforts to create a trilateral security partnership to deal with current and emerging issues, especially North Korea. Worse, the difficulties between Seoul and Tokyo entice China to exploit those tensions as Beijing tries to erode a US alliance system that it sees as a threat. Ultimately, the disagreements affect deterrence and send the wrong messages to both North Korea and China.

To the credit of both South Korea and Japan, the difficulties have been contained, with both governments insulating large elements of the security dialogue from the most divisive aspects of relations. One tactic has been keeping cooperation under the radar, which avoids unwanted attention but also deprives the three governments of positive examples to build upon for more extensive cooperation. It subjects important opportunities to the vagaries of politics and public opinion as well as limits options in the event of crises or contingencies. The fact that there hasn't been a bilateral summit meeting of top leaders of Japan and South Korea since both current governments took office is a painful reminder of the costs of the status quo: the normal business of diplomacy has been stymied. Exhibit B in this indictment was the “unhelpful and useless”

debate between Seoul and Tokyo that preceded our meeting over the role of US forces in a Korean Peninsula contingency.

Fortunately, there are signs that a floor has been set and limits reached on the deterioration of relations. The three defense chiefs met at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore in May 2014 and there is a director general-level conversation on North Korea among the foreign ministries. Still, the prospect of a “qualitative change” in the North Korean threat – a deliverable nuclear weapon – will transform regional security dynamics. All three governments must anticipate this development and strengthen our deterrent capability. A failure to do so will trigger debates about the wisdom of domestic nuclear capabilities. A more powerful and more assertive China raises similar security concerns even if the threat is not as sharp or as well defined.

Four themes dominated the subsequent discussion. The first concerned the state of trilateral relations. No one challenged the speaker’s claim that the security relationship is better than the overall relationship and that problems between Seoul and Tokyo limit the potential for security cooperation. Opinion polls show the Korean public backs ROK-Japan bilateral security cooperation and in one recent track 1.5 discussion, there was “a 95 percent overlap” among presentations from the three countries on North Korea. Unfortunately, explained one ROK participant, it’s hard for political leaders to move forward when the history issue “overwhelms” all other topics. There was consensus that governments alone cannot fix these problems and that the private sector has to step up. Opinion leaders in all three countries have to make the case for cooperation and counter dominant media narratives in both countries that were characterized as “corrosive” and unhelpful.

A second topic that weaved its way through the discussion was the ROK-China relationship. Korean participants dismissed the perception that Seoul was falling into China’s orbit. While China plays an increasingly important role in the ROK economy, all participants rejected the notion that ties with the US (or Japan) were being weakened as a result. Seoul once saw Beijing as a potentially helpful interlocutor as it attempted to engage Pyongyang but there is an emerging consensus that China is not being helpful in that role. The historic visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping to Seoul – the first time a Chinese leader visited the South before going to the North – triggered some alarms, but South Koreans “were offended” by claims that they were tilting toward China. They insisted that the Korean people saw through cynical attempts by Xi to manipulate opinion in their country. One ROK participant agreed that Beijing is trying to get the ROK to join an anti-Japan coalition,” but he countered that “History is a bilateral or a universal issue; it is not a geopolitical tool.”

ROK concern about developments in Japan is magnified by a natural outcome of the lack of dialogue: a lack of transparency about what is going on in Japan. Throughout our meeting, ROK participants asked Japanese counterparts about changes that would result from the July 1 decision by the Japanese Cabinet to reinterpret the right of collective self-defense (CSD). The uncertainty about the meaning of this shift was our third key theme. Japanese and US participants generally agreed that the changes are

important in principle. Japanese participants insisted the changes are an attempt by Japan to shoulder more regional security responsibilities and be a better ally and partner of the US – and South Korea, as these changes should facilitate cooperation in the event of a North Korean crisis. At the same time, the majority view among American and Japanese participants was that the change will have limited application in practice; “it is not nearly enough,” argued one US participant.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, specific changes that would follow are unclear since legislation that will translate the Cabinet decision into policy has not yet been written. Japanese participants understand the importance of providing a window on their thinking and are prepared to do so, but they charged that attempts to reach out had been rebuffed by Seoul. Several Japanese participants added that there is no payoff for Koreans to challenge the conventional wisdom about developments in Japan; instead, there is a political reward for riding the waves of antagonism. (Japanese speakers also warned that while Koreans may think they are criticizing the Abe government, the Japanese public “hears” criticism of Japan more generally.)

