

JOURNAL OF
INDO-PACIFIC
AFFAIRS

VOL. 5, NO. 6 OCTOBER 2022 (SPECIAL ISSUE)

GUEST EDITOR:
DR. HYUN JI RIM



JIPA

THE JOURNAL OF INDO-PACIFIC AFFAIRS

Chief of Staff, US Air Force

Gen Charles Q. Brown, Jr., USAF

Chief of Space Operations, US Space Force

Gen John W. Raymond, USSF

Commander, Air Education and Training Command

Lt Gen Brian Robinson, USAF

Commander and President, Air University

Lt Gen Andrea D. Tullos, USAF

Director, Air University Academic Services

Dr. Mehmed Ali

Director, Air University Press

Dr. Paul Hoffman

Editorial Staff

Dr. Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, *Editor in Chief*

Jon Howard, *Deputy Editor in Chief*

Liam Casey, *Assistant Editor in Chief*

Dr. Achala Gunasekara-Rockwell, *Assistant Editor*

Dr. Hyun Ji Rim, *Guest Editor*

Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs (JIPA)

600 Chennault Circle

Maxwell AFB AL 36112-6010

email: JIPA@au.af.edu

Visit *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* online at <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JIPA/>.

ISSN 2576-5361 (Print) ISSN 2576-537X (Online)

Published by the Air University Press, *The Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs (JIPA)* is a professional journal of the Department of the Air Force and a forum for worldwide dialogue regarding the Indo-Pacific region, spanning from the west coasts of the Americas to the eastern shores of Africa and covering much of Asia and all of Oceania. The journal fosters intellectual and professional development for members of the Air and Space Forces and the world's other English-speaking militaries and informs decision makers and academicians around the globe.

Articles submitted to the journal must be unclassified, nonsensitive, and releasable to the public. Features represent fully researched, thoroughly documented, and peer-reviewed scholarly articles 5,000 to 6,000 words in length. Views articles are shorter than Features—3,000 to 5,000 words—typically expressing well-thought-out and developed opinions about regional topics. The Commentary section offers a forum about current subjects of interest. These short posts are 1,500 to 2,500 words in length. Submit all manuscripts to JIPA@au.af.edu.

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of the Air Force, the Department of Defense, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government.



<https://www.af.mil/>



<https://www.spaceforce.mil/>



<https://www.aetc.af.mil/>



<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>

INTRODUCTION

1 South Korea's Stepping Up as an Indo-Pacific Actor Challenges for the New Yoon Administration

Dr. Hyun Ji Rim, guest editor

SENIOR LEADER PERSPECTIVE

5 The Potential of Korean Unification and a Unified Korean Armed Forces

A Cultural Interpretation

Col Michael Edmonston, PhD, USAF

FEATURES

54 Seoul's Geopolitical Code on Quad Imperative or Elective?

Dr. Jagannath Panda

74 Clash or Consensus?

The Conflicting Economic and Security Imperatives of Semiconductor Supply- Chain Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific

Jonathan Corrado

95 A Polarized Audience in South Korea and Its Impact on North Korea Policy

Dr. DongJoon Park

109 South Korea's Evolving Quest for Energy Security Away from Fossil Fuels and Back to Nuclear Power

Dr. James E. Platte

123 The Growth of South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications

Dr. Minsung Kim

VIEWS

139 Seoul's Impaired Comprehensive Security

Adding "Water" to the Security Agenda of the Yoon Administration

Yoonjin Kim

151 Obstacles to US–South Korea Alliance Regional Contingency Planning and Considerations for US Policy

Maj Jessica Renée Taylor, USAFR

South Korea's Stepping Up as an Indo-Pacific Actor

Challenges for the New Yoon Administration

DR. HYUN JI RIM, GUEST EDITOR

In his *Foreign Affairs* article titled “South Korea Needs to Step Up,” presidential candidate Yoon Suk-yeol noted that his vision for the South Korea focuses on expanding capacity and roles of the country in terms of foreign policy and diplomacy beyond the Korean Peninsula to integrate itself into Indo-Pacific collaborative bodies in the theater, including the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). Yoon emphasized a more proactive role for Seoul on the international stage, moving away from strategic ambiguity and toward strengthening the United States–Republic of Korea (US–ROK) alliance. Many voiced hopes for the new administration’s policies, while others remained unconvinced. President Yoon will have to prove his competence through achieving true cooperation among his country’s various political parties, which he promised to do during the campaign, as well as by successfully orchestrating a larger role for South Korea on the international stage.

South Korea’s Indo-Pacific strategy amid strategic competition between China and the United States and the ongoing Russian invasion of Ukraine is likely to face countless challenges across multiple domains. One area that Seoul is most vulnerable to is North Korean denuclearization and reunification of the Korean Peninsula. North Korea poses a direct and imminent military threat to South Korea. Under such circumstance, nuclear proliferation and unification issues have been discussed on various multilateral, minilateral, and bilateral platforms; however, we have yet to see any improvements.

While Washington is weighing a US counterpunch in the case of Pyongyang’s seventh nuclear test and China and Russia vetoing UN Security Council’s additional sanctions on North Korea,¹ Yoon’s hardline approach—relative to the previous Moon administration’s appeasement approach—is carried out through visual expansion of Seoul’s military capabilities and the strengthening of Washington–Seoul ties as seen in the cases of resumption of US–ROK joint military exercises and South Korea’s participation in Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC) 2022 exercise.

While modernizing South Korea's military, adapting to potential threats amplified by the use of emerging technologies, gray-zone tactics, and new military campaigns for cyber and space security, Seoul is also promoting defense exports, which are expected to bring in more than USD 10 billion in 2022, just one year after defense exports exceeded imports for the first time.² Ranging from K9 Thunder howitzers to medium-range surface-to-air missiles and from antiair defense systems to supersonic KF-21 Boramae fighter jets, Seoul is expanding its global network of comprehensive cooperation with countries in all six inhabited continents.³

Moreover, discarding the strategic ambiguity concept, which many observers thought was no longer viable in current geostrategic settings, allows Seoul to focus South Korea's efforts on catching up with other nations in Indo-Pacific networking and strategic cooperation. As seen in the case of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), experts believe that strengthening the US–ROK alliance and joining IPEF is a must in establishing a mid- to long-term geo-economic strategy for Seoul's survival in the changing global market.⁴

With the backdrop of a two-level approach for intertwined Indo-Pacific strategy and national security, both traditional and nontraditional, this special issue of the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* focusing on Korea examines eight issue areas that could pose challenges in South Korea's stepping up. First, Col Michael Edmonston, USAF, provides a unique insight into the potential of Korean unification and unified Korean armed forces from a cultural perspective, working with core concepts of national identities, national values, national security preferences, and unification strategies.

Second, Dr. Jagannath Panda explores Seoul's tilt toward the Indo-Pacific concept, its bilateral connections with the Quad member states, and the future course of Quad–ROK cooperation. Third, Jonathan Corrado delves into the geoeconomic aspect of South Korea's semiconductor supply-chain collaboration in the Indo-Pacific, arguing that multilateral cooperation is ultimately the only feasible long-term solution. Fourth, Yoonjin Kim offers valuable insight into the strategic value of water for Yoon's comprehensive security agenda, contending that water security issues are no longer limited to tackling national water supply or sanitation risks but also cover geopolitical concerns as in the case of Mekong River conflicts.

Then, Dr. DongJoon Park offers analysis on South Korea's polarized domestic politics and its impact on Seoul's North Korea policy, carefully predicting that both Koreas are unlikely to be shy in showing their military resolve to gain the upper hand in inter-Korean relations. The sixth issue area is energy security cooperation between the United States and South Korea in the civil nuclear sector, covered by Dr. James Platte. While energy security emerged as a critical aspect of

geopolitics after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Platte's article seeks to provide a roadmap for US–ROK cooperation in energy strategy. In the seventh article, Dr. Minsung Kim investigates the geopolitical implications of growing South Korea's soft power, recommending how Seoul ought to further promote *Hallyu*, a term referring to the success of South Korean popular culture in China, as a public good in its global agenda.

Finally, Maj Jessica Renée Taylor, USAFR, explains the challenges the US–ROK alliance faces in terms of regional contingency planning. After examining the obstacles to Seoul supporting US-led regional security cooperation, she argues for a more holistic approach with examples of evolving US security guarantees to economic retaliation and tech-centered alliance. She posits that such an approach will contribute to strengthening and expanding the alliance to meet South Korea's evolving regional threat environment more concretely.

This special issue aims to provide a list of potential strategic issues that deserves South Korea's attention in the long run, examine the current situation in Seoul, and explore potential challenges in these fields, which will eventually contribute to South Korea's stepping up as a global actor in the Indo-Pacific era.

Dr. Hyun Ji Rim

Dr. Rim is a non-resident scholar at the Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies at the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), Johns Hopkins University, a visiting research associate at the University of Missouri—Kansas City, and a Kim Koo Fellow at the Korea Society. She writes extensively on extended deterrence, Indo-Pacific strategy, and East Asian security dynamics, including US extended deterrence and emerging technologies and alliance politics. Her articles have appeared in the *Pacific Review*, the *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs*, *Asian Perspective*, and the *International Journal of Korean Unification Studies*, among others. She also held research fellowships with the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tuft University and the Pacific Forum. She received her PhD in international relations from the School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS) at Johns Hopkins University.

Notes

1. “북한 핵실험하면 신규 대북제재 재추진’... 미국의 경고,” *BBC Korean*, 2 June 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/>.
2. Robbie Gramer, “South Korea Is Turbocharging Its Arms Sales Business,” *Foreign Policy*, 14 July 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.
3. Some examples of countries that signed contracts include Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Senegal, Peru, Poland, Australia, United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, India, and so forth.
4. Kwon Hayoung, Lee Dongwoo, and Lee Junhyung, “美 이익 반하면 반도체도, 배터리도 없다’ [한중 공급망 진단-좌담회],” *아시아경제*, 9 June 2022, <https://view.asiae.co.kr/>.

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

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 cooperate 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 non-violent.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 *Hana-wons*—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.

Acknowledgments

This is an expanded version of a previously published article by the author: "The Potential of a Unified Korean Armed Forces: A Cultural Interpretation," *Journal of Indo-Pacific Affairs* 5, no. 3 (May–June 2022): 2–24. Colonel Edmonston would like to thank the faculty at the School of Advanced Air & Space Studies, and Dr. Jim Tucci, Dr. Lina Svedin, and Dr. Robert Hutchinson in particular, for encouraging him in his research and writing on the topics of national unification and post-conflict integration of military forces, as well as several military officers from the Federal Republic of Germany and the Republic of Korea who have offered their insights into these topics over the last several years.

Notes

1. Mark Milley, Chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, address, United States Air War College, Maxwell Air Force Base, AL, 7 Oct 2020.

2. For the article, I use the terms "army" (including the Korean People's Army), "armed forces," and "military" interchangeably, since the armies of both sides make up the largest percentage of the military personnel.

3. Edgar Schein, quoted in Isabel V. Hull, *Absolute Destruction: Military Culture and the Practices of War in Imperial Germany* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005), 95.

4. Stathis N. Kalyvas, *The Logic of Violence in Civil War*, *Cambridge Studies in Comparative Politics* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 389.

5. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised Edition (New York: Verso Books, 1991), 6.

6. Mark Cartwright, "Ancient Korea," *Ancient History Encyclopedia*, <https://www.ancient.eu/>.

7. Jacques L. Fuqua, Jr., *Korean Unification: Inevitable Challenges* (Potomac Books: Washington, DC, 2011), xv; Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 36.

8. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 35–37.

9. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 24.

10. "How Was Hangul Invented?," *The Economist*, 8 Oct 2013, <http://www.economist.com/>; Bae Yong Joon, *A Journey in Search of Korea's Beauty*, trans. Sora Kim-Russell (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 2010), 262.

11. Thae Yong Ho, "North Korea Must Stop False Claims about Hangul," *Daily NK*, 31 Oct 2019, <https://www.dailynk.com/>.

12. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 43.

13. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 43.
14. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 186.
15. George Russell, "UN Aid Support Dwindles for North Korea, Syria's Silent Partner on Chemical Weapons," Fox News, 6 Sep 2013, <http://www.foxnews.com/>.
16. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 10.
17. Dennis Van Vranken Hickey, *The Armies of East Asia: China, Taiwan, Japan, and the Koreans* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001), 177.
18. "List of OECD Member Countries - Ratification of the Convention on the OECD," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, n.d., <http://www.oecd.org/>.
19. Jung Soo Kim, "The Proactive Grand Strategy for a Consensual and Peaceful Korean Unification" (Naval Postgraduate School, 2007), 36.
20. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 85–87.
21. Part in quotes adapted from the American Heritage Dictionary, 1985 College Edition.
22. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 37–41, 113.
23. Don Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas: A Contemporary History*, Revised Edition (Indianapolis: Basic Books, 2001), 401.
24. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 113.
25. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 41.
26. Donku Kang, "The Transmission of Christianity and the Reception of Western Philosophy in Korea" in *East Meets West*, Volume 1, ed. Hyoung-chan Kim (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 2014), 31.
27. Kang, "The Transmission of Christianity," 34.
28. Michael W. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 324.
29. Melanie Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea: The Untold Story of Asia's Underground Railroad* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012), 165.
30. Doyle, *Ways of War and Peace*, 324.
31. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 402. This is a reference to Hwang Jang Yop, "one of North Korea's most prominent officials and the architect of its Juche philosophy" (399), who defected to South Korea on 12 Feb 1997.
32. Ahn Wae-soon, "A Review of the Intellectual Thrust to Adopt Democracy in the Late 19th Century: The Integration of Eastern and Western Thought" in *East Meets West*, Volume 1, ed. Kim Hyoung-chan (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 2014), 65–66.
33. Ahn, "A Review of the Intellectual Thrust to Adopt Democracy," 63.
34. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 164.
35. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 163, 178, 279. This election refers to Kim Young Sam. Roh Tae Woo, his predecessor, was directly elected as well, but he was Chun Doo Hwan's chosen successor, and like Chun he had been a career military officer.
36. Kang, "The Transmission of Christianity and the Reception of Western Philosophy in Korea" in *East Meets West*, Volume 1, ed. Hyoung-chan Kim (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 2014), 65–66.
37. "Sirhak," *New World Encyclopedia Online*, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/>.
38. "Christianity in Korea," *New World Encyclopedia Online*, <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/>.
39. "About Korea: Religion," *Korea.net*, <http://www.korea.net/>.

40. Young-bae Song, "Confucian Response to the Shock of Western Culture: From Orthodox Resistance to Confucian Reformatory Visions" in *East Meets West*, Volume 1, ed. Hyoungh-ghan Kim (Seoul: Hollym Corporation, 2014), 104–05.
41. Song, "Confucian Response," 105.
42. Robert Wade, "East Asia's Economic Success: Conflicting Perspectives, Partial Insights, Shaky Evidence," *World Politics* 44, no. 2 (Jan 1992), 284–85; Chalmers Johnson, "Political Institutions and Economic Performance," 139, quoted in Michael Edmonston, "How the East Asian Developmental State Achieved an Optimal Balance between States and Markets," research paper, Naval Postgraduate School, 2013, 2–4.
43. Edmonston, "How the East Asian Developmental State Achieved an Optimal Balance," 6.
44. Johnson, "Political Institutions and Economic Performance," in Deyo, ed., *The Political Economy of the New Asian Industrialism*, 141.
45. This observation is based largely on the author's experience working directly with the Korean military for two years as a Foreign Area Officer in the Air Force. The downside to these qualities is that Korean supervisors expected very long work hours of their employees. Work sometimes expanded to fill the time as a result. From conversations with American ex-patriots working in Seoul, this is true of the business culture as well.
46. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 94.
47. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 87.
48. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 12.
49. Based on the author's conversations with Koreans in 2012–2016.
50. Victor Cha and David C. Kang, *Korea: A Debate on Engagement Strategies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 192.
51. Joseph S Bermudez, *The Armed Forces of North Korea* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 17–18.
52. Kijoo Kim, "Post-Cold War Civil-Military Relations in South Korea: Toward a Postmodern Military?," PhD diss., New York State University, Buffalo, 24 April 2009, 44.
53. Eleanor Albert, "North Korea's Military Capabilities," Council on Foreign Relations, 20 Dec 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/>.
54. Bermudez, *The Armed Forces of North Korea*, 1.
55. Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future*, 60.
56. Lorraine Murray, "Kim Jong-Un," *Britannica Online*, <https://www.britannica.com/>.
57. Albert, "North Korea's Military Capabilities;" Katharina Buchholz, "North Korean Missile Tests Intensify in 2022," *Statista*, 18 January 2022, <https://www.statista.com/chart/9172/the-worrying-escalation-of-north-koreas-missile-tests/>; Sophie Jackman & Sanmi Cha, "North Korea fires 8 missiles, Testing Biden with Launch Record," *Bloomberg News*, 4 June 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-06-05/north-korea-fires-ballistic-missile-toward-sea-off-east-coast#xj4y7vzkg>.
58. "North Korean People's Army Study Guide, Part 3: Special Operations," Federation of American Scientists, <https://fas.org/>.
59. Albert, "North Korea's Military Capabilities."
60. Oberdorfer, *The Two Koreas*, 140–41.
61. Hannah Ellis-Peterson and Benjamin Haas, "How North Korea got away with the assassination of Kim Jong-nam," *The Guardian*, 1 April 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

62. Terence Roehrig, "North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and the Stability-Instability Paradox," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis* 28, no. 2 (June 2016), 190–91; "North Korea Denies Laying Landmines in DMZ That Wounded South Soldiers," *Reuters*, 14 Aug 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
63. Roehrig, "North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and the Stability-Instability Paradox," 191.
64. "Korea, South," CIA World Factbook, <https://www.cia.gov/>.
65. "South Korea Military Strength (2020)," Global Firepower, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/>.
66. Min Yong Lee, "South Korea: From New Professionalism to Old Professionalism" in *Military Professionalism in Asia: Conceptual and Empirical Perspectives*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Honolulu: East-West Center, 2001), 56.
67. Lee, "South Korea: From New Professionalism to Old Professionalism," 56.
68. Edward Kwon, "South Korea's Deterrence Strategy Against North Korea's WMD," *East Asia* 35 (2018), 5, 7.
69. "Missiles of South Korea," Missile Defense Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2020, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/>.
70. "Missiles of South Korea," Missile Defense Project, Center for Strategic and International Studies.
71. Grant Wyeth, "Time to reopen the Kaesong Industrial Complex? A Conversation with Jin-hyang Kim," *The Diplomat*, 27 Feb 2020, <https://thediplomat.com/>.
72. Justin McCurry, "Kim Jong-un Orders Razing of South's 'Unpleasant' Mount Kumgang Buildings," *The Guardian*, 23 Oct 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.
73. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 392.
74. Zeeshan Aleem, "North and South Korea Marched Together under One Flag at the Olympics," *Vox*, 9 Feb 2018, <https://www.vox.com/>.
75. Basil Henry Liddell Hart, *Strategy*, 2nd rev. ed (New York: Meridian, 1991), 349–50.
76. Coghlan, "Prospects from Korean Unification," 1; Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Panmunjeom Declaration for Peace, Prosperity and Unification of the Korean Peninsula*, 27 April 2018.
77. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 12.
78. Jacques L. Fuqua, Jr., *Korean Unification: Inevitable Challenges* (Potomac Books: Washington, DC, 2011), 65–66.
79. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 67.
80. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 6.
81. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 6.
82. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 7.
83. Joseph S Bermudez, *The Armed Forces of North Korea* (London; New York: I.B. Tauris, 2001), 12.
84. Bermudez, *The Armed Forces of North Korea*, 12.
85. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 7.

86. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 7.
87. Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing North Korean Elites for Unification* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2017), 26.
88. Ryoo, "The ROK Army's Role When North Korea Collapses without a War with the ROK," 22.
89. Minister of National Defense Kim Kwan Jin in the preface to the ROK's 2012 "Defense White Paper."
90. Ministry of Unification, "Policy and Initiatives," 2011, <http://eng.unikorea.go.kr/>.
91. Ministry of Unification, "Policy and Initiatives."
92. Ministry of Unification, "2019 White Paper," <https://www.unikorea.go.kr/>, 2–5.
93. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 9–10.
94. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 11.
95. Ryoo, "The ROK Army's Role When North Korea Collapses without a War with the ROK," 22.
96. Ministry of Unification, "2019 White Paper," 144.
97. Ministry of Unification, "2019 White Paper," 144.
98. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 17.
99. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 67.
100. Cha, *The Impossible State*, 111.
101. Coghlan, "Prospects from Korean Unification," 4.
102. Coghlan, "Prospects from Korean Unification," 5.
103. Coghlan, "Prospects from Korean Unification," 5.
104. Based upon general format of joint operational planning in the US military.
105. David W. Shin, *Rationality in the North Korean Regime: Understanding the Kims' Strategy of Provocation* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), 23.
106. Peter D. Feaver, "Command and Control in Emerging Nuclear Nations," *International Security* 17, no. 3 (Winter 1992/93), 169.
107. Bruce W. Bennett, *Preparing North Korean Elites for Unification* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 2017), 5.
108. Patrick McEachern, *Inside the Red Box: North Korea's Post-Totalitarian Politics*, *Contemporary Asia in the World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 30.
109. Bennett, *Preparing North Korean Elites for Unification*, 10–14.
110. Quoted in Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 74.
111. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 75.
112. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 75.
113. Benedict Anderson, "Imagined Communities," in *The Origins of Nationalism*, n.d., 48–59 , 49.
114. "Korean unification is less likely to be gradual and peaceful than nasty, brutish, and quick," *The Economist*, 3 May 2014, 37.
115. Coghlan, "Prospects from Korean Unification," 1, 4–5.
116. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 71.

117. Michael D. Cohen, "North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and No Good Options?" in *North Korea and Nuclear Weapons: Entering the New Era of Deterrence*, ed. Sung Chull Kim and Michael D. Cohen (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2017), 58.
118. Cohen, "North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and No Good Options?," 57.
119. Todd S. Sechser and Matthew Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 45, 75.
120. Sechser and Fuhrmann, *Nuclear Weapons and Coercive Diplomacy*, 57, 60.
121. Cohen, "North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and No Good Options?," 58–9.
122. Bennett, *Preparing North Korean Elites for Unification*, 2; Roy Licklider, ed., *New Armies from Old: Merging Competing Military Forces After Civil Wars* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2014), 261.
123. Bruce W. Bennett and Jennifer Lind, "The Collapse of North Korea: Military Missions and Requirements," *International Security* 36, no. 2 (Fall 2011), 93.
124. David McNeill, "North Korea's Reservists 'Called Back to Help with Spring Harvest,'" *The Independent*, 9 April 2013, <http://www.independent.co.uk>; Ju-Min Park, "North Korea's Peasant Army Gets Ready to Farm, Not Wage War," *Reuters*, 9 April 2013, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
125. Victor Cha, *The Impossible State: North Korea, Past and Future* (New York: Harper Collins, 2012), 39.
126. Anthony Forster, Timothy Edmunds, and Andrew Cottey, eds., *The Challenge of Military Reform in Postcommunist Europe* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2002), 8–9;
127. James Hackett and Mark Fitzpatrick, "The Conventional Military Balance on the Korean Peninsula," *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, June 2018, 38.
128. Fred L. Huh, "Azimuth Check: An Analysis of Military Transformation in the Republic of Korea—Is It Sufficient?" thesis, School of Advanced Military Studies (Fort Leavenworth, KS: United States Army Command and General Staff College, 2009), 14. In one bilateral meeting the author attended at Combined Forces Command, Yongsan Garrison, Seoul, in 2016, the ROK J3 (Operations) Chief, a three-star general, stated to his American equivalent in US Forces Korea he wanted to know how many military forces and weapons systems the United States was bringing to bear if a full-scale conventional conflict broke out on the peninsula. He said the US answer would determine what Korea could budget for in its military. In response, the American general reversed the scenario, stating anything the United States brought to bear was contingent on what Korea could provide.
129. Joohoon Kim, "Filling South Korea's Counterinsurgency Gap: Looking Ahead to Potential Problems Facing South Korea in the Aftermath of North Korea's Collapse," thesis (Fort Leavenworth, KS: School of Advanced Military Studies, 2012), 3.
130. Carl Von Clausewitz, *On War*, ed. Michael Howard and Peter Paret, indexed (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 88.
131. Min, Shin, and Lee, "U.S., China, and Japan's Policies on the Korean Peninsula and Prospects for Upcoming Summits," 6.
132. Hee Jung Choi and Nora Hui-Jung Kim, "Of Soldiers and Citizens: Shallow Marketization, Military Service, and Citizenship in Neo-Liberal South Korea," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 47, No. 4 (2017), 521.
133. Choi and Kim, "Of Soldiers and Citizens," 518.
134. Florence Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 134.
135. Licklider, *New Armies from Old*, 2.

