The Potential of Korean Unification and a Unified Korean Armed Forces

A Cultural Interpretation

Col Michael Edmonston, PhD, USAF

Since the foundation of the South Korean state in 1948, the rhetoric of unification has occupied a prominent place in its official vocabulary. Unification with the North was always presented as the great national goal, which any government should pursue at any cost.
—Andrei Lankov, Director, Korea Risk Group

Introduction

This article examines the prospect of Korean unification and the possibility of a future unified Korean Armed Forces through the lens of culture. Korea provides an interesting subject for cultural study for a few reasons. First, the desires of South and North Koreans suggests that unification, while presently unfeasible, is likely at some point in the future. In the words of the US Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff about Korea, "Eventually, peoples do tend to unify, one way or another. It just has to be managed closely and carefully to avoid armed conflict."[1] Second, and following from the Chairman's comments, how to ensure peaceful unification in Korea is a looming strategic question whose answer depends at least partly on whether the cultures of the two Korean states can be reconciled. The dynamics of inter-Korean relations regarding unification suggest the manner of the event's unfolding is far from decided. Depending on the course of Korea's unification, there are lessons historical unification cases can offer regarding the military outcome—both what is most likely and what should happen—to maintain peace and stability on the peninsula and in the region. Third, American commitment to stability on the Korean Peninsula demands that the United States take some responsibility for what happens to the militaries of both sides if Korea unifies. Consequently, recommendations for American foreign and military support follow speculation on the possible military outcomes of a Korean unification.

This article begins by making arguments for the prospects of Korean unification from four perspectives that largely center on culture: national identities, national values, national security preferences, and unification strategies. Both North and South Korea have socialized peaceful strategies for unification, but because identities, values, security preferences, and even the strategies themselves differ significantly, there is still a looming possibility for two other unification scenarios:

war and collapse. I discuss each of these, as well as the prospect of a continued status quo.

Second, the article explores the potential military outcome of Korean unification in terms of two variables: the fate of the North Korean People's Army (KPA) and the character of unified Korean Defense Forces (KDF) in a democratic, unified Korea.[2] My approach is both speculative and advisory. I examine the impact of different unification scenarios on the likelihood of the KPA being integrated into a unified military and follow with a look at the KPA's expected contribution to the unification process should Korea wish to preserve peace within and project strength to its neighbors.

In exploring the character of a unified KDF, I examine four aspects that concern or derive from the respective cultures of the two Korean militaries. These aspects include operational culture, military sociology, military professionalism, and military technology. I speculate on each aspect based on the current security environment and how that environment can be expected to change during and after unification. Furthermore, I make recommendations for Republic of Korea (ROK) (and later unified Korean) policy toward a KDF, with the objectives of promoting national unity and regional stability. Finally, I close the article with six recommendations for US policy and military support to the ROK during and after unification that promotes global and regional security but also respects ROK (and later unified Korean) national and military culture.

A Note on Culture

A useful definition of "culture" for this study is "the total of the collective or shared learning of [a] unit as it develops its capacity to survive in its external environment and to manage its own internal affairs."[3] In the Korean context, the unit is the nation, and for Koreans the shared learning that makes up culture has been based much more firmly and declaratively on an ethnic foundation than in a more ethnically diverse country such as the United States. However, even though a largely common ethnic cultural heritage joins North and South Korea, there have often been significant regional distinctions in Korean history. Furthermore, the need for each modern Korean state's political leadership to develop different capacities for survival in its external environment and also to manage internal affairs has caused culture to diverge a good deal. In fact, I would propose that because the two Koreas have existed in a condition of suspended civil war for decades, there is now a fixed cultural gap—one that would be very challenging to close, should the two states unify. This gap extends to the culture of the two states' military forces, making the prospect of integration between the two of them very inauspicious.

Culture and Prospects for Unification

Thanks to the great Juche idea and Songun politics of the Workers' Party of Korea and the devoted struggle of our service personnel and other people who are unfailingly loyal to the Party, proud victories have been achieved in socialist construction and lasting foundations for accomplishing the cause of the Juche revolution have been laid.

—Kim Jong-un

We pursue a "Korean Peninsula of co-prosperity," where South and North respect and co-operate with each other, by defining our stance as the "3-Nos" - no desire for the North's collapse, no pursuit of unification by absorption, and no pursuit of unification through artificial means.

—(South) Korean Ministry of Unification, 2021

To better explain how the cultural gap has developed between North and South Korea and what it means for the future, I have borrowed several terms from Stathis Kalyvas, who wrote a book titled *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*. He stated that as a "transformative phenomenon," civil wars are highly "endogenous" in that they shape and reshape "collective and individual preferences, strategies, values, and identities."[4] For Korea, a country that exists in a state of suspended civil war, I focus on the collective aspect of these terms, and I modify them slightly, calling them security preferences, strategies for unification, national values, and national identities. I've also reversed the order of discussion, since values and identities—two ideas around which national culture coalesces—help to drive security preferences as well as unification strategies. For each of these terms, I will examine their formation in the two Koreas and their impact upon the prospect for Korean unification.

National Identities

More than simply outward political allegiance, national identity in this paper refers to the idea of a "limited" and "sovereign . . . imagined community," to use the words of Benedict Anderson.[5] Based on this definition, the strongest coidentity between the southern and northern halves of the peninsula existed during relatively brief periods under certain Korean dynasties and later under Japanese occupation (1910–1945). Apart from these periods, political and economic factors have served to divide more than unite the peninsula. Any efforts at unification will need to overcome or reconcile these factors, and decisions on the fate of the KPA in unified Korea will also need to consider them if violence is to be avoided.

Historical Perspective. An examination of ancient Korean history suggests that common identity across the peninsula was not necessarily the norm. Those who justify a unified Korea point back to dynasties such as the Koguryo (37 BCE

to 668 CE), Unified Silla (668–918), the Koryo (918–1392) from which Korea gets its name, and the Chosun (1392–1910).[6] However, with the exception of the Chosun Dynasty, sovereign control did not comprise the combined territories of today's North and South Korea. Furthermore, the span of time during which these dynasties existed includes periods of internecine conflict and Chinese or Mongol suzerainty that divided rather than unified the population. Jacques Fuqua suggests the early Koryo period is really the best example of unified national identity, while Victor Cha claims both Koreas look more to the Koguryo Dynasty as the "primary precursor of the modern Korean nation" even though half of it was in modern day Manchuria.[7] Interestingly, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) has claimed to be the inheritor of both the Koguryo and Chosun dynasties, despite the capital of the latter being located at the site of present-day Seoul (perhaps one more reason for the North's interest in unification).[8] However, the Chosun Dynasty is not the best model for either modern state to use to promote a national Korean identity.

The problem with tracing a national identity to the Chosun Dynasty is that almost from its start, there was a sociocultural divide between North and South. A ruling class grew up in Seoul, composed mostly of the gentry and scholars. These groups protected their status largely by excluding the lowest classes from political, social, and economic benefits. The ruling class also forced members of the unwanted classes to migrate to the northern reaches of the dynasty with the intention of using them to defend against foreigners. Because of this "bifurcation policy," "no one from the two provinces of P'yongan and Hamgyong [in northern Korea] . . . served in a high bureaucratic office" for three centuries.[9] In this way, the policy set a historical foundation for social and regional prejudice in Korea.

The Chosun Dynasty is responsible for at least one notable unifying element that has persisted through the centuries to the present day: the Hangul script. The invention of the script by King Sejong and his scholars in the late fifteenth century helped cement a separate cultural identity for the Korean people and "opened up communication between social classes."[10] Despite some divergence of Hangul since today's division of the peninsula and alleged claims from the North Korean regime today that the Kim family is responsible for inventing Hangul, there is perhaps hope for leveraging the common Korean history of this intangible cultural asset to promote peaceful unification.[11] Unfortunately, common lingual heritage was far from enough to overcome the class and regional divisions that began to break up the Chosun Dynasty by the end of the nineteenth century.

Ironically, the internal weakening of the Chosun Dynasty coincided with the emergence of first China and then Japan as Korean enemies, helping to promote a Korean nationalism that eclipsed the north–south divide. Korea became a Japa-

nese protectorate in 1905 after its victory in the Russo-Japanese War, and in 1910 it officially became a Japanese colony. As such, Korea became an industrial hub of Japan's expanding empire, but it also suffered misfortune as the colonial government sought to make the society Japanese by forbidding Korean religious customs and forcing Koreans to take Japanese names. This oppression, to which Koreans were subject regardless of social class, became for all of them "a point around which to rally."[12] The result was that "for the first time since the onset of the Chosun period, Korea existed as a single and unified polity, both de facto and de jure, sans any internally imposed arbitrary political or social divisions."[13] Thus, Japanese occupation serves as the singular modern period in which Koreans seem to have shared a common national identity. Unfortunately, the formal political division of the peninsula after World War II obscured this identity.

Modern Identity Formation: North Korea. Beginning in 1946, the new North Korean regime politically affirmed the sociocultural divisions of the Chosun Dynasty, except that the ruling class set itself up in Pyongyang instead of Seoul. One's national identity as a North Korean citizen therefore also includes a fixed constituent status, or *songbun*. Formalized in 1958, *songbun* subdivides "the population of the country into 51 categories or ranks of trustworthiness and loyalty to the Kim family and the North Korean state."[14] Creating a stratified social consciousness that permeates both society and the military, *songbun* is perhaps even more rigid than any preexisting class system under the Chosun Dynasty. Its ubiquity has also discouraged the provision of aid to those in North Korea who need it most and contributes to their poor treatment generally.[15]

By outward appearance, these social class distinctions do not appear to have detracted from loyalty to the North Korean state. There is likely a mixture of forced and voluntary allegiance, the former made easier by the relative absence of information about the outside world. Though many Koreans simply wound up on the wrong side of the 38th parallel in 1945, others whose families had historically been neglected by the government in Seoul were more easily won over by the one in Pyongyang. Regardless, neither group had a choice in the matter once the Soviets had firmly installed their chosen leader. Drawing upon communist ideology, Confucianism, and a blend of history and fiction, Kim Il-sung built an identity for the North Korean state as the only true Korea, with himself (and later his son and grandson) as its rightful leaders. The enduring success of propaganda painting the regime's rulers as divine benefactors is evident in the unremitting loyalty of some defectors from the regime. These individuals refuse to blame "The Great Leader" for the economic misfortunes that motivated their defections.[16] Their attitude indicates that national identity in North Korea may depend very little on the economic welfare of its citizens. If it had, the state would have likely collapsed

long ago, considering that the majority live in poverty by the standards of developed nations. Furthermore, the last seven decades also demonstrate strong national identity in North Korea does not depend on the approval of the international community.