This thread segued into the fourth important theme of the discussion, namely the appropriate role of the US amidst these tensions. All participants agreed that the US has a role to play, and that its “nudges” facilitated the meeting of the three top leaders at The Hague Nuclear Security Summit in March 2014. While that encounter was valuable and broke the ice for the subsequent military heads meeting and lower-level discussion, it remains, as one US participant conceded, “small ball.” All also agreed that it is up to Seoul and Tokyo to do the heavy lifting.

Ultimately, one Japanese participant cautioned, this trilateral will be different from other trilats. The US can attempt to align the two Northeast Asian alliances – the official statements released by the governments after the stops during President Obama’s April 2014 tour are proof of how interests and discussions parallel each other – but this trilateral relationship is structurally different from that of the US, Japan, and Australia. The TSD is more than the mere coordination of alliances.

A genuine discussion of security concerns among the three, together and in pairs, is needed. “Briefings” will not suffice. There has to be give and take. Both allies seek transparency about what the other alliance is doing. South Koreans repeatedly pushed Japanese counterparts to detail how defense policy and procurement would change in the aftermath of the CSD decision. They also sought insight into the consultative mechanism that Tokyo and Washington would use when Japan invokes CSD. This is a core concern for Koreans: they are particularly exercised about the prospect of Japanese forces taking action during a Korean Peninsula crisis. This fear has prompted a Japanese response that emphasizes the need for Japanese acquiescence to the use of bases in Japan to support US forces in Korea. As one Japanese participant explained, if Japan could suffer 300,000 casualties in the event of a North Korean nuclear strike against its territory, Japanese leaders have to be involved in any decision that could result in a choice to trade Tokyo for Seoul. That risk exasperates Japanese who cannot understand why Koreans would

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<sup>1</sup> This topic is taken up in more detail in the US-Japan Strategic Dialogue conference, a meeting that followed this trilateral discussion. That report is available at: <http://csis.org/publication/issues-and-insights-vol-14-no-14-changes-japan-push-alliance-forward>

object to a change in Japan's defense policy that would create greater risks for Japan as it helps defend Korea. (Meanwhile, throughout the discussion, Korean interlocutors emphasized that they did not oppose Japan's exercise of the right of CSD; merely that they wanted to understand it better.)

### **Trilateralism, deterrence, and the Korean Peninsula**

Session two attempted to detail ways that the three countries could surmount those obstacles and work together to strengthen trilateral cooperation on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>2</sup> Our South Korean speaker lamented the deterioration of ROK-Japan relations, especially after the progress made possible by the earlier work of Pacific Forum and its dialogue partners, the New Asia Research Institute in Seoul and the Okazaki Institute in Tokyo. "Korea and Japan are back to where we were 17 years ago," he fumed. He blamed political leaders in Seoul and Tokyo for ignoring the fundamentals of the relationship and focusing instead on nationalism and public sentiment. Each government is waiting for the other "to come to its senses" when real leadership demands some accommodation of a neighbor's sentiment.

While the South relies on US extended deterrence for its security, that reliance creates a dilemma for ROK decision makers. A core component of the extended deterrent is missile defense (MD) against North Korean missiles, and the larger the network of sensors and interceptors, the more effective an MD system will be. (This same logic drives the conclusion that closer US-Japan security cooperation is good for ROK strategic interests.) At the same time, however, Koreans fear that integration of their missile defense effort with that of the larger regional US program risks drawing the ROK into a contingency involving Taiwan or the Senkaku islands. Thus, the political decision about the appropriate level of integration will send signals about Korean commitment to both the alliance and its reliability as a security partner and ally. Not surprisingly, our ROK speaker urged a cautious discussion of the location, rationale, and function of the US forces in Korea.

Our Japanese speaker agreed with that logic and applauded the success of the US extended deterrent in containing tensions on the Korean Peninsula. Despite several incidents, conflict and escalation have been avoided. Now, however, there is a new behavior to be deterred – nuclear blackmail – and it is not clear how well the three countries and their two alliances are prepared to deal with it. Critical to the success of those efforts is consensus among the three countries and the wider international community about the appropriate red lines to be drawn and the response if they are crossed. Our speaker argued that Pyongyang's nuclear development is not the red line but rather nuclear development related to military use. He also conceded that enforcing that red line will be different if the North Korean leadership believes – as is widely assumed – that such weapons are necessary for regime survival. (He also highlighted the core

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<sup>2</sup> Previous strategic dialogues, both bilateral and trilateral, have made clear that the best prospects for such cooperation would focus on a North Korean contingency rather than other regional security threats or challenges.

dilemma that Pyongyang faces: the regime needs help to survive but any opening of the doors to foreign influence threatens the regime's foundations.)