136. Licklider, *New Armies from Old*, 2.
137. Park, "South and North Korea's Views on the Unification of the Korean Peninsula and Inter-Korean Relations," 9–10.
138. Bennett, *Preparing North Korean Elites for Unification*, 2
139. Licklider, *New Armies from Old*, 260.
140. U.S. House of Representatives, "An Insider's Look at the North Korean Regime," hearing before the Committee on Foreign Affairs, 115th Cong., 1st sess., 2017, 36.
141. Morris Janowitz, *Sociology and the Military Establishment*, 3rd ed. (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1974), 93.
142. Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars*, 135.
143. Samuel Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 1957), 2, 8–10.
144. Min Yong Lee, "South Korea: From New Professionalism to Old Professionalism," 56; a "nonhierarchical" coup is launched by a military officer independently of his chain of command. He is usually a junior or midgrade general officer, as in the cases of Park Chung-hee and Roh Tae-woo.
145. Joint Publication 3-0, "Joint Operations," 11 August 2011 in Martin Dempsey, "Mission Command White Paper," Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, 3 April 2012, 1.
146. Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars*, 136.
147. Gaub, *Military Integration after Civil Wars*, 139.
148. Licklider, *New Armies from Old*, 266.
149. Sung-han Kim, "The Day After: ROK-U.S. Cooperation for Korean Unification," *The Washington Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (30 Oct 2015), 52.
150. Jörg Schönböhm, *Two Armies and One Fatherland* (Providence, RI: Berghahn Books, 1996), 80; "Germany-West (FRG)," *Military Technology*, Jan 1989, 108.
"German Luftwaffe and the MiG-29 Fulcrum," *MiGFlug*, <https://migflug.com/>; Uwe Heßler, "East German Army Unit Finds Skills Still In Demand after Reunification," 16 Aug 2010, <https://www.dw.com/>.
151. Kim, "The Day After: ROK-U.S. Cooperation for Korean Unification," 52–53.
152. Hackett and Fitzpatrick, 21.
153. Hackett and Fitzpatrick, 12–13.
154. Fitch Solutions. *South Korea Defence & Security Report 2020*. Fitch Solutions Group Limited, 2020, 6.
155. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 133.
156. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 133–34.
157. The White House, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" December 2017, 46.
158. Chae-jöng Sö, *Power, Interest, and Identity in Military Alliances* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 199–201.
159. The White House, "National Security Strategy of the United States of America" Dec 2017, 46.
160. Taeun Min, Jong-Ho Shin, and Kitae Lee, "U.S., China, and Japan's Policies on the Korean Peninsula and Prospects for Upcoming Summits," Korea Institute for National Unification, Publications: Online Series, 8 Oct 2018, www.kinu.or.kr, Abstract.

161. Burke R. Hamilton, "Northeast Asian Regional Power Security Issues of Korean Unification" (Air Command and Staff College, 2004), 12.
162. Emma Chanlett-Avery, "North Korea: US Relations, Nuclear Diplomacy, and Internal Situation," Congressional Research Service, 17 Jan 2012, www.crs.gov, Summary, 10.
163. Victor Cha, "Complex Patchworks: U.S. Alliances as Part of Asia's Regional Architecture," *Asia Policy* 11 (Jan 2011), 29.
164. Licklider, *New Armies from Old*, 266.
165. Fuqua, *Korean Unification*, 126.

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

Seoul's Geopolitical Code on Quad

Imperative or Elective?

DR. JAGANNATH PANDA

Abstract

Under the new government helmed by President Yoon Suk-yeol, South Korea (ROK) has displayed a clear tilt toward and a more open embrace of the Indo-Pacific concept. Interestingly, Yoon has also expressed the need for a review of South Korea's ties with China, strengthening the United States–South Korea alliance, and an interest in participating in the Quad forum. This article looks to explore such goals and understand the political and strategic imperatives of a Quad plus South Korea framework. The article outlines the transition in South Korea's foreign policy toward the Indo-Pacific under Moon Jae-in and Yoon. It analyses South Korea's bilateral connections with the four Quad powers—India, Japan, the United States and Australia—to draw conclusions as to what capacity Quad–ROK cooperation can take a real shape—particularly considering the disconnect between their priorities vis-à-vis China and North Korea. Additionally, it examines the scope for South Korea's greater involvement in the other Indo-Pacific-oriented initiatives (like Build Back Better World, Democracy 10, and Global Gateway) and regional organizations like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Globally, states are looking for renewed alignments and realignments as the war in Ukraine rages on and as the debate on autocracies versus democracies intensifies. One of the most important voices has been that of US President Joe Biden: “In the battle between democracy and autocracy, democracies are rising to the moment, and the world is clearly choosing the side of peace and security.”¹

Nowhere in the Indo-Pacific is this choice more relevant—and more evident—than in the Republic of Korea (ROK; South Korea), which not only evolved from the throes of authoritarianism to a well-rounded democracy but also faces, in the

Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK; North Korea,) a neighbor that is still caught in the past: a totalitarian legacy that has deepened repression and continues to violate multiple United Nations (UN) resolutions.² At the same time, the ROK is faced with its other neighbor, China, whose rise has swiftly gone from being peaceful to being contentious and conflict ridden. China's rise as an economically and militarily powerful major power, as well as its ongoing (and rather intense) rivalry with the United States, has had unprecedented and long-term implications on not just the ROK's economy but also Seoul's foreign policy, which was stuck in an unending loop of balancing and hedging. This has resulted in a burgeoning power dwarfed by its own compulsions.

Against this scenario, the recent embrace of the Indo-Pacific construct by the new ROK government under President Yoon Suk-yeol has elicited several speculations and questions. Korea and Indo-Pacific watchers across the world have raised debates about the potential geostrategic and geopolitical trajectory of this yet-to-be released vision for the ROK's unfulfilled ambitions as an Asian powerhouse. Also brought to the forefront are concerns for regional and global security implications of Seoul's tilt toward the Indo-Pacific. Some of the foremost debates center on the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad, comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the United States), the mainstay of the Indo-Pacific—and by extension, Asian—security architecture today. In particular, the new South Korean government's embrace of the Indo-Pacific, and explicit interest in the Quad, has raised the following questions:

- What are South Korea's underlying reasons for seeking a role within the Quad? What is the nature of its bilateral ties with the four Quad member states? Looking at this, does South Korea merit inclusion into this much-touted forum?
- What are the potential means of Seoul's participation: as a full partner or through a quasi-association with the Quad Plus or working groups?
- What is the nature of the ROK's engagement (existing or potential) with other global multilateral (and minilateral) initiatives aimed at the region? This includes forums and frameworks such as the Build Back Better World (B3W), Democracy 10 (D10), Global Gateway, Five Eyes (FVEY), Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI), and the latest US-initiated Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), as well as regional groupings like the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)-centered Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP).

This article attempts to answer such questions by first outlining South Korea's foreign policy transition in its long-awaited recognition of the existing liberal, universal values-based Indo-Pacific architecture—during the Moon Jae-in era (from ambiguous to tacit approval) and at the outset of Yoon's presidential tenure (ardent, unequivocal support). It explores Yoon's rhetoric and examines what the ROK's involvement in the Quad format would mean for his broader regional policy. Next, it attempts to analyze how far the bilateral connect between the ROK and the individual Quad states will propel its inclusion in the Quad format, and in what capacity is Quad–ROK cooperation likely to be realized while also examining Quad's North Korea focus. Finally, it scans the potential scope of the underutilized South Korean middle-power diplomacy in other Indo-Pacific-oriented initiatives (like B3W, D10, and Global Gateway) and regional organizations like ASEAN.

From Moon to Yoon: The Elusive Quest for Strategic Autonomy

The rising US–China battle for global hegemony that started escalating during the Donald Trump era spelled trouble for most middle-power economies, and South Korea was no exception. Faced with a choice between the devil and the deep blue sea, the ROK had to contend with maintaining a delicate balance with its treaty ally and main security guarantor, the United States, and its biggest trading partner (accounting for about 25 percent of ROK exports in 2019 and 2021) and crucial North–South dialogue partner, China.³

One of the hardest lessons and points of inflection for the ROK was China's punitive economic retaliation to the deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system in 2017, during the Park Geun-hye era, months before Moon assumed office.⁴ Although Moon resolved the issued by publicly accepting what are called the three “no's”—no additional THAAD deployments, no participation in US-led strategic missile defense system, and no creation of an ROK–US–Japan security trilateral.⁵ This was not only a blow to the strategic autonomy of the nation but also, in retrospect, a successful psychological manipulation attempt by China that thwarted any potential Indo-Pacific maneuvers by Moon in the near future. Thus, the delay in implementing overt and drastic foreign policy changes, which would probably have catapulted the already established economic powerhouse and a middle-power approach with considerable resources toward the Indo-Pacific, should be seen within the baggage of this context.

From 2018 onward, the continuously intensifying US–China trade war tested the Moon presidency (2017–2022) to the fullest.⁶ Although the main impetus of Moon's foreign policy was the North–South détente, there were definite strides made toward achieving greater strategic autonomy objectives within the con-

straints of the great-power balancing act. Moreover, South Korea's quest for strategic autonomy in its decision making was also aimed at deepening relationships beyond the ROK's immediate and highly tense neighborhood of Northeast Asia. A majority of South Korea's foreign policy was understandably focused on its alliance with the United States, the China–North Korea partnership, and persisting tensions with Japan;⁷ however, Moon sought to ensure that these factors did not limit Seoul's strategic autonomy. One initiative in this direction, launched in 2017, was the New Southern Policy (NSP), a landmark foreign policy initiative—unveiled at the height of the THAAD economic fallout—that aimed at trade diversification through elevated ties with Southeast Asian nations and India to the level maintained with China, Japan, Russia, and the United States, which have traditionally ranked foremost in South Korea's foreign policy.⁸

Nonetheless, even as the NSP (Plus) partially succeeded in creating a strategic space for the ROK in the regional politics, its foundational limitation not to go beyond nontraditional security agenda prevented the ROK from realizing its full strength as a middle power. Toward the latter half of his term, Moon did soften his stance on the Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) vision that was being propelled by all major stakeholders, namely the Quad states, European countries, and ASEAN. The NSP not only provided “quiet diplomatic support” to the FOIP but even publicly acknowledged an on-paper “cooperation” (via the 3Ps of prosperity, peace, and people) in the joint factsheet in 2019, which was strengthened further two years later following the ascension of the Biden administration when the US and ROK agreed to “align” the two visions.⁹

Already in 2020, COVID-19 had allowed the ROK's assimilation with the Indo-Pacific framework through the Quad, when South Korea (along with Indonesia, New Zealand, and Vietnam)—unofficially dubbed the “Quad Plus”—participated in meetings to bolster global efforts to stem the pandemic.¹⁰ However, even as the efforts pushed forward the idea of a possible extension of the Quad, it largely remained limited to vaccine and public health-related meetings, rather than a strategic or security-focused dialogue.¹¹

Yoon's election as president has hastened this Indo-Pacific convergence, which was until recently emerging under a gradual shift. Since his candidacy, Yoon has been categorical in his stance not only in favor of strengthening the US–South Korea alliance that was “forged in blood” but also pushing for the country's greater involvement in multilateral and minilateral mechanisms such as the Quad.¹² Moreover, this hardline stance—reflected in his platform of adopting a tough, non-negotiable military and dialogue stance on traditional “enemy” North Korea's denuclearization, as well as a review of China ties—was translated into action by Yoon's embracing of the US-led FOIP order soon after his inauguration; this

served to indicate how Yoon's election rhetoric will bring about a swift change in the ROK's foreign policy.¹³

Naturally, Yoon's Quad overtures have also been in step with his administration's new alignment with the United States, as highlighted by the latest joint statement (released exactly a year after the Moon–Biden summit in 2021)¹⁴ and Biden's 2022 visit to the ROK coinciding with the Quad summit in Japan. Although Yoon has been accused of snubbing US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during her visit to the region, Pelosi's visit brought to the forefront the sensitive Taiwan question and Seoul was forced to prioritize the national interest and take a more cautious approach. Nevertheless, Pelosi met with her South Korean counterpart and took a phone call with the President Yoon.¹⁵ Moreover, the fact that a majority of South Koreans (60.3 percent) found the action to be 'inappropriate' only shows the public support for the US.¹⁶ That the ROK was immediately, entirely, and enthusiastically on board with the newly minted IPEF (a US-led effort) before its launch and President Biden was encouraging of South Korea's new "Indo-Pacific initiative" reflected the urgency of Yoon's "global pivotal state" vision.¹⁷ This vision essentially entails South Korea repositioning itself as a *global pivotal nation*, which empowers it to "offer its intellectual leadership toward advancing global discussions in line with shared democratic principles and universal values."¹⁸ This goal requires a comprehensive engagement in the international arena beyond the half-hearted middle-power diplomacy the ROK has been employing—a contrasting case study is Japan's recent diplomatic efforts and its growing perception as an Indo-Pacific anchor state.

In this context, the notion of making "Quad Plus" a reality has gained significant traction again, with the possibility of a rotational membership allowing room for democratic members like the European Union (EU), Vietnam, and South Korea, which would be a boon for the ROK.¹⁹ South Korean participation would likely see more cooperation in initiatives like sustainable supply chains, 5G, development assistance, and global health, presumably through working groups initially. Herein, the SCRI of India–Australia–Japan may also find a key partner in Seoul.

Notably, it appears that Yoon's focus is on joining the core Quad—beyond Quad Plus—to engage in more direct security-based collaborations.²⁰ But, the question remains, is it an achievable goal in the near future?

Seoul: Destabilizing the Imperfect Quad Geometry?

In the aftermath of Yoon's inauguration and his administration's fast reversal of Moon's cautious stance to the US-led FOIP—by not only strengthening the deterrence measures against the DPRK but also seemingly disregarding the China

factor by siding with the US through the IPEF and unambiguous Quad desire—Quad skeptics have begun another round of speculations about the split in the grouping. Since the Russian invasion of Ukraine and India's decision (the so-called strategic silence) to back neither the UN resolutions nor the US-led sanctions against Moscow, the differences among the Quad states have taken on a life of their own.²¹ Although some contended that the split would be definitive, the two Quad summits in 2022 laid such rumors to rest. The ambitious agenda—including unveiling of new initiatives—underscored the commitment of the members to a united Quad, certainly in its home sphere of the Indo-Pacific.²² However, the recent diplomatic spat between the United States and India about the latter's questionable domestic stance on human rights, liberalism, and pluralism and India's equally vociferous response have not only added fuel to the existing divergence due to the Ukraine war but also rehashed the debate around the Quad, this time showcasing South Korea as an “alternative to India.”²³

Undoubtedly, the Seoul's eagerness to expand the ROK's regional outreach amid a new—albeit emerging—diplomatic clarity, not to mention its economic and military strengths as a substantial (however underutilized) middle power, bolsters South Korea's ambitions for being involved in the Quad. However, replacing India, an already established Indo-Pacific state, as a member is a far-fetched notion, not based on the ground reality. The Quad's status as an Indo-Pacific group is reinforced by New Delhi's inclusion, considering that India is the only Indian Ocean power among the four states. Replacing India with South Korea, another Pacific power, is hence not an option if the Quad wants to sustain its Indo-Pacific character. Moreover, at present, Seoul's Indo-Pacific tilt is just that—an explicit but informal inclination toward the concept. As of yet, Yoon is still navigating the early days of his leadership; he has not announced an Indo-Pacific vision for the ROK, and his policy on China and Japan remains similarly unspecific. In other words, as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific, South Korea needs greater strategic clarity and more clearly expressed positions on critical issues like the South China Sea, China in the Indian Ocean, and Taiwan.

With China, the Yoon administration's intent is to develop “qualitative and quantitative economic cooperation” without foregoing “mutual respect,” a reference to the coercion suffered by the ROK following the 2017 THAAD fiasco.²⁴ However, amid increasing Chinese fears of Quad becoming an “Asian NATO,” the ROK's deeper involvement with the grouping will be seen as a betrayal of the “hard-earned normalized relations.”²⁵ With regard to Japan, although normalization of relations has been the buzz phrase, no concrete plans have yet been revealed, apart from an agreement to enhance cooperation through the Japan–ROK–US trilateral in the May summit with Biden;²⁶ going by history, mere

rhetoric will hardly suffice in bridging the gap between both countries that has persisted since Japan's twentieth-century colonization of the Koreans.²⁷ Regarding China and Japan, there remains a lack of consensus within Seoul—and the mainstream political parties—on the direction the country should take. This extends to a lack of a consensual foreign policy approach vis-à-vis the Indo-Pacific, even though Yoon's victory suggests that Seoul is looking to embrace the Indo-Pacific undercurrents.

In this situation, the inclusion of the ROK into the core Quad unit seems unlikely. Notably, Washington has also denied any expansion to include South Korea.²⁸ However, there is still ample scope for coordination through working groups, bilaterals with Quad states, minilaterals (including ASEAN as well), and obviously the Quad Plus format, which should see a more regular recurrence. If the recent Biden visit to East Asia was any indication, Yoon is likely to pursue stronger military, technological, and economic security relations with the other Quad powers, too. This comes despite such measures inducing a strain in ties with China, which the ROK already fears is siding with the DPRK—the growing domestic antagonism toward China is an added incentive.²⁹

Bilateral Bonhomie + Scope of Cooperation

The ROK has pursued an enhanced relationship with Australia, India, and the United States (excepting Japan, where relations during the Moon era saw a down-right slump) underpinned by shared values of democracy and universal human rights, as well as commitment to a rules-based regional and global order and to ASEAN centrality. These nations' respective approaches to the Indo-Pacific and the ROK's NSP Plus are aligned on paper, with initiatives covering strategic, security, economic, and technological areas, among others. On North Korea, the Quad has a unanimous stand: complete, verifiable, and irreversible denuclearization as per the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolutions.³⁰

Australia

Australia, the ROK's comprehensive strategic partner, is the only country (other than the United States) that holds a 2+2 ministerial meeting with South Korea; and their wide-ranging cooperation includes post-pandemic economic recovery, military training and exercises, defense science and technology, defense logistics and support, climate change, and enhancing the already robust trade relationship.³¹ Seoul and Canberra also have a memorandum of understanding on cyber and critical technology cooperation, an area where the ROK can contribute in the Quad.³²

Interestingly, the ROK's deteriorating relations with Japan were one of the reasons for Seoul's enhanced ties with Australia.³³ To achieve its greater goals in the Indo-Pacific (in turn the Quad), South Korea should allow Australia and India, which have burgeoning relations with Japan, to act as facilitators.³⁴ South Korea must make concerted efforts to woo Australia not just because of the latter's economic and geostrategic vitality in the region (CPTPP, RCEP, IPEF, Quad, and AUKUS member) but also because of its trajectory as a fellow middle power that enacted the hedging strategy and has borne the brunt of Chinese economic coercion, akin to the ROK, prior to its rather defiant allegiance with the United States.³⁵

India

Similarly, the ROK and India have a "future-oriented" special strategic partnership, where the economic aspect has benefited tremendously through the NSP (bilateral trade reached an all-time high of USD 23.7 billion in 2021). However, the strategic aspects, including the regional cooperation, did not receive due attention.³⁶ Despite New Delhi and Seoul exploring cooperation in defense technology, as well as signing a logistics support agreement, the disparity in intent has slowed the process.³⁷

With Yoon's embrace of the Indo-Pacific security architecture, India will not only be a significant strategic partner bilaterally but also via trilaterals, say, with ASEAN states, Australia, and Japan post normalization. India could be a credible partner in not only enhancing regional outreach and facilitating connection with Japan but also to garner support in multilateral bodies like the Quad and the UN to build the ROK's middle-power strength.

Japan

With Japan, as mentioned earlier, bilateral relations are frosty. In the security arena, Seoul and Tokyo share sensitive information through the General Security of Military Information Agreement, which though not scrapped, is under strain; and in the precarious North Korean scenario at present, the situation is not sound for the ROK or Japan.³⁸ Considering the tensions between the two countries, it is worth noting that Japan might not welcome Seoul's formal involvement as an extended Quad member. Both countries continue to fiercely compete in the East Asian and Southeast Asian regions; however, Tokyo's championing of a free and open Indo-Pacific has allowed Japan to strengthen its political, economic, and security ties with regional partners. Quite ironically, in fact, some have found that Seoul's strong desire to avoid antagonizing or directly challenging China—an

attitude shared by several middle-power actors in the region, including ASEAN—has detracted from the ROK's attractiveness as a preferred strategic partner in the region.³⁹ Now, should South Korea become a member of the Quad, Tokyo could fear the threat of greater competition with a formidable power within its strategic space, which would weaken Japan's growing reputation as not only a developmental but also a security partner. In other words, the ROK's inclusion may only serve to add greater friction to the current security dilemma between Tokyo and Seoul, which would detract from the Quad's efficacy and hinder the rapid progress the bloc has achieved in recent years.

However, there is hope: the Japan–ROK–US trilateral has begun its new course with the ministerial dialogue in June 2022,⁴⁰ where a range of topics including trilateral security cooperation were discussed. Moreover, both Japan and the ROK attended the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit as invited observers.⁴¹ The Summit focused on the Ukraine crisis, and as Japan and the ROK both declared their stand against Russian aggression in the strongest possible terms, this meeting was expected to thaw in the Japan–ROK ties to some extent. However, to the contrary, the NATO Summit only demonstrated that Japan–ROK tensions are deep-seated and unlikely to be put to rest anytime soon.⁴² Until the last minute, the South Korean government maintained that Yoon was unlikely to speak to Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida. Although Yoon emphasizes the importance of enhanced cooperation with Japan, the threat to abandon the meeting was a stark reminder of Japan–ROK frictions. Both leaders met in person (although a bilateral meeting failed to materialize) only at the urging of the Biden administration. The issues between the two states are long-standing ones with a lot at stake domestically; so, any resolution would not be a hasty affair—even so, a temporary thaw would prove beneficial for the ROK in its Quad quest.

United States

The US–ROK alliance is the most crucial for Seoul's involvement in the Quad. Their strengthening of ties—with Washington giving extended deterrence and the ROK reciprocating by joining the IPEF, agreeing to release its own Indo-Pacific vision, coordinating a united stance on Ukraine, and reaching out to Japan—has added immensely to the regional security architecture.⁴³

Today, the two are pushing toward an economic security- and technology-driven global comprehensive alliance, given that the United States is the ROK's second-largest trade partner (sixth-largest vice versa), and Korean industrial giants like Samsung and Hyundai are technology powerhouses with strong footprints in the semiconductor and electric vehicles markets (both big investors in

the United States).⁴⁴ They will also engage at the expert working level to strengthen supply chain early warning systems to prevent disruptions.

Thus, the ROK's moving beyond its North Korea preoccupation, even amid escalating tensions between the two states, shows Seoul's intent to follow through on the global pivotal state aspirations. On North Korea, Washington and Seoul have agreed to "close the loopholes in the implementation of existing sanctions" and to further tighten the sanctions regime in anticipation of a new nuclear test by the DPRK soon.⁴⁵ As North Korea declared itself a nuclear state with a first-use policy if threatened—thus drawing an irretrievable line and closing the door to any negotiations⁴⁶—US, Japan and the ROK have escalated their collaboration and prepared for all contingencies to "protect allies in the region" in face of the North Korean nuclear threat.⁴⁷ Here too, Seoul's cooperation with Japan (despite their tensions) and focus on regional security stemming from the North Korean threat shows its willingness to emerge as a more proactive regional power.

Quadrilateral Engagement

Considering the aforementioned bilateral relations, the ROK's Quad involvement will certainly mirror its US ties, or at least be an integral component of the US-led security architecture. Assertions of the nature of the alliance as global (along with urgent facilitation of relations with Japan) highlight that the United States will carve out a space for the ROK in its Indo-Pacific security structure, especially in the Quad. However, the possibility of the ROK joining at present as a full member is negligible for a variety of aforementioned reasons (from complexities within the Quad to unsteady relations with Japan). In fact, arguably, South Korea's engagement with the Indo-Pacific will bear more fruition if conducted via forums such as the Quad Plus rather than the Quad dialogue proper. Yet, the Quad's increased ambit that includes multiple critical yet nontraditional security areas like supply chains, semiconductors, and emerging technologies, as well as its launch of new initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) and Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package (Q-CHAMP), provide enough range for maneuver.⁴⁸

On the security front, the ROK has already been engaging with the Quad states in maritime exercises like the Indian-led Milan and Rim of the Pacific (RIMPAC; the ROK's largest fleet exercise to date), which will allow greater interoperability and ensure military readiness in times of conflict.⁴⁹ Other such joint exercises could be organized, along with enhanced security cooperation among the states, bilaterally and trilaterally.⁵⁰

Regarding digital infrastructure, supply chains, 5G, and semiconductors, deep cooperation with South Korea in investment security, or cyber security, or data

security are required to cover the vulnerabilities.⁵¹ In 2021, the ROK, along with the EU and 15 like-minded countries, was part of the Biden-hosted Summit on Global Supply Chain Resilience.⁵² These track 1.5 dialogues on critical and emerging technologies could be explored to trigger better alignment, investment, and information sharing. Certainly, the ROK–Quad cooperation through the IPEF (14 countries from Northeast, Southeast, and South Asia; Oceania; and the Pacific)⁵³ with a wide ambit covering trade (including digital), supply chains, clean energy, anticorruption, and tax would be critical for current challenges such as ensuring greater market access and creating affordable, secure digital infrastructure.⁵⁴

The North Korea Facet

Notably, another gap between the Quad and South Korea, which complicates Seoul's inclusion in the Quad, pertains to North Korea. The Quad's primary focus has, until now, remained on China. Although North Korea has been mentioned in numerous Quad joint statements, indicating that it is a point of discussion at various levels of Quad meets, China ranks as a much more urgent threat for all four Quad states individually. Even though it has not yet been explicitly named in any of the Quad statements, the "China challenge" remains an undeniably important driver for the Quad.