Modern Identity Formation: South Korea. By sharp contrast, South Korea today finds much of its national identity in international cooperation and economic prosperity. These two sources are increasingly framed by a democratic, capitalistic worldview. Although the military had once been a "powerful force in ROK politics" and "was largely responsible for crafting the country's defense and foreign policies," democratization in the 1980s cut back its influence and shifted how South Korea sought to present itself to the world.[17] The ROK's efforts to advertise itself as a friendly place for foreign investment and its willingness to abide by the International Monetary Fund's conditions following the 1997 Asian Financial Crisis testify to South Korea's desire for a new image following decades of dependence upon foreign aid. The Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development has recognized its efforts and reinforced its identity by admitting South Korea as a member in 1996. The International Olympic Committee similarly promoted Korea's identity by awarding it the 1988 and 2018 Olympic Games.[18] The North Korean attempt to reverse the Olympic Committee's decision on the 1988 games and its negative reaction once the games began proves the event was an identity crisis for the DPRK. At least to the outside world, it was losing the fight to portray itself as the one true Korea.[19]

Prospects for Unification. In view of both ancient and modern history, creating a new national identity in a unified Korea will be extremely challenging. South Korea, presumed to quickly become the dominant state in unification, will need to make a concerted effort across all branches of government to shift North Koreans' sense of identity from the Kim regime—essentially the monastic rulers of a renewed dynasty—to one that embraces a common sociocultural history. To do so, the South Korean government will need to dispel myths the Kim family has propagated for decades about its own origins and the origins of cultural assets such as Hangul that predate North Korea. This endeavor may take a couple generations to see results.

A unified Korea will also need to consider how to reconcile national identity with current geopolitics. Creating a common Korean enemy in Japan to recreate conditions of unity from the colonial period is neither possible nor wise. A better solution is to open former North Korean citizens up to the world around them so they can better define themselves in relation to it. Information has likely been leaking into the North Korean population gradually through campaigns launched by both nongovernmental organizations and the South Korean government, and

its effect will only likely become fully known once North Korean citizens are free from the shackles of the current regime.

Of course, South Koreans will also need to adopt a national identity that permits the assimilation of uneducated, unskilled (by Western standards), and largely poverty-stricken North Koreans into its framework. Drawing from the challenges of South Korean government-sponsored assimilation programs for North Korean defectors, Jacques Fuqua suggests that South Koreans will generally be hard-pressed to accept millions of them if unification occurs.[20] For acceptance to happen, there will need to be an empathetic view toward the distinct values that have developed over time on the other half of the peninsula, followed by a commitment to inculcate in former North Koreans new values that will enable them to contribute to society in a unified and presumably capitalist, democratic state.

National Values

A national value is a "principle, standard, or quality considered worthwhile or desirable" by the government or society.[21] The difference in national values affecting the relationship between North and South Korea has evolved hand-in-hand with the diverse paths to national identity that each state has pursued. Therefore, while some values are rooted in ancient Korean history, political imposition upon their interpretation has varied between the two modern Korean states. This analysis does not presume that government influence through policy has transformed individual values, but over time it has surely shaped them. This subsection will briefly examine that influence in terms of opposing values: the North Korean idea of *Juche*, or self-reliance, and the principles of democratic freedom and interdependence that the majority of South Koreans more readily identify with. That both nations have adapted traditional Confucian thought to become acceptable to their respective values is also germane.

North Korea. *Juche*, meaning "self-reliance," is arguably an entire philosophy. It owes its origins to several factors: a society rooted in Confucianism, a political system with Marxist origins, a belief that North Korea is the inheritor of Korea's Koguryo and Chosun dynasties, and the emerging personality cult of the ruling Kim family.[22] Officially adopted in the 1950s under Kim Il-sung and written into the DPRK's 1972 constitution, *Juche* has been the tool of choice for the government to harness the loyalty of its populace, and it has been increasingly necessary in recent decades with the demise of the North Korean economy.[23] Ironically, *Juche* may be largely responsible for this demise, considering that North Korea has reportedly preferred "superhuman zeal" over trade to accomplish its economic goals.[24] Interestingly, North Korea has accepted assistance of various types from other countries, particularly China and Russia. Such assistance may appear anti-

thetical to the DPRK's philosophy, but according to author Victor Cha, *Juche* would "justify the apparent contradiction by stating that such dependence was still *Juche* because it was doing what was good for Korea."[25] With this view in mind, one would think North Korea could also accept aid and assistance from the United States, arguably the most prosperous country in the world. The definition of what is "good" for Korea, however, ceases to fit here. Not only is acceptance of most aid from the United States dependent on changes in North Korean behavior that its military and the Korean Workers' Party (KWP) believe would be harmful to its security generally, but it would present an ideological dilemma to a country that has demonized the United States to its citizens for generations.

Juche does not only affect North Korea's outlook toward economic development and diplomacy. Its blend of traditional Confucian loyalties and communist glorification of the state excludes private religious practice, restricts education, and leads to abuse of human rights. All three of these effects are linked. Confucianism by itself does not denigrate divine authority, but the Confucian ruler has traditionally "justified his position as the carrying out of the mandate of Heaven."[26] By this reasoning, any perspective that suggests there is disagreement between an earthly ruler and God is perceived as a threat to government. This interpretation in Korea during the Chosun Dynasty discouraged Western learning—and specifically Catholic teaching—for nearly a century until 1886.[27] The imposition of communism and Marxist principles after 1948 (somewhat selectively, since *songbun* precludes the Marxist ideal of a classless society) further narrowed the possibility for private religious practice by reducing morality to whatever behavior promotes progress in socialism.[28] Since one key principle of Confucianism is that "moral behavior is the source of power and authority," Marxism then becomes the justification for placing that power in the person of the socialist leader. Philosophy guides policy, so it is not surprising that the North has officially forbade religion since the country's founding and made possession of religious books such as the Bible a crime. Moreover, the ruling family has effectively stepped into the place reserved in most religious-liberty abiding states for God.[29]

In such a place, education is also strictly channeled. The state-run system promotes the idolization of the Kim family, who are the models of *Juche* for youth. In step with Marxism, *Juche* also teaches the populace that violent behavior is justified against those who oppose socialist progress, even if their opposition is nonviolent.[30] Under Kim Jong-il, that notion became more militarized, with some debate emerging among observers as to whether "revolutionary and martial spirit" is separate from or a part of *Juche*. However, the falling from favor of *Juche's* chief architect in 1997 after he openly opposed war with the ROK suggests that the ideas are at least closely linked in the minds of North Korean leadership.[31]

Since human rights in *Juche* are nonexistent save in service to the state, there is no accountability for the wanton imprisonment of political opponents or the abuses practiced in North Korea's prison camps. These abuses often end in the death of the prisoners, either deliberately via execution or through neglect. While perhaps a stretch to say that *Juche* is responsible for these deaths, ideas have far-reaching consequences. North Korean leadership must know that if it were to abandon *Juche* and become reliant on outside help to resolve its internal problems, it would have to divulge the wrongs it has imposed on generations of its citizens. Therefore, *Juche* has also become a survival strategy for the regime.

South Korea. Because South Korea comprises an open, democratic society, there is no single guiding principle or philosophy in the vein of *Juche*. Freedom of expression, together with the ROK's reliance on free trade and cooperation with outside powers to promote its economy and the welfare of its citizens, stands in direct contrast to North Korea's self-reliance and isolation. On the other hand, South Korea's society is still ethnically and culturally homogenous, and it has only been open to the outside world for about 135 years. It is therefore an interesting study in the merging of Korean and foreign values, or more generally Eastern and Western values. A useful means for interpreting this merge is to contrast it with the one that took place in North Korea. There, Confucianism was reformed into a communist, atheistic mold. In South Korea, it was reformed into a mixed mold of democratic freedom and interdependence.

Although South Korea did not begin as a democracy, democratic freedoms introduced through Western philosophy ultimately took root partly because South Korean society was able to reconcile them with traditional Confucian values. The reconciliation that took place was largely between the West's belief in individual rights and Confucianism's emphasis on duty and national authority. As essayist Ahn Wae-soon writes, "Korea's early enlightenment scholars"—those open to Western political thought—"saw that one could pursue individual interests by working for national ones and that the provision of political rights would impress a sense of duty, thus further promoting national interests."[32] In this way, political participation through public demonstration became consonant with duty. Ahn further writes "the Confucian idea of political participation and the resistance of the people had the potential to develop into the idea of rights of political participation and rights of resistance, given the right impetus."[33]

In South Korean politics, this impetus proved to be the "worldwide trend in the mid-1980s, in which the United States played a supporting role, toward democratization of authoritarian, military-backed regimes."[34] The government of Chun Doo-hwan was arguably one such regime, having cemented its authority in 1980 when it used the military to violently suppress citizen protests in the city of

Kwangju. The event later became a rallying cry for democracy, and unlike the massacre in China's Tiananmen Square during the same decade, led to meaningful reform in the South Korean government. The nation elected its first civilian president in 1992.[35]

Public expression in South Korea not only covers the right of resistance, but also of religious practice—another stark difference with North Korea that will impact the nature of unification if it takes place. Historically, this right precedes democracy and even the political division of the peninsula, so it is more factual to say that the DPRK reversed or at least forced underground a growing religious trend than to say that religious freedom originated with the ROK. A brief history is telling. The Chosun Dynasty first guaranteed freedom of religion for Koreans in an 1886 treaty with France, whose Catholic missionaries had previously endured a century of persecution.[36] By that time, however, many Korean scholars of the Sirhak ("practical learning") movement had adopted Catholicism, breaking away from neo-Confucianism, which was the Chosun Dynasty's official ideology.[37] Protestantism entered Korea in the 1880s through American missionaries, though it did not grow significantly among the Korean population until the Japanese occupation.[38] Today, 44 percent of Koreans identify with a religion, and of those, 45 percent are Protestants, 35 percent are Buddhists, and 18 percent are Catholics.[39] Along with secular cultural connections that have arisen through trade, political ties, and globalism generally, these statistics help explain another source of many South Koreans' shared values—and hence interdependence—with those outside the peninsula.

Although the discussion on national identity touched on South Korea's desire to be seen as a constructive international player, interdependence on the modern world stage is similar to democratic freedom in that it is a value shaped by the intermingling of East and West. Underlying the value are two seemingly contradictory facets that any developing state confronting globalization has to balance: acceptance of foreign technology and practices on one hand, and strengthening of the nation on the other. Korean scholar Bak Eun-sik, a neo-Confucianist, believed it was possible to "assimilate the West's superior technology" while eschewing its materialism.[40] Author Song Bae-young further states that in adapting Confucian ethics to a modern interdependent community, one must also subjugate "private interests" to "study and introspection led by a member of the elite one hand, and concern for those in one's community on the other."[41]

To some degree, this balance is what South Korean President Park Chung-hee sought to achieve in the 1960s with the Korean version of the developmental state economic model. The model generally promotes five concepts: "stable rule by a political-bureaucratic elite," "collaboration between the government and private

industries," heavy investment in "universal basic education," "policies to distribute wealth equitably across the population," and enhancement of economic growth via "monetary and financial instruments."[42] Together, these concepts coupled national development and community benefit more deliberately than free-market capitalism by leveraging entrepreneurship and skills within certain industries for both purposes. For South Korea's growing interdependence, they also "ensured that the largest companies were linked to the state and to international markets."[43] The developmental state model is partly responsible for an average gross national product (GNP) growth rate of 8.5 percent between 1962 and 1980 and an increase in gross domestic product (GDP) per capita of 963 percent between 1950 and 1980.[44] Although the model is much less pronounced in South Korea today, it set a precedent for the Korean work culture, which is generally characterized by ardor, diligence, and appreciation for high academic achievement.[45] These qualities have helped make South Korea one of the most prominent players in the world economy.