Trilateral cooperation among Tokyo, Washington, and Seoul is hampered by the different weights the three governments attach to the components of the extended deterrent – Tokyo and Seoul put greater importance on the nuclear component than does Washington – as well as the different priorities among the three: Tokyo is focused on the fate of the abductees, the US on Pyongyang's nuclear capabilities, and South Korea worries about the North's conventional and special ops forces. A belief among South Koreans that Japan constitutes the second largest threat to the ROK – as was revealed in a May 2014 poll – doesn't help.

To strengthen extended deterrence, the three countries should consolidate and modernize the individual alliances and strengthen military relations between Japan and the ROK. Our speaker clarified that he does not envision actual military forces working together but is referring to maritime fuel and other replenishment operations, information sharing, ammunition sharing, and minesweeping. The two countries' publics need to grasp that their security is complementary: each needs the other as a partner.

Trilateral security cooperation will be built, first, upon better information sharing among the three governments. Our Japanese speaker urged his government must do more to resolve the history issue and avoid any perception of high-handed behavior. For its part, Seoul should separate history from security; he emphasized that he wasn't dismissing the importance of history, but that it needs to be distinguished from other, current concerns. Meanwhile, the US needs to strengthen cooperation among alliances and to transition from the hub-and-spoke mentality that has dominated its security policy in Asia. It should be more concrete about the objectives of the rebalance.

Our US presenter explored North Korean thinking, attempting to identify Pyongyang's "theory of victory" and the strategy that would be required to defeat it. This theory uses nuclear blackmail to backstop the North's strength and resolve in a conflict with the US-ROK alliance and other adversaries. In practice, Pyongyang would take Seoul hostage, demonstrate its conventional superiority on the Korean Peninsula, and threaten the US homeland with its nuclear weapons to decouple the two allies. The credibility of its threat to cross the nuclear threshold would be based on the asymmetry in stakes – a threat to the survival of the North Korean regime – and the geographic distance between the two halves of the US-ROK alliance.

The US has been working on a response to this strategy since the first Persian Gulf War. The concept that has emerged relies on US allies in Northeast Asia. The response does not rely on either nuclear weapons or missile defense, and demands allied contributions and a distribution of burdens among nuclear and nonnuclear tools in the deterrence tool kit. Critical to the success of this strategy is trilateral cooperation. It increases the operational effectiveness of the various elements of this approach and it reduces Pyongyang's belief that it can divide the three governments. One particular area to which allies can contribute is in conventional strike capabilities.

A regional ballistic missile defense system provides particular added value to the extended deterrent by complicating an adversary's planning and introducing greater uncertainty into planning and operations. The greatest impact can be achieved through the integration of sensors, even without interceptor integration. Our US speaker endorsed a track-two study of missile defense that would examine and clarify the various systems being discussed and make recommendations about how to proceed.

Our discussion assessed the credibility of the North Korean nuclear threat. Some Japanese noted the prospect of decoupling from the US in the face of North Korea's deployment of a nuclear-tipped ballistic missile – “a game changer” – and warned of Pyongyang's overconfidence in its deterrent vis-à-vis the United States. South Korean participants generally believed that Pyongyang would not attack both Japan and South Korea, although one conceded “the remote possibility” of a North Korean strike on US forces in Japan. To counter North Korean blackmail, a Japanese participant endorsed “the introduction of the nuclear component in a more visible way.” That speaker distinguished this from the “robust security guarantee” that is needed to reassure Japan. It is important to note, however, that while most Japanese agreed that Pyongyang could get cocky and miscalculate, this should not be seen as a lack of confidence in the US commitment.

A US participant pushed back against giving the North too much credit. Decoupling shouldn't be a concern, he argued with some exasperation. Pyongyang has never demonstrated the ability to land a reentry vehicle, much less hit a target. MD capabilities increase those uncertainties. As he bluntly put it, the government in North Korea cannot expect to use a nuclear weapon and survive.

Regardless of what objective calculations might suggest, a US participant insisted that the evidence shows that North Korea thinks it has a trump card. While US resolve is vital, in fact, “the test in blackmail is collective resolve.” To decrease the odds of successful North Korean blackmail, some South Koreans endorsed a more extensive regional MD system, even one that covers China. “Such a system will ultimately serve a unified Korea's national interest. We should get it in place now, before unification. It will be too late after,” offered one ROK participant. Japanese participants agreed that a broader response was needed, but urged the US and Japan to focus on their alliance cooperation – particularly as policy changes in light of the CSD decision – rather than the larger multilateral context.