On the other hand, for South Korea and the Yoon administration, the DPRK continues to be an equal, if not more critical threat. The difference is in the scope and perception of the two threats: while China is a global concern, North Korea is a local (and therefore more immediate) challenge. Yoon has eschewed Moon's more conciliatory approach in favor of a more hawkish stand on Pyongyang, while looking to maintain inter-Korean dialogue and humanitarian aid to North Korea.⁵⁵ Denuclearization remains the need of the hour for Yoon, which would ideally be followed with a push for an end-of-the-war declaration. Nonetheless, expanding defense and deterrence in line with the ROK–US alliance remains important, with a focus on offensive strike capabilities and enhanced missile defenses amid North Korea's ever-increasing missile testing.⁵⁶

Here, Yoon's rationale for the Quad grows clearer. Even though the grouping is focused on China and the Indo-Pacific, participation in the same could allow Seoul greater room to build "mutual respect" with Beijing. China's complete opposition to THAAD deployment in South Korea has gravely limited Seoul's deterrence and security abilities.⁵⁷ Under the aegis of the Quad—along with the ROK's growing intel-based engagements with NATO and the United States—South Korea can find broader scope to procure such defense systems, unlike in 2017, when Seoul had to sign military constraints to protect its economy.⁵⁸ South

Korea now stands better placed to build ties without dire economic consequences following the gradual decoupling from the Chinese economy.⁵⁹

Notably, at the recent Quad summits, members have vowed to focus on the denuclearization of North Korea—albeit not the entire peninsula.⁶⁰ In 2022 the representatives condemned North Korean missile launches and coercive diplomacy of states, showing that along with China, the topic of North Korea is slowly but surely finding its way actively into the Quad's agenda.⁶¹ The Quad nations all have concerns about North Korea's destabilizing impact in the Indo-Pacific, but still the brunt of the nuclear provocations currently falls on South Korea. Hence, South Korea's closer coordination with the grouping (as well as its individual members) and (limited) access into its mechanism would certainly guarantee a deeper Korean peninsular focus, with the grouping also carrying some of this burden—a “win-win cooperation.”⁶²

However, it should be noted that not all Quad member states may necessarily want to refocus or expand the focus of the Quad framework. While North Korea is a concern for the United States, for Australia and India, it is a more distant issue. New Delhi faces China directly at its border, and for Canberra, China's economic retaliation and influence operations have threatened to undermine Australia's democracy and sovereignty. Thus, both would like to see China as the prime focus of the Quad grouping. While Japan too has a direct stake in the challenge posed by North Korea in East Asia and would not be entirely opposed to expanding the Quad's scope to include (and perhaps even emphasize) North Korea, China remains a more urgent and complex problem for Tokyo. At the least, all four countries will be concerned that any expansion of the Quad's focus could negatively affect their aim to become an impactful, action-oriented forum. In this context, South Korea's involvement with the Quad would be more effective via a Quad Plus forum, whereby Seoul can gain the support of the Quad nations vis-à-vis DPRK while enabling the Quad to sustain its core China focus. Although South Korea's inclusion might strengthen the Quad's umbrella, it would take time and effort to build the level of convergence of interests and values that the Quad states presently enjoy.

Networks Beyond the Quad?

Despite its emergence as the eleventh-largest economy in the world, a global innovative leader in information and communication technologies, a strong and vibrant democracy, and an extremely capable military power, South Korea has not exerted its full middle-power influence in the regional security architecture.⁶³ As such, there are multiple avenues of cooperation where Seoul's interests align with like-minded global partners: semiconductors, supply chains, maritime security,

economic security, emerging technologies, digital trade, defense, secure sea lines of communication, capacity building, and so forth. Beyond the Quad, South Korea would be looking to rebuild its engagement in other existing international forums aimed at the Indo-Pacific, as Seoul unveils its ambitions to find a greater role in the geostrategic and geopolitical architecture of the Indo-Pacific.

Already South Korea has officially applied, despite opposition from the agriculture and fisheries sector, to join the CPTPP, a free trade agreement (FTA) that does not include either the United States or China.⁶⁴ The ROK would be looking to join the CPTPP before China, as that would provide Seoul negotiating leverage; South Korea's resolve to apply to the pact was also solidified only after China and Taiwan joined the fray.⁶⁵ Another important pact is the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA), which sidesteps conventional FTA agenda in favor of the digital trade aspect covering identities, e-payments, data protection, and cross-border data flows.⁶⁶ South Korea, having completed the domestic requirements, has officially started negotiations with DEPA members and is awaiting approval by their joint committee.⁶⁷ The CPTPP and DEPA together with the IPEF, which is still in the developing stages, and the RCEP, which includes all three major Northeast Asian states and could revive the long-pending China–Japan–ROK FTA, could provide the Yoon government the impetus to build a pivotal role in creating fertile (inclusive, comprehensive, and transparent) trade conditions for the Indo-Pacific region.⁶⁸

As a long-standing member of the Group of Twenty (G20), the “premier body for global economic coordination”—but one that has not filled its expectations either—South Korea should find ways to coalesce with other member nations (including several Indo-Pacific states) to ensure that the G20 finds greater resonance as the world faces unprecedented nontraditional security challenges. The G20 seems an apt forum for such issues.⁶⁹

In 2020 and 2021, the ROK was invited as a G7 plus member, an important moment for the country's foreign policy. The guest role, however, was not fully exploited, as the ROK did not come on board the joint statement—in view of the balancing act by Moon—that expressed concerns about the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait but did not name China, and stuck to non-offensive (important but ultimately inconsequential to global ambitions) topics on post-pandemic recovery, vaccines, and value of open societies.⁷⁰ There is enough scope in participating in the G7's quality infrastructure initiative B3W, which is seen as a rival endeavor to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) aimed at narrowing the “\$40+ trillion infrastructure need in the developing world,” and complements the Quad's extended goals as well.⁷¹

In the technology arena, the Future Tech Forum, an initiative rolled out during the G7's 2021 United Kingdom presidency, could help further South Korea's tech prowess by coalescing like-minded partners in building digital regulatory framework and enhancing emerging technology ecosystems.⁷² Another initiative with potential for cooperation on cost-effective high-tech 5G networks and supply chains to counter Chinese developments was the Boris Johnson-promulgated Democracy 10 (D10), the group of G7 plus countries included in the Carbis Bay summit in 2021 (namely Australia, India, and the ROK), which was aimed to give an Asia-Pacific impetus to the West-heavy forum.⁷³ The D10 construct is not a new one, dating to a US Department of State initiative launched in 2008, which aimed for a strategic coalition of democracies across the Atlantic and Pacific to advance Washington's rules-based order.⁷⁴ However, the status of the D10 as of 2022 is unknown; in any case, Japan had reservations against including South Korea, which is an area that the new ROK government is looking to overcome by normalizing relations so that such opposition is a thing of the past.⁷⁵ For example, if the ROK intends to meaningfully participate in global forums like the Blue Dot Network (BDN)⁷⁶ and SCRI, Seoul will need Tokyo's support.

In the regional domain, the connection with ASEAN, which is already strong thanks to the NSP, needs to be reinvigorated by analyzing and covering NSP's limitations.⁷⁷ Apart from working on bilaterals with the ASEAN states, building trilaterals such as with India and Japan is important to expanding the ROK's outreach and to moving beyond trade and investment goals. Innovative technology, sustainable infrastructure, and maritime security are potential areas of synergy. The US-ROK statement has already made all the correct references to increasing ASEAN cooperation,⁷⁸ but the devil lies in the details.

Some initiatives like the defense pact AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States)⁷⁹ and the intelligence-sharing Anglosphere network FVEY are significant military deterrents, but the expansion of these pacts is more a matter of speculation at present, and directly joining these blocs may invite trouble from China, which at the moment is neither feasible nor advisable for Yoon. South Korea could, however, build strong links with the individual states on areas of complementary interests such as security and defense, technology transfers, and supply chains via its Quad involvement.⁸⁰

Among the European initiatives to the Indo-Pacific, there is immense potential for collaboration with the recently launched Global Gateway and Strategic Compass, which are aiming at a comprehensive, integrated policy for the Indo-Pacific. South Korea is already a NATO partner state, and the ROK's National Intelligence Service (NIS) is the first Asian spy agency to join NATO's Cyber Defense Group, which has already drawn a tense reaction in China: a former edi-

tor of the Chinese state-owned *Global Times* warned the ROK that such “hostile” steps could lead to a “Ukraine.”⁸¹ Notwithstanding such a chilling and an incommensurate reaction, at the NATO summit in June, Yoon focused on strengthening ties with the NATO members. In total, Yoon participated in 16 diplomatic events along the sidelines of the NATO Summit, including 10 bilateral meetings, with other attending Asia-Pacific states to discuss security issues in the region.⁸² Through such meetings, Yoon also promoted South Korean defense industry, nuclear energy, and advanced technologies. Overall, Yoon’s actions at the Summit demonstrated the new South Korean government’s commitment to play a more active and larger role in international (and Indo-Pacific) affairs.

The growing uncertainty about the US–China rivalry amid the escalating situation in Europe has allowed Yoon to strengthen the alliance with the United States. However, as the Washington and Beijing are both mediation partners in resolving the ROK’s most pressing threat, North Korea, Yoon will be best served by diversifying Seoul’s outreach to multiple engagements with other stakeholders, including the Quad members, ASEAN states, and European powers. Yoon has recognized that to rebuild focus on the Korean peninsula, South Korea must emerge as a more regional player. China–North Korea ties have continued to grow, so much so that after the latest intercontinental ballistic missile tests in May, Beijing was responsible (along with Moscow) for vetoing new UN sanctions against the DPRK, not only highlighting the wide-open split in the UNSC but also confirming the ROK’s fears vis-à-vis China and justifying Seoul’s renewed US alignment.⁸³

Thus, Seoul must not only actively strengthen the ROK–US alliance (which has received a big boost already) but also pursue an integrated policy that includes consolidating efforts in the economic sphere (like applying to the CPTPP and DEPA, as well as joining IPEF) with deeper multiple defense and security engagements toward realizing Yoon’s local and global ambitions. ★

Dr. Jagannath Panda

Dr. Panda is the head of the Stockholm Centre for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) at the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), Sweden. He is also the director for Europe-Asia Research Cooperation at the Yokosuka Council on Asia-Pacific Studies (YCAPS) in Japan. Additionally, Dr. Panda is a senior fellow at The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS), The Netherlands.

He is also the series editor for Routledge Studies on Think Asia. Dr. Panda is the author of the book *India-China Relations* (Routledge: 2017) and *China’s Path to Power: Party, Military and the Politics of State Transition* (Pentagon Press: 2010). Dr. Panda’s recent edited works are: *Chinese Politics and Foreign Policy under Xi Jinping* (co-edited), *Quad Plus and Indo-Pacific* (Routledge: 2021); *Scaling India-Japan Cooperation in Indo-Pacific and Beyond 2025* (KW Publishing Ltd. 2019), and *The Korean Peninsula and Indo-Pacific Power Politics: Status Security at Stake* (Routledge, 2020); and co-editor of *The Future of Korean Peninsula: Korea 2032 and Beyond* (Routledge, 2021).

Notes

1. The White House, "Remarks of President Joe Biden—State of the Union Address As Prepared for Delivery," 1 March 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
2. Bryce Wakefield and Robert M. Hathaway, "The Other R.O.K.: Memories of Authoritarianism in Democratic South Korea," Wilson Center, 11 October 2011, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/>; United Nations (UN), "Security Council Extends Mandate of Expert Panel Overseeing Sanctions against Democratic People's Republic of Korea Until 30 April 2023," 25 March 2022, <https://www.un.org/>; and Human Rights Watch, "North Korea: Events of 2020," *World Report 2021*, <https://www.hrw.org/>.
3. Victor Cha, "Collateral Damage: What U.S.-China Competition Means for Korea," Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS), 10 October 2019, <https://www.csis.org/>; and Council on Foreign Relations (CFR), "U.S. Relations With China: 1949–2022," <https://www.cfr.org/>.
4. Daekwon Son and Andray Abrahamian, "South Korea's search for autonomy," *The Interpreter*, 15 December 2017, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/>.
5. Park Byong-su, "South Korea's 'Three No's' Announcement Key to Restoring Relations with China," *Hankyoreh*, 2 November 2017, <http://english.hani.co.kr/>.
6. Chung Min Lee, "South Korea Is Caught Between China and the United States," *Carnegie*, 21 October 2020, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>; and CFR, "U.S. Relations With China: 1949–2022."
7. Kathryn Botto, *South Korea Beyond Northeast Asia: How Seoul Is Deepening Ties With India and ASEAN* (Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2021), <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.
8. Kathryn Botto, "South Korea Beyond Northeast Asia: How Seoul Is Deepening Ties With India and ASEAN," *Carnegie*, 19 October 2021, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.
9. US Mission Korea, "U.S. & ROK Issue a Joint Factsheet on Their Regional Cooperation Efforts," 2 November 2019, <https://kr.usembassy.gov/>; Andrew Yeo, "South Korea and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy," *CSIS*, 20 July 2020, <https://www.csis.org/>; The White House, "U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement," 21 May 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
10. Jeff M. Smith, "How America Is Leading the 'Quad Plus' Group of Seven Countries in Fighting the Coronavirus," *National Interest*, 30 March 2020, <https://nationalinterest.org/>.
11. Jagannath P. Panda and Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell, eds., *Quad Plus and Indo-Pacific: The Changing Profile of International Relations* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2021).
12. Kwon Hyuk-chul, "Yoon's Foreign Policy Agenda Prioritizes Ties with US, Sows Seeds of Conflict with N. Korea, China," *Hankyoreh*, <https://english.hani.co.kr/>.
13. Kwon Hyuk-chul, "Yoon's Foreign Policy Agenda Prioritizes Ties."
14. The White House, "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement," 21 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>. Also see The White House, "Remarks by President Biden and President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea in Joint Press Conference," 21 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
15. Justin McCurry, "South Korean president accused of avoiding Nancy Pelosi in bid to placate China," *The Guardian*, 4 August 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.
16. Kim Arin, "Was Pelosi 'snubbed' in South Korea?," *Korea Herald*, 8 August 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/>.

17. The White House, "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement."
18. Song Kyung-jin, "Yoon-Biden summit, toward Korea becoming global pivotal state," *Korea Times*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
19. Jagannath Panda, "Making 'Quad Plus' a Reality," *The Diplomat*, 13 January 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/>.
20. "Yoon Says Will 'Positively Review Joining' Quad If Invited: Report," *Yonhap*, 26 April 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/>.
21. Jagannath Panda, "Quad: Divided over Ukraine, United in the Indo-Pacific?" *National Interest*, 18 March 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/>.
22. Sheila A. Smith, "The Quad Is Getting More Ambitious in the Indo-Pacific," *CFR*, 27 May 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/>; and Panda, "Quad."
23. Richard Javad Heydarian, "South Korea Emerges as Quad Alternative to India," *Asia Times*, 26 April 2022, <https://asiatimes.com/>; and "After Blinken's Remarks on India's Religious Freedom, MEA Slams US 'Votebank Politics'," *The Wire*, 3 June 2022, <https://thewire.in/>.
24. Josh Smith, "South Korea's Yoon Uses Biden Summit as Springboard for Global Agenda as China Looms," *Reuters*, 23 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
25. Cheng Xiaohe, "S. Korea Should Be Wary of Becoming Another Quad Chess Piece," *Global Times*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/>; and Zhang Jiadong, "QUAD desires 'Asian NATO,' But China Has Smarter Solutions," *Global Times*, 11 October 2020, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/>.
26. The White House, "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement."
27. Jagannath Panda, "The Biden-Yoon Summit: Where Does Japan Figure?" *Japan Forum for Strategic Studies*, 31 May 2022, <http://www.jfss.gr.jp/>.
28. Kang Seung-woo, "Why Doesn't US Want to Add South Korea to Quad?" *Korea Times*, 26 May 2022, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
29. William Gallo, "In South Korea, Antagonism Toward China Is Growing," *VOA*, 20 April 2021, <https://www.voanews.com/>.
30. The White House, "Quad Joint Leaders' Statement," 24 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
31. Department of Foreign Affairs & Trade (DFAT), Australia, "Australia-Republic of Korea Comprehensive Strategic Partnership," 13 December 2021, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/>.
32. DFAT, "Joint Statement: Australia-Republic of Korea Foreign and Defence Ministers' 2+2 Meeting 2021," 13 September 2021, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/>.
33. Chris Khatouki, "South Korea's embrace of Australia goes beyond China," *The Interpreter*, 17 January 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/>.
34. Khatouki, "South Korea's Embrace of Australia Goes Beyond China."
35. Wongi Choe, "Australia and Korea: Middle Powers in Uncharted Waters," *Asia Society*, 22 November 2021, <https://asiasociety.org/>.
36. Embassy of India, ROK, "India and Republic of Korea: A Vision for People, Prosperity, Peace and Our Future," 10 July 2018, <https://www.indembassyseoul.gov.in/>; Jagannath P. Panda, "Framing an Indo-Pacific Narrative in India-South Korea Ties," Academic Paper Series, Korea Economic Institute of America (KEIA), 7 January 2020, <https://keia.org/>; and Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), ROK, "Korea-India economic relations (as of 2021)," 16 March 2022, <https://overseas.mofa.go.kr/>.

37. Dipanjan Roy Chaudhary, "India, South Korea Explore Joint Development and Joint Production Initiatives in Defence Sector," *Economic Times*, 3 December 2021, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/>.

38. "Japan Hopeful of Sharing Military Intelligence Again with South Korea," *Kyodo News*, 14 June 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/>.

39. Adam Gadd, "Why South Korea Fell Behind Japan in Southeast Asia," *The Diplomat*, 1 December 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

40. Office of the Spokesperson, US Department of State, "Joint Statement on the Republic of Korea-U.S.-Japan Trilateral Vice Foreign Ministerial Meeting," June 8, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/>.

41. Kana Inagaki and Christian Davies, "'Now or Never': Japan and South Korea Seek a Relationship Reset," *Financial Times*, 8 June 2022, <https://www.ft.com/>; and US Department of Defense, "United States-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Ministerial Meeting (TMM) Joint Press Statement," 11 June 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/>.

42. Duncan Barlett, "Japan-South Korea Tensions on Display at NATO Summit," *The Diplomat*, 5 July 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

43. The White House, "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement."

44. US Department of State, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Park Jin at a Joint Press Availability," 13 June 2022, <https://www.state.gov/>.

45. US Department of State, "Secretary Antony J. Blinken and Republic of Korea."

46. Ryan Pickrell, "North Korea's new law lets it strike first with nuclear force if its leadership faces an imminent threat," *Business Insider*, 9 September 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/>.

47. Associated Press, "Japan, US, South Korea Reaffirm Joint Response to North Korea Threat," *VOA*, September 7, 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/a/japan-us-south-korea-reaffirm-joint-response-to-north-korea-threat/6734644.html>.

48. The White House, "Quad Joint Leaders' Statement," 24 May 2022.

49. Song Sang-ho, "S. Korea's Military Team to Leave for Hawaii to Join U.S.-Led RIMPAC Exercise," *Yonhap*, 31 May 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/>; and US Navy Office of Information, "US Forces Participate in Indian Navy-Led Exercise Milan for First Time," 25 February 2022, <https://www.navy.mil/>.

50. Kristi Govella, Garima Mohan, and Bonnie S. Glaser, "Expanding Engagement Among South Korea and the Quad Countries in the Indo-Pacific," *German Marshall Fund*, 6 June 2022, <https://www.gmfus.org/>.

51. "South Korea and the New Geoeconomics of Asia," *Brookings*, 25 May 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.

52. Other countries in the summit were Australia, Canada, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Germany, India, Indonesia, Japan, Mexico, Italy, Netherlands, Singapore, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The White House, "Summit on Global Supply Chain Resilience to Address Near-Term Bottlenecks and Tackle Long-Term Challenges," 31 October 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

53. As of late June 2022. Fiji was the newest country to join, announcing the decision amid the 10-nation trip in the region by Wang Yi, the Chinese foreign minister. "White House welcomes Fiji to its Indo-Pacific economic plan," *Reuters*, 27 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

54. "South Korea and the New Geoeconomics of Asia," *Brookings*.

55. Albert Hong, So Young Kim, and Sangmin Lee, "Yoon's Victory in South Korean Election Signals Hawkish Shift in North Korea Policy," *Radio Free Asia*, 9 March 2022, <https://www.rfa.org/>.
56. Kim Tong-Hyung, "North Korea Test-Fired Ballistic Missile from Submarine, South Korea Says," *News Hour*, 7 May 2022, <https://www.pbs.org/>.
57. Scott Snyder, "China-South Korea Relations Under South Korea's New Yoon Administration: The Challenge Of Defining 'Mutual Respect,'" *Forbes*, 11 May 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/>.
58. David Josef Volodsko, "China Wins Its War Against South Korea's US THAAD Missile Shield—Without Firing a Shot," *South China Morning Post*, 18 November 2017, <https://www.scmp.com/>.
59. Peter S. Kim, "Korea's Decoupling with China," *Korea Times*, 3 April 2022, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
60. Yi Whan-woo, "Quad to Focus on Denuclearization of North Korea, Not Entire Korean Peninsula," *Korea Times*, 14 March 2021, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
61. Rekha Dixit, "Quad Condemns North Korea's Missile Launches, Opposes 'Coercive' Economic Policies," *The Week*, 11 February 2022, <https://www.theweek.in/>; and The White House, "Quad Joint Leaders' Statement," 24 May 2022.
62. Nicholas Hanson, "Why South Korea's Place Is in the Quad," *National Interest*, 3 April 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/>.
63. John Lee, "South Korea's misplaced military inferiority complex," *Asia Times*, 11 August 2021, <https://asiatimes.com/>.
64. The FTA includes 11 Pacific Rim countries. Yonhap, "S. Korea Decides to Join CPTPP Trade Agreement," *Korea Herald*, 15 April 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/>.
65. Bryce Baschuk and Jiyeun Lee, "South Korea 'Seriously' Looking to Join CPTPP Following China Bid," *Bloomberg*, 8 October 2021, <https://www.bloomberg.com/>.
66. The first-of-its-kind FTA was signed in 2020 by Singapore, Chile, and New Zealand, coming into effect in 2022. Ministry of Trade & Industry, Singapore, "Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA)," <https://www.mti.gov.sg/>.
67. Yonhap, "S. Korea Holds Talks on Joining DEPA Pact," *Korea Herald*, <http://www.koreaherald.com/>.
68. Xiang Haoyu, "RCEP Integrates Economies of China, Japan, S. Korea Closer," *Global Times*, 4 January 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/>; and Jeffrey J. Schott, "RCEP is not enough: South Korea also needs to join the CPTPP," Policy Brief 21-17, July 2021, <https://www.piie.com/>.
69. Stewart M. Patrick, "The G20 Was Made for Moments Like This," *CFR*, 25 October 2021, <https://www.cfr.org/>.
70. The White House, "Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué," 13 June 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>; and Ramon Pacheco Pardo, "South Korea's Participation in the G7 Summit," Center for Security, Diplomacy and Strategy, 14 June 2021, <https://brussels-school.be/>.
71. The White House, "Factsheet: President Biden and G7 Leaders Launch Build Back Better World (B3W) Partnership," 12 June 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
72. The White House, "Carbis Bay G7 Summit Communiqué."
73. Mercedes Page, "The D10 Is Dead, Long Live the ... Network of Liberty?," *The Interpreter*, 24 January 2022, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/>.
74. "D-10 Strategy Forum," *Atlantic Council*, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/>.

75. Page, "The D10 Is Dead."

76. The BDN comprises Japan, Australia and the United States and was introduced to promote "quality infrastructure investment that is open and inclusive, transparent, economically viable, Paris Agreement aligned, financially, environmentally and socially sustainable, and compliant with international standards, laws and regulations." Although it is still being worked out, the BDN will act as a certification mechanism that is unbiased and removed from geopolitical considerations. See "Blue Dot Network," US Department of State, accessed June 25, 2022, <https://www.state.gov/>.