Prospects for Unification. Sharp differences in values between the two Koreas create a wide gulf between them that will likely take much longer to bridge than reaching a formal political agreement for unification. Assuming a South Korean–dominated process, assimilation will "necessitate the 'unlearning' of undesired behaviors" and the values behind them, followed by "basic socialization" into the values and behaviors that will enable former North Koreans to contribute productively to South Korea's more democratic, interdependent society.[46] This two-step process will be easier for younger North Koreans than for older ones, both because of education and the greater resistance to change that comes with age. Those who have been educated their whole lives in socialist values, and who are taught moreover to depend entirely on the government and distrust the outside world, will find adjustment to the competitive, democratic education system of South Korea very difficult.

Finding employment will be equally challenging. The privileged among the KWP from Pyongyang may be able to integrate into many South Korean government jobs, since bureaucracies tend to share certain organizational values across cultures. However, the majority of North Koreans will lack the requisite education level and skill to work alongside South Koreans in civil service or business—a prediction supported by employment statistics for North Korean defectors in the ROK. As of 2011, 43 percent of defectors worked as day laborers, compared to only nine percent of South Koreans. The rest of former North Koreans worked in manufacturing, service jobs in lodging and restaurants, construction, or retail.[47] If a unified Korea is to raise a larger percentage of former North Koreans to equivalent skill levels with South Koreans in other sectors, it will need to exponentially

increase the capacity of its *Hanawons*—the state's "resettlement and training centers" for North Korean migrants.[48]

It is also likely that in a unification scenario, many North Koreans will experience immense disillusionment as they discover the values they built their lives upon do not serve them in the unified state. This realization may lead to depression, as it has for many defectors. Some of these have even tried to return to North Korea after experiencing life in the south.[49] Others may rejoice at their newfound freedoms, however. In the long run, the willingness of South Koreans to accept them into their schools, offices, churches, and temples will be deciding factors in whether they embrace South Korean values or not.

The military of a unified Korea will likewise need to confront the differences in internal values between KPA and South Korean armed forces members. On one hand, familiarity with privation will likely make KPA soldiers hardy and disciplined. On the other hand, inculcation with *Juche* will make them ill-prepared for functioning in the professional military of a democratic society. They will also need to overcome the mutual antagonism that has characterized the two states' distinct preferences for security the last several decades.

National Preferences for Security

The suspended state of war between the two Koreas as a result of the 1953 armistice is perhaps the most obvious obstacle to unification, regardless of what form it were to take. If either side were to unify the peninsula by force of arms, that war resumes. If a mutual political agreement about a process to unification were to be reached instead—the preferred option for most Korean and international actors—the war must necessarily be resolved peacefully. Despite increased inter-Korean dialogue and agreements between Kim Jong-un and former ROK president Moon Jae-in between 2017 and 2021, that outcome is still far from assured. As a result, both sides continue to prioritize national security against the other, and their shared border remains one of the most heavily defended in the world. Unlike in many conflicts, however, the face-off has not resulted in symmetry of approaches to security. The reason is that the distinct identities and values discussed above have produced very different preferences for national security.

North Korea. The DPRK's ideology and isolated geopolitical position dictate its preferences for national security. These preferences include a disproportionately large conventional military, sabotage through cyber and physical attacks, limited provocations against South Korea, coercive diplomacy and propaganda, and an increasingly credible nuclear arsenal for deterrence. Most recently, Kim Jong-un has latched his legacy to a concept called *byungjin* that "calls for the simultaneous development of North Korea's economy and its nuclear weapons."[50]

This concept is likely to build upon his grandfather's military-first doctrine, since the purpose of the KPA is to defend the Kim regime above and beyond the state itself.

The military-first doctrine established the KPA as the "the central unifying structure in the country and the source of power for the regime."[51] Today, North Korea possesses the fourth-largest standing armed forces in the world, at 1.2 million active-duty personnel (six percent military-to-population ratio, or MPR), and 70 percent are stationed near the Demilitarized Zone.[52] To reinforce them, the regime can also call up more than six million reserve personnel.[53] It prioritizes the material welfare of those forces above the population, as demonstrated by the military's preeminence when disbursing scarce food in the country.[54] The preference has philosophical underpinnings and became enshrined as policy under Kim Jong-il, who "privileged the military above all as the key decision-making body."[55] That Kim Jong-un was made a four-star general of the KPA in 2010 despite no previous military experience proves the military's premier status within the government and the Party is fixed for the foreseeable future.[56] In light of this prospect, the decision of how to dispose of the KPA will be front and center in any debate about unification, peaceful or not.

In the last few decades, the DPRK has strengthened and diversified its application of the military instrument of power. The most alarming shift has been its reliance for deterrence upon increasingly powerful missiles and the country's accompanying nuclear weapons program. Although begun under Kim's grandfather and further developed by his father, nuclear testing has spiked since 2010 under Kim Jong-un. That the regime has conducted 151 missile tests under Kim Jong-un compared with only 16 under Kim Jong-il suggests strategic deterrence is quickly becoming the backstop to conventional deterrence.[57] Unless North Korea agrees to relinquish all nuclear materials, weapons, and facilities, they will together present the greatest obstacle to political unification and become part of any political bargaining taking place pursuant to it.

Compared to 20 years ago, the regime also relies more heavily today upon special operations forces (estimated at over 120,000 personnel) and submarines to insert teams into enemy territory in case of a renewed civil war.[58] The shift suggests the DPRK would likely supplement any conventional ground and air attack into Seoul with an irregular warfare front and indirect attacks on South Korean coasts. Even if the ROK is able to quickly defeat KPA regular forces if full armed conflict resumes, lingering guerilla operations could threaten to undermine any subsequent political efforts at unification.

Furthermore, North Korea has pursued cyber capabilities as an additional deterrent to military attack as well as a means of financial gain. Although its grasp

of computer networking is reportedly basic, the regime is widely believed to be responsible for several distributed denial of service attacks as well as the hacking of Sony Pictures, the South Korean military cyber command, and several foreign banks.[59] Hired groups operating outside North Korean borders accomplish these attacks. If they are any trend, North Korea will seek to infiltrate the cyber networks of South Korea and its allies—particularly those used by their governments—if there are any attempts at unification that do not have the full support of the DPRK government.

North Korea has also not shied from planning physical attacks against individuals that are considered a threat to the regime. These include bold military-led assassination attempts such as the 1968 attack by North Korean commandos against South Korean President Park Chung-hee at his official residence in Seoul, and the 1983 attempt against Park's successor Chun Doo-hwan on an official visit to Burma.[60] However, the regime has also hired foreigners to do its dirty work, as in the 2017 poisoning of Kim Jong-un's older brother by two women from Vietnam and Indonesia, respectively. These attacks are intended to send messages that no one who stands in the way of the regime is safe outside the country. That the 2017 attack was successful and its perpetrators largely escaped justice suggests North Korea will employ similar tactics in the future to improve its security.[61]

Periodic provocations against South Korea round out the DPRK's preferences for national security. The majority of these have taken place in and around the Korean Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) or the Northern Limit Line—the disputed maritime demarcation line between the two states in the West Sea. In the last decade or so, the most notable of these provocations include the sinking of the ROK corvette *Cheonan* and associated loss of 46 South Korean sailors in 2010; the shelling of South Korea's Yeonpyeong Island the same year, resulting in four deaths; and the placing of three landmines on the south side of the DMZ in 2015, resulting in serious injury to two ROK soldiers.[62] Such incidents are often interspersed with brazen rhetoric from the DPRK regime.

However, apart from continued missile test launches, such "deterrence posturing" has become less frequent in the last five years.[63] It is unknown whether the regime has since determined the provocations are not having the intended effects or whether Kim Jong-un is pausing them for the sake of improved relations with the ROK under its current administration. Perhaps both postulates carry truth. Regardless, deterrence posturing and coercive diplomacy are likely to resume if the current state of relations deteriorates again.

South Korea. In contrast to North Korea, the ROK's preferences for national security are much more broad, extending beyond its military forces and hardware to its economic, diplomatic, and soft informational power. It can pursue these

means of security with considerable success because unlike North Korea, it is able to shift much of the responsibility for military protection to the United States. Extended deterrence provided by the US nuclear umbrella has obviated the need for South Korea to expend money and effort on an organic nuclear program and allowed it to focus instead on economic growth—an agenda that has helped pay off with a national economy that is currently the 14th largest in the world by GDP.[64] South Korea supplements its economy with assertive diplomacy around the globe and soft power projected through Korean pop culture. While immediately indicative of and geared toward greater material prosperity, there is a security aspect to these achievements such that in a unification scenario they are more likely to galvanize international support for South Korea in the process. This prospect stands in contrast to North Korea, which endures harsh international sanctions, depends almost singularly upon China for trade, and is as much the "Hermit Kingdom" today as the Chosun Dynasty was a century and a half ago.

Besides America's extended deterrence, its alliance commitments to the ROK also guarantee assistance should deterrence fail, preventing the need for the ROK to maintain an active-duty force on par with North Korea's. Currently, that force stands at 580,000 active-duty (1.1 percent MPR) and 3.1 million reservists.[65] The forecast of an aging population suggests the ROK will further draw down its military size, and popular pressure has led the government to gradually reduce the mandatory conscription period for males, currently at 18 months. After conscription expires, the majority of young men continue their education or pursue jobs in business—opportunities that fewer North Koreans have in a command economy. That is not to say South Korea does not have a professional military today. Citizens who become officers and make the military a career are "fairly paid compared to other public servants" and are "highly educated in order to perform more specialized jobs."[66] Since the election of Kim Young Sam in 1991, they have also been excluded from "directing political order and guiding national development."[67] This separation has promoted corporateness and operational expertise within the officer corps.