### **Table-top exercise: responding to North Korean provocations**

In addition to substantive dialogue, participants took part in a two-stage table-top exercise (TTX). Step one began with North Korea sinking a Japanese vessel – and admitting it had done so – amid increased tensions on the Korean Peninsula.<sup>3</sup>

*Japan's* government immediately sought Cabinet approval to issue a defense operation order, after which it explained to the country the risks involved as it deployed the SDF in an attempt at reassurance. It recognized the situation as “an armed attack on

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<sup>3</sup> For details, see Appendix A.

Japan,” deployed armed forces, began civil defense measures, deployed missile defense assets, and counter special operations measures. It also asked the US for a joint response under Article 5 of the Mutual Defense Treaty and activated bilateral coordination mechanism. The US was asked to retaliate against North Korea. Simultaneously it sought a UNSC resolution to condemn North Korea. It also began to consider the evacuation of Japanese nationals from the Korean Peninsula. The first five phone calls from the command authorities were made to the US president, the ROK president, the Chinese president, the UN secretary general, and the Russian president. Critically, Japan expected a statement from the US president that strongly supported Japan and assurance that it would respond as an Article 5 issue. It sought reinforcement of military assets, BMD deployment, and coordinated efforts to mobilize international support. From Seoul, Japan sought diplomatic support, information sharing and a commitment to protect Japanese nationals in the ROK.

“Japan expects a strong US response,” warned one Japanese participant. “We lack the credible capability to respond on our own,” he added. “Any US hesitation to retaliate would evaporate trust in the alliance.” The response has to be proportional but there was no agreement among Japanese of what specifically was required. There was discussion of a preemptive missile strike, but no consensus.

The *ROK* group assessed the situation as “very dangerous” and noted at the outset that it was “worried about escalation.” It concluded that North Korea would try to drive a wedge among the allies and that a collective and cooperative response was required. The group emphasized that there should be no unilateral action. Unlike the other teams, the South Korean group focused on the economic effect.

The ROK government immediately sent three messages: it called on Pyongyang to stop all provocative actions immediately; assured the ROK public that its safety was guaranteed, called for calm and urged them to follow the government; and called on the international community to respond in a collective and cooperative way.

Seoul would activate the National Security Council to serve as internal coordinator for all responses. The Ministry of National Defense would move to Watchcon 2, and ascertain the readiness of the combined military response posture. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade would be tasked with coordinating with other countries and promoting the ROK diplomatic position. The economic impact of the crisis would be closely monitored.

Like the Japanese group, the ROK would call the top leaders of the US, Japan, China, and Russia, as well as the UN. From the US, Seoul expects information sharing, intelligence assets, and analysis. The US should deploy additional military assets to show its readiness to respond to further provocations. In dealing with Japan, the ROK side emphasized the need for good judgment and accurate assessment. To that end, it urged closer consultation and the maintenance of open channels of communications. When questioned, ROK participants admitted that there is great concern about a unilateral Japanese response. While acknowledging Japan’s right to defend itself, there was a

warning to act quickly or that right would diminish over time. They also reminded the group that the absence of an information-sharing agreement (the General Security of Military Information Agreement, or GSOMIA) should not inhibit contact. South Koreans bristled at the prospect of an evacuation of Japanese nationals from their country, insisted such steps were premature and sent the wrong signals to the 2 million foreign nationals in South Korea. South Koreans also stressed, when pressed, that at this stage, in the absence of a direct military attack against their country, there would be no ROK military response, alone or in coordination, against the North.

The *US* team emphasized the political determination to defend Japan and to fulfill its obligations to its allies, while conceding the “Peoria problem”: convincing the US heartland of the need to honor alliance commitments and of the interests and stakes. (Of course, the US, like Seoul, would also send condolences to Japan.) Washington would take appropriate military steps, increase the alert level, emphasize that all options are on the table, and ensure the safety of US citizens in Japan and the ROK. The US team underscored its commitment to consultations with Japan, the ROK, other P5 members, and key stakeholders. In concrete terms, it would activate the bilateral coordinating mechanism with Japan, and take comparable steps with the ROK to increase readiness. The US would upgrade regional ISR, as well as regional missile defense systems and *Aegis* cruisers. Japan would be offered whatever assistance is required in recovery and salvage and confirming the source of attack. In an attempt to demonstrate nuclear resolve, nuclear-armed bombers would be deployed to Guam. Conventional strike options were discussed but no conclusions reached: the group only agreed that it would offer a “proportionate response.”