77. Botto, "South Korea Beyond Northeast Asia."

78. The White House, "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement."

79. AUKUS was announced on 15 September 2021, as an "enhanced trilateral security partnership" to deepen security and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and meet regional challenges. It encompasses a broad focus on "security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chains," with its first and most prominent initiative being equipping Australia with nuclear-powered submarines—something South Korea has long been interested in. See The White House, "Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS," 15 September 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

80. The White House, "Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS," 15 September, 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

81. Hu Xijin 胡锡进 [@HuXijin_GT], "If South Korea Takes a Path of Turning Hostile Against Its Neighbors, the End of This Path Could Be a Ukraine," *Twitter*, 5 May 2022, 9:25 a.m. <https://twitter.com/>.

82. "Yoon to Attend NATO Summit in Spain on June 29–30," *Yonhap*, 10 June 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/>.

83. Khang Vu, "Why China and North Korea Decided to Renew a 60-Year-Old Treaty," *The Interpreter*, 30 July 2021, <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/>; and "China, Russia Defend N Korea Vetoes at UN General Assembly," *Al Jazeera*, 9 June 2022, <https://www.aljazeera.com/>.

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

Clash or Consensus?

The Conflicting Economic and Security Imperatives of Semiconductor Supply-Chain Collaboration in the Indo-Pacific

JONATHAN CORRADO

Abstract

As a crucial node in technology supply chains, semiconductors are a vital part of the global economy and especially important for the Indo-Pacific region, which is host to the most important chip producers and production networks. The nature of the industry is highly distributed and concentrated. No country is vertically integrated, and, therefore, all rely on supply and cooperation across the region. Recent supply-chain disruptions demonstrate the fragility of the ecosystem. Each government and its private sector must balance the competing imperatives of innovation, cooperation, and resilience and find ways to deal with the Chinese government's efforts to distort the market and steal intellectual property. Beijing's industrial policies aim at acquiring more advanced chip production capabilities, which could enable Beijing to occupy supply-chain chokepoints and utilize this leverage to force trade partners to make political concessions. This article examines these challenges and contends that, despite its complexity and drawbacks, multilateral cooperation involving the private and public sectors of the United States, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the European Union is ultimately the only feasible long-term solution to ensure a robust supply chain, maintain the technological advantage, reduce economic blowback, and limit China's ability to coerce partner countries and distort the global marketplace.

In the beginning of 2021, a global shortage in semiconductors caused supply-chain disruptions for a wide array of products across the world, highlighting the importance and difficulty of maintaining robust supply lines. The global semiconductor industry is projected to reach USD 573 billion in sales in 2022.¹ Chips are the fourth-highest traded product across the world and are not only at

the heart of the modern economy but also central to several frontier technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), quantum computing, and electric vehicles.² The nature of the industry, and the geopolitics that surround it, creates complexities in the effort to shore up the supply chain and maintain continued innovation.

An underestimation of demand was the principal cause of this supply crunch, though the pandemic, natural disasters, shifting trade deals, and slowing economic growth also played roles. Although macroeconomic factors caused the current chip shortage, it is conceivable that an adversary could deliberately restrict access to chokepoints in the chain to exact political concessions. In particular, if China can develop and scale production capabilities to develop monopolies over irreplaceable components, Beijing could intentionally disrupt the civilian and military supply chains of the United States, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and other nations. A National Security Commission on AI report to the Congress said, “If a potential adversary bests the United States in semiconductors over the long term or suddenly cuts off U.S. access to cutting-edge chips entirely, it could gain the upper hand in every domain of warfare.”³ China engages in industrial policies that distort the market and create unfair advantages for its domestic firms and also routinely conducts corporate espionage to steal intellectual property. Despite this, China remains a crucially important player in the industry, meaning that a technological decoupling would have disastrous economic consequences for the United States, South Korea, and the entire Indo-Pacific. To forecast potential solutions, it is important to examine the nature of the industry and then review what has been done thus far.

Supply-chain vulnerability is inherent to the semiconductor industry because of its distributed, interdependent, and concentrated nature. No country is vertically integrated, and, therefore, all rely on supply and cooperation across the region. This global value chain boosts price efficiency and leads to performance improvements. The capital intensity of chip design and production has spurred specialization.⁴ While there are a handful of integrated device manufacturers (such as Intel) that both design and produce chips, many firms specialize in either research and development (R&D) (called *fabless firms*) or manufacturing (called *foundries*). There are more than 50 points in the supply chain where a single region has in excess of 65 percent of market share.⁵ The highly concentrated nature of the industry makes supply chains extremely vulnerable to natural disasters and geopolitical risk.

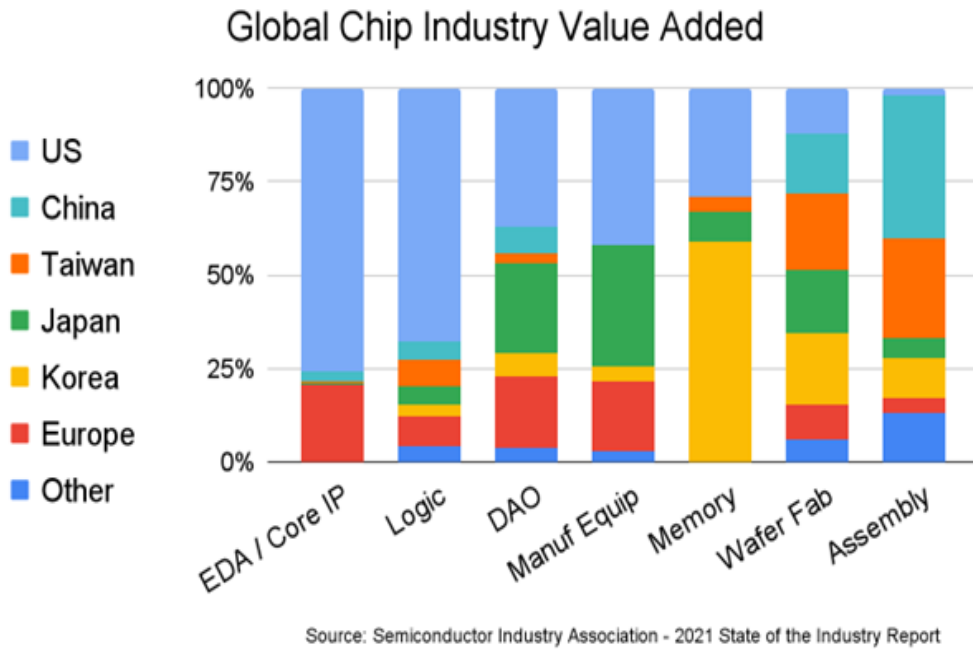
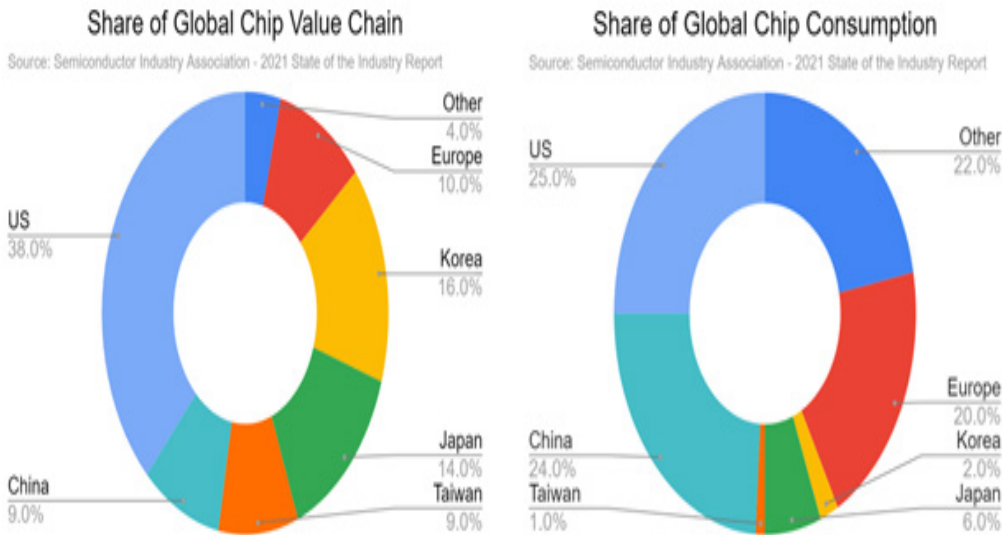


Figure 1. Global chip industry value added

Three-fourths of chips are now made in China and East Asia. In particular, all production of cutting-edge logic chips below 10 nanometers is done in Asia (Taiwan produced 92 percent of those below the 10-nanometer level in 2019). South Korea leads in memory chips, and China leads in assembly, packaging, and testing. The United States leads in processes that are more R&D intensive, including electronic design automation (EDA) and reusable architectural building blocks (Core IP); logic semiconductors; and discrete, analog, and other (DAO) semiconductors, which receive and transmit information like temperature and voltage. The world's three largest chip companies (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co., Samsung Electronics Co., and Intel Corp.) account for more than 40 percent of all chip-making equipment.⁶ Together, the United States, Japan, and the Netherlands control about 90 percent of production capacity of advanced chip-making equipment.⁷



Figures 2 and 3. Shares of global chip value chain and consumption

America's share of global semiconductor manufacturing has slipped from 37 percent in 1990 to just 12 percent today.⁸ Nonetheless, America remains the global leader in market share, with 47 percent in 2020, compared to South Korea (20 percent), Japan (10 percent), Europe (10 percent), Taiwan (seven percent), and China (five percent). America's high market share depends on access to a global marketplace. This in turn enables the United States to enter a virtuous innovation cycle in which the revenues secured through the large market share and global access are used to fund the highly capital-intensive R&D process required to ensure technological enhancements to retain a strong position.⁹ Because of China's critical role in late-stage assembly, Beijing purchases about half the global total of chip sales, to the tune of just less than USD 300 billion.¹⁰ China produces more than half the world's circuit boards and the majority of raw materials needed for chip production (such as tungsten and silicon).¹¹

The United States and its Indo-Pacific partners have become increasingly concerned about vulnerabilities in the supply chain and have initiated efforts to address them, although these plans remain largely in the incubation stage and questions linger about the degree of cooperation possible. The United States and its partners—South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the EU—each have a different risk assessment of China and varying degrees of willingness to confront and pressure Beijing to play by the rules. Another aspect of the industry that adds to the complexity of cooperation is the competing needs of innovation, resilience, and coop-

eration. Striking a balance between these competing elements will be essential in the effort to answer national security threats while minimizing economic impact.

State of Play

Supply-chain disruptions prompted governments around the world to enact policies to add rigidity to the supply chain and increase self-sufficiency. A shortage of semiconductor manufacturing equipment has prompted the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) to warn customers that it may be unable to increase production of advanced chips until after 2024.¹² Demonstrating the gap between demand and supply, global chip companies project more than USD 180 billion in capital expenditure this year, but chip-making equipment manufacturers predict only USD 107 billion worth of sales. This will impact the production of next generation (two- and three-nm) chips, with International Business Strategies Inc. Chief Executive Handel Jones saying that there will be a 10–20-percent supply shortage for these most advanced chips in the next few years. National security concerns have increasingly risen to the fore, adding a new dynamic and extra complexity to the global industry.

In May 2019, the US Bureau of Industry and Security added the Chinese company Huawei to the Entity List of the Export Administration Regulations for engaging in activities “determined to be contrary to the national security or foreign policy interests of the United States.”¹³ Unable to source component parts for its smartphones from US suppliers, Huawei then turned to Japan, Taiwan, and the Netherlands. In August 2020, the United States added additional affiliates to the list, limiting Huawei from accessing chips containing US parts or technology.¹⁴ In April 2022, US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo called the chief executive officers of three US chip producers (Applied Materials, Lam Research Corp., and KLA Corp.) to discuss accusations that Chinese customers were being favored. Over the past two years, all three firms ramped up China sales growth more rapidly than total growth, according to data from Bloomberg. “If at any point we found evidence of preferencing Chinese companies, then we would take action to address it immediately,” Raimondo said.¹⁵ After the meeting, it was determined that only market forces were responsible.

Indeed, in recent years, US-based private investors have ramped up investment in Chinese chip companies, doubling the number of deals from 2013–2016 to 2017–2020 to 58 deals.¹⁶ The high-intensity dealmaking has continued since 2020, with US investors inking 67 deals to fund Chinese chip firms. National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said the United States is “looking at the impact of outbound U.S. investment flows that could circumvent the spirit of export controls or otherwise enhance the technological capacity of our competitors in ways

that harm our national security.” US Senators Bob Casey (D-PA) and John Cornyn (R-TX) introduced new legislation that would introduce measures to address this. That bill is lauded by the bipartisan, independent U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission but criticized by the US Chamber of Commerce and the US-China Business Council.¹⁷

Citing national security concerns, the United States and its partners have moved to restrict China’s access to the most sophisticated chip-making technology. US officials believe that the capacity would benefit China’s military modernization. One example is that China’s People’s Liberation Army seeks to develop and harness AI, and this effort will depend on access to chips utilizing US technology.¹⁸ Export controls have not yet affected the lower rungs of the production ladder. China’s annual purchases of foreign semiconductor-producing machinery increased 58 percent in 2021, making it the world’s largest buyer for two years running.¹⁹ One explanation for the buying spree is that Chinese firms anticipate that more stringent export controls will prevent future purchases, so they are buying now to meet present and future needs. And 40 percent of these purchases were by multinational firms in China.

The effort to restrict access to the most advanced technology involves the Dutch firm ASML, which makes an extreme ultraviolet (EUV) lithography tool. This tool enables the creation of the world’s smallest, fastest, and most powerful semiconductors. The EUV machines contain US technology. ASML has a monopoly over the advanced lithography machines, which are thought to be too complex to be reverse engineered and replicated.²⁰ Each EUV tool requires “5,000 suppliers [providing] 100,000 parts, 3,000 cables, 40,000 bolts and 2 kilometers of hosing.” It “ships in 40 freight containers, spread over 20 trucks and 3 cargo planes.”²¹ China is the Netherlands’ third-largest trading partner, and nearly 15 percent of ASML’s revenue came from the Chinese market last year. The Dutch government has not renewed ASML’s license to export the machines to China. Nonetheless, even with the restriction, ASML’s sales to China tripled in the past five years.²² In early summer 2022, the United States began lobbying the Dutch government to expand the existing restrictions to include older lithography machines, which are a step behind the bleeding edge but still “the most common method in making certain less-advanced chips required by cars, phones, computers and even robots.”²³ Despite the ban, China’s Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC) is reportedly selling bitcoin-mining technology using 7-nanometer semiconductors. The US ban was meant to prevent China from developing below the 10-nanometer threshold.

Continuing this export restriction will become increasingly fraught. Partner countries have fabrication plants in China, and without the EUV tools, these

firms fear that they will fall behind. For example, in November 2021, Korean chip maker SK Hynix halted plans to install EUV technology in its Wuxi, China-based production plant because of US concerns about China acquiring the tech.²⁴ The single SK Hynix plant in Wuxi produces more than 40 percent of the company's dynamic random-access memory (DRAM) chips and seven percent of the world's total supply. It is believed that SK Hynix seeks to use EUV tech to improve production efficiency and better compete with rivals Micron and Samsung, which are increasingly turning to EUV machines. The United States is reportedly always lobbying the Japanese government to also restrict sales of the older lithography machines to China. Being deprived of access to the older lithography machines would stifle China's plans to develop its domestic chip-making industry.

All the major Indo-Pacific players are taking steps to shield their domestic industry from supply shocks and national security threats. A quick review of recent developments provides context for the difficulty of balancing the needs of cooperation, resilience, and innovation.

The United States

Facing supply-chain disruptions and increasing competition, the United States is pushing forward on initiatives to improve the resilience of its semiconductor supply chain and the innovative capacity of onshore producers.²⁵ To do so, the executive and legislative branches are moving ahead on parallel tracks. In February 2022, the White House unveiled its Plan to Revitalize American Manufacturing and Secure Critical Supply Chains in 2022, which resulted in chips being designated a critical export sector that is eligible for financing from the Export-Import Bank (EXIM) Domestic Manufacturing Initiative.²⁶ After languishing in Congress, the CHIPS and Science Act of 2022 was signed into law in August 2022, providing USD 52.7 billion in incentives for American semiconductor manufacturing, R&D, workforce development, and collaboration with partners on chip supply chains.²⁷ Foreign recipients of the funds are barred from building advanced chip facilities in China and other countries of concern. This has also been complemented by onshoring efforts that have resulted in the construction of a new USD 12 billion TSMC plant in Arizona that specializes in five-nm chips²⁸ and a new USD 17 billion Samsung plant in Texas.²⁹ The US-based Intel moved forward with a USD 20 billion plant in Arizona and a USD 20 billion plant in Ohio, reaching more than USD 100 billion "in investment pledges over the past year."³⁰

Importantly, some foreign investments were said to be contingent upon the provision of US government incentives. For example, TSMC CEO Mark Liu said the company would only go ahead with its USD 12 billion Arizona plant if

the United States can “make up TSMC’s running costs difference between the United States and Taiwan.”³¹ Similarly, Taiwanese firm GlobalWafers announced plans to build a USD 5 billion wafer fab in Texas, but its CEO told Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo that the investment “is contingent upon Congress passing the CHIPS Act.” However, it should be noted that Samsung’s USD 17 billion plant in Texas moved forward even before the CHIPS Act, in part because the firm was able to secure incentives at the state and local level.

On the diplomatic front, the United States proposed “Chips 4,” a multilateral group involving Korea, Taiwan, and Japan, for the purpose of coordinating semiconductor supply chains.³² Beijing pressured Seoul through the media and in diplomatic communications to abstain from the group, but Korea’s Foreign Minister Park Jin asserted Korea’s right to attend the initial meeting of the group at the end of summer 2022, insisting that the intention is not to “exclude” China.³³ The group is still in an initial phase, and it is still unclear if Chips 4 will be an information-sharing consultative body, an investment-coordination vehicle, a supplier-diversification scheme, a venue to coordinate export controls, or some combination of the aforementioned activities.

People’s Republic of China

China is the world’s largest consumer of chips, taking in more than half of all supply. It currently depends on imports for more than 80 percent of its needs, a statistic that Beijing is hoping to reduce within the next decade.³⁴ As part of China’s 2014 *National Integrated Circuit Industry Development Guidelines*, Beijing set a goal to lead all segments of the industry by 2030.³⁵ To do so, China is pouring massive amounts of state-directed aid, lowering barriers to entry for foreign firms, providing breaks on import taxes for raw materials and parts, and acquiring foreign firms and foreign talent. The country also engages in less scrupulous and illegal means. For instance, Chinese firms collude to reduce the value of a takeover target and then purchase it at a reduced rate.³⁶ Additionally, espionage operations target US firms Micron, Avago, and Skyworks; Taiwanese-based firms TSMC and Nanya Technology;³⁷ and South Korean firms as well.

In 2015, Beijing announced its *Made in China 2025* initiative, which hoped to raise the proportion of indigenous components in chips to 40 percent by 2020.³⁸ Reflecting the challenges posed by this ambitious plan, the country had only achieved a rate of 16 percent by 2021. In an analysis, Boston Consulting Group estimates that Beijing will be able to increase China’s self-sufficiency to 40 percent by 2025.³⁹ This would cause the US global market share to slip by 2–5 percent, US revenues to drop 3–9 percent, and US R&D spending to decline 2–10 percent.

In response to export controls that limit the flow of US and other technology to China, Beijing is pouring government capital into tech firms to ramp up domestic production capacity.⁴⁰ China's Ministry of Industry and Information Technology lists nearly 5,000 "Little Giant" firms in critical tech sectors like chips that receive support from the government in the form of subsidies, loans, tax cuts, and talent placement.⁴¹ The subsidy-to-sales ratio of Chinese firms is much higher than that of other countries. The ratios for the Chinese firms Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation (SMIC) and for Huahong Group are 6.6 percent and 5 percent, respectively. This compares with 0.8 percent for South Korean firm Samsung Electronics and 0.5 percent for SK Hynix.⁴² US-based Micron Technology, Qualcomm, and Intel had a ratio of 3.8 percent, 3 percent, and 2 percent, respectively. Taiwan's TSMC was 3 percent. Beijing's aggressive support policy has a mixed record thus far. On the one hand, it is yielding some dividends. Thanks to sanctions and supply-chain snarls, Chinese firms that were once dependent on chips from abroad are now able to buy them at home from an assortment of Chinese chip companies that are growing more quickly than anywhere else in the world.⁴³ China's Dual Circulation Strategy aims to increase the country's economic self-sufficiency. To do this, it needs to both grow the middle class to boost domestic consumption and progress indigenous technologies up the value chain. Analysts at the China Power project believe this will be difficult to meaningfully accomplish in the short term.⁴⁴ Furthermore, Beijing's industrial policies that guarantee state financing to chip startups could bake-in inefficiencies and stymie innovation. An analyst from the research firm Rhodium Group assesses, "China's semiconductor industry is an industrial-policy-driven bubble," noting the creation of 22,000 new chip companies in 2020, an annual increase of 200 percent.⁴⁵

South Korea

South Korea's market share in the global chip sector (20 percent) lags only the United States. Chips are extremely important to Korea's economy and represent its largest export. In 2021, Seoul announced that companies would invest USD 450 billion in the chip sector within the next decade and the government would expand tax benefits.⁴⁶ The dilemma for Seoul is that China is the country's largest trade partner, while the United States is its most essential security ally. China accounts for about half of South Korea's chip imports and exports. Both Samsung and SK Hynix are moving forward with expanded production in China.⁴⁷ However, from 2018–2021, South Korean chip exports to China increased by just 6.5 percent, much less than those of Taiwan (57 percent) and Japan (34 percent).⁴⁸ The Federation of Korean Industries attributes this decline to increasing Chinese

self-sufficiency, falling prices, and US export controls, which restricted South Korean sales to Chinese firms Huawei and the SMIC.

During the first summit meeting between presidents Joe Biden and Yoon Suk-yeol, the United States and South Korea pledged to “enhance public and private cooperation to protect and promote critical and emerging technologies, including leading-edge semiconductors [and] establish a regular ministerial-level Supply Chain and Commercial Dialogue to discuss promotion of resilient supply chains of key products, including semiconductors.”⁴⁹ In a sign of the issue’s prioritization, Biden and Yoon also visited a Samsung semiconductor plant, hailing chips as “the key to propelling us into the next era of humanity’s technological development.”⁵⁰

Taiwan

Taiwan’s TSMC is a crucially important player in the global chip chain, producing 92 percent of the world’s most advanced chips, which are used in both civilian technology and military equipment.⁵¹ TSMC announced that it plans to begin production of the next generation two-nm chips by 2025. Semiconductors alone accounted for almost half of Taiwan’s trade with China. Geopolitical risk is created by the fact that the country’s fabrication plants are all located on Taiwan’s west coast near the “red beaches” that would be the landing zones in the case of a Chinese invasion. China routinely talent poaches Taiwanese chip experts, for instance luring 10 percent of the country’s 30,000 R&D engineers to the mainland in 2019. Taipei has taken measures to “reshore” operations by securing over USD 20 billion in “investment pledges from 156 Taiwanese companies returning from the mainland.”⁵² TSMC has resisted participating in export controls against firms blacklisted by the United States such as Huawei, arguing that it does not need a US export license because its products and processes are composed of less than 25 percent of US technology.⁵³

Japan

Like the United States, Japan is engaging in efforts to recover lost manufacturing capabilities. It previously produced over 50 percent of the world’s semiconductors but now makes around 10 percent.. To brace against geopolitical risk, Tokyo has adopted a “China+1” strategy, “which has Japan staying in the Chinese market while actively developing other markets as well.”⁵⁴ Tokyo’s Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry has plans to reinvigorate the Japanese chip industry, and the Kishida administration approved a USD 6.8 billion domestic chip investment in November 2021.⁵⁵ In a May 2022 summit between President Biden

and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, the two countries “concurred on establishing a joint task force to explore the development of next generation semiconductors.”⁵⁶ Thereafter, the partners launched plans to build a joint manufacturing base to produce next-generation, two-nm semiconductors by 2025.⁵⁷ This cooperation will see both governments providing support for a collaboration between Japanese and US firms. However, there are lingering doubts whether Japan’s efforts have “the funding, the diplomacy and the zeal necessary for success.”⁵⁸

The Argument for Balanced Dynamism

This section examines different approaches that the United States, South Korea, Japan, Taiwan, and the EU can adopt to address the challenges facing the industry. The first critical factor will be the extent to which the partners can harmonize an approach to the competing imperatives of innovation, resilience, and cooperation. The second critical factor will be the extent to which the partners will develop consensus about the threats posed by Chinese market distortion, espionage, and geopolitical risk. The threat perception will also need to then be balanced against the economic benefits gained from maintaining an open, global ecosystem.

These critical factors are mutually reinforcing. The degree of harmony achieved in one domain will positively impact the ability of the partners to generate consensus in the other domain. Likewise, failure to come to terms in one domain will impair coordination on the other front. Deciding not to adapt, of course, is also an option though for obvious reasons this would cause considerable economic setbacks and add significant risk exposure. This path is not worth serious discussion besides to point out that failing to act would be a tremendous mistake for any of the countries under observation. The global surge in political capital and private investment directed to the semiconductor industry is testament to the near-universal recognition that action is needed.