The emphasis on quality over quantity is evident not only in the ROK's personnel under arms, but also in its weapons systems. For example, military balance data from the International Institute for Strategic Studies shows that despite smaller numbers of combat aircraft, they are much more capable (and the pilots much better trained) to conduct operations against targets in urban areas and in mountainous terrain, as well as in various weather conditions. South Korea also possesses fewer numbers of most other types of weapons systems and military vessels, but they are generally much more modern than their North Korean equiv-

alents, most of which were bought from the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s.[68]

Since the ROK's focus is primarily on defense rather than offense, it also does not need the same numbers of equipment and weapons systems as the DPRK. In response to the increasing threat from North Korea's missile tests, what is more important is the guarantee provided by a comprehensive air defense network. Accordingly, the ROK's air defense strategy builds on a foundation of "detection and preemptive strike doctrine," known otherwise as "Kill Chain," as well as the concept of "Korea Massive Punishment and Retaliation."[69] Together, these ideas depend on the integration of various precision-guided munitions "in tandem with the emerging Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) architecture, which seeks to protect military assets and minimize South Korean casualties."[70] The US-designed Terminal High Altitude Area Defense, a "transportable system that intercepts ballistic missiles inside or outside the atmosphere during their final, or terminal, phase of flight," is the latest addition to this architecture, adding to the effect of deterrence by denial against a North Korean attack.

Prospects for Unification. Based upon the current security preferences of North and South Korea, unification does not appear likely in the near future. If war does occur, the balance of security reaffirms the assumption of this paper that South Korea will prevail, though not without significant losses from an onslaught by the KPA along with missile and artillery attacks against the population. The threat of nuclear attack will also always loom large, particularly if ROK or US forces cross into North Korean territory.

Regardless, the decades-long face-off has almost made a taboo of the type of confrontation that took place during the Korean War. Although the combination of entrenched conventional and nuclear means of deterrence by both sides creates a high degree of tension, it also preserves a level of stability that is likely to keep military conflict below the threshold of conventional war between its armed forces. Pressure from China toward North Korea and the United States upon the ROK reinforce this threshold.

Optimistically, if this threshold is maintained or even lowered in the future and North Korea demonstrates enough willingness to compromise on its missile and nuclear weapon ambitions, there may be a path to peaceful unification discussions. First, progress in these areas over a long enough period may provide the environment to restart past joint Korean efforts or embark on new ones. Past such efforts include the Kaesong Industrial Complex and the Kumgang Mountain tourist resort on the northern side of the ROK-DPRK border, both products of South Korea's "Sunshine Policy" between 1998 and 2008. The Kaesong complex "provided South Korean companies with cheaper labor costs, while providing North

Korea with critical hard currency."[71] The South Korean government closed it in 2016 as a means of pressuring Pyongyang to discontinue its missile and nuclear testing. The mountain resort was a symbolic international venture that closed in 2008 after a North Korean soldier shot and killed a South Korean tourist who ventured into a prohibited area. "Stalled negotiations over Pyongyang's nuclear and ballistic missile" programs are the primary reason the resort has not reopened.[72] If circumstances permit the two facilities to reopen, opportunities may also arise to begin others, such as ROK-financed rail lines, highways, and ports in North Korea, long planned during the Sunshine Policy but never constructed.[73] Such cooperative ventures may open the doors to unification discussions if security tensions relax.

Second, in view of the symbolic efforts between the two Koreas in international sporting events, the question arises whether friendly competition between Korean armed forces would also be possible, spurring unity discussions in the security arena. Successes on past athletic fields include most notably the 2018 Winter Olympics, in which North and South Koreans attended the opening ceremony under a single flag and competed on the same female hockey team. The 2006 Winter Olympics in Italy and 1991 World Table Tennis Championships also featured the display of a Korean unification flag.[74] These events set models for the two countries' armed forces, which could compete either in athletics or military skill. To prevent such competitions from becoming politicized, they would need to be organized under international oversight with strict rules. Participation in events alongside other countries' military forces would also help reduce the stigma arising from decades of confrontation. While not a panacea for all the obstacles to unification, such an event holds the potential to thaw intermilitary as well as inter-Korean political relations.

Understandably, any progress in unification—peaceful or following conflict—will require "securing the means of security" on each side of the border to prevent them from getting into the wrong hands. Securing nuclear weapons, facilities, and materials will likely require international assistance. The sheer quantity of North Korean conventional weapons and equipment will also pose a threat to stability, requiring a large contingent of the South Korean military to dismantle, dispose, or repurpose them. In fact, they may need the assistance of KPA personnel for these tasks, since South Korea's military will only be familiar with such weapons and equipment from an adversarial perspective.

The need of KPA personnel following unification leads to the second question of this article: What are the possible outcomes for North and South Korean armed forces if Korea should unify? The answer hinges on the conclusions of the

previous three subsections on identity, value, and security preferences, as well as one more: resolving the distinct strategies for unification between the two Koreas.

Korean Unification Scenarios

To set the stage for a discussion of military outcomes of unification and the potential for a unified Korean armed forces, this section examines the nature and security implications of three possible unification scenarios: gradual reform leading to peaceful unification, war on the Korean Peninsula, and collapse of the North Korean regime and/or government. The article also considers whether the status quo is a possibility for the long term, concluding that it may not be.

Gradual Reform Leading to Peaceful Unification

B. H. Liddell Hart wrote that the problem for "grand strategy" is "the winning of the peace."[75] For North and South Korea, unification is one way of winning the peace, but their national strategies for going about it are different because of the distinct identities, values, and preferences for national security belonging to each side. Nevertheless, there have been mutual agreements in the past pointing toward the possibility of a peaceful unification. Key instances of cooperation include the 1972 joint agreement between Pyongyang and Seoul "that reunification would occur peacefully without foreign interference" and the 2018 Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity, and Unification of the Korean Peninsula in which the two countries' leaders committed to "bring a swift end to the Cold War relic of longstanding division and confrontation."[76] The commitment includes willingness to hold meetings with the United States and China for establishing a peace agreement in place of an armistice agreement at the border between the Koreas. However, there are no timelines associated with this agreement, making it little more than a gesture of goodwill. In order for such agreements to gain traction, it will be necessary to resolve historically different strategies for unification.

North Korea. The DPRK model for unification, first advanced by Kim Il-sung, seeks to establish a central national government known as the Democratic Republic of Koryo that has "equal participation from both sides based on mutual tolerance of differences in ideologies and counterparts."[77] The formula for reaching that model begins with a confederation of two governments that come together to direct political, diplomatic, and military affairs.

This plan sounds accommodating to South Korea, but Jacques Fuqua offers a different critique. He cites one of the principles of the model as an "overhaul of the South Korean government . . . to ensure its 'full democratization.'"[78] This is clearly democratization in the socialist view, not the democratization that allows

for citizens to elect a government and hold it accountable for its decisions. Consistent with this interpretation is the model's requirement for South Korea to "abrogate its decades-long security relationship with the United States and fundamentally discard the democratic basis of its government."[79] Beyond that, "the U.S. must be denounced, South Korea must expel anti-unification forces . . . and independence must be realized."[80] In this context, "independence" refers not to human dignity, but to a "socio-political life' under the "Supreme Leader" in accordance with *Juche* ideology.[81]

Fuqua also notes that the model offers no phases by which the confederation should form or a means by which it unifies into a single government. The model therefore appears to be a weak government similar to the US Articles of Confederation. If true, the interpretation begs the question how North Korea will accomplish its version of "democratization" and "independence."

One should not dismiss the possibility of North Korea using military force to accomplish its political objectives. Although Park Young-ho believes "the North Korean view of national unification has been defensive" since the late 1980s and particularly in the wake of the reunification of Germany, the North Korea expert Joseph Bermudez points to the KPA to suggest otherwise.[82] He writes that the KPA has devised "a number of basic interrelated political and military conditions" that "underlie [its] offensive war strategy and belief that victory in a war of reunification is possible."[83] These conditions stem from lessons learned in the Korean War and the KPA's perception of the ROK and the United States. The lessons include a quick war that prevents outside assistance, military isolation of Seoul, and exploitation of America's perceived intolerance for high combat losses.[84] The odds of the DPRK actually carrying out such an attack are slim in light of its military capabilities and realization that the ROK and the United States have trained together for 65 years to oppose it. However, the possibility should not be discounted, and Park cites periodic North Korean provocations as evidence.[85]

Park also considers that the DPRK could pursue unification by raising up South Korean antigovernment revolutionaries—a strategy consistent with socialist ideology from its beginnings.[86] The focus on special operations forces, submarines, and amphibious capabilities featured more prominently among the North's national security preferences in recent years seems to support this possibility. According to such a strategy, irregular warfighting forces would help set the conditions for uprisings in various South Korean cities and reinforce conventional attacks closer to the border.

The question then arises how North Korea perceives the military in a unified (or confederated) Korea. Since the political leaders in the North's Democratic Republic of Koryo unification model would come together to decide on military

affairs, it is reasonable to conclude that even if there are two separate militaries, they would work together to combat external threats. Given that North Korean military leaders are also political elites—all of the DPRK's 1,200 or so generals are part of the KWP and the core (loyal) social class—it is difficult to see how they would accommodate South Korean military leadership in strategic decision making.[87] What to do about North Korea's military elites will also be an issue for South Korea to solve in the more likely case that it is the dominating state in unification of the peninsula.

South Korea. The South Korean model for unification is more gradual than that of the DPRK, and it lays out a path to full political unity through normalization of inter-Korean relations over time. The strategy incorporates three basic steps: "reconciliation and cooperation between the ROK and the North," the "establishment of a Korean commonwealth," and "complete integration of Korea through a democratic election."[88]

Many of the political means of accomplishing these steps do not exist at the present time, so the ROK government has entrusted a longer-term, more subtle strategy to its Ministry of Unification.[89] This ministry aims to break down the psychological barrier between the two sides by "realizing a new unified Korea that ensures everyone's happiness."[90] Toward achieving this utopian vision, the ministry aims at three objectives—economic revival (in North Korea), the welfare of ROK citizens, and a thriving Korean culture—all of which contribute to building a foundation for national unification. The tasks associated with this strategy emphasize trust building, small-scale projects, and practical measures.[91] Denuclearization and fostering relevant dialogue between the United States and North Korea are part of trust building, and the current administration counts the recent US-DPRK summits in Singapore and Hanoi as among its successes in the drive toward unification. Projects and practical measures carried out by the Ministry of Unification are incredibly diverse, spanning inter-Korean exchanges, settlement of humanitarian issues, joint cultural initiatives, settlement support of defectors, and educational programs.[92] The holistic approach reflects South Korea's identity as a liberal, democratic state, the cultural value it puts on interdependence and cooperation, and its broad approach to national security.

The commonwealth—step two of the South Korean model—is different from North Korea's Democratic Republic of Korea in that there are two states rather than one, each with "respective rights to . . . diplomacy, economy, and security."[93] Furthermore, the concept promotes a unified stance in "non-political areas" such as those covered by the Ministry of Unification's ongoing tasks and practical measures.[94] Through these tasks and measures, the commonwealth will gradually

reach the conditions in which democratic elections take place and a fully unified Korean government is in place.