After communicating with the US public and Congress to ensure domestic support, Washington would reach out to Japan, the ROK, China, and Russia. While promising close communication with Seoul, the governments in Beijing and Moscow would be informed that their actions would be seen as a test of their commitment to resolve crises peacefully. Those governments would also be urged to inform Pyongyang of what is meant by the US insistence that “all options remain on the table.”

The US side would seek a trilateral meeting at the SecDef or the chairman of JCS level in Tokyo to make a visible show of resolve backed by a clear statement of an agreed joint response. All three would work on the same strategic messages and would coordinate lobbying at the UN. The aim would be, as one US participant explained, “to coordinate international activity to bring pain to North Korea short of military action as the first step to reinforce deterrence.”

In addition to the obvious similarities in the responses, one key question was how the three governments would respond to the attack on Japan as North Korea seemed to prepare for war. As an ROK participant noted, these are two different situations and demand different responses. The two are linked, but this is, as one US participant pointed out, the essence of a “gray zone” act. “The US must act in a decisive way that restores deterrence but is not escalatory.” Moreover, several US participants explained that the Quadrennial Defense Review requires the US to ensure that an adversary cannot escalate



its way out of a crisis. Significantly, several Japanese participants expressly said that they were reassured by the US response.

A second emphasis was on intelligence. There is a huge appetite for information that will be impossible to satisfy. It is incumbent, then, that the three governments anticipate as much as possible what information will be needed (and most in demand) during a crisis. Our group thought that insight into the thinking of the North Korean leadership would be invaluable.

### **TTX scenario step 2 - 48 hours later**

In step two, there had been a US/Japan strike against a North Korean naval base, which was followed by a North Korean artillery barrage against an isolated South Korean farmland (with several civilian casualties) and a North Korean nuclear detonation over the Sea of Japan/East Sea (in which there were no casualties).<sup>4</sup>

The JASDF provision of aircraft for a strike against a North Korean target allows *Japan* to claim that the operation was truly “joint.” While the situation has expanded, Japanese interpret North Korean rhetoric as suggestive of restraint, rather than a desire to escalate to war. The nuclear detonation is similarly read as signaling – “mainly a warning shot to Japan” in an attempt to drive a wedge between Tokyo and Seoul – and not further aggression. (This was not a unanimous conclusion, however.)

Japan seeks to contain the conflict and de-escalate, fully aware of the risk of inaction. Japanese participants assumed that the ROK would retaliate against the artillery shelling but there was great concern that a kinetic response would trigger escalation and an attack on Japan. Indeed, Japanese feel they are uniquely vulnerable to a North Korea attack. Japan will maintain its defense posture but will not escalate without additional North Korean action. Alliance coordination will continue, as will communication with the ROK.

The *South Korean* team presumed that the country had responded in a 3:1 ratio as demanded by the proactive deterrence policy. It also assumed that the Seoul government had consented to the US-Japan joint strike: in other words, the emphasis was on agreement among the allies. The ROK team was adamant that it must respond to the North Korea attack or risk being considered a paper tiger by Pyongyang, or worse, signal that nuclear blackmail will work. The North must be told to stand down. A majority of ROK participants – not all – backed a surgical strike to end the North’s nuclear program. (The ROK team said that adoption of this response would depend on who is on the National Security Council and the country’s leader at the time of a crisis.)

The ROK team acknowledged that China figured prominently in its discussions. Participants explained that good ROK-China relations are needed to understand North Korea actions; to get Beijing to understand the stakes; to get Beijing to stop all support

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<sup>4</sup> For details, see Appendix B.

for the North; and to persuade Pyongyang to de-escalate. And yes, South Koreans did worry about PRC intervention.

Significantly, at this point, the South Korea group sought a more clear and visible demonstration of the US nuclear presence on the Korean Peninsula. They suggested *B52* flights or nuclear submarine activities. Those signals would be complemented by activation of the civil defense law and intense monitoring of the economy. The UNSC would be the front lines of diplomatic activity. While the ROK group expected Japan to be more cautious than in the first move, a Japanese participant noted that Seoul's response was much more assertive than expected.

The *United States'* response began by outlining North Korea's strategic intent and its theory of victory. It assessed the nuclear shot as another provocation that demanded a response tailored to its character. US participants also concluded that China would be more likely to join international efforts to constrain Pyongyang at this point. "We will not allow the North to escalate out of a crisis." In other words, the US cannot de-escalate through inaction. Instead, the US reaction should be "the beginning of the end of North Korea's nuclear arsenal." While regime removal is not the medium-term goal, the US and its allies should seek to separate the North Korean regime from its nuclear weapons and end its ability to threaten South Korea. In short, they should remove Pyongyang's capability to present an immediate threat. This underscores the necessity of strong conventional retaliation.