However, just because the need to act is quite apparent does not mean the path forward is clear. The Global Semiconductor Strategy Map, below, illustrates the first critical factor, demonstrating how the three competing needs of resilience, innovation, and cooperation can be balanced—but at a cost. For instance, the chart shows how a resilience-first approach would use export controls and subsidies to achieve added autonomy and some shock resistance. However, the resilience-first approach will also impair growth and innovation and elevate costs because of the lack of access to the global value chain, which supercharges innovation and boosts efficiency.

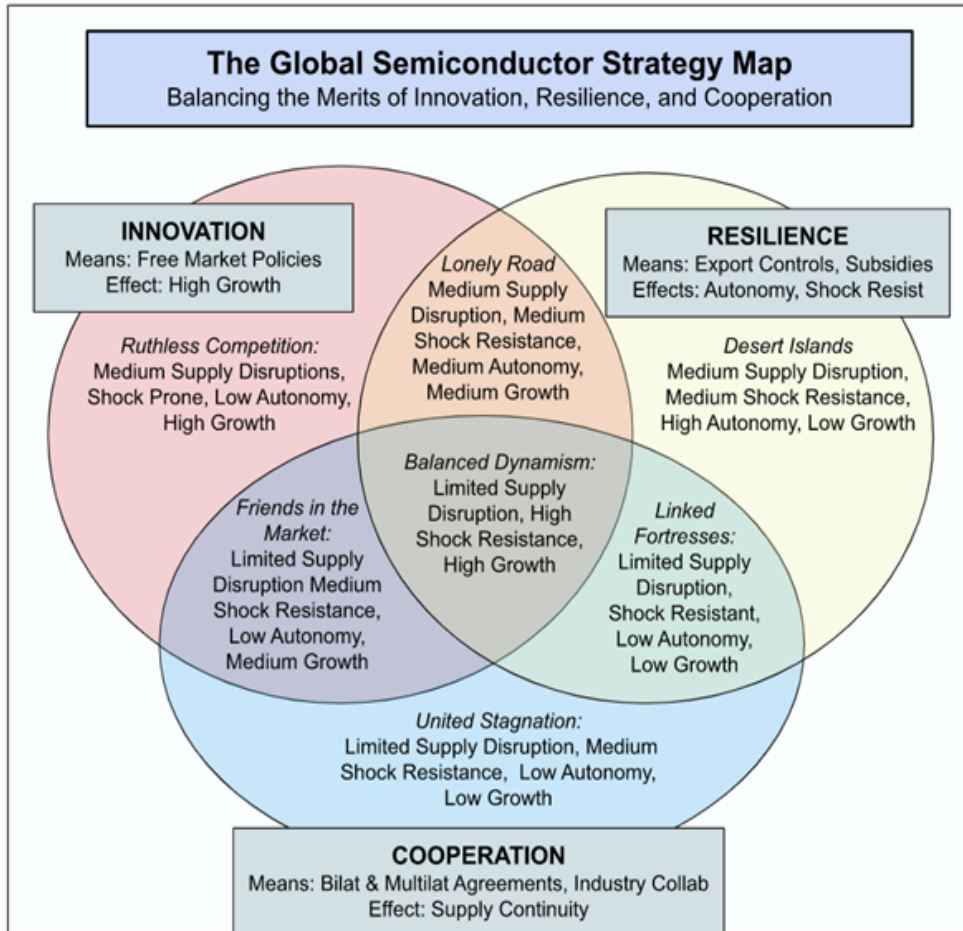


Figure 3. Global semiconductor strategy map

Importantly, no approach is perfect, and the most important factor is harmony. If the United States chooses to prioritize cooperation but its most important partners instead prioritize resilience, the plan will fail. Similarly, if the United States prioritizes innovation but other countries enact high barriers to trade, subsidies, and export controls, US firms will struggle to derive the benefits of the approach. Herein lies the prisoner's dilemma aspect of the problem. The United States and its partners stand to benefit from cooperation, but none can be sure that their partners are dependable. For example, TSMC founder Morris Chang criticized US efforts to improve chip autonomy, saying "it will be impossible for the U.S. to rebuild a full chip supply chain in the country."⁵⁹ And S. Paul Choi, founder of Seoul-based political risk advisory StratWays Group, said, "The U.S. is worried about technology being transferred to China, but many Koreans are

equally worried about their technology being transferred to the U.S.” He added that, “Koreans don’t want to be strong-armed by the Chinese but they don’t want to be strong-armed by the Americans either.”⁶⁰

For this reason, it is essential that the United States develop and lead cooperation based on high standards, fair practices, reciprocity, common values, and market principles balanced with mutually agreeable security measures. This would require negotiating (and continually adjusting) agreements on export controls, subsidy ceilings, and working together on joint ventures, talent development, and R&D. Critically, this effort would need to engage and involve the private sector, including each country’s respective semiconductor industry association. Consultative working groups and task forces should advise on policies and adjustments to answer to critical national security threats without compromising the conditions needed for continued innovation and cross-border cooperation. There are several existing multilateral groups that can serve as vehicles for different aspects of this approach.

The current approach is mostly defensive. Supply-chain resilience cooperation will be orchestrated through the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF) and perhaps also through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). Export controls are orchestrated through the Wassenaar Agreement, a 42-country agreement designed to slow the spread of technologies with potential military applications. “Under Wassenaar, Washington and its allies have harmonized controls over the flow of chip technology to China.”⁶¹ However, the overall plans remain incipient, reactive, and unbalanced. Demonstrating the need for further progress, in March 2022, the United States reportedly suggested a semiconductor alliance with South Korea, Japan, and Taiwan.⁶² Seoul reportedly rejected the idea as “not fully acceptable” given the retaliation vulnerability presented by the large presence of South Korean firms in China and South Korean chip sales to China. To address this, the United States must present a vision for cooperation that registers and accommodates for the different levels of exposure and vulnerability of each partner country.

Going forward, there is room in the debate about the degree to which each lever can be pulled in terms of responding to the China threat and balancing innovation, resilience, and cooperation. Figure 4 portrays an array of responses, ranging from the most drastic and disruptive on the left side (in red) and the least disruptive and most cooperative on the right (in green). Decoupling and onshoring are the only surefire ways to insulate the domestic supply chain completely from supply shocks and geopolitics, but there is reason to believe this strategy is infeasible and would cause more harm than good. The best way forward is to harness the productivity of the global supply chain and simultaneously take steps to

shield against supply shocks and geopolitics through an approach called *balanced dynamism*. This approach combines public–private cooperation, friendshoring, ally coordination, and selective restrictions.



Figure 4. The China chip threat response spectrum

The Boston Consulting Group investigated two different scenarios.⁶³ In one scenario, which may be referred to as *technological decoupling*, all US semiconductor firms would be blocked from making sales to Chinese customers. Technological decoupling would result in a 100-percent decline in US revenues from Chinese customers. Global US revenue would drop 37 percent compared to 2018, and global US market share would drop 18 percentage points to 30 percent. Declining revenues would cause a reduction in R&D spending of 30–60 percent. The resulting decline in innovation would hurt the competitiveness of US firms, causing gradual reductions in market share and revenue. In the near term, these drawbacks would open the door for South Korea to become the market leader, followed in the long term by China.

The Boston Consulting Group also analyzed the economic impact of selective restrictions, describing a scenario wherein existing US restrictions on Chinese access to US technology remain in place and become the status quo. Within a few years, this scenario would cause US companies to lose 55 percent of their revenues from Chinese customers compared to 2018. Global US revenue would drop 16 percent compared to 2018, and global US market share would drop eight percentage points to 40 percent. Declining revenues would cause a reduction in R&D

spending of 13–25 percent. Despite these drawbacks, the United States would remain the market leader.

It is not necessary to rely only on forecasts to predict how decoupling will affect US chip firms. Downstream complications from the US–China trade war have already constrained the revenue growth of US semiconductor firms.⁶⁴ The annual growth rate of the top 25 US chip companies declined from 10 percent prior to the imposition of tariffs in July 2018 to 1 percent thereafter. Subsequent restrictions on US technology sales to Huawei had a similar effect. However, the cost of decoupling would not just be prohibitive for the United States. The rest of the world would also have to deal with the fallout. In case of severe decoupling, Bao Yungang, a computing technology expert at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said, “China is fully capable of advancing the evolution of [its indigenous chip architecture] independently and building an ecosystem together with Belt and Road countries.”⁶⁵ However, there are reasons to think that China would realistically struggle to catch up, especially with regard to producing chips below the 10-nm level. Despite self-sufficiency goals, domestic firms remain at least a generation behind in production capacity and rely on foreign firms for crucial inputs, particularly manufacturing equipment.⁶⁶ For example, heeding the call from President Xi Jinping to onshore chip supply chains, Chinese automakers have developed advanced chips, such as Geely’s 7-nm DragonHawk 1, but foundries are still unable to manufacture any chips below the 10-nm mark due to US restrictions. Geely turned to Taiwan’s TSMC to make the DragonHawk chip.⁶⁷ Furthermore, Belt and Road countries are currently not active players in the global chip supply chain and lack the talent, materials, and IP to quickly scale up.

The fallout of technological decoupling for the rest of the world would depend on the degree of unity among US partners. As argued by a Boston Consulting Group report, if South Korea sits on the sidelines of a decoupling scenario, Korean firms would grow market share and revenue. The same could be true for Taiwan. However, given the degree of US technology in Korean and Taiwanese chips (not to mention the high level of supply-chain integration), it is difficult to imagine how either country could practically sit out a decoupling without choosing sides. Instead, it is more likely that two separate ecosystems with two separate technological standards would emerge, resulting in a suboptimal supply chain: “higher costs and innovation loss for all semiconductor end-users globally.”⁶⁸

A complement to decoupling is onshoring. Harvard professor Graham Allison and former Google CEO Eric Schmidt recommend that the United States “use its political leverage” (along with tax incentives and subsidies) to convince Taiwan and South Korea to “form partnerships with U.S. chip designers and manufacture advanced semiconductors in America.”⁶⁹ This is a mistake. First, a 100-percent

onshoring approach would be expensive and counterproductive, according to a joint report by the Semiconductor Industry Association (SIA) and Boston Consulting Group.⁷⁰ An initial investment of USD 1 trillion would be required to make domestic chip supply chains fully self-sufficient and would cause chip prices to increase by 35–65 percent. Second, too much pressure toward a one-sided agenda will ultimately be counterproductive. If the United States tries to duel with China in a competition of industrial policies, Washington will not have a strong hand to play. China is a bigger market. It buys more chips and, therefore, has more leverage in that regard. However, the United States can offer something China cannot—a vision for a set of fair standards that ensures reciprocal benefits across the long term. The United States' strength over China is not the size of the market and the exercise of its leverage, but America's ability to inspire, cooperate, and lead based on shared interests and shared values.

The alternate to decoupling and onshoring is selective restrictions and friendshoring. US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen described *friendshoring* as deepening “ties with those partners and to work together to make sure that we can supply our needs of critical materials.”⁷¹ This will enable the United States to “get the benefits of continued efficiencies in production by having a group of partners who work to shore up supply chains and make them more resilient.” With regards to the possibility of decoupling, Yellen said, “I would like to see us preserve the benefits of deep economic integration with China, not going to a bipolar world, but clearly that’s a danger that we need to address.” For an example of this approach in action, we can again turn to President Biden’s trip to a Samsung plant in South Korea, where he cautioned against a supply chain that relies too much on countries that “don’t share our values.”⁷² The “critical component” of this approach is to work with and exchange investments in partners that do share values, such as South Korea, Biden added. Korean President Yoon said, “Korea-U.S. relations will be reborn as an economic and security alliance based on high-tech and supply chain cooperation.”⁷³ This approach needs to strike a delicate balance.

Secretary Yellen said that many US allies are reluctant to cut business ties with China and that technological decoupling could cause the United States to lose out on the benefits of access to the global supply chain, “where advances in one country benefit countries worldwide.”⁷⁴ As explained by Georgetown University’s Center for Security and Emerging Technology, a full chip embargo against China “would alienate regional partners and jeopardize the long-term viability of the U.S. semiconductor industry.”⁷⁵ An official with South Korea’s Chamber of Commerce and Industry explained, “China’s pursuit is a life-or-death concern not just for the U.S. but for us too, and it will necessitate a proactive joint response.”⁷⁶ A joint response means allowing partners to help shape the agenda. A South Korean

think tank researcher said that it is in Seoul's interest "to get on board with the U.S.-led supply chains, but officially taking part in a cartel to shut China out is an entirely different issue."⁷⁷

Conclusion

Balanced dynamism is the only approach that balances the competing imperatives of innovation, cooperation, and resilience and affords the best possible protection against market distortion and coercion. Boston Consulting Group advocates for a balanced dynamism approach, arguing that the "dual objectives [of addressing national security concerns and preserving global market access for US firms] are fundamental to maintaining the proven innovation model that will allow the industry to continue to deliver technology breakthroughs that are crucial for U.S. economic competitiveness and national security."⁷⁸ The United States should pursue such an approach aggressively and in close coordination with South Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and the EU, setting forth a values-based vision of fair and reciprocal standards. Working multilaterally and cooperatively with representatives from the private sector will ensure that this set of practices represents balanced and future-oriented priorities, protecting against national security threats but not allowing said provisions to obstruct the market and inhibit innovation. ⚡

Jonathan Corrado

Mr. Corrado is director of policy for The Korea Society, where he produces programming and conducts research on security, diplomacy, and socioeconomic issues impacting the US-Korea Alliance, the Korean peninsula, and Northeast Asia. He was formerly a nonresident James A. Kelly Fellow at Pacific Forum, an emerging leader at the National Committee on American Foreign Policy, a contributor to *NK Pro*, a translator for *Daily NK* (Korean to English), an Foreign Corrupt Practices Act due diligence investigator for Steele Compliance Solutions, a graduate fellow for McLarty Associates, and a volunteer analyst for the Congressional Research Service. Corrado received an MA from Georgetown University's Asian Studies Program in the Walsh School of Foreign Service.

Notes

1. "2021 State of the U.S. Semiconductor Industry," Semiconductor Industry Association, <https://www.semiconductors.org/>.

2. Gaurav Batra, et al., "Artificial-intelligence hardware: New opportunities for semiconductor companies," McKinsey & Company, 2 January 2019, <https://www.mckinsey.com>; Liam Critchley, "The Role of Semiconductors in Quantum Computing," *AZO Materials*, 12 November 2018, <https://www.azom.com/>; and Luke Gear, "EV Power Electronics: Driving Semiconductor Demand in a Chip Shortage," *ID Tech Ex*, 23 September 2021, <https://www.idtechex.com/>.

3. Yimou Lee, Norihiko Shirouzu, and David Lague, "Taiwan Chip Industry Emerges as Battlefront in U.S.-China Showdown," *Reuters*, 27 December 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

4. Justin Feng, "The Costs of U.S.-China Semiconductor Decoupling," *New Perspectives on Asia*, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 25 May 2022, <https://www.csis.org/>.

5. Antonio Varas, et al., “Strengthening the Global Semiconductor Supply Chain in an Uncertain Era,” The Semiconductor Industry Association and Boston Consulting Group, April 2021, <https://www.bcg.com/>.
6. Jenny Leonard, Ian King, and Debby Wu, “China’s Chipmaking Power Grows Despite US Effort to Counter It,” *Bloomberg News*, 13 June 2022, <https://www.bnnbloomberg.ca/>.
7. Leonard, King, and Wu, “China’s Chipmaking Power Grows.”
8. “2021 State of the U.S. Semiconductor Industry,” Semiconductor Industry Association, <https://www.semiconductors.org/>.
9. Antonio Varas and Raj Varadarajan, “How Restricting Trade with China Could End US Semiconductor Leadership,” Boston Consulting Group, 9 March 2020, <https://www.bcg.com/>.
10. Jung Suk-ye, “The U.S. Seeking New Alliance in Semiconductor Industry,” *Business Korea*, 28 March 2022, <http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/>.
11. Graham Allison and Eric Schmidt, “Semiconductor Dependency Imperils American Security,” *Wall Street Journal*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/>.
12. Asa Fitch and Jiyoung Sohn, “Chip Shortage Threatens Cutting-Edge Tech Needed for Next-Generation Smartphones,” *Wall Street Journal*, 9 June 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/>.
13. “Addition of Entities to the Entity List,” Bureau of Industry and Security, 21 May 2019, <https://www.federalregister.gov/>.
14. “Addition of Huawei Non-U.S. Affiliates to the Entity List, the Removal of Temporary General License, and Amendments to General Prohibition Three (Foreign-Produced Direct Product Rule),” Bureau of Industry and Security, 17 August 2020, <https://www.federalregister.gov/>.
15. Leonard, King, and Wu, “China’s Chipmaking Power Grows.”
16. Kate O’Keeffe, Heather Somerville, and Yang Jie. “U.S. Companies Aid China’s Bid for Chip Dominance Despite Security Concerns,” *Wall Street Journal*, 12 November 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/>.
17. “China Commission Report Includes Recommendation to Implement Casey-Cornyn Outbound Investment Policy,” US Senator Bob Casey, 17 November 2021, <https://www.casey.senate.gov/>.
18. Ryan Fedasiuk, Karson Elmgren, and Ellen Lu, “Silicon Twist: Managing the Chinese Military’s Access to AI Chips,” Center for Security and Emerging Technology, June 2022, <https://cset.georgetown.edu/>.
19. Leonard, King, and Wu, “China’s Chipmaking Power Grows.”
20. “Why Can’t China Just Reverse Engineer Chips?,” *Semi-Literate*, 29 November 2020, <https://semiliterate.substack.com/>.
21. “A backgrounder on Extreme Ultraviolet (EUV) lithography,” *ASML*, 18 January 2017, <https://medium.com>.
22. Leonard, King, and Wu, “China’s Chipmaking Power Grows.”
23. Jillian Deutsch, et al., “US Wants Dutch Supplier to Stop Selling Chipmaking Gear to China,” *Bloomberg*, 5 July 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/>.
24. Stephen Nellis, Joyce Lee, and Toby Sterling, “Exclusive: U.S.-China tech war clouds SK Hynix’s plans for a key chip factory,” *Reuters*, 17 November 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
25. Justin Feng, “How are Washington and Beijing Utilizing Industrial Policy to Bolster Domestic Semiconductor Manufacturing?” *New Perspectives on Asia* (blog), 29 March 2022, <https://www.csis.org/>.

26. Aidan Arasasingham, Emily Benson, and William A. Reinsch, "Takeaways from President Biden's Supply Chain Plan for 2022," *Critical Questions*, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, 28 February 2022, <https://www.csis.org/>.

27. "FACT SHEET: CHIPS and Science Act Will Lower Costs, Create Jobs, Strengthen Supply Chains, and Counter China," The White House, 9 August 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

28. Cheng Ting-Fang and Lauly Li, "TSMC starts construction of \$12bn Arizona chip plant," *Nikkei Asia*, 2 June 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.

29. Jiyoung Sohn, "Samsung to Choose Taylor, "Texas, for \$17 Billion Chip-Making Factory," *Wall Street Journal*, 22 November 2021, <https://www.wsj.com/>.

30. Yifan Yu, "Intel breaks ground on \$20bn Arizona chip plants in battle with TSMC," *Nikkei Asia*, 25 September 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.

31. Eamon Barrett, "Chip makers are refusing to build new semiconductor plants in the U.S. unless Congress unlocks \$52 billion in funding," *Fortune*, 28 June 2022, <https://fortune.com/>.

32. Choi Byung-il, "Why Korea must join the Chip 4," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, 21 August 2022, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/>.

33. Min Suk-hyen, "Foreign Minister Park delivers S. Korea's position on THAAD to China," *Arirang*, 10 August, 2022, www.arirang.com/.

34. "Semiconductor Industry: China vs the US vs South Korea vs Taiwan," *Seoulz*, 1 May 2022, <https://www.seoulz.com/>.

35. "Semiconductor Industry," *Seoulz*.

36. Paul Mozur and Jack Ewing, "Rush of Chinese Investment in Europe's High-Tech Firms Is Raising Eyebrows," *New York Times*, 16 September 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

37. Stephen Ezell, "Moore's Law Under Attack: The Impact of China's Policies on Global Semiconductor Innovation," Information Technology and Innovation Foundation, 18 February 2021, <https://itif.org/>.

38. Scott Kennedy, "Made in China 2025," Center for Strategic and International Studies, 1 June 2015, <https://www.csis.org/>.

39. Varas and Varadarajan, "How Restricting Trade with China Could End."

40. Bloomberg Staff, "U.S. Sanctions Help China Supercharge Its Chipmaking Industry," *Bloomberg News*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.yahoo.com/>.

41. Bloomberg Staff, "China's 'Little Giants' Are Its Latest Weapon in the U.S. Tech War," *Washington Post*, 23 January 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.

42. Kim, "Korean Semiconductor Companies Losing Market Share in China."

43. Bloomberg Staff, "U.S. Sanctions Help China Supercharge."

44. China Power Staff, "Will the Dual Circulation Strategy Enable China to Compete in a Post-Pandemic World?" *China Power*, 15 December 2021, <https://chinapower.csis.org/>.

45. O'Keeffe, Somerville, and Jie. "U.S. Companies Aid China's Bid for Chip Dominance."

46. Jaewon Kim, "South Korea plans to invest \$450bn to become chip 'powerhouse,'" *Nikkei Asia*, 13 May 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.

47. Kim Hoe-seung, "S. Korea's tech, industry shift toward US likely to foster China-based risks," *Hankyoreh*, 23 May 2022, https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_business/1044001.html.

48. Kim Eun-jin, "Korean Semiconductor Companies Losing Market Share in China," *Business Korea*, 26 April 2022, <http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/>.

49. "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement," The White House, 21 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
50. Sunny Kim, "Joe Biden visits Samsung semiconductor plant on first trip to Asia," *CNBC*, 20 May 2022, <https://www.cnbc.com/>.
51. Yimou Lee, Norihiko Shirouzu, and David Lague, "Taiwan Chip Industry Emerges as Battlefront in U.S.-China Showdown," *Reuters*, 27 December 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
52. Ryan Fedasiuk, "Building a Silicon Bulwark: How the United States and Taiwan Can Retain Joint Leadership of the Global Semiconductor Industry," *Global Taiwan Brief* 7, no. 13, (2022), <https://globaltaiwan.org/>.
53. Fedasiuk, "Building a Silicon Bulwark."
54. Jin Kai, "Will South Korea Join the US Effort to Insulate Supply Chains from China?" *The Diplomat*, 19 January 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/>.
55. Mariko Togashi, "Japan prioritises semiconductor industry in bid to enhance economic security," International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 20 March 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/>.
56. "Japan-U.S. Joint Leaders' Statement: Strengthening the Free and Open International Order," The White House, 23 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
57. Ko Fujioka, "Japan seeks to produce Cutting-edge 2-nm chips as soon as 2025," *Nikkei Asia*, 15 June 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.
58. Leo Lewis, "Is it too late for Japan's semiconductor industry?" *Financial Times*, 14 September 2021, <https://www.ft.com/>.
59. Liam Gibson, "Home Business 'Impossible': TSMC founder Morris Chang on US dreams for onshoring chip supply chain," *Taiwan News*, 28 October 2021, <https://www.taiwannews.com.tw/>.
60. Song Jung-a, Christian Davies, and Demetri Sevastopulo, "South Korea's SK Hynix caught in US-China semiconductor battle," *Financial Times*, 24 November 2021, <https://www.ft.com/>.
61. Lee, Shirouzu, and Lague, "Taiwan Chip Industry Emerges as Battlefront."
62. Jung Suk-ye, "The U.S. Seeking New Alliance in Semiconductor Industry," *Business Korea*, 28 March 2022, <http://www.businesskorea.co.kr/>.
63. Varas and Varadarajan, "How Restricting Trade with China Could End."
64. Varas and Varadarajan, "How Restricting Trade with China Could End."
65. Che Pan, "US-China tech war: top Chinese scientist envisions forked RISC-V chip design standard to cushion decoupling impact," *South China Morning Post*, 23 June 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/>.
66. Feng, "The Costs of U.S.-China Semiconductor Decoupling."
67. Shunsuke Tabeta, "China's automakers fight supply chain chaos with in-house chips," *Nikkei Asia*, 25 December 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.
68. Feng, "The Costs of U.S.-China Semiconductor Decoupling."
69. Graham Allison and Eric Schmidt, "Semiconductor Dependency Imperils American Security," *Wall Street Journal*, 20 June 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/>.
70. Varas, et al., "Strengthening the Global Semiconductor Supply Chain."
71. "Transcript: US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen on the next steps for Russia sanctions and 'friend-shoring' supply chains," Atlantic Council, 13 April 2022, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/>.
72. Trevor Hunnicutt and Josh Smith, "First stop Samsung: Biden touts South Korean role in securing global supply chains," *Reuters*, 20 May 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.