Also, unlike the North Korean unification model, the South Korean model allows for two separate national security policies and therefore distinct policies for the employment of military forces—at least up until the election of a unitary government. At that time, it will be necessary to decide upon the fate of the KPA and the future of North Korea's national defense architecture. Needless to say, the ROK's strategy for unification does not include an option to attack the North or absorb it into South Korea by force.[95] However, the possibility that the North Korean government or regime collapses before the ROK strategy can take effect should not be dismissed.

Prospects for Unification. Despite differences in models, unification according to either state's strategy would proceed through political negotiations over time. Ideally, joint dialogues, exchanges, and training exercises would be valuable catalysts for progress in such negotiations, as well as vehicles for the gradual integration of values between the two countries. This integration would also apply to government institutions such as the two national militaries in preparation for the possibility of physical integration at a later date.

Of course, there have been hundreds of inter-Korean relations meetings since 1971 with little substantial progress to show. Admittedly, personnel exchanges have picked up immensely in the last few years, with South Korean visitors to North Korea increasing from 52 to 6,689 between 2017 and 2018 alone.[96] This shift is due largely to changes in South Korean policy since Moon Jae-in's transition to power and the noticeable decrease in North Korean provocations and missile tests since 2017. However, reciprocation from the North is tepid, with only 841 visitors to the South in 2018.[97] This lack of reciprocation is understandable considering the North Korean model focuses on the political means of unification rather than the sociocultural aspects. Moreover, "quantitative increase in personnel and material exchange" has so far failed to "bring any qualitative change in inter-Korean relations."[98]

Unification will also need to reconcile other imbalances between the two countries. The North Korean model overlooks the vast differences in the two countries' "populations, economies, per capita income, and other metrics."[99] This oversight is significant, considering that the GDP of South Korea is on average about 44 times that of the North, and its population is about twice as large.[100] Inherent in the South Korean model is an economic reform in the DPRK similar to what China has undertaken since the late 1970s. However, there is no evidence Kim Jong-un would pursue such reforms or even be successful at them. In fact, his ability to stay in power can be attributed in large part to his ability to hold the

majority of the population in economic dependency on the government. Furthermore, to make reforms work he would likely have to dispose of *Juche*, the military-first policy, and *byungjin*, all of which are pillars of his power.[101]

For such reasons, while gradual, peaceful unification may be the most favorable outcome, it also appears the least likely at the present time. Considering this prognosis, the next section will look at the possibility of three other scenarios.

Other Unification Scenarios

> *The people's army should always maintain a highly agitated state and be equipped with full fighting readiness so as to smash the enemies with a single stroke if they make the slightest move and achieve the historic cause of the fatherland's reunification.*
>
> —Kim Jong-un

> *Korean unification is less likely to be gradual and peaceful than nasty, brutish, and quick.*
>
> —The Economist, 3 May 2014

Besides gradual reform, there are two other possible scenarios that most scholars believe could lead to a unified Korea: war, and North Korea's collapse. It is also possible that the two Koreas will remain in the current security configuration for quite some time. The following sections will address these three scenarios in turn.

War on the Korean Peninsula

The most likely precipitating event in a war scenario of unification is a military attack against the South at an opportune moment in response to a "precipitative" or even an accidental event.[102] The North may launch the attack while its military is still strong and the United States is distracted with another conflict. In such an event, it is fairly certain that the ROK and its allies would prevail, but not without substantial casualties.[103]

War with North Korea would bring to bear the manpower, technology, and strategies described in the discussion on national security preferences. Beyond a certain threshold, the aim of each side is likely to be unification of the country. For the ROK and the United States, that threshold has historically been the successful execution of the existing combined operational plan into its combat operations phase.[104] If the US–ROK alliance enters into that phase, deterrence has failed, as have attempts at preventing escalation following expected North Korean provocations. Of course, if US foreign policy changes and is less willing to actively support the continued ROK drive to unification in a war with the North, the operational plan may change as well.

For the DPRK, the threshold beyond which it will pursue unification can only be guessed at. Kim Jong-un seems to suggest the threshold is very low, but if one

believes Kim Jong-un is rational in his decision making—and there is an abundance of evidence from past provocations that he is—any quote to the contrary is more likely bravado than real intention.[105] The likelihood of the conflict favoring a ROK–US victory once US assets begin flowing into the theater after the first few months of combat makes it doubtful the regime will cross it. The wild card is, of course, the possibility of North Korea employing its nuclear weapons. The North is most likely to use nuclear weapons in a situation where ROK forces have crossed the 38th parallel, since such an invasion would pose the greatest threat to its existence. Therefore, it is to the benefit of the ROK–US alliance to take out any DPRK launch facilities at the start of the conflict, if possible. Taking out North Korean leadership will also be helpful for staving off a nuclear attack, since the nature of the regime would seem to favor an assertive nuclear command and control structure—one that places the authority for execution in the hands of a select few political leaders.[106]

If such a decapitation of the regime is possible and use of nuclear weapons is no longer a credible threat, the political questions for pursuing unification become what sort of power any remaining government officials have to continue prosecuting the war. The military question likewise becomes what degree of cohesiveness exists in the North's remaining fielded forces. The answers to these questions are similar to those following the other possible scenario leading to a ROK-dominated unification: North Korean collapse.

Collapse of the North Korean Regime and/or Government

There are two types of collapse that could take place in North Korea: collapse of the regime, and collapse of the entire government. Clearly, the ROK will be able to spur political unification much easier when both happen. However, interviews that Korea scholar Bruce Bennett conducted in 2016 with a dozen North Korean elites who defected to South Korea suggest the former is much more likely than the latter.[107] In his book *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Totalitarian Politics*, Patrick McEachern makes a similar conclusion following an investigation of changes in the DPRK's government over time. Drawing from a wealth of translated North Korean materials, McEachern states that, unlike the government under Kim Il-sung, the government under Kim Jong-il began to feature a more dispersed authority among individuals and institutions. As a result, Kim Jong-il had to play the cabinet, the military, and the workers' party against each other to maintain power.[108] While there is evidence Kim Jong-un has consolidated his power somewhat, it is likely that removal of Kim Jong-un—either from within or from outside the country—would unleash that intragovernment com-

petition into the open in a bid for national leadership. Efforts at unification would have to confront this possibility.

Furthermore, even if ROK military forces are able to take over Pyongyang and prevent a replacement North Korean government from coming to power, there is a high likelihood of an insurgency in the countryside that will stymie stabilization efforts. Bennett contends that only the willingness of South Korea to offer safety, security, position, and wealth to North Korean military elites nationwide will remove this obstacle. However, doing so may be unpopular on both sides of the border because of the perception that those elites have exploited the population.[109]

These difficulties are among several reasons that some scholars are not optimistic about the potential of a North Korean collapse scenario to result in unification. The eminent Korea scholar and Columbia University political scientist Samuel S. Kim states it is not realistic to expect that "South Korea has both the will and the capacity to absorb a collapsing North Korea politically, militarily, economically, socially, and culturally."[110] Jacques Fuqua writes further that absorption of North Korea following its collapse is not a shortcut "to a multifarious process as complex as unification, which at once comprises human emotion, ideology, national security and well-being, and feelings of nationalism."[111] In fact, he suggests there are no shortcuts to unification at all.[112]

However, it is important to distinguish between political unification and the sense of imagined community that the scholar Benedict Anderson uses to define a state.[113] The latter definition is what makes unification so multifaceted. South Korea's unification model attempts to create this imagined community between the two Koreas ahead of political unification, potentially extending the timeline for decades. A North Korean collapse holds potential for the order to be reversed, so that the building of a unified Korean nation in the minds of its citizens follows the formation of a single government. The hasty formation of that government following either war or collapse of the DPRK is what the 2014 *Economist* article quoted at the beginning of this section envisions.[114] However, there is a third (or really, fourth) option as well.

Continued Status Quo

According to the status quo scenario, North Korea continues to survive indefinitely through a combination of rent-seeking, the pursuit of increasingly capable nuclear weapons under the military-first policy, regional brinkmanship, and inducement of concessions from the West.[115] The regime's resilience over the last few decades in overcoming domestic catastrophes and its "intransigence and vituperative behavior" in the face of external pressures suggest the status quo scenario is perhaps even more likely than war or collapse.[116]

The one factor that seems to suggest the status quo cannot continue forever is that it has never really worked in North Korea's favor and appears unlikely to do so in the future. As Michael Cohen states: "Pyongyang has lived with an unfavorable status quo for sixty years."[117] Its best response to change existing conditions since developing nuclear weapons is what is termed nuclear compellence—"threats to respond with retaliation to the continuation of the status quo."[118] However, in their treatise on nuclear compellence (also called "nuclear coercion"), Todd Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann argue from historical cases that "threats to use nuclear weapons for coercion usually lack credibility," and even the possession of nuclear weapons do not significantly increase the chances that compellence of any type will be successful.[119] Although the authors fail to distinguish in their analysis between nuclear compellence and conventional compellence by nuclear states, it is likely that Kim Jong-un believes both are in his favor as he continues to grow his nuclear arsenal.

The question then becomes whether further expansion of nuclear capabilities will cause him to issue more provocative threats. Sechser and Fuhrmann would contend they do not, but other predictions suggest North Korea's economic and geopolitical position will become more desperate with time under existing sanctions, possibly leading to even more escalatory threats.[120] These predictions include the continuing contraction of the North's economy relative to the ROK's, the further obsolescence of its weapons systems, and the increasing difficulty of preventing information about the outside world from reaching the population.[121] These trends paired with North Korean possession of a nuclear-tipped missile capable of reaching the United States could make Kim Jong-un more willing to take risks in brinksmanship. If the United States or the ROK is unable to persuade Kim that any actions the US–ROK alliance takes in response to North Korean provocations are purely defensive, or else either power purposefully undertakes offensive action to force him to back down, another war on the peninsula becomes more likely.

If such a war does lead to unification, the fate of the KPA and the character of unified Korean Defense Forces will be at the forefront of Korean nation-building efforts. These are the respective subjects of the next two sections.

Military Outcomes: The Fate of the Korean People's Army

This section speculates on the fate of North Korea's military under South Korea–led unification in different unification scenarios, as well as how a unified Korea should deal with the KPA if the state is to preserve peace within its borders and project strength to its neighbors. The section explores the degree to which the KPA might be integrated into a unified Korean armed forces; distinguishes be-

tween short-, medium-, and long-term employment of the KPA in a unified Korea; and makes recommendations regarding how to assimilate the KPA into a unified military. For purposes of this discussion, "short term" is one to two years, "medium term" is three to five years, and "long term" is greater than five years. In this section, "integration" refers primarily to the organizational incorporation of the KPA, whereas "assimilation" is concerned more with the psychological transformation KPA members would need to undergo to serve effectively in the armed forces of a democratic society. Assimilation, therefore, is more dependent on cultural change.