The military strike would not be surgical because the target set would not be small. The US should be seen as conspicuously striking all three types of threats – nuclear, conventional, and special forces – but not in a way that could be interpreted as laying the foundation for large ground combat. North Korea would be left to decide its fate: accept the loss of those capabilities or risk regime survival. Meanwhile, the three defense ministers would publicly acknowledge nuclear deterrence considerations and US nuclear systems – *Trident* subs and dual-capable aircraft – would be visibly deployed. Aggressive regional diplomacy would follow; like the ROK team, the US acknowledged the important role that China would play at this stage.

Two questions dominated discussion of the US response. The first was whether the Pyongyang government could survive removal of its nuclear capability. We reached no consensus, although the collapse of the North was not seen as especially problematic in its own regard. No one objected to that outcome, although some participants wondered whether it should be a goal of trilateral action. Second, there was concern whether target selection would send a readable signal to the North. Historically, that has not been the case.

The US side argued that there was a powerful case for military action even if the signals weren't interpreted correctly. The US recognized that Pyongyang wasn't yet on the path to war, but it wanted the North to acknowledge that choice and recognize the options. Indeed, North Korea's detonation of a nuclear device in the scenario in a way

that did not inflict casualties indicates that the leadership understands the options and that deterrence works.

The Pacific Forum CSIS Young Leaders from all three countries served as a control group. For the most part, their deliberations showed no significant deviations from those of the seniors, although ROK YLs professed “surprise” at the readiness of their Japanese counterparts to forego retaliation in Step 1. Like the seniors, they assessed North Korea as attempting to divide the three allies, and urged the three governments to deter and de-escalate through a strong demonstration of force.

## **Assessment**

Japanese participants were satisfied by the US response on their behalf in Step 1. The alliance worked as expected. In contrast, some Japanese participants expressed concern that the US response in Step 2 went too far. (Japanese participants repeatedly emphasized the diversity of views among their group and cautioned against drawing too firm conclusions from its deliberations. In other words, outcomes are very dependent on personalities of participants.) Consistent with that evaluation was ROK reaction: fear that the US and Japan might go too far when their interests were attacked, yet less concerned about escalation when Seoul and Washington were responding to an attack on the ROK. One US participant noted that allied reservations about the appropriate response was to be expected: the US has its own equities to defend and they include and in some cases extend beyond those of its allies. In sum, and perhaps predictably, participants worried about military action to which they were not a party and sought consultation and other mechanisms that could slow responses and prevent escalation in those cases.

There was considerable debate about signaling, especially by the US, and what red lines were being drawn. One Japanese participant confessed to confusion about which North Korean action crossed the line and worried that Pyongyang wouldn’t be able to make the fine distinctions about intent that the US was making. It was generally agreed, however, that any response needed to occur within 48 hours of a provocation; a longer delay risked diluting or obscuring the message.

US participants urged both South Korea and Japan to voice strategic preferences in crises. There was a tendency, at least among Japanese, to offer the US *carte blanche* as it acted (while ensuring that consultation mechanisms be used, of course). Japanese also worried that the public would prove to be a wild card – and restraining action – as the nation deliberated its response to a nuclear provocation.

South Koreans were asked about their expectations of Japan in a Korean Peninsula crisis: the short answer is rear-area support at the start, and perhaps more later. But Japanese participants noted that while such a role has been considered automatic, the prospect of a North Korean nuclear attack on Japanese territory – made possible by the modernization of its missile and nuclear capabilities, and probable, in their own minds, because Japan is uniquely vulnerable to such an attack – means that a Japanese prime minister cannot be assumed to acquiesce to such a decision. As one Japanese participant

explained, the prime minister “has a right to say no” when facing the choice of trading Tokyo for Seoul. (He quickly admitted, however, that saying no to US use of its bases on Japan in such a case would end the alliance.)

## **Wrapup Session**

Despite some initial fears that the scenario was outlandish, most participants considered it realistic. It managed to focus on the key concerns: facilitating trilateral cooperation and managing the risk of escalation. Participants agreed that preparations – both national, bilateral, and trilateral – are essential to ensuring that the three governments have choices in a crisis so that they, not North Korea, determine the pace and trajectory of decision making. Future exercises should include Chinese players to make the deliberations more realistic (and more complicated.) It was also recommended that future simulations consider crises elsewhere in the region.