73. Aamer Madhani and Josh Boak, "Biden: SKorean chip plant a model for deeper ties to Asia," *Associated Press*, 20 May 2022, <https://apnews.com/>.
74. Jodi Xu Klein, "Restrictions are needed but full US-China tech decoupling isn't wise, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen says," *South China Morning Post*, 17 June 2021, <https://www.scmp.com/>.
75. Fedasiuk, Elmgren, and Lu, "Silicon Twist."
76. Kim Hoe-seung, "S. Korea's tech, industry shift toward US."
77. Kim, "S. Korea's tech, industry shift toward US likely to foster China-based risks."
78. Varas and Varadarajan, "How Restricting Trade with China Could End."

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

A Polarized Audience in South Korea and Its Impact on North Korea Policy

DR. DONGJOON PARK

Abstract

This article examines the implications of South Korea's 2022 presidential election on Seoul's policy toward North Korea. Specifically, this article seeks to explain how a deeply divided public will affect the credibility of the conservative Yoon administration as it seeks to implement a tougher stance toward Pyongyang. By incorporating recent findings on the relationship between polarization and audience costs, the article contends that audience costs will be more difficult to generate as supporters will excuse the administration's decision to back down as strategically correct or necessary decisions. On the one hand, this incentivizes North Korea to probe Seoul's level of resolve through military provocations or other aggressive behavior. On the other, this also grants the Yoon administration the freedom to experiment with various tactics intended to escape the current stalemate on the Korean peninsula. Combined, a polarized electorate adds to the strategic ambiguity already inherent in power transitions. As a result, the two Koreas are both likely to behave forcefully to demonstrate their level of resolve and gain the upper hand in inter-Korean relations. This article examines the strategic interactions between North and South Korea over the first few months of the Yoon administration to verify these claims.

South Korea's 2022 presidential election demonstrated just how divided the nation's society is. Conservative candidate Yoon Suk-yeol defeated his opponent Lee Jae-myung in the closest election in South Korea's history. Two aspects of the election process stood out. First, both candidates were relative outsiders who replaced the mainstream contenders in their respective parties. This reflected not only the desire for change among the public but also the internal struggles within the two major parties that persisted throughout the campaign. Second, the election process was extremely negative. As election day drew near,

both sides focused on attacking their opponent to discredit them as an unviable candidate. Both these aspects of the election meant that electability was key. Each side viewed it as essential to fiercely consolidate their respective supporters, which transformed the process into a nasty and brutish affair.¹ In this regard, the election results on 9 March were not only a symptom of South Korea's polarization but also a contributing factor.

Since the election, experts have been discussing the foreign and domestic implications of President Yoon's victory. The underlying message of the incoming Yoon administration is to correct the various mistakes of the previous Moon government. This is also true for foreign policy. Regarding inter-Korean relations, President Yoon is expected to adopt a hardline approach that seeks to reclaim the initiative he believes his predecessor relinquished to North Korea. The Yoon administration also hopes to revitalize South Korea's alliance with the United States and develop that relationship into a comprehensive strategic partnership. In terms of strategy, the Yoon administration has emphasized deterrence and reciprocity. The controversy surrounding the possibility of adopting a preemptive strike posture vis-à-vis North Korea demonstrates how sincere President Yoon is about his foreign policy principles.²

To a certain extent, these policy positions summarized above are consistent with those of former conservative South Korean governments. What has changed, however, is the increasingly polarized nature of the South Korean public. While presidential elections have been close in the past, most notably in 2009, polarization has undoubtedly become more extreme over the past couple of decades. How does this affect the Yoon administration's ability to effectively promote its foreign policy?

This article seeks to address this question by explaining how a deeply divided public will affect the credibility of the conservative Yoon administration as it seeks to implement a tougher stance toward Pyongyang. Specifically, this article incorporates insights and findings on the relationship between audience costs and polarization. Audience costs, defined as the "domestic political costs a leader may pay for escalating an international dispute, or for making implicit or explicit threats, and then backing down or not following through," are understood as a mechanism that contributes to the credibility of a threat issued by a state.³ The prospect of losing public support by failing to act on threats effectively ties the hands of the leader. This, in turn, makes a country's threats more credible. Recent studies, however, have shown that this mechanism fails to materialize when the domestic political environment is polarized. This is because, due to the nature of polarization, supporters will be more likely to excuse the government's decision to

back down from their threats instead of punishing them for backing down, thereby exempting leaders from political repercussions.

This article claims that audience costs will similarly become less relevant in South Korea due to increasing polarization. As a result, the work expects two main implications for the Yoon administration's foreign policy. First and foremost, the absence of audience costs will likely make South Korea's threats less credible in the eyes of North Korea. This creates a doubly dangerous environment on the Korean peninsula because it not only emboldens Pyongyang to defy or ignore South Korean threats but also because it incentivizes the regime of Kim Jong-un, North Korea's dictator, to probe the resolve and intentions of the Yoon administration through various actions. This suggests that military provocations or other aggressive behavior may continue, at least for the foreseeable future.

On the other hand, the lack of audience costs generated by the South Korean society may enable the Yoon administration to be more flexible. This may appear somewhat counterintuitive. However, because President Yoon is expected to face fewer consequences if and when he decides to back down, alternative approaches may be attempted if pressuring North Korea through military and diplomatic means either fails or results in unacceptable levels of risk. Such freedom will also allow the Yoon administration to focus on other foreign policy issues, including how to strengthen the alliance with the United States or manage difficult relationships with Japan and China while intentionally ignoring North Korea in the process.

To examine the validity of these statements, this article explores inter-Korean relations over the past few months before and after the inauguration of the Yoon administration. While it is too early to tell, the evidence so far appears to suggest that the situation on the Korean peninsula may have become increasingly vulnerable to a general lack of credibility. To offer an initial assessment, the article examines recent tensions that have intensified due to reports that North Korea may be preparing for another nuclear test and how the South Korean government has responded to discuss implications.

The remainder of the article is organized as follows. The following section summarizes the literature on audience costs, focusing on how it impacts the ability of governments to credibly signal their intentions and how polarization impacts this mechanism. Next, the article discusses polarization in South Korea and how it is related to the country's foreign policy. Based on these descriptions, the subsequent section analyzes recent developments on the Korean peninsula to confirm whether polarization has reduced audience costs and weakened Seoul's ability to credibly signal and deter Pyongyang.

Audience Costs: An Overview

The concept of audience costs was first introduced by James Fearon, who claimed that audience costs are generated when a leader backs down from a threat that he or she had previously issued. Specifically, Fearon argued that “backing down after making a show of force is often most immediately costly for a leader because it gives domestic political opponents an opportunity to deplore the international loss of credibility, face, or honor.”⁴ The idea has since been popularized in the field of international relations. Subsequent studies have sought to empirically verify the existence of audience costs,⁵ identify the micro-foundations of the logic,⁶ examine whether it works similarly in both democratic and nondemocratic countries,⁷ and determine whether the public punishes the leader for displaying weakness or being inconsistent.⁸

Audience costs involve two audiences: domestic and international. Domestically, leaders are concerned about the consequences of issuing threats that they might later be compelled to withdraw. Whether it is due to the country’s loss of face, a display of incompetence, or inconsistent leadership, the public punishes the leader at the voting booth under such circumstances. Leaders can minimize audience costs and moderate the consequences. This is accomplished by justifying the decision to back down as the rational or right option, particularly when based on new information.⁹ Regardless of a leader’s ability to lessen the fallout, this nevertheless demonstrates the political salience of audience costs as a way domestic politics influence foreign policy decisions.

The domestic component is closely related to the international one. First, as noted above, the public’s disapproval of the leader stems from the perceived loss of credibility and reputation that the country suffers by backing down from threats. The international component of this logic is widely viewed as the main reason why states and leaders care about their reputations; maintaining a strong reputation is considered crucial for issuing credible threats in the future.¹⁰ As an example, President Barack Obama’s decision to declare a red-line against Syrian dictator Bashar al-Assad that the United States later failed to enforce when chemical weapons were used is criticized as one of his biggest foreign policy mistakes.¹¹ Some have suggested that the lack of firm US action in response to al-Assad’s indiscretions emboldened Russian President Vladimir Putin to invade Ukraine in 2014.¹²

Second and more immediate, the prospect of being criticized and punished by the domestic audience is the reason threats are perceived to be credible by the international audience. The core logic is that foreign countries understand what will happen domestically to leaders who back down. As a result, foreign countries

consider threats to be more credible when leaders are likely to be held accountable. Skeptics have noted that this relies on the adversary's ability to know about the domestic politics within the country that has issued the threat.¹³ However, increased flows of information across borders strongly suggest that countries today have a good appreciation of domestic politics in other countries. Even without intricate knowledge of the political environment, the simple prospect of sowing internal divisions in rival countries also suffices as an incentive to defy issued threats.

Regarding these audience cost mechanisms, scholars have recently begun to explore political polarization might affect the equation, particularly in the context of the presidency of Donald Trump. Daniel Drezner, for example, has claimed that audience costs may not exist in extremely polarized political environments. This is because supporters will either not perceive an empty threat as "empty" or because they will be inclined to interpret a decision made by a leader in the most favorable way possible. In other words, polarization causes audience costs to disappear even without the leader having to justify their decision to back down.¹⁴

Polarization, Audience Costs, and Foreign Policy in South Korea

Based on the theoretical descriptions above, this section explains the increasing polarization in South Korea and its impact on foreign policy. As evidenced by the recent presidential election results, polarization has increased in South Korea over the past several years. Kenneth Schultz identifies four distinct but closely related defining aspects of polarization. First, a sharper divide between the ideological positions of elites. Second, the "sorting" of the public into homogenous parties. Third, distrust and dislike of people from the other party, referred to as "affective" or "negative" polarization. And lastly, fragmentation of the media compounds the problem of polarization by enabling the public to conform to their existing beliefs.¹⁵

South Korea has witnessed each of these aspects.¹⁶ Studies have warned about increasing elite polarization between the two major parties. This has substantially shrunk the overlapping range of positions between the two sides and rendered moderate politicians an endangered species.¹⁷ Starkly divided views expressed by party leaders have also precipitated the polarization of the public and the consolidation of highly homogenous political parties.¹⁸ Furthermore, the South Korean public has tightly consolidated around the two major parties by following the cues of the elite. Party affiliation is no longer a matter of policy preference but increasingly a key part of an individual's identity.¹⁹ Studies have also suggested that affective rather than ideological polarization has been more acute among the South Korean public.²⁰ Lastly, the explosion of "new" media outlets on social

networking platforms such as YouTube and Facebook have exacerbated the media divide that already existed in South Korea.²¹ Such polarization has led some to believe that South Korea has followed, instead of bucked, global trends of “democratic depression.”²²

In addition, a unique feature of polarization in South Korea is that the public is divided over foreign policy, particularly on the North Korea question. Partisanship on foreign policy issues exists in other countries such as the United States, where preferences diverge on issues such as the use of force, unilateralism or multilateralism, and trade policy. Yet at the same time, politics tends to “stop at the water’s edge,” especially when national security is concerned.²³ At a minimum, differences remain ideological and thus less divisive. Relative bipartisanship on foreign policy can also partly be attributed to how the public is perceived to know and care less about international affairs.²⁴ While this has ebbed and flowed in recent years, the country’s relatively united front against a more assertive China both politically and economically demonstrates that this dynamic still exists.

Neither is true in South Korea. First, rather than foster bipartisanship, foreign policy exacerbates polarization. Two closely related issues lie at the heart of the divide: the country’s alliance with the United States and how to address the North Korea problem. A recent study revealed that the views held by opposing sides of the political spectrum have become more divergent on key statements such as “the ROK-U.S. alliance should be strengthened further” and “aid to North Korea should be increased.”²⁵ Other studies corroborate such a divide, identifying partisanship as a key determinant of an individual’s views of North Korea and unification.²⁶

Second and relatedly, the South Korean public is often required to pay close attention to foreign affairs as it directly impacts their safety and livelihoods. The threat of North Korea is a constant reality for the people of South Korea, not to mention how inter-Korean relations are a matter of culture and national heritage that invokes a more emotional reaction. South Korea’s tough geopolitical position contributes to the public’s heightened awareness. China’s economic retribution in response to South Korea’s decision to install Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) batteries reminded the public just how closely tied the fate of the nation is to broader global trends. These two aspects cause the South Korean public to be more aware of foreign affairs than other nations in general.

These characteristics suggest that domestic politics and polarization in South Korea will deeply impact foreign policy. Regarding this particular relationship between domestic and foreign policy, scholars have discussed the potency of the so-called “south–south conflict” that has centered on competing views on North Korea policy and attitudes toward the United States. For example, the south–

south conflict may have made South Korea more vulnerable to manipulation by North Korea. Dong Sun Lee and Sung-Yoon Chung argue that polarization in foreign policy makes it easier for North Korea to try to alter South Korean policies that harm Pyongyang's own interests. This is because, on the one hand, the absence of audience costs makes it more convenient for South Korean governments to withdraw their initial threats. On the other hand, the polarized nature of the South Korean society makes it easier for North Korea to generate pressure on the government by instigating detractors.²⁷ Based on these mechanisms, Lee and Chung conclude that the south–south divide has caused North Korean provocations.

This is likely to be the case for the Yoon administration also. Specifically, increased polarization in South Korea and the consequent absence of audience costs are likely to result in two main implications for the Yoon administration. First, threats that the Yoon administration chooses to issue may become less credible. This, in turn, may have two related consequences. First, North Korea may become increasingly emboldened to challenge threats issued by the Yoon administration. This is a direct function of the decreased credibility of threats due to a lack of audience costs. In comparison, a more indirect outcome might be that North Korea becomes incentivized to probe the Yoon administration's intentions through aggressive actions. This may particularly matter more in the earlier stages of the new administration as North Korea seeks to assess how the next five years of inter-Korean relations will unfold.

These mechanisms will likely exacerbate international tensions inherent when a country undergoes a power transition, creating a more contentious environment on the Korean peninsula. Theoretically speaking, newly elected leaders are incentivized to cultivate a strong reputation so that their future bargaining leverage increases. Opposing countries are similarly motivated to not only gain the upper hand but also assess the resolve of their new negotiation partner.²⁸

This has been empirically proven on the Korean peninsula. The Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) has found that North Korea frequently times its military provocations to coincide with elections to maximize impact. In addition, the “provocation window,” or the time between elections and provocations, has narrowed over time. CSIS also finds that North Korea is indiscriminate toward conservative and progressive South Korean governments.²⁹ Such evidence implies that North Korea has become more strategic and is well aware of election processes in South Korea and the United States.³⁰

Second, it is worth also considering the domestic consequences in Seoul. The absence of audience costs suggests that the Yoon administration may enjoy greater flexibility to attempt a wider range of policy options. While President Yoon has

begun his term with stern threats directed at North Korea, the option to choose alternative strategies will remain available as this shift will not entail domestic political consequences. Furthermore, such relative freedom will enable the South Korean government to focus on other foreign policy priorities with neighboring countries such as the United States, China, and Japan. The key to this potential transition will be the success of initial pressure campaigns implemented by the Yoon administration.

Situation on the Korean Peninsula Since the Elections

Turning to an analysis of strategic interactions between the two Koreas over the past few months before and after the elections, one can assess whether the mechanisms described above have appeared on the Korean peninsula. Throughout the campaign, President Yoon proposed the denuclearization of North Korea as his top foreign policy priority to be pursued through a “principled and reciprocal” approach. At the same time, the Yoon campaign vowed to restore relations with the United States which, it argued, had been weakened by making too many concessions to North Korea.³¹ During the transition period, the president-elect followed up these promises through the transition team’s announcement of the 110 national key tasks on 3 May.³²

President Yoon’s claims about the prospect of preemptive strikes against North Korea are especially worth noting. The idea arose in response to North Korea’s missile test on 11 January. Speaking to reporters, then-candidate Yoon stated that “there is no other option to block a nuclear attack at the moment except through a preemptive strike with the Kill-Chain.”³³ Despite harsh criticism from his election opponent, Yoon doubled down on his statement a week later, claiming that “peace is the result of overwhelming force” and that “only a strong deterrent will protect the peace of South Korea.”³⁴ This view has been reiterated by key members of the administration since then, including former Defense Minister Suh Wook, who served under the Moon and Yoon administrations.³⁵

In contrast to the vagueness of North Korea policies proposed by both the campaign and the transition team, the prospect of preemptive strikes is much clearer and more direct. Moreover, it can be viewed as an initial threat targeting North Korea, particularly when considering how the notion was initially mentioned by Yoon in response to a missile test launch by North Korea. The immediate reaction reflected the polarized nature of the South Korean public. Conservatives welcomed the firm stance, while progressives criticized the statement as “irresponsible.”³⁶

At least on the surface, President Yoon’s threat appears to have had little impact on North Korea’s calculus, either before the election or since the inauguration.

From January 2022 until the elections in March, North Korea conducted nine separate provocations, all in the form of test launches of missiles with various ranges. North Korea's provocations have continued since the elections, with the Kim regime test-launching missiles on numerous occasions.³⁷

Aside from the relative frequency of these test launches, the escalation of tensions by North Korea provides further evidence that the initial threat might have been ineffective. In early May, reports started to appear that North Korea may be preparing for its seventh nuclear test, its first since the last nuclear test in 2017. Various experts and organizations, including the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and US military and intelligence agencies, have speculated that a nuclear test is imminent. Satellite images have revealed how North Korea has prepared the Punggye-ri nuclear test site and has resumed construction of a second nuclear reactor at the nuclear facilities at Yongbyon.³⁸ The South Korean government also confirmed in late May that North Korea had been testing a nuclear triggering device.³⁹ While North Korea has not yet conducted its nuclear test, concerns remain as the Kim regime has maintained an aggressive tone.⁴⁰ There is also speculation that North Korea might be waiting for China's party congress expected to be held later this year.⁴¹

What is remarkable about the prospect of another nuclear test by the Kim regime is the fact that North Korea had previously declared the completion of its nuclear arsenal. In 2018, Kim Jong-un had declared that North Korea would no longer need further nuclear tests "under the proven condition of complete nuclear weapons."⁴² The relatively marginal need for additional testing of nuclear capabilities compared to the immense costs involved suggests that such posturing by North Korea is more the result of lack of credibility of South Korea's threats than the goal of advancing its nuclear capabilities.

In other words, it is possible that recent provocations by North Korea intend to test the resolve of the new South Korean government to verify the extent and sincerity of the Yoon administration's hardline policies. The understanding that polarization has weakened the impact of audience costs in South Korea may have led North Korea to believe that enough pressure caused by a seventh nuclear test could compel the Yoon administration to soften its stance. If North Korea succeeds, it also acquires long-term benefits in the form of greater bargaining leverage.

If this is indeed the intended goal of the Kim regime, Pyongyang has certainly not achieved it so far. The Yoon administration has steadfastly maintained its firm position on North Korean provocations and has undertaken both military and diplomatic steps in response. For example, South Korea flew fighter jets in coordination with the United States in a show of force over the Yellow Sea on 7

June.⁴³ And during his recent visit to Madrid to attend the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit, President Yoon met with his counterparts from the United States and Japan and vowed to strengthen trilateral cooperation against North Korea in the region.⁴⁴

While still early, it is apparent that the two Koreas have been testing each other's resolve and intentions through various threats and initiatives. Neither side has yet to back down from their original positions, which is why tensions have persisted. The seventh nuclear test being prepared by the Kim regime, if and when it occurs, will likely set in motion a sequence of events that will allow the two sides to properly assess where each nation stands as they start the processes of competition and dialogue over the next five years.

Conclusion

This article has discussed the recent results of the South Korean presidential elections and explored its implications for the Yoon administration's policy toward North Korea. Based on existing studies, this article has shown polarization creates an environment in which leaders become free from the consequences of audience costs. This will subsequently lead to two outcomes. First, threats issued by states may become less credible which, in turn, increases the likelihood of threats being ignored by the target state. Second, the absence of political ramifications implies greater flexibility to attempt a wider range of policy options. This article has demonstrated that both of these mechanisms likely apply to South Korea, particularly given how the nature of polarization in the country makes it harder for South Korean society to generate audience costs. The analysis of recent tensions surrounding the Yoon administration's mention of preemptive strikes and North Korea's preparations for a nuclear test provides evidence that the Korean peninsula is currently susceptible to the absence of audience costs and credibility.

To conclude, two points are worth mentioning. First, future research is necessary to test the propositions claimed in this article. While recent developments certainly suggest that the mechanisms proposed in this article may exist, further investigation is required to empirically verify these claims—most notably because neither side has backed down yet. Future scenarios that involve, in particular, a decision by the Yoon administration to soften its position vis-à-vis North Korea will grant a better understanding of how audience costs are generated and function in today's polarized South Korean society.

Second, the descriptions suggested in this article apply in the short term. In other words, it anticipates that while audience costs will be hard to generate for the foreseeable future, they may return at later junctures. This can be attributed to the fact that polarization tends to peak during elections but also because the pub-

lic's expectations shift. It is to be expected that the Yoon administration will enjoy greater flexibility in the short term as its policies are compared to those of the previous administration and perceived to be firmer. However, the longer the Yoon administration maintains hardline approaches, the baseline will shift. This will make policy shifts more difficult in the future as conservatives may disapprove of the slightest of concessions, reintroducing audience costs into the mix.

There are signs that changes might be occurring on the Korean Peninsula. During his first Liberation Day speech on 15 August 2022, President Yoon outlined an "audacious" initiative that includes a wide range of assistance programs in exchange for "a comprehensive, phased, and step-by-step" denuclearization process.⁴⁵ But North Korea immediately rejected the offer, deeming it "foolish."⁴⁶ This indicates not only that the two sides are not yet ready to talk but also that they are not done competing for leverage. The period after power transitions involves the greatest amount of uncertainty both at home and abroad. How successfully the Yoon administration navigates these initial few months will determine how much progress is made toward peace and stability on the Korean peninsula.



Dr. DongJoon Park

Dr. Park is a senior researcher at the Peace and Democracy Institute (PDI) at Korea University. His research focuses on the role of reputations in international relations, alliance politics, and, the relationship between domestic and international politics. Previously, he was a visiting scholar at the Institute of Security and Conflict Studies (ISCS) at the George Washington University from 2020 to 2021 and a James A. Kelly Korea Research Fellow in residence at the Pacific Forum, in Honolulu, Hawai'i, from 2011 to 2012. He received his PhD in political science from the Department of Government at Georgetown University in August 2020.

Notes

1. Sang-hun Choe, "South Korea's Presidential Election: What to Watch," *New York Times*, 8 March 2022, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.

2. Shin Ji-hye, "Yoon says 'Preemptive Strike' is 'to protect Peace'," *Korea Herald*, 3 February 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/>.

3. James Fearon, "'Credibility' Is Not Everything but It's Not Nothing Either," *Monkey Cage*, 7 September 2013, <https://themonkeycage.org/>.

4. James D. Fearon, "Domestic Political Audiences and the Escalation of International Disputes," *American Political Science Review* 88, no. 3 (1994), 581.

5. For example, see, Kenneth A. Schultz, "Looking for Audience Costs," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 45, no. 1 (2001): 32–60; Michael Tomz, "Domestic Audience Costs in International Relations: An Experimental Approach," *International Organization* 61, no. 4 (2007): 821–40; and Joshua D. Kertzer and Ryan Brutger, "Decomposing Audience Costs: Bringing the Audience Back into Audience Cost Theory," *American Journal of Political Science* 60, no. 1 (2016): 234–49.

6. Alastair Smith, "International Crises and Domestic Politics," *American Political Science Review* 92, no. 3 (1998): 623–38.