First, regardless of the means by which unification occurs, the KPA is unlikely to be integrated on a large scale into a single Korean military. Even if the political will exists to leverage the military as an institution for promoting national unity and identity, conditions following unification—short of an unforeseen external threat to the Korean Peninsula—will favor a large reduction in forces that discourages integration.

Second, however, the means of unification is still likely to determine the manner and degree of integration. Gradual unification under the South Korean model will provide the most favorable conditions for carefully managed, peaceful integration of any significant scope. These conditions are control of both the time and spatial elements of unification, which in turn are more likely to provide the opportunity to accommodate local North Korean political and military elites whose support will be needed for making integration succeed. This assertion is based both on scholarly analyses of the politics and sociology of the North Korean military and conclusions made from studies of other countries in which military integration has followed civil war.[122]

Collapse is the next most likely scenario to afford peaceful integration of the KPA on a significant scale. The ROK Armed Forces may have a valuable role to play in peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, and administration of the KPA in the absence of DPRK leadership. Out of this mission will come the potential task of assimilating KPA members into the KDF. However, there are at least two factors that cast doubt on the prospect. First, in such a scenario, unification is likely to be an intervening condition in the military outcome, which depends more on the past relationship between the two Koreas than on the collapse itself. This relationship is likely to be less amenable to the integration of the KPA than if it had grown under the South Korean model of gradual unification. Second, it is possible that collapse of the regime could end in either a military takeover or an internal power struggle—especially considering that a complete collapse of the state is unlikely. Considering these potential outcomes, a collapse of just the regime might

be the grounds of renewed civil war rather than the result of it, should the ROK intervene.

A renewed Korean War scenario will likely prevent assimilation of most if not all of the KPA into a unified military—at least in the short to medium term. The priority will be stabilizing and returning security to areas where fighting has taken place—a task that is likely to be too enormous for South Korea to take on alone. Therefore, international assistance will be crucial for stabilizing North Korea—and perhaps the entire peninsula—in the event's aftermath. Foreign powers intervening in North Korea during or following a war will likely seek a more influential voice in the fate of the KPA than during a collapse scenario, and the United States in particular will bring lessons from past nation-building efforts to bear on the issue. Exactly what these lessons are may depend on the administration in power, but from experience in Iraq and Afghanistan the US government will likely recommend against letting KPA members fade back into society with their weapons.

This is a good lesson regardless of the unification scenario, and it points to another aspect of the KPA's fate in the short term. In the intervening period between active North Korean control of its means of national defense and the assertion of control by a new unified government, there are several missions the KPA can assist with. These include security details at northern military bases, disposal of certain weapons, border patrol, and humanitarian assistance—all missions that will help stabilize the state and lessen the burden on outside countries whose military forces would be less welcome in the former North Korea.[123] In particular, border patrol and humanitarian assistance may require ROK supervision considering reports of North Korean abuse against refugees in the past. Regardless, in view of the ROK's "projected demographic shortfalls," it is almost essential that the KPA assist with those missions. The KPA will also be more familiar with its own facilities, weapons, and equipment than the ROK armed forces or military forces contributed by outside countries would be.

Employing the KPA in these missions will also provide the ROK opportunities to prepare North Korean military forces for assimilation in the long term—if not into the KDF, then into society. Since the North Korean army has traditionally assisted the population with planting and harvesting during critical times, funneling many of its junior members into such jobs on a more permanent basis may be an available alternative to assimilating them into the KDF.[124] Assuming it is possible to arrange for such workers to be paid for their tasks, the choice may also assist with stabilizing the North's economy, particularly in the event of a collapse.

For those in the KPA who are interested, deemed worthy, and able to be accommodated into the KDF, the stabilization period will be useful for assimilating them. First, the ROK armed forces will have to shake from the KPA's collective

mentality an image of the South as a population to be liberated. Depending on the manner in which unification unfolds, this task may be easy or hard. Regardless, it may take time to persuade the KPA of South Korea's peaceable intentions. Without regular access to media sources outside the country, mirror-imaging and government propaganda has likely shaped their perceptions of the ROK for decades.

Second, to make the KPA effective members of unified Korean military services, the ROK must imbue into them a spirit of cooperation with other countries and an attitude relatively free of social prejudice. While North Korea's military had worked secretly with other countries such as Syria and Iran to help them develop certain capabilities, the idea of collective security is foreign to the concept of *Juche*.[125] Norms for the equal treatment of military subordinates regardless of social background may also be absent in the KPA, so some degree of reeducation may be necessary for any to serve in the ROK armed forces.

Third, it will be necessary to disengage KPA members from the propagandized notions that the DPRK is the only true Korea and the Kim family is its rightful ruler. The dependence of three generations of Kims largely on maintaining a god-like image and possessing a strong military for power suggests that if a ROK-dominated unification scenario does unfold, the family will be out of the picture. Moreover, its legacy will likely be absent from the heritage of a unified Korean military. The next section explores what the character of this military might be like.

Military Outcomes: The Character of Unified Korean Defense Forces

The character of the KDF will depend not only on inter-Korean dynamics—to include different national cultures—but also on regional geopolitics and how unification unfolds. However, culture is a useful place to begin for both describing what unified armed forces are likely to look like under democratic Korean leadership and recommending decisions concerning those armed forces that will maximize the chances of a peaceful national transition and project an image of strength. The difference from the first half of the article is that here, in the definition of culture adopted from Schein, the cultural unit is no longer primarily the nation, but rather the military. Accordingly, the first aspect of unified Korean military character is called "operational culture."

Operational Culture

"Operational culture" encompasses what I call "orientation" and "role," terms I have taken from a military typology set forth by the authors Anthony Forster, Timothy Edmunds, and Andrew Cottey in their study of postcommunist militaries. Based on their construct, today's South Korean military, sometimes called the South Korean Defense Forces (SKDF), is focused on "territorial defense"–that is, "primarily oriented toward national defense but also capable of contributing in a limited way to multinational power projection operations."[126] For national defense, the SKDF focuses almost exclusively on the North Korean threat. However, the SKDF have participated in foreign operations periodically since sending two divisions to Vietnam in support of US objectives there in the 1960s. Therefore, aside from taking on domestic assistance roles before South Korea became a full-fledged democracy in the late 1980s, the SKDF has prioritized the role of national security against external aggression.

With regard to the North Korean threat, however, there are limits to carrying out this role independently. Per bilateral agreement, the United States still maintains operational control of ROK forces if war breaks out against North Korea. Some argue the delay in passing this control to the SKDF impedes its emergence as a fully sovereign military. However, for the ROK to assume wartime control, three conditions must be met. There must be "a security environment" conducive to transfer, "the right mix of capabilities to lead combined ROK–US forces," and "capabilities that can address North Korean nuclear and missile threats in the early stages of a regional provocation or conflict."[127] The latter two of these conditions suggest the SKDF cannot be sovereign until it is fully capable against the North. However, attitudes in both SKDF leadership and the Korean Parliament regarding defense funding priorities may have to change before operational control transfer can be achieved.[128] If a crisis erupts in the North that leads to military conflict and the United States still has wartime control, the SKDF may lose face. However, losses on the battlefield against the DPRK would have a much worse effect should the SKDF be ill-prepared to lead the fight. The most likely scenario in war against North Korea—and perhaps the best solution if the United States still has wartime control of operations—is that US Forces Korea hand over control to the SKDF as combat concludes and stability operations begin. This will be a gradual transition that is dependent on conditions in each North Korean territory. As the transition takes place, new or expanded roles are likely to open for the Korean military that mold its future operational culture as a unified force.

These roles are important to prepare for because of the likelihood of unrest in the North in any unification scenario, and they will be formative for a future KDF.

First, the SKDF should prepare to expand its power projection role so that it can rotate forces in and out of North Korea regularly. Second, it will increasingly take on the role of domestic military assistance, to include providing basic services to the most beleaguered members of the North's population, augmenting governance where civilian authority is lacking, establishing security in the case of insurgent activity, and coordinating with Seoul in the conduct of an information campaign targeting the North Korean population.

This last function will be especially important following a collapse, since there will be a much greater potential for insurgent activity north of the 38th parallel. In fact, if the postcollapse environment features guerilla warfare by fragments of the KPA, the use of conventional military power to establish security is likely to be counterproductive without carefully coordinated information campaigns targeting the North Korean population. That the South Korean military is ready to execute such a strategy is doubtful, as recent assessments have judged the SKDF to have "operational shortfalls in the knowledge, planning, and potential execution of [counterinsurgency]."[129]

A lengthy counterinsurgency campaign may follow a renewed war with North Korea, since total military victory will be both difficult and undesirable. South Korea will have to pay for whatever it destroys in the process of subduing the North. Pursuing a strategy of annihilation would also lose South Korea the moral high ground. Any destruction in North Korea resembling the "Highway of Death" that the US coalition left behind in Kuwait after Operation Desert Storm should be avoided. It would be much better for the SKDF to disable its opponent using nonkinetic or even nonlethal means, if possible. In any case, the words of Clausewitz are worth noting here: to lay the seeds for a healthy operational culture in a unified Korean armed forces, SKDF forces will need to examine the situation in North Korea and "establish . . . the kind of war on which they are embarking, neither mistaking it for, nor trying to turn it into, something that is alien to its nature."[130]

In any scenario that is not entirely peaceful, the SKDF—and later the KDF—may also need to be prepared to address security threats from China. Of the three external powers previously discussed in the context of Korean unification besides the United States, China is the most likely to intervene in North Korea during collapse or war. ROK and especially US military intervention in either scenario would violate China's policies of "peace and stability" and "resolution of issues through dialogue and negotiation" on the Korean Peninsula.[131] Therefore, the SKDF or KDF may need to yield to diplomatic efforts by Korean and US governments with China to smooth the path to full political unification.

If the KDF does incorporate a sizable portion of the KPA into its ranks, it may need to compromise a degree of readiness for the sake of those forces' training, reeducation, and acclimatization. In other words, a unified Korean state may need to focus internally for a time. This is a luxury many unifying states in the past did not have, due to external threats. However, assuming China is willing to accept a continued US military presence on the southern half of the Korean Peninsula, the new state would have the assurance of protection from its American ally while it builds a new defense institution.

In the longer term, perhaps over a period of decades, there is one additional role that a unified Korean military will take on: that of nation building. Defined as inculcating national values into military members, the focus of nation building will initially be any KPA members that transfer into the unified forces, but ultimately to recruits. Whether or not to institute a form of conscription in the former DPRK is a decision of great political consequence. Conscription in the ROK has undergone almost continual reform as part of the civilian leadership's aim for greater legitimacy, and it is likely to face significant obstacles in a unified Korea sans a significant external threat.[132] Most advanced democratic nations in similar circumstances have moved away from using the military as a nation-building institution, so a unified Korea would be unique if it continued to do so.[133] However, in order to bridge the cultural, social, and economic gaps between the North and South after unification, the government should look at military service as one option through which young adults can develop social responsibility and a sense of patriotism in the new state. This prospect touches on the military's sociology, which is the next cultural aspect of military character for this article.