Several participants noted that the discussion appeared to undervalue the significance of the first use of a nuclear weapon and its impact on international rules and norms. While all parties sought UN action to rally international support and condemn North Korea, there was little emphasis on Pyongyang’s behavior as framed by the taboo against nuclear use. US participants argued that their US response was at least partly driven by these considerations, however, and that it was an important factor in their discussions. That may have been the case – and in the other countries’ deliberations as well – but the presentations focused on the military responses and less on the norm. (As an exercise sponsored by the Department of Defense that might be expected, but a holistic approach to extended deterrence demands inclusion of such thinking in the response.)

Uncertainty about North Korean thinking hung over the discussions. As noted, the demand for information is insatiable and planners in all three governments need to think about what they will want and need in a crisis. Among their many tasks, the three governments must ensure that their assessments of North Korean logic and intentions line up.

While our results largely tracked the conclusions of track 1 simulations – or so we were told – the fact is governments cannot hold these exercises. The ability of the Pacific Forum CSIS and the Asan Institute to bring experts and officials from the three countries together is an important contribution and a reminder of the value of nongovernmental efforts to promote trilateral cooperation. A US participant highlighted one unintended consequence of the meeting: it gave South Koreans an opportunity to better understand the meaning and significance of the changes in Japan’s interpretation of the right of collective self-defense. It was an educational experience for all. Future iterations will do more to better prepare the three governments for what appears to be an inevitable crisis and facilitate a coordinated response to it.

**APPENDIX A**  
**Extended Deterrence Trilateral Scenario**  
**Maui, July 23-24, 2014**

**Background:**

For the most part, relations in Northeast Asia continue on current trajectories. Despite his interest in meeting with his South Korean and Chinese counterparts, Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo is unable to schedule a summit level meeting with either. The governments in Seoul and Beijing demand more “sincerity” from Abe in addressing historical issues.

South Korean President Park Geun-Hye continues to consolidate her relationship with Chinese President Xi Jinping; they will hold a bilateral discussion at the upcoming APEC leaders meeting.

President Obama has also arranged for another US-Japan-ROK trilateral meeting on the sidelines of the APEC meeting.

The one major regional change concerns Japan-DPRK relations. Lack of progress in talks over abductees, along with closer US-Japan relations in the wake of the Abe government’s change in the interpretation of the right of collective self-defense and other defense modernization plans, prompt Pyongyang to end talks with Tokyo. It declares that “Recent developments expose Japan’s true intent to remilitarize and again enslave the peoples of Asia. Closer ties to the United States are a tissue paper to hide Japan’s imperialist designs on the region, which Pyongyang will fight and repulse.”

North Korea also states that “Our unyielding nuclear deterrent is a deterrent for all Korean people and all Korean land, including Dokdo, which Japan absurdly claims as its own.”

Amid reports that North Korea has tested rocket engines for the KN-08, Pyongyang claims that its nuclear deterrent has reached “new heights” and that “the world will soon know its reach and potency.”

The DPRK military has been ordered to a high state of alert.

Tensions between North and South Korea remain high after several rounds of live fire drills and rocket tests that are consistently closer to the other's territory. All economic activity and assistance has been frozen.

Inside North Korea, there have been reports of purges, leadership changes, and reorganization of the military-security branches.

**The Crisis**

North Korea has announced that it will hold a series of missile tests in the first week of November. Intelligence reveals increased activity around the North’s nuclear test sites as

well. In response, the United States and South Korea are holding naval exercises in the Yellow Sea. Japan has sent air and naval assets to the Sea of Japan to monitor tests and communications and to collect debris after the tests.

Several days into the exercises, salvos of short-range missiles are launched without warning into the Sea of Japan. At the same time, North Korea disperses dozens of road mobile missiles from storage facilities. There is stepped-up electronic chatter from military facilities on both North Korean coasts. During one of the salvos, a Japanese naval vessel on station collecting information from the launches experiences an explosion and sinks, with the loss of all hands.

North Korea announces that it was responsible for the incident and the vessel was in North Korean territorial waters (a charge that Japan disputes). It warns against any retaliation, saying that its mobile missiles have been outfitted with nuclear devices and that any attack against its forces or territory will result in “a beating to the imperialist forces that will bring them to their knees. Japan will be destroyed in a sea of fire. If the government in the south betrays its own people and sides with the enemy of the people, then it will not be spared from the same fate. It is time for true Koreans to unite once and for all, to repel the Japanese and American aggressor imperialists from our Fatherland.”