7. Jessica L. Weeks, "Autocratic Audience Costs: Regime Type and Signaling Resolve," *International Organization* 62, no. 1 (2008): 35–64.
8. Jack Snyder and Erica D. Borghard, "The Cost of Empty Threats: A Penny, not a Pound," *American Political Science Review* 105, no. 3 (2011): 437–56.
9. Alexander B. Downes and Todd S. Sechser, "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility," *International Organization* 66, no. 3 (2012): 457–489; Matthew S. Levendusky, and Michael C. Horowitz, "When Backing Down is the Right Decision: Partisanship, New Information, and Audience Costs," *The Journal of Politics* 74, no. 2 (2012): 323–338.
10. For an overview of the literature on reputations, see, Allan Dafoe, Jonathan Renshon, and Paul Huth, "Reputation and Status as Motives for War," *Annual Review of Political Science* 17 (2014): 371–93.
11. Daniel L. Byman, "Mr. Obama, Don't Draw That Line," *New York Times*, 4 May 2013, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.
12. Marc A. Thiessen, "Obama's Weakness Emboldens Putin," *Washington Post*, 3 March 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>. For a counter-argument, see, Julia Ioffe, "How Russia Saw the 'Red Line' Crisis," *The Atlantic*, 11 March 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>.
13. Downes and Sechser, "The Illusion of Democratic Credibility," 485.
14. Daniel W. Drezner, "The Stranger things about Polarization and Foreign Policy," *Washington Post*, 12 April 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.
15. Kenneth A. Schultz, "Perils of Polarization for U.S. Foreign Policy," *Washington Quarterly* 40, no. 4 (2017): 8–9.
16. For a broader discussion of concerns about the state of the South Korean democracy, see, Gi-Wook Shin, "South Korea's Democratic Decay," *Journal of Democracy* 31, no. 3 (2020): 100–14; and Jang Jip Choi, "Reconsidering the Korean Democracy : Crisis and Alternative [in Korean]," *Korean Political Survey* 29, no. 2 (2020): 1–26.
17. Hoon Jaung, "Ideological Polarization in Foreign Policies among members of National Assembly [in Korean]," *Journal of Future Politics* 9, no. 2 (2019): 67–101.
18. NaeYoung Lee, "Main Source of Ideological Conflict in Korea: Public Polarization or Elite Polarization? [in Korean]," *Korean Party Studies Review* 10, no. 2 (2011): 251–87.
19. Gidong Kim and Jae Mook Lee, "Partisan Identity and Affective Polarization in South Korea [in Korean]," *Korean Party Studies Review* 55, no.2 (2021): 57–87.
20. Jung ah Gil and Shang E. Ha, "How Perceptions of Inter-party Conflict Influence Partisan Affect: The Moderating Role of Party Identification [in Korean]," *Korean Journal of Legislative Studies* 25, no. 1 (2019): 45–78.
21. Kyungmo Kim and Seungsu Lee, "News Audiences' Perceptual Biases and Assessment of News Fairness : An Analysis of the Influences of Trust for Media, Message Bias, Self-categorization, and Self-enhancement [in Korean]," *Communications Theories* 14, no. 3 (2018): 145–98.
22. Shin, "South Korea's Democratic Decay," 101.
23. Joanne Gowa, "Politics at the Water's Edge: Parties, Voters, and the Use of Force Abroad," *International Organization* 52, no. 2 (1998): 307–24; Stephen Chaudoin, Helen V. Milner, and Dustin H. Tingley, "The Center Still Holds: Liberal Internationalism Survives," *International Security* 35, no. 1 (2010): 75–94; and Joshua D. Kertzer, Deborah Jordan Brooks, and Stephen G. Brooks, "Do Partisan Types Stop at the Water's Edge?" *Journal of Politics* 83, no. 4 (2021): 1764–82.
24. Benjamin I. Page and Jason Barabas, "Foreign Policy Gaps between Citizens and Leaders," *International Studies Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (2000): 339–64.

25. Yeilim Cheong and Stephan Haggard, "Polarization in Korea Part II: Divided Over What?" *Korea Economic Institute* (KEI), 3 March 2022, <https://keia.org/>.
26. Sang Sin Lee, et al., *The KINU Unification Survey 2021: New Approaches to Unification and North Korea* [in Korean] (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2021).
27. Dong Sun Lee and Sung-Yoon Chung, "Blame Game under Fire: Parsing South Korean Debate on North Korea Policy," *Korea Observer* 44, no. 2 (2013), 328–29.
28. Scott Wolford, "The Turnover Trap: New Leaders, Reputation, and International Conflict," *American Journal of Political Science* 51, no. 4 (2007), 772–73.
29. Victor Cha, "DPRK Provocations Possible Around South Korean Elections," *Beyond Parallel*, 18 April 2017, <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/>.
30. Over the past few cycles, North Korea's official state media has reported on South Korea's election results. Experts consider this somewhat surprising as the regime is expected to be "reluctant to publicize information about South Korea's democratic, free election system." Jieun Kim, "North Korean State Media reports South Korean Election Results," *Radio Free Asia*, 11 March 2022, <https://www.rfa.org/>.
31. "A New South Korea Based on Fairness and Common Sense: The Policy Platform of the People's Party for the 20th Presidential Election [in Korean]," <https://www.peoplepowerparty.kr/>.
32. "110 Key National Tasks of the Yoon Seok-yeol Government [in Korean]," <https://www.korea.kr/>; and Lee Haye-ah, "Transition Team Unveils 110 Key Tasks to Pursue under Yoon," *Yonhap News*, 3 May 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/>.
33. Yonhap, "Yoon cites Preemptive Strike as Option to Deal with N.K. Threat," *Yonhap News*, 11 January 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/>.
34. Ga-yoon Kim, "Candidate Yoon details 'Preemptive Strikes against North Korea', Vows to Restore the 'Three Axes' [in Korean]," *Hankyoorae*, 17 January 2022, <https://www.hani.co.kr/>.
35. "Yoon's Spokesperson defends S. Korea's Right to Launch Preemptive Strike," *Yonhap News*, 5 April 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220405005400315> (accessed June 30, 2022).
36. Da-min Jung, "Controversy Rises over Yoon's Preemptive Strike Remarks," *Korea Times*, 13 January 2022, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
37. "Database: North Korean Provocations," *Beyond Parallel*, 20 December 2019, <https://beyondparallel.csis.org/>.
38. Zachary Cohen, "New Satellite Images reveal North Korea has Restarted Construction on Long-Dormant Nuclear Reactor," *CNN*, 13 May 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/>.
39. Lee Haye-ah, "N. Korea Tests Nuclear Detonation Device: Presidential Office," *Yonhap News*, 25 May 2022, <https://en.yna.co.kr/>.
40. Christy Lee, "North Korea's Latest Threat Seen as Pretext for Nuclear Test," *VOA*, 31 July 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/>.
41. Min-ho Jung, "North Korea May Delay Nuclear Test until End of China's Party Congress: Experts," *Korea Times*, 29 July 2022, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
42. Sophie Jeong, Will Ripley, and Euan McKirdy, "Kim Jong Un: North Korea no longer needs Nuclear Tests," *CNN*, 22 April 2018, <https://edition.cnn.com/>.
43. Brad Lendon and Yoonjung Seo, "South Korean and US Fighter Jets in Show of Force to Kim Jong Un Amid Fears over North Korean Nuclear Test," *CNN*, 7 June 2022, <https://edition.cnn.com/>.

44. The White House, "Readout of President Biden's Trilateral with President Yoon Suk Yeol of the Republic of Korea and Prime Minister Fumio Kishida of Japan," 29 June 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

45. Scott Snyder, "Why North Korea Might Reject Yoon Suk-yeol's Audacious Initiative," *Forbes*, 17 August 2022, <https://www.forbes.com/>.

46. Bethany Dawson, "Kim Jong-un's Powerful Sister tells South Korean President to 'Shut his Mouth' in heated Aid Row," *Business Insider*, 21 August 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.in/>.

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

South Korea's Evolving Quest for Energy Security

Away from Fossil Fuels and Back to Nuclear Power

DR. JAMES E. PLATTE

Abstract

This article will explore Seoul's evolving energy-security strategy under the Yoon administration. It will start with an overview of South Korea's energy-security situation and a summary of the Yoon administration's new energy policies, focusing on policies to replace fossil fuels. The next sections will focus on two key factors for the Yoon administration: the potential effects of the war in Ukraine on South Korea's energy relations with Russia and attempts to bolster South Korea's domestic nuclear power industry. The latter will include a discussion of ways that South Korea can work with the United States on nuclear energy.¹ Finally, the article will conclude with an outlook on South Korea's energy security.

Yoon Suk-yeol assumed the presidency of South Korea in May 2022 facing some challenges that each of his predecessors have had to deal with. Among these enduring challenges for South Korean leaders is energy security. While energy security is an issue for every country, it is a particularly acute problem for South Korea, which is highly dependent on energy imports to power its export-driven, industrialized economy. Yoon took office, however, amid a transition for South Korea's energy-security strategy, as the country is increasingly looking for ways to move away from fossil fuels to reduce carbon emissions and energy imports. Yoon's predecessor, Moon Jae-in, particularly emphasized renewable energy and hydrogen energy to replace fossil fuels, and Yoon has promised to undo Moon's nuclear phase-out policy and increase South Korea's use of nuclear power. The war in Ukraine further complicates Seoul's new energy-security calculus. South Korea had sought to expand energy relations with Russia for the past few decades, but those ties now appear uncertain.

South Korean Energy Security under Yoon Suk-yeol

There is no single definition of *energy security* among scholars and practitioners, but this article will start with the definition used by the International Energy Agency (IEA), which defines energy security as “the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price.”² The IEA also differentiates between long-term energy security as mainly concerning “timely investments to supply energy in line with economic developments and environmental needs” and short-term energy security as focusing on “the ability of the energy system to react promptly to sudden changes in the supply-demand balance.”

Perceptions of energy security can vary from country to country, and for Seoul, both long-term and short-term energy security have meant managing volatile international energy markets due to the country’s high energy import dependence. South Korea relies on imports for more than 90 percent of its primary energy supply, and energy imports account for around a quarter of the country’s total imports.³ Moreover, high dependence on specific regions, such as the Middle East, for energy imports adds to vulnerabilities to South Korea’s energy security. Given this high energy import dependence, Herie Park and Sungwoo Bae stated that Seoul’s “top priority in energy supply security has thus been to avoid any disruption of the energy supply.”⁴

The importance of energy-supply security is emphasized by the fact that South Korea is among the world’s top five importers of liquified natural gas (LNG), coal, and total petroleum liquids.⁵ Petroleum and other liquids, coal, and natural gas accounted for 43 percent, 28 percent, and 16 percent, respectively, of South Korea’s primary energy supply in 2019.⁶ With no road, rail, or pipeline connections to the Asian mainland, South Korea also relies exclusively on maritime shipments of the fossil fuels that deliver more than 85 percent of the country’s primary energy supply. Nuclear power and renewable energy accounted for 10 and 3 percent, respectively, of the country’s primary energy supply in 2019, but with no domestic uranium mines, South Korea is completely reliant on imports to fuel nuclear power plants, too.

One way that Seoul has sought to bolster energy security in recent years is by diversifying the country’s sources of fossil fuel supplies. South Korea imported about 69 percent of its crude oil from Middle Eastern countries—principally Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, and Iran—in 2019, but it also has increased imports from other suppliers, such as the United States, Russia, Mexico, and Kazakhstan in recent years.⁷ Top sources of LNG imports in 2019 included the Middle East (Qatar and Oman), Australia, and Southeast Asia (Malaysia and Indonesia), and LNG shares from the United

States rose from 1 percent in 2016 to 14 percent in 2019.⁸ Major coal suppliers in 2019 were Australia, Indonesia, Russia, and Canada.⁹ Diversifying fossil fuel suppliers can increase energy security by being able to respond to short-term and long-term changes to the fossil fuel markets, but it also means that Seoul must manage many energy import relationships and be concerned about multiple primary sea lanes for shipping.

This is the energy-supply structure that the Yoon administration inherited earlier this year, but the administration released its own view of South Korea's energy-security situation in July 2022. The Republic of Korea (ROK) Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy (MOTIE) stated, "Amid the global push for carbon neutral, escalation of Russia-Ukraine conflict and global energy-supply chain uncertainties, energy security and attaining carbon neutral goals are now more critical than ever."¹⁰ MOTIE did not set overall energy mix goals but set a goal of having nuclear power deliver 30 percent of South Korea's electricity by 2030. It emphasized having market principles guide policies on other energy sources and using energy industry exports as growth engines for South Korea's economy.

MOTIE also did not set a date for South Korea's economy to become carbon neutral but emphasized realizing carbon neutral goals as imperative for South Korea's energy security. Pursuing carbon neutrality surely is motivated for environmental reasons; however, the new energy policy announcement ended with arguably an equally important reason for this pursuit. MOTIE claimed that implementing the Yoon administration's energy policies "will help reduce reliance on fossil fuel imports from 81.8 percent (2021) to 60 percent (2030)."¹¹

Successfully moving away from fossil fuels, thus being less reliant on energy imports, could help South Korea meet the IEA's definitions of both long-term and short-term energy security. In the short-term, South Korea will remain heavily reliant on energy imports, but the war in Ukraine highlights the need to pursue more stable import relationships while transitioning away from fossil fuels. In the long-term, investments in nonfossil fuel energy sources, like nuclear power and renewables, will be vital for South Korea's energy security. This article now turns to the impact of the war in Ukraine and revitalizing South Korea's domestic nuclear power industry, key factors for implementing the Yoon administration's energy policy.

Impacts of Russia's War in Ukraine on ROK Energy Security

Seoul has been interested in importing fossil fuels from reserves in the Russian Far East since the late 1980s to diversify ROK energy imports. In 1992, South Korean and Russian leaders agreed to study the joint development of natural gas fields in the Russian Far East and gas pipelines from Russia to South Korea.¹² In

the following decades, the two countries explored jointly developing natural gas and oil fields in the Russian Far East, an oil complex in the Vladivostok area, and a power grid interconnection project involving North Korea.¹³

These efforts by South Korea produced some substantial results, as energy imports from Russia gradually rose in the past few decades. By 2021, imports from Russia accounted for about 9 percent of all fossil fuel imports by South Korea, including 5 percent of LNG imports, 6 percent of crude oil imports, and 17.5 percent of coal imports.¹⁴ Pipelines or power lines connecting Russia and South Korea did not materialize, and difficulties cooperating with China and North Korea on such projects significantly contributed to those failures.

Yet, Se Hyun Ahn argued that other factors have limited broader energy cooperation between Russia and South Korea. He wrote that Seoul–Moscow relations “have not facilitated greater cooperation in energy projects” and that “South Korean investors have been skeptical about investing in Russia because of the unstable political and economic situation and Russia’s patchwork reform.”¹⁵ He added that Moscow views fossil fuel exports as a tool to restore Russia’s status as a great power, which has had Russian leaders reluctant to make more structural reforms or encourage more foreign cooperation in energy projects.¹⁶ Kent Calder similarly argued that natural gas pipelines can give the exporter leverage over the importer and wrote that Russia has used pipelines through Moldova and Ukraine as political leverage over those two countries.¹⁷

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine further complicates South Korea’s views of energy cooperation with Russia and makes Moscow appear to be a more politically unreliable energy partner. After Seoul agreed in March 2022 to enforce sanctions on Russia for the war in Ukraine, Moscow responded by designating South Korea an unfriendly country and demanding that unfriendly countries pay for natural gas imports in rubles.¹⁸ This did not immediately stop energy cooperation between the two countries, as South Korea continued to import LNG from Russia at levels similar to 2020 and 2021 through the first half of 2022.¹⁹ Yet, previous concerns about Russia using fossil fuel exports as political leverage and generally being an unreliable energy partner may be coming to fruition now.

These political concerns with Russia are combined with rising global energy prices. Global prices for coal, natural gas, and oil all have steadily risen since mid-2020, with coal and natural gas prices rising sharpest. Global energy prices were rising before Russia invaded Ukraine, but the war in Ukraine exacerbated this trend and has made importers of Russian fossil fuels begin to look for alternative ways to meet their energy needs.

Seoul’s energy relationship with Russia is further strained by continued tension with North Korea that has prevented any progress on pipelines from Russia to

South Korea. Calder forecast on South Korea's energy future and said the following about what South Korea would do when facing high global energy prices and tension with North Korea: "Should global energy prices prove to be high and should the political status quo in North-South relations remain ambiguous or turn more hostile once again, nuclear reliance could have a compelling logic for Korea as a whole. This would be particularly true if North-South political disputes prevent the realization of a trans-Korea gas pipeline."²⁰ The war in Ukraine only adds to this logic pushing the Yoon administration to reemphasize the use of nuclear power in South Korea.

Potential Nuclear Renaissance in South Korea

South Korea's civil nuclear program goes back to the 1960s, but the country's first major push toward nuclear power came in the 1970s, in the wake of the 1973 oil crisis.²¹ South Korea's first commercial nuclear reactor, Kori-1, entered commercial operation in 1978, and nuclear power quickly grew to providing more than 50 percent of the country's electricity by 1987.²² While other power sources also grew in subsequent years to balance out the ROK's power sector, South Korea remains one of the top users of nuclear power in the world. South Korea's nuclear industry was among the top six countries in the world in terms of operable reactors, net electrical capacity, and electricity supplied in 2021, and nuclear power accounted for 28 percent of the country's electricity that year.²³

Despite the prominence of nuclear power in South Korea's energy portfolio since the 1970s, previous ROK president Moon Jae-in initiated a policy to phase out nuclear power due to concerns regarding safety and long-term viability of the nuclear industry. The phase-out policy mostly consisted of not starting new reactor construction projects and shutting down existing reactors when they reached 40 years of operation. South Korea's two oldest reactors, Wolsong-1 and Kori-1, shut down during Moon's presidency, but the relative youth of the country's reactor fleet meant that the phase-out policy would take until about 2060 to complete. Thus, when Yoon took office in May 2022 with a campaign promise to reverse the phase-out policy, he still inherited a robust nuclear sector. However, it is a sector in need of more stability and support to be able to meaningfully contribute to South Korea's pursuit of carbon neutrality and reduced dependence on fossil fuel imports.

The Yoon administration has moved to support South Korea's nuclear sector rhetorically and financially. MOTIE's new energy policy announcement declared that "it is imperative that new energy policy goals and directions are set so as to better accomplish carbon neutral government projects and the expansion of nuclear power."²⁴ MOTIE also set three targets for the country's nuclear industry to

achieve by 2030: account for 30 percent of the country's electricity, export 10 nuclear power plants, and develop a unique small modular reactor (SMR).²⁵ Financially, the Yoon administration said they will increase funding for nuclear research-and-development projects and government-backed loans for companies working with the nuclear industry.²⁶

Yoon also is looking to bolster cooperation with South Korea's oldest nuclear energy partner, the United States, to help strengthen his country's nuclear industry. Yoon and US president Joe Biden met in May 2022 and proclaimed that they "recognize the importance of nuclear energy as a critical and reliable source of carbon-free electricity, an important element to grow our clean energy economy, and an integral part of enhancing global energy security."²⁷ They committed to increasing civil nuclear cooperation, particularly in the areas of advanced SMR development, assured fuel supply, and spent nuclear fuel (SNF) management.²⁸ This article will now look at how South Korea can cooperate with the United States in these three areas.

Opportunities for US–ROK Cooperation

The first area of cooperation is the development and deployment of advanced SMRs. The existing fleets of commercial reactors in South Korea and the United States comprise large-scale reactors that are designed to provide stable baseload power for the electricity grid. Except for four heavy-water reactors in South Korea, all are light-water reactors (LWR). These reactors have successfully provided carbon-free electricity generation for several decades in both countries. Nevertheless, there does not appear to be strong demand for building more of these types of reactors, especially in the United States, largely due to high upfront capital costs. The recent attempts to build large LWRs in the United States do not provide much reason for optimism. Construction on two new LWRs each at the VC Summer nuclear power plant in South Carolina and the Vogtle nuclear power plant in Georgia began in 2013. The project at VC Summer ceased in 2017, and while construction continues at Vogtle, those two reactors are well behind schedule and over the initial budget estimate. These experiences led to the bankruptcy of Westinghouse Electric Company and dampened hopes for building additional large LWRs in the United States.

Even as these larger reactors face challenges, there is optimism for advanced SMRs. There is no common definition of an SMR, but it generally has one-third or less the generating capacity of a traditional LWR, with capacities ranging from tens of megawatts up to around 300 megawatts. SMRs can be based on traditional LWR technologies, but they also can use other coolants, such as gas, liquid metal, or molten salt. SMRs have been touted for a variety of uses, including power

generation, process heat, and desalination. Thus, SMRs could contribute to decarbonization across various economic sectors. The US Department of Energy (DOE) has promoted the development of advanced SMRs for several years, citing “relatively small physical footprints, reduced capital investment, ability to be sited in locations not possible for larger nuclear plants, and provisions for incremental power additions” as among the main advantages of SMRs over traditional LWRs.²⁹

Collaboration between South Korean and US firms on SMR development is already under way. For example, Doosan Enerbility and Samsung C&T both recently completed agreements with NuScale Power related to the construction of NuScale’s 50 megawatt SMR.³⁰ NuScale plans to begin operating its first SMR in the US state of Idaho by 2029 and is exploring other opportunities in Europe and Asia. SK Group is considering investing a 10-percent stake in TerraPower, which plans to build its first demonstration reactor in the state of Wyoming by 2028.³¹ Finally, Hyundai Engineering & Construction signed an agreement for the turnkey supply of Holtec International’s SMR in 2021, which is considering building an SMR in the state of New Jersey.³²

These examples are similar to the US–ROK collaboration at the Barakah nuclear power plant in the UAE, where South Korean firms led construction and component supply and US firms provided design and service support. With South Korea’s more recent success in nuclear reactor construction, it only makes sense that US nuclear design firms would look to South Korean firms for construction and component supply. Moreover, the provision of South Korean financing, such as SK Group’s interest in TerraPower, could prove vital to actualizing SMR deployment in the United States by 2030.

A good next step would be for US firms such as NuScale to explore options for siting an SMR project in South Korea, despite facing competition from domestic South Korean SMR designs. However, with South Korean firms planning to provide construction, component, and financing services, even US-based SMR designs would benefit South Korean nuclear firms. Selecting an existing US-based design that is already moving toward deployment could speed up SMR deployment in South Korea. The Yoon administration should set a goal of starting construction on an advanced SMR by 2027, which would put the country on a similar timeline to SMR deployment in the United States. Siting such a project would be challenging, but South Korea could explore similar options as US SMR siting plans, such as at national laboratories or at existing power plant sites.

The nuclear industries in both countries have faced challenges with siting and financing before, but a new challenge related to fuel supply has now arisen due to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and subsequent economic sanctions imposed on Russia by the United States and allies. Russia’s Techsnabexport (Tenex) supplies

around 20 percent of the low-enrichment uranium (LEU), which is typically enriched to between 3 percent and 5 percent for US LWRs, and it signed a new contract in 2020 to supply uranium-enrichment services for South Korean LWRs through 2030.³³ Moreover, most of the advanced nuclear reactors under development in the United States require high-assay low-enriched uranium (HALEU), enriched to between 5 percent and 20 percent.³⁴ The United States currently has no capacity to produce HALEU, and Russia was expected to supply this uranium for at least the initial advanced SMRs in the United States. There are new calls in the United States to increase domestic uranium-enrichment capacity, including for HALEU production, so that advanced SMR deployment is not delayed due to the political or economic effects of the war in Ukraine.

The DOE has two programs—the Strategic Uranium Reserve and HALEU Availability Program—that could address this need to increase domestic uranium-enrichment capacity. The DOE's National Nuclear Security Administration (NNSA) initiated purchases for the former program this past summer, and for fiscal year 2023, the White House requested USD 1.5 billion for the latter program.³⁵ The HALEU Availability Program would commit the DOE to buy some of the first batches of HALEU, thereby supplying needed market certainty for uranium-enrichment providers to produce HALEU and for advanced SMR developers to proceed with deployment plans. Time is of the essence here, as processing a license to modify an existing uranium-enrichment facility or to build a new facility would take two to four years.³⁶ The only licensed enrichment facility in the United States is operated by Urenco and can produce up to 5.5 percent LEU. Centrus Energy's license to produce up to 20 percent HALEU at a demonstration project site will end later this year, and the firm said it would take four years to bring a commercial facility online after securing funding or purchase commitments.

Thus, increasing HALEU production capacity is another area where South Korea and the United States could deepen their civil nuclear cooperation. South Korea has no uranium-enrichment capacity and would need permission from the United States to enrich uranium, per the terms of the two countries' 123 Agreement from 2015.³⁷ Yet, as with advanced SMR development, South Korea could provide financing to help increase US uranium-enrichment capacity. For example, TerraPower's Sodium reactor requires HALEU, and SK Group could further support TerraPower's deployment plans by investing in or signing a purchase agreement for US-produced HALEU.³⁸ Other advanced SMR designs—including those by NuScale, Holtec, and the Korea Atomic Energy Research Institute's SMART SMR—use standard LEU. Thus, South Korean investments in expanding any uranium-enrichment capacity in the United States would be beneficial.

The 123 Agreement also established the High-Level Bilateral Commission specifically to address issues such as “assured stable fuel supply.”³⁹ A meeting of the commission to address this uranium-enrichment challenge for advanced SMR deployment could explore such opportunities for South Korean support for domestic LEU and HALEU production in the United States. Increasing US enrichment capacity, in partnership with South Korean firms, would also help the United States and South Korea present a more competitive, full-service package for nuclear reactor exports to third countries, which is something the nuclear industries in both countries have desired for many years.

While there should be much focus over the next five years on supporting advanced SMR deployment and assured fuel supply, the existing fleets of nuclear reactors in both countries should not be ignored. Many of these reactors are slated to operate for decades to come, but others will be shut down and enter decommissioning in the coming years. Operating and decommissioning legacy reactors present opportunities for advancing US–ROK civil nuclear cooperation.

For operating reactors, the US and ROK nuclear industries have worked to increase fleetwide capacity factors, and reactor capacity factors have topped 90 percent in both countries in recent years.⁴⁰ This does not leave much room for improvement. Nonetheless, continued sharing of best practices in reactor operations can help ensure that existing reactors continue to operate with high-capacity factors. In addition, South Korea can learn from how US reactors continue operating beyond 40 years. Initial reactor licenses in both countries are for 40 years, but many reactors in the United States are now slated to operate up to 60 years or more. As South Korea's reactor fleet ages, reactor operators and regulators in both countries should increase information exchanges on safe, efficient reactor operations beyond 40 years.