Sociology

For the purposes of this article, "military sociology" is defined as the "peacetime character" of a military force and is primarily concerned with the issue of KPA integration: how the integration process will affect the military's social and organizational makeup, the success of the KDF's postunification roles, and the military's relationship to the society from which it draws its members. This section speculates on these outcomes for three different decisions regarding former KPA personnel: no incorporation, selective incorporation of low-ranking KPA members, and selective incorporation of members up to senior leadership.

First, it is possible following a renewed war or a lengthy counterinsurgency campaign in North Korean territory that a unified Korean government will choose not to integrate any former KPA in its armed forces. After keeping enough KPA personnel on various posts to maintain security and accountability of weapons and equipment during stability operations and the transition to political unifica-

tion, the SKDF may discharge them and hopefully connect them with means of civilian employment. A unified Korea largely under South Korean leadership may justify the decision in the name of military efficiency and effectiveness as well as the generally antagonistic view the SKDF holds toward the KPA. As Florence Gaub observes in her studies of military integration following civil wars, there is a commonly held belief that since those in a civil war "have fought each other, they must think badly of one another and hence conflict is preassigned."[134] Korea's civil war never really ended, so this belief may still dominate South Korean thinking.

Alternatively, there may be government leaders in Seoul who see "military integration . . . as a means for making renewed civil war less likely by reducing fear" in the minds of North and South Koreans.[135] Incorporating some personnel from the KPA would also "reduce the number of former fighters who have to be disarmed and integrated into the society."[136] The government will have to weigh the economic and societal burden of integrating the KPA into the KDF against that of integrating them into society by finding them civilian employment. The number of those incorporated into the KDF is likely to be very small regardless. However, any degree of incorporation will pit more immediate pragmatic considerations against questions about identity and ideology in the two Korean militaries. As this article has already explained, both are woven together in the concept of *Juche*, with the result that former KPA members will require extensive means of assimilation—that is, retraining and reeducation—into the KDF. However, concepts of purely North Korean identity may be less developed in the mind of a KPA private or sergeant than in the mind of a colonel or general officer. Therefore, the more junior ranks will be more easily molded by reeducation and training.

A third possibility—selective incorporation of KPA members up to senior leadership—is most likely in the case of a gradual, peaceful unification process. Leaving certain senior KPA leaders in place may be a concession to the North in exchange for accepting more democratic means of governance in the establishment of a Korean commonwealth—the second step of the South's unification formula. After all, formation of the commonwealth assumes separate responsibility for security.[137] Furthermore, as Bruce Bennett has concluded, accommodating Korean military elites is a precondition to peaceful unification.[138] Leaving them in charge of their military organizations or giving them authority over new units that form after unification may be easier than finding positions of similar influence for them in the civilian world and more ethical than just paying them off. However, it is important for leadership in a future KDF to ask whether former South Korean military members would be willing to serve under a commander from the North. Alternately, if KPA commanders are to continue leading only

KPA members, will there be an unhealthy bifurcation of hierarchies in the KDF? On one hand, units with members of similar national background may have higher group cohesion. On the other, the most successful examples of military integration after civil wars have penetrated to the individual level rather than just the unit level.[139]

These are difficult questions to answer, especially if there is pressure to make decisions about integration quickly during unification as there was during the reunification of Germany in 1990. The loyalties and personalities of individual KPA members will also likely play a factor—particularly at more senior levels—making integration a case-by-case decision. There have been several high-ranking defectors from North Korea over the years, suggesting there may be others in leadership positions that are secretly in the "wavering" social class, meaning they did not fully buy into the North Korean *Juche* ideology.[140] They may have simply lacked the opportunity or courage to defect.

In the long term, integration of senior leaders into the KDF after unification should probably be the exception rather than the rule. It may be necessary to keep a few in the short term for their expertise in certain military missions that the ROK or unified government needs to better understand. However, the burden of reeducating them into the principles of serving under a democracy will more than offset the benefits of maintaining their expertise. Instead, it would behoove the government to find civilian positions of influence for them that have minimal political consequences.

Therefore, selective integration of only the more junior members is the preferred course of action. For them, "the importance of ideological and political values" will fade against the group cohesion that develops from serving alongside others with a military mindset.[141] As Florence Gaub concludes, "the military as an organization embeds . . . men in a surrounding that emphasizes, just like the values [of service], similarities over differences, and provides a common basis for understanding and cooperation."[142] That said, any KPA members that serve in the KDF should be volunteers—that is, those with a positive disposition to serve under South Korean leadership—at least after the initial period during which they are needed to maintain security of weapons and facilities. A unified Korea may choose to pursue conscription in the former North Korea at a later time, but forcing KPA members to serve after their state ceases to exist may undermine progress toward peace on the peninsula. Doing so may also compromise professionalism in the ranks, which is the next aspect I speculate on and make recommendations for the character of a unified Korean military.

Professionalism

Military professionalism concerns characteristics inherent to the institution such as expertise, responsibility, and corporateness—qualities defined by Samuel Huntington in his book *The Soldier and the State*—as well as the understanding and acceptance of a clear boundary between military and political authority.[143] Between South Korea's founding and its democratization in the late 1980s, three factors encouraged the SKDF to periodically transgress American-accepted civil-military professional boundaries. These factors were the North Korean threat, economic instability, and the SKDF's domestic popularity. However, the same North Korean threat, along with the professional influence of the US military and the fact that ROK military coups were generally "non-hierarchical," helped preserve a high degree of professionalism within the SKDF that continues to this day.[144] That level of professionalism will be sustainable during unification and in a unified Korean armed forces if those forces can accomplish three things: effectively employ principles of mission command in stabilizing and securing North Korea, disarm and integrate former KPA members peacefully, and yield political decisions to a future unified Korean government once it is effectively in place.

The first two recommendations address how the SKDF can best demonstrate the professional characteristics of expertise, responsibility, and corporateness in carrying out two expected tasks during unification. "Mission command" is "the conduct of military operations through decentralized execution based on mission-type orders."[145] Whether the ROK military conducts operations into North Korea at an advanced stage of peaceful unification in the wake of a DPRK regime collapse, or as part of a wartime coalition, it will encounter dynamic situations in which it will need to rely on its organizational, technical, and leadership expertise. As the image-bearer of the ROK and an institution that will interface with some of the North Korean population before most other government institutions, it will need to remember that its responsibility is for the security and welfare of that population as much as for South Korea's. Finally, the corporateness of the SKDF should reinforce its unity in carrying out assigned missions.

Disarming and integrating former KPA members narrows the professional focus to a group with shared values and norms more similar to the ROK military's own than those of the general North Korean population. This comparison will likely be more accurate the more specialized the KPA member is within the military profession, since entry into specialized jobs takes place through competitive selection, disciplined self-selection, or both. However, even for the basic recruit, "the military occupation provides its personnel with a stronger alternative in identity terms than do other institutions."[146] It is up to the SKDF to capitalize on

such common bonds for promoting peace and convince the KPA of benign intentions during disarmament.

However, the SKDF should also expect to encounter a much different psyche from its own, particularly after a war or collapse. "Nowhere else does the army mirror its society's problems more clearly," explains Gaub, "than in post-conflict states."[147] Ideally, an information campaign targeting the KPA will precede disarmament, preventing surprises on the ground. The campaign should encourage local political and military leadership to become a stabilizing influence rather than a resistance force. However, the SKDF should anticipate renegade actions and respond in a way that is proportional, de-escalatory, and out of necessity. Doing so will set a positive precedent for the professional heritage of a unified Korean military.

Yielding political decisions to the ROK government—the third recommendation in this section—is a humble recognition of what does not fall within the military's expertise. The SKDF may be called upon to initiate governance in areas where it does not exist after a war or collapse. However, Seoul will likely have plans for cities and towns to transition to civilian governance once they have met certain conditions of stability and security. It is important for the SKDF and the KDF after it to recognize ahead of this transition that "military governments do not bring economic development or political democracy and often result in the eventual weakening of the military itself."[148] While the developmental state model of economic growth under Major General Park Chung-hee in the 1960s might offer a counterexample to this assertion, the question is whether a military government is necessary to provide the needed stimulus for the lengthy task of closing the economic gap between North and South in unification. South Korea has come too far as a democratic state to risk the military's professionalism again for achieving economic growth.

Nevertheless, the SKDF may be able to assist the local North Korean population alongside the KPA. Such considerations will benefit the domestic professional image of the future KDF in North Korea, even if there is a short-term sacrifice in terms of the expertise and corporateness embodied in more exclusively military roles.

The expertise and corporateness resident in the culture of modern military forces also depends on its technological capacity: the degree to which it can procure, maintain, and employ modern weaponry. This topic is the final aspect of the KDF's character I examine.

Technology

For the unification of Korea, there are two questions regarding military technology whose answers have cultural implications. First, what role will such technology play in the unification process? Second, what role will relative technological capacity between the military forces of the two states play in a future unified armed forces? The external and inter-Korean threat environments during a potential unification contribute to answering the first question, whereas the external threat environment, intelligence value, and propensity for building military cohesion help answer the second question.

Regarding the first question, an environment that is free of domestic (inter-Korean) threats will favor gradual, peaceful unification and therefore minimize the impact of military technology in the process. Ideally, North Korea will have denuclearized prior to political unification, removing nuclear capability as a bargaining chip in the process. However, it is possible that the South Korean model of unification may proceed with some residual North Korean nuclear capability still in existence, in which case the United States may have to play a balancing, deterrent role in the process. This role will include preventing China or Japan from intervening militarily in a manner that destabilizes the Korean Peninsula.[149]

If deterrence against North Korea fails and war breaks out, the DPRK may seek to leverage its nuclear superiority against South Korea or even coerce the United States into ceasing its support for the ROK. In this case, the key for the United States in preventing a regional nuclear conflict is to assure South Korea and Japan that its nuclear umbrella is sufficient to obviate their own need for nuclear weapons. Part of this assurance will be the willingness to destroy North Korean nuclear capability in the initial stages of an inter-Korean conflict or respond with a retaliatory nuclear strike if the DPRK resorts to employing nuclear weapons. Assuming these measures are successful, the remainder of a war on the peninsula will be conventional in character, and US–ROK technological superiority will likely play a large role in forcing a political truce upon the regime in a short period of time.

However, if the KPA resorts to irregular warfare afterward, dragging on the conflict for months or years, technology will matter much less than political resolve in bringing the conflict to an end. If there is not enough resolve in the United States and the ROK to pursue unification in these circumstances—either because of domestic costs, opposition from China, or both—it is possible that a different regime takes over North Korea. In such a case, technological superiority will have no strategic value in bringing about unification. This assertion also ap-

plies if the DPRK regime collapses and the ROK and United States lack the political will to pursue unification.