Allied forces observe the fueling of missiles at launch sites of missiles that have overflowed Japan in the past, with unusual activity that feeds speculation about the type of warhead being prepared. There is also the dispersal of naval assets, including the submarine fleet, along with increased activity and communications along forward deployed conventional command posts. There has been an uptick in cyber-attacks on South Korean and Japanese government and financial institutions. Kim Jong Un has not been seen in public in over a week.

### **The Assignment**

You are a member of the National Security Council that is preparing options for the National Command Authorities. Your immediate tasks are to

1. Outline the three key points of any message sent to domestic audiences.
2. Identify the first five steps that your defense and security bureaucracies take in response
3. Identify and prioritize the first five phone calls made to international counterparts and the message to be sent to each.
4. Identify and outline expectations for your other two partners (i.e., the US should identify expectations for Japan and the ROK, etc...)

## **APPENDIX B**

### **Trilateral Scenario Step 2 – 48 hours later**

Following a joint-US-Japan strike on a North Korea navy port, the North Korea National Defense Committee says that its sovereignty is under assault and its very survival is a risk. “The US and South Korea hostile actions leave us no option. Our warnings are not empty threats.” The DPRK military remains on high alert and there are signs of increased activity at virtually every military facility. A DPRK battery near the Demilitarized Zone launches a short artillery barrage that lands in farmland north of Seoul. A family of elderly Korean farmers is killed but there are no military casualties.

Shortly after, a nuclear device explodes in the East Sea. There are no casualties. The NDC announces that “this proves the great wisdom of Our Leadership in its determination to acquire a national deterrent. We remain committed to peace, however, and we urge all governments to end their aggression against North Korea or face even more powerful retaliation.”

In Tokyo, a crowd estimated to exceed 500,000 people gathers in Hibiya Park to denounce the Abe government for imperiling Japan. Speakers demand that Japan pull its military back to its territory so that Pyongyang is not threatened. There are also demands that the Japanese government act as a force for peace and announce that it will refuse to join any attack against North Korea.

#### **Your Assignment**

1. How do you assess the situation and the threats created?
2. What is your desired end state? Prioritize your goals and objectives.
3. What do you recommend as courses of action for your national decisionmaker?





**APPENDIX C**  
**US-ROK-Japan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue**  
**Royal Lahaina Resort, Maui**  
**July 22-24, 2014**

**AGENDA**

**Tuesday, July 22, 2014**

6:30 PM      **Opening Trilateral Dinner**

**Wednesday, July 23, 2014**

8:00 AM      **Continental breakfast**

9:00 AM      **Introductory remarks**

9:15 AM      **Session 1: The Korea-Japan Security Relationship**

What is the state of the Korea-Japan security relationship, and what are US expectations for that relationship within the context of extended deterrence and US strategic objectives?

US presenter: Evans REVERE

10:30 AM      **Coffee break**

10:45 AM      **Session 2: Trilateralism, Deterrence, and the Korean Peninsula**

What is extended deterrence supposed to deter in a Korean Peninsula contingency, and how does it work in such a contingency? How specifically can trilateral cooperation contribute to extended deterrence in a Korean Peninsula contingency? How can/should the three countries cooperate in a Korean Peninsula contingency (this is cooperation generally, not necessarily related to Extended Deterrence)?

ROK presenter: Prof. KIM Tae-hyo

Japan presenter: Shutaro SANO

US presenter: Brad ROBERTS

12:30 PM      **Boxed Lunch in breakout rooms: Tabletop exercise: Groups get exercise, prepare answers to questions**

2:00 PM      **Round One Assessment**

Plenary reconvenes to provide answers to questions and how each group reached those conclusions. After each presentation, the group is questioned by others on process and outcome.

4:30 PM **Report of Pacific Forum CSIS YL Working Group on Japan-ROK Relations**

**Thursday, July 24, 2014**

8:30 AM **Round two begins**

10:30 AM **Round two assessment**

12:30 PM **Lunch**

2:00 PM **Session 3: Assessing the TTX**

This session critically examines the outcomes of the TTX, focusing on expectations among all players, especially as identified in Session 2. What divergences among countries were revealed? How did responses differ from expectations? What are the key lessons learned from this exercise?

4:00 PM **Session 4: Next Steps**

We should be done to close those gaps, to move trilateral cooperation forward, as well as next steps for Pacific Forum and this DTRA process.

5:30 PM **Session adjourns**

6:30 PM **Trilateral Dinner**

**APPENDIX D**  
**US-ROK-Japan Trilateral Strategic Dialogue**  
**Royal Lahaina Resort, Maui**  
**July 22-24, 2014**

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