If Korea does unify, the answer to the second question of this section—what role relative technological capacity between the military forces of the two states plays in a future unified armed forces—becomes important. Following unification, the value of the North's military technology to the ROK will depend on the residual external threat as well as the intelligence value and the contribution of certain weapons technologies to institutional cohesion in a unified Korean armed forces. While logical on its own, this assertion is also based on the success of German reunification, in which protection offered by the United States and NATO obviated the need to keep most East German weapons systems but value for intelligence or cohesion during integration of the East German military merited the preservation of a few. These included the Mig-29 fighter jet and a deception operations unit.[150]

Similarly for Korea, a continued balancing role for the United States may help to contain a potential arms race between China and Japan after Korean unification, obviating the need for maintaining the vast majority of the DPRK's weapons inventory. If such an arms race does ensue, a unified Korea is going to worry about becoming victimized as it was in previous northeast Asian conflicts between its neighbors.[151] As a result, it may elect to keep a lot of former North Korean weapons systems operational despite their relative obsolescence.

However, in the absence of a significant external threat, there are few reasons not to dismantle and dispose of the myriad of equipment, facilities, and weapons systems the DPRK currently possesses, both nuclear and conventional. The costs of maintaining them would be staggering in terms of manpower, material, and integration costs. Korea would need to retain a large number of KPA personnel (to include those belonging to the Korean People's Navy and Air Force). Furthermore, due to international sanctions that prevented more recent purchases, the most advanced of North Korea's weapons systems date from the 1980s.[152] They are decades behind the ROK in automation, networking, and electronic warfare capabilities, so they would not be worth the cost to keep them operational. Moreover, because North Korea generally acquires "appropriate, rather than cutting-edge, technology, and offsets quality with quantity"—a tendency reinforced by *Juche* ideology—integrating them into the ROK's existing security architecture would strain the defense budget of a unified Korea with only marginal benefits to show for it.[153]

Similar to Germany in 1990, intelligence value or military cohesion would be among the few practical reasons for a unified Korea to retain certain systems and equipment. First, keeping certain aircraft, submarines, ships, and missiles opera-

tional in small numbers may have value for "red-teaming" in training and understanding how to counter threats from China or Russia, which manufactured most of North Korea's weapons systems. Second, some weapons systems may be useful as coalescing platforms for the integration of SKDF and former KPA units—at least in the short to medium term. Korea may even decide to create combat units that mix North and South Korean systems within certain categories such as naval patrol or airborne search and rescue, together with qualified personnel from the two former states. Such initiatives should be on a small scale because weapon sustainment costs will be much higher than for more homogenous units. However, they may be worth their extra cost for the models of inter-Korean cooperation they set.

Regardless of what North Korean military technology a unified Korea decides to retain and dispose of, the disappearance of the DPRK threat will likely decrease the "demand for military hardware in the future."[154] This decreased demand will negatively impact current ROK defense industries. Of course, the same decrease may shift much-needed government money to the monumental task of integrating the economies and societies of North and South Korea. Absorbing former North Koreans with military-related skills will be a small part of this task, and legacy ROK-led joint projects such as the Kaesong Industrial Complex "might represent a workable model in post-unification" for employing northerners.[155] However, such initiatives will "require substantial capital outlay, coordination, and cooperation between government and private enterprise."[156] Clearly, differences in North and South Korean culture and the ability of a unified Korean government to reconcile these differences will play a large impact in whether these endeavors bear fruit, whether in the armed forces or civilian enterprise.

Conclusion

Drawing from interpretations of North and South Korean national culture, this article first speculated on the likelihood and sustainability of a unified Korea under three different scenarios: gradual reform, war, and North Korean collapse. In the article, I have proposed that opposing identities, values, national security preferences, and strategies for unification help keep the Koreas divided today. Transitioning peacefully to unitary statehood from a condition of suspended civil war between the two countries is daunting enough that unification through war or the collapse of North Korea appears more probable, regardless of what regional powers would prefer. The way around these undesirable scenarios is for the two states to draw from historical events and time periods that awaken a broader national consciousness. In the end, a unification process largely dominated by South Korea appears almost determined.

As the second half of this article maintains, the manner of unification is likely to be formative in the fate of the North Korean People's Army and the character of a unified Korean armed forces (the KDF). Gradual reform offers the best opportunity for the ROK military to integrate the KPA. War or state collapse offers less opportunity because of the increased chances of hostility and irregular warfare in the aftermath of either scenario.

However, even following the outbreak of war there are reasons to integrate some portion of the KPA into a unified Korean military. As a national institution bearing the state's image, the military is perhaps the most suitable vehicle from which to begin building the new Korean nation. Integrating the subjugated state's forces is a viable means to do so provided they can be reeducated into the societal and professional military values of a democracy such as South Korea. Military integration will also demonstrate solidarity toward the population of both states, provide sustained employment to a number of personnel during the expected economic upheaval of the transition, and alleviate North Korean concerns that the SKDF is just an occupying force. Moreover, studies have shown that military cohesion tends to override former national allegiances when integration takes place at the individual level.

In the meantime, there are several ways the SKDF can prepare for unification. It should train not only in the role of nation building, but also domestic military assistance. Within this latter role, it should be amenable to assisting the KPA with economic assistance functions, even if these compromise professionalism and capability in more exclusive roles in the short term. The SKDF should also brush up on irregular warfare capability through exercises simulating the aftermath of war or North Korean government or regime collapse. Finally, with the exception of North Korean technology that is useful for intelligence or integration purposes, the SKDF should be prepared to dismantle and dispose of most of its neighbor's obsolete military technology.

Recommendations for US Foreign Policy and Military Support to the ROK during Unification

As a stabilizing force in the dynamic northeast Asia region and South Korea's most enduring ally, the United States will play a vital role during and after any Korean unification scenario. It should support a unifying Korea in a way that continues to deter external regional aggression, upholds the US–Korean alliance, and respects Korean culture, to include culturally determined aspects of the Korean military. The following six recommendations stem from this broad guidance.

Emphasize the enduring value of the US–ROK alliance for regional security, not just to defend against the DPRK. In accordance with the first condition, the ROK alliance should be the springboard from which the United States supports unification. The December 2017 US National Security Strategy states that its "alliance and friendship with South Korea, forged by the trials of history, is stronger than ever."[157] Furthermore, since 2002 the United States and South Korea have promoted their alliance as a vehicle to improve stability in the region, not just on the peninsula.[158]

Urge the ROK to make unification dependent upon denuclearization, peaceful inter-Korean dialogue, a phased political process, and continuance of a limited but assertive US military presence in the ROK. For the United States, denuclearization is a global issue, not just a regional one.[159] However, some Korean scholars believe South Korea may be willing to press ahead with peaceful reforms leading to unification without the need for North Korea to fully denuclearize first.[160] If the unification process proceeds in this order, North Korea is likely to use its nuclear arsenal as leverage in the unification process, clouding discussions about common Korean culture and heritage that might promote unity. The United States should therefore push for denuclearization ahead of inter-Korean political agreements leading to unification. Only a continued US military presence in the ROK is likely to achieve this outcome, and it has the added benefits of preempting "the need for Japan to re-militarize" and acting as "a wedge to offset both China and Russia from bullying Korea on political issues."[161]

Push for resumption of six-party talks if unification is imminent and include the future of a unified KDF in Asian security architecture discussions. If Korea unifies, the United States may have an opportunity to revitalize the Six-Party talks among the two Koreas, the United States, China, Russia, and Japan that took place between 2002 and 2009. These talks previously centered on denuclearization, and restarting them under the auspices of Korean unification has the potential to finally resolve the nuclear issue.[162] For the talks to take place, it is assumed that North Korea will have already collapsed, been gradually reformed, or been beaten in a war. Therefore, there should be little disagreement on *whether* the peninsula should be denuclearized. Rather, *how* to dispose of the DPRK's nuclear weapons and facilities will be the center of the debate. This decision being made, it will be easier to discuss how to build a regional security framework around a unified Korea. The US-led 2+4 talks that took place in Europe following the reunification of Germany took on a similar challenge. The lack of a common regional identity like that in Europe will likely prevent the formation of "a single overarching institution," in northeast Asia, but it will be necessary to discuss

whether the current Asian architecture needs to change to preserve regional stability.[163]

Retain a deterrent and balancing role for the US military against the DPRK and China during unification. Intervene to secure or destroy the North's nuclear weapons (if not already accomplished) should war break out or collapse ensue. The United States' balancing role stems not only from its manpower commitment and nuclear umbrella but also from overlapping Korean and US missile defenses and cross-domain deterrence among cyber, space, and the traditional physical domains. If war breaks out or North Korea collapses, nuclear deterrence in particular may be less effective, since the North Korean government is more likely to lose control of its arsenal and proliferation of weapons becomes more likely. This is a situation to be prevented, if possible.

Be prepared to assist the ROK with stability operations in North Korea, but in a way that respects culture. Considering that the United States will be sharing the wartime burden and at least have an advisory capacity under other circumstances, it may exert pressure on the ROK to shape unified armed forces according to its own mold. There are positive and negative aspects to this pressure. On the positive side, the United States has successfully integrated a diverse population into a military that is second to none professionally. This success has lessons for integrating the KPA. On the negative side, the United States may urge the ROK to adopt policies toward the KPA that leave local ROK military personnel at odds with local civilian and military leadership in the former DPRK. Granted, the military is perhaps the best institution through which to pursue North–South social integration since it is nationally based and not locally based. However, policy consequences may still be localized, and they will be felt long after US influence is gone.[164] For example, similar to other communist militaries in Asia, the KPA has traditionally assumed economic assistance roles during certain times of the year in many parts of the country. This need may amplify during unification because many former North Koreans will likely flee south, leaving large parts of North Korea bereft of human labor.[165] The United States and its military should consider the KPA's potential to fill this gap when making recommendations for disbanding or integrating it.

Support the ROK's democratic, free-market narrative. This is a narrative that most of the world can resonate with and from which the ROK has emerged as an economic and political success story. Despite the rise of China, this story will continue to challenge the North Korean narrative, which really only resonates with an internal audience. Despite the apparent resiliency of the DPRK across decades, South Korean culture has been gradually seeping into North Korean society, and the effects are only known from the reports of defectors. It remains to

be seen whether the status quo will continue, whether gradual reform will take place leading to unification, or a violence-laden scenario drives change on the peninsula. Regardless, culture will undoubtedly play a major role in the outcome. ✪

Col Michael Edmonston, PhD, USAF

Colonel Edmonston is a 2000 graduate of the USAF Academy and has a PhD in Military Strategy from Air University. As an Air Force officer, he has served as a B-1 and MQ-1 pilot as well as a Northeast Asia Foreign Area Officer. He is currently the Director of Warfighting Education at the LeMay Center for Doctrine Development and Education at Maxwell Air Force Base. In summer 2022, he will PCS to Fort Leavenworth to be the Air Force Element Director there.

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Notes

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Disclaimers