Not all reactors will operate beyond 40 years, and safely decommissioning reactors is an important part of the nuclear industry's long-term viability. The first two reactors to shut down in South Korea came recently in 2017 and 2019.⁴¹ The Moon administration announced plans in 2019 to bolster South Korea's decommissioning capabilities, but this development is still in early stages and will require several more years to acquire the necessary technologies.⁴² Partnering with US firms that have significant decommissioning experience, such as Holtec, could speed up South Korea's acquisition of decommissioning technology. Such corporate partnerships also could bolster US–ROK nuclear reactor exports by offering better end-of-life services to customers.

Related to reactor operation and decommissioning is SNF management, which is a challenge that the nuclear industry has struggled to address for decades. Neither the United States nor South Korea has a long-term SNF management plan

in place, but the two countries recently concluded a 10-year joint fuel cycle study on using pyroprocessing and sodium-cooled fast reactors (Pyro-SFR) to process and better manage SNF.⁴³ Development and deployment of a Pyro-SFR system is a long-term project. In the meantime, the United States and South Korea could work together on expanding the use of dry casks for interim storage of SNF. Sit-ing interim and long-term storage facilities for SNF is an ongoing challenge that could be addressed through technological cooperation and information exchanges. Doing so is necessary for the current and future viability of nuclear power.

Cooperating with the United States in these areas could significantly strengthen South Korea's domestic nuclear sector and could improve Seoul's export competitiveness. Despite Moon's policy to phase out nuclear power domestically, his administration supported nuclear technology exports, like the Yoon administration's support for nuclear exports. A May 2021 joint statement between Moon and Biden committed the two countries "to develop cooperation in overseas nuclear markets, including joint participation in nuclear power plant projects."⁴⁴ Yet, a domestic nuclear phase out likely would reduce South Korea's competitiveness in the export market, and areas for cooperation with the United States would also be limited domestically and internationally. Without a domestic market, South Korea likely would see a decrease in its nuclear-related labor force and in manufacturers certified to produce components for nuclear reactors, which would weaken the broad industrial base necessary for nuclear reactor construction. Thus, the Yoon administration's political and financial support should provide a boost for South Korea's domestic nuclear industry, improve export competitiveness, and expand areas for US–ROK cooperation, providing an opportunity to secure the future of nuclear power in both countries' push for carbon neutrality.

Conclusion

South Korea's move away from fossil fuels is driven by desires to improve the natural environment and to bolster energy security through reduced dependence on fossil fuel imports. At the 2021 United Nations Climate Change Conference (often referred to as COP26), South Korea pledged to reduce carbon emissions by 40 percent from 2018 levels by 2030, equaling nearly 270 million tons of emissions. Troy Stangarone wrote that South Korea could cut roughly 73.5 million tons by 2030 by replacing imports of Russian fossil fuels with nonfossil fuel energy sources.⁴⁵

Not all these imported fossil fuels are used in the power sector, but the reemphasis on nuclear power by the Yoon administration could help South Korea replace Russian fossil fuels with nonfossil fuel energy sources. Completely replacing Russian fossil fuel imports and achieving carbon neutrality by 2050 will require

that other energy sources—like solar, wind, and hydrogen—be developed and deployed on a much larger scale than their current utilization. Cooperation with the United States and other more politically stable partners will be critical for the Yoon administration and future South Korean governments to improve the country's energy security by reducing fossil fuel imports and related carbon emissions.

For short-term energy security, the Yoon administration must take measures to deal with rising global energy prices and supply-chain disruptions—both partly caused by the war in Ukraine. Fossil fuel imports from Russia cannot be cut off immediately, unless Moscow decides to do so, due to long-term contracts and time needed to transition energy systems, but South Korea can start looking now to increase fossil fuel imports from other countries, such as the United States. Other demand-side measures, like energy conservation and government support for consumers, also can be considered to improve short-term energy security.

For long-term energy security, the measures that the Yoon administration takes to move South Korea away from fossil fuels, such as revitalizing the domestic nuclear power sector, will be critical for achieving carbon neutrality and significantly reducing energy import reliance. Complete energy independence is likely an unrealistic and undesirable goal. Uranium will need to be imported for nuclear power plants, and some fossil fuel imports for industrial and energy use will likely be needed for the foreseeable future. Import capacity and relationships also help hedge against possible domestic energy shocks in the future. However, transitioning energy systems takes on the order of decades, so the Yoon administration is facing a critical time for South Korea to be able to transition the country's economy away from fossil fuels by 2050. ♣

Dr. James E. Platte

Dr. Platte is an assistant professor with the School of Advanced Military Studies at Fort Leavenworth. His research focuses on strategic deterrence, cybersecurity, energy security, and strategy in the Indo-Pacific, and his writings have been published in *Comparative Strategy*, *Cyber Defense Review*, and the *Journal of International Politics*, among others. Previously, he was an assistant professor at the US Air Force Center for Strategic Deterrence Studies, and he worked on nuclear security with the Department of Energy, Defense Intelligence Agency, and National Nuclear Security Administration. He also held research fellowships with the National Bureau of Asian Research, East-West Center, Pacific Forum, Council on Foreign Relations, and the Harvard Kennedy School. He received his PhD in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy at Tufts University.

Notes

1. Portions of this article, particularly regarding US-ROK cooperation on civil nuclear energy, were published by the National Bureau of Asian Research in a report, "A Path to Net Zero: Opportunities for U.S.-ROK Technology Collaboration," 27 September 2022, <https://www.nbr.org/>.
2. "Energy Security," International Energy Agency, 2022, <https://www.iea.org/>.
3. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, "Energy," 2013, <https://www.mofa.go.kr/>.
4. Herie Park and Sungwoo Bae, "Quantitative Assessment of Energy Supply Security: Korea Case Study," *Sustainability* 13, no. 4 (2021), 3.
5. US Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Executive Summary: South Korea," October 2020, 1, <https://www.eia.gov/>.
6. US Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Executive Summary: South Korea," 2.
7. US Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Executive Summary: South Korea," 4–5.
8. US Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Executive Summary: South Korea," 6–7.
9. US Energy Information Administration, "Country Analysis Executive Summary: South Korea," 12.
10. Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea, "Korea's new energy policies are announced," 5 July 2022, <http://english.motie.go.kr/>.
11. Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea, "Korea's new energy policies."
12. Robert Manning, "Excerpt: The Asian Energy Factor," Council on Foreign Relations, 6 September 2000, <https://www.cfr.org/>.
13. Se Hyun Ahn, "Framing Energy Security between Russia and South Korea?," *Asian Survey* 50, no. 3 (May–June 2010), 592, <https://www.jstor.org/>.
14. Troy Stangarone, "How South Korea Can Wean Itself Off Russian Fossil Fuels," *The Diplomat*, 31 March 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/>.
15. Ahn, "Framing Energy Security between Russia and South Korea?," 603–04.
16. Ahn, "Framing Energy Security between Russia and South Korea?," 605.
17. Kent E. Calder, "Korea's Energy Insecurities: Comparative and Regional Perspectives," Korea Economic Institute of America, 2005, 47, <http://keia.org/>.
18. Stangarone, "How South Korea Can Wean Itself."
19. "Monthly Energy Statistics, August 2022," Korea Energy Economics Institute, 12 August 2022, 58, <http://www.keei.re.kr/>.
20. Calder, "Korea's Energy Insecurities," 51.
21. Manning, "Excerpt: The Asian Energy Factor."
22. Calder, "Korea's Energy Insecurities," 15.
23. International Atomic Energy Agency, "Nuclear Share of Electricity Generation in 2021," 16 August 2022, <https://pris.iaea.org/>.
24. Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea, "Korea's new energy policies."
25. Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea, "Korea's new energy policies."
26. Lee Ho-jeong, "More funds to be committed to nuclear industry revival," *Korea JoongAng Daily*, 10 August 2022, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/>.
27. "United States–Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement" (statement, White House, 21 May 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.

28. "United States-Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement."
29. Office of Nuclear Energy, US Department of Energy, "Advanced Small Modular Reactors (SMRs)," n.d., <https://www.energy.gov/>.
30. Sonal Patel, "Doosan Kicks Off NuScale SMR Production for Idaho Nuclear Project," *Power*, 26 April 2022, <https://www.powermag.com/>; and Hong Yoo, "Samsung C&T Partners with NuScale to Enter Global SMR Market," *Korea Herald*, 10 May 2022, <http://www.koreaherald.com/>.
31. Heesu Lee, "SK May Invest in Nuclear Firm Including Bill Gates' TerraPower," *Bloomberg*, 11 April 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/>.
32. "Holtec and Hyundai Finalise SMR Design and Deployment Agreement," *World Nuclear News*, 24 November 2021, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/>.
33. Paul Day, "U.S. Urges Haste on Domestic HALEU Plan as Russia Faces Isolation," *Reuters Events*, 22 March 2022, <https://www.reutersevents.com/>; and "Russia's Tenex Wins Tender for Fuel Supply to South Korea," *Nuclear Engineering International*, 25 January 2020, <https://www.neimagazine.com/>.
34. Office of Nuclear Energy, US Department of Energy, "What Is High-Assay Low-Enriched Uranium (HALEU)?," 7 April 2020, <https://www.energy.gov/>.
35. "US NNSA initiates process to purchase strategic uranium," *World Nuclear News*, World Nuclear Association, 1 July 2022, <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/>, and "White House would send the DOE \$1.5 billion to set up reliable LEU/HALEU supply," *NuclearNewswire*, American Nuclear Society, 8 September 2022, <https://www.ans.org/>.
36. Day, "U.S. Urges Haste on Domestic HALEU Plan."
37. Per NNSA, "Section 123 of the U.S. Atomic Energy Act generally requires the conclusion of a peaceful nuclear cooperation agreement for significant transfers of nuclear material or equipment from the United States. Moreover, such agreements, commonly referred to as '123 Agreements,' facilitate cooperation in other areas, such as technical exchanges, scientific research, and safeguards discussions." National Nuclear Security Administration, US Department of Energy, "123 Agreements for Peaceful Cooperation," 10 January 2022, <https://www.energy.gov/>.
38. "Frequently Asked Questions," *Sodium Power*, 2022, <https://sodiumpower.com/>.
39. Bureau of International Security and Nonproliferation, US Department of State, "U.S.-Republic of Korea (R.O.K.) Agreement for Peaceful Nuclear Cooperation," fact sheet, n.d., <https://www.state.gov/>.
40. "Nuclear Power in South Korea," *World Nuclear Association*, June 2022, <https://world-nuclear.org/>; and US Energy Information Administration, "U.S. Nuclear Industry," *Nuclear Explained*, 18 April 2022, <https://www.eia.gov/>.
41. "Nuclear Power in South Korea," *World Nuclear Association*.
42. Kang Yoon-seung, "S. Korea to Foster Nuclear Plant Decommissioning Industry amid Phaseout Policy," *Yonhap News Agency*, 17 April 2019, <https://en.yna.co.kr/>.
43. Hae-Sung Lee, "U.S., Korea Approve Nuclear Fuel Recycle Technology," *Korea Economic Daily*, 2 September 2021, <https://www.kedglobal.com/>.
44. "U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement" (statement, White House, Press Release, 21 May 2021), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
45. Stangarone, "How South Korea Can Wean Itself."

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

The Growth of South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications

DR. MINSUNG KIM

Abstract

Over the past few decades, South Korean culture has gained popularity worldwide. Since the 1990s, government-led cultural policies have transitioned from focusing on economic strategy to national branding and soft power and have had a positive impact on the domestic ecosystem of cultural industry and contributed to promoting South Korea abroad. There are three aspects contributing to the development of South Korean soft power—the successful history with economic development and democratization, the development of creative content that led to global competitiveness due to the compressed growth experience and the limited domestic market, and the development of digital technology, especially the change in the media environment. However, this increased soft power is still limited as a tool to handle problems facing South Korea, mainly because of the nation's geopolitical situation. South Korea should pay more attention to active participation in specific global agendas—especially in development and cooperation, emerging technology, and human rights issues. As a beneficiary of the existing liberal international order, South Korea achieved a prosperous economy and democracy. This aspect provides a cornerstone upon which to build South Korean cultural resources and promote them beyond its borders. South Korea should contribute creating public goods through its active engagement and leadership on various global agendas. This dedication to the international community ultimately benefits South Korea in the long run.

How has South Korean soft power captivated the world, and what does this emerging global phenomenon mean for South Korea? South Korean culture has become popular worldwide, from pop culture to cuisine, and this phenomenon creates a ripple effect that generates not merely South Ko-

rea's economic benefits but also the enhances the country's image abroad. In addition, the South Korean government invests in the nation's soft power as an effective means for Seoul's public diplomacy: "The country was once largely known for cars and smartphones, but a global audience has become mesmerized by its entertainment, and creators say success didn't happen overnight."¹ This is a quote from a November 2021 *New York Times* article that explores the development of South Korean soft power and the high status of the country's current global reputation. South Korean culture, especially television dramas and music, has been popular among fan groups in certain countries and regions, mainly Asia, since the late 1990s. When the smash hit *Gangnam Style* by South Korean singer Psy became a worldwide phenomenon, including in Europe and the United States, and reached number two on the Billboard Hot 100 chart in 2012, many assessed the song's success as a one-time event rather than a harbinger of the genre's global impact. However, this opened the door for more opportunities of recognition of South Korean culture beyond Asia.

In recent years, South Korean culture has garnered more global attention thanks to the success of K-pop groups such as BTS and Blackpink, the movie *Parasite*, and the Netflix series *Squid Game*. According to *Guinness World Records*, published in September 2021, BTS has achieved 23 titles in terms of music and social media. As of the date the article was released, BTS was ranked as "the most streamed group on Spotify, the most followed music group on Instagram, and the most Twitter engagements for a music group."² BTS reached number one on the Billboard Hot 100 chart several times. Meanwhile, Blackpink's music video, *How You Like That*, released in June 2020, received 86.4 million views in 24 hours, marking it the most anticipated music video debut ever. This group also became the first artist on YouTube to hit 75 million subscribers, setting the record of the most subscribers as of June 2022.³ According to Spotify, one of the largest music streaming websites, K-pop music streams on Spotify has increased in audience by 107 percent in the United States and 230 percent globally since 2018.⁴

Recent successes of South Korean movies and television dramas are sensational as well. *Parasite*, a dark comedy thriller released in 2019, was the first South Korean film to win the Palme d'Or at the Cannes Film Festival and to win four awards in the 92nd Academy Awards, including Best Picture, Best Director, Best Original Screenplay, and Best International Feature Film. The South Korean television show, *Squid Game*, released in September 2021, was Netflix's most-watched show of all time, with a total of 1.65 billion hours of streaming in the first four weeks of release alone. It ranked as the number-one show in at least 90 countries, including South Korea and the United States.⁵ A cycle of interest in South Korean culture has taken place, while listening to K-pop music and watching movies

and dramas have created additional attention toward Korean cuisine, fashion, beauty, and so forth.

How does this growth in interest in South Korean culture translate to soft power in the international arena? It is useful to understand the concept of *soft power*, which has been widely discussed in international relations as well as foreign policy debates. Joseph Nye introduced the term to explain US global leadership and the means for sustaining its position in the post–Cold War era,⁶ and reintroduced its role for the period in the post–September 11 era.⁷ Nye defines *soft power* as the ability to persuade others to do what one wishes them to without force or coercion.⁸ It attracts people or countries outside the country of origin without coercive measures or threats. It is different from *hard power*—military and economic power—which can be described as the ability to *force* others to act in ways contrary to what they want.⁹ Nye also raised the concept of *smart power*, encompassing a blending of soft and hard power in such a manner as to create a more holistic and balanced strategy. From the US perspective, “smart power means developing an integrated strategy, resource base, and tool kit to achieve American objectives, drawing on both hard and soft power.”¹⁰ Therefore, the concept of soft power has been widely accepted, especially for advanced countries, including the United States, as a useful means of securing and maintaining their status and roles through more attractive means of influence rather than coercive measures.

Additionally, soft power is recognized in middle-power countries, including South Korea, as useful leverage that can broaden diplomatic horizons by filling inherent gaps in hard power. However, if a state does not have enough bases for hard power, it is difficult to exert its influence only with its soft power. In this regard, South Korea can be considered a noteworthy case, pursuing both hard and soft power and integrating them as a middle-power country. South Korea has a history of achieving democratization and economic development within a relatively short time after the Korean War (1950–1953). South Korean hard power is also emphasized. The IMF World Economic Outlook announced that the South Korean economy was the tenth-largest in the world based on nominal gross domestic product (GDP) in 2021.¹¹ The Lowy Institute’s Asia Power Index ranked South Korean military capability and defense spending fifth out of 26 countries analyzed,¹² and Global Fire Power ranked South Korea sixth out of 142 countries for 2022 military strength.¹³

Along with its hard power, can South Korea’s soft power contribute to moving beyond the country’s political and security difficulties and toward exerting its diplomatic capabilities within the region and beyond? This article aims to analyze the development of South Korean soft power and its possible role in handling Seoul’s geopolitical limitations by answering the following questions: How did South

Korea develop its soft power; what are critical elements that South Korea possesses that establish its global reputation as a cultural powerhouse? Will South Korean soft power be able to contribute to Seoul's efforts in the geopolitical realm?

Driving Forces in South Korean Soft Power

Government-led Soft-Power Policies: Economic Strategy to Public Diplomacy

What are the essential factors leading to the expansion of South Korean cultural popularity? Some experts assess the success of the Korean wave—the rapid growth of South Korean cultural industries and their exports since the late 1990s—as a result of the South Korean government's organizational support.¹⁴ It is a fact that South Korean governments have established various cultural policies as economic strategy. Such policies have later transformed into public diplomatic tools. Seoul started utilizing the cultural industry to stimulate economic growth and began to establish an active cultural policy in the 1990s. There was a famous story regarding an instance when the Presidential Advisory Board on Science and Technology made a presentation to President Kim Young-sam regarding the potential export of the cultural industry in which the board pointed to the fact that the Hollywood movie *Jurassic Park* generated as much revenue as the export of 1.5 million Hyundai cars overseas.¹⁵ Since then, South Korean governments have introduced and provided diverse policies to support cultural industries, mainly focusing on export-centered economic strategies. For instance, the Kim Dae-jung administration, beginning in 1998, announced the Hallyu Industry Support Development Plan, aiming to increase the value of the South Korean cultural industry. At the time, the Kim administration expanded its budget for cultural industry from USD 14 million in 1998 to USD 84 million in 2001. Likewise, the Roh Moo-hyun administration increased subsidies for cultural startups.¹⁶ Governments also invested in such initiatives to improve the atmosphere of the cultural industry and enacted laws to protect domestic cultural markets. For instance, there was the Basic Law for Culture Industry in 1999, the establishment of the Culture and Content Agency in 2001, and the Online Digital Contents Industry Development Act in 2002. In addition, the 1995 Motion Picture Promotion Law aimed to protect South Korea's domestic film industry through the implementation of securing screen quotas.¹⁷

However, the Lee Myung-bak government changed the direction of cultural policies from economic-focused strategy to a national branding and competitiveness strategy. In particular, the concept of “Global Korea” under the Lee administration embraced economic, political, ideological, and cultural initiatives to build

South Korea's national identity as "future-orientated, multicultural and visionary."¹⁸ The *Diplomatic White Paper* published in 2010 described *soft power* as "becoming increasingly important; culture has surfaced as an indispensable element of a nation's competitiveness and economic resource that produces added value. To keep in pace with this changing global environment, Korea has adopted cultural diplomacy as a new pillar of the country's diplomatic make up."¹⁹ Additionally, the Lee administration operated the Presidential Council on National Branding for public diplomacy and shifted its focus of cultural policy into an approach based on the concept of soft power. Many considered this approach a useful way to engage in economic development and diplomacy. The government viewed the Korean wave as a new source of income via enhanced exports and tourism. This became increasingly relevant as the Korean wave expanded to include other exports such as on-line games, beauty products, and fashion. The Korean wave became an important component of soft power.²⁰

President Park Geun-hye also pledged to strengthen South Korea's cultural policy as one of her administration's main objectives. Riding the success of Psy's *Gangnam Style*, the Park administration increased the budget of the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism for various projects, including building a series of giant auditoriums and cultural centers worldwide.²¹ This emphasis on cultural policy continued under the Moon Jae-in administration. For instance, in 2020, the Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism announced the establishment of a new *Hallyu* department—*Hallyu* being the Korean term for the Korean wave—within the ministry and new strategies aimed at "diversifying *Hallyu* content, fostering other industries through *Hallyu* content, and creating a sustainable environment for the growth of *Hallyu*." The ministry also declared the current period a "new *Hallyu* era," following the *Hallyu* 1.0, 2.0, and 3.0,²² and announced various government-led projects aimed at developing and exporting South Korean culture.

With the government's support, South Korean culture's popularity and its expansion beyond the domestic audience and diaspora grew. Dal Yong Jin and Tae-Jin Yoon define this *Hallyu* phenomenon as the rapid growth of South Korean cultural industries and their exports of products to Asian markets mainly since 1997.²³ They include several advanced cultural forms as components of the Korean wave, "including popular music (K-pop), animation, and digital games, which have gradually penetrated global markets."²⁴ Yeonhee Yoon suggests including additional sectors within the Korean wave and describes *Hallyu* as "the phenomenal popularity of South Korean popular cultural products and industries ranging from television dramas, movies, popular music (K-pop) and dance, and tourism to food, gaming and technology, and fashion which began in East Asia."²⁵

Table 1. Development of the Korean Wave by period

Classification	Korean Wave 1.0	Korean Wave 2.0	Korean Wave 3.0
Period	• From 1997 to mid-2000s	• From the mid-2000s to the early 2010s	• From the early 2010s to present
Characteristics	• Advent of the Korean wave • Focused on visual content	• Diffusion of the Korean wave • Focused on K-pop groups	• Diversity of the Korean wave including online games, cuisine, fashion, and beauty products
Main Genre	• TV Drama	• K-pop	• K-culture
Genres	• Drama, movie, K-pop	• Public culture, some parts of art, and culture	• Traditional culture, art and culture, popular culture, and lifestyle
Region	• Asia	• Asia and some parts of Europe, Africa, Central and South America, and the United States	• Worldwide
Major Media	• Cable TV, satellite TV, and Internet	• Video websites (YouTube), SNS (Facebook, Twitter)	• All media types including OTT (Netflix)

Source: Revised and added by Author based on Ministry of Culture, Sports, and Tourism [2013], requoted by Ministry of Land Infrastructure and Transport, *The National Atlas of Korea I*, 2019, <http://nationalatlas.ngii.go.kr/>.

Scholars usually categorized three periods from the emergence to the present in explaining the Korean wave.²⁶ The initial period started with the popularity of a few television dramas such as *What is Love*, *Dae-jang-guem*, and *Winter Sonata*, which were especially popular in China, Taiwan, and Japan, with varying degrees of interest elsewhere in Asia as well. For example, when China Central Television (CCTV) broadcasted the TV drama *What is Love* in 1997, it ranked second place among imported content. This helped set in motion the Korean wave in China including the emergence of the term, *Hallyu*. In the case of Japan, *Winter Sonata*, aired by NHK in 2003, became a “megahit” and increased Japanese tourism to South Korea in the early 2000s.²⁷ This period is the first generation of the Korean wave (*Hallyu 1.0*). In this period, the popularity of South Korean culture was geographically limited to Asia, including Southeast Asian countries. Mary Ainslie describes the characteristic of *Hallyu 1.0* as “inter-Asian affinity.”²⁸ During

this period from 1997 to mid-2000s, the main content focused on TV dramas, which were popular especially among certain fan groups.

The second generation of the Korean wave (*Hallyu 2.0*) bore different characteristics from the previous period: diversity of popular content, geographical expansion, diversity of fan groups, mutual communication between artists and fans through social networking services (SNS such as Facebook, Twitter, etc.), utilizing popular video websites such as YouTube, and a substantial increase in the exports of cultural products and related goods.²⁹ In particular, South Korean pop groups garnered significant attention from global audiences during this period. K-pop was regarded as a distinctive genre, incorporating aspects of hip-hop, rock, pop ballads, rhythm and blues, and electronic music and featuring skillfully crafted choreography that spread beyond Asia to the other continents.³⁰ During this period, K-pop groups held concerts not only in Asia but also in Europe, including the United Kingdom, France, and Turkey. This shows the expansion of sectors and rapid growth of cultural influence beyond Asia, which opened new markets for the South Korean content industry.

The third generation (*Hallyu 3.0*) represents the period starting from the mid-2010s. *Hallyu 3.0* is different from previous generations regarding expansion of markets, content production mechanisms, active utilization of various social media networks, and over-the-top (OTT) media service platforms. In particular, geographical boundaries expanded further, branching into the United States, United Kingdom, and France³¹—the Western Hemisphere in particular. Within the third generation, according to the Korea Foundation for International Culture Exchange (KOFICE), exports of the South Korean content industry have increased overall, including not only music and movie but also publication, cartoon, animation, and so forth—video games represent the largest portion of this export content over the most recent five years.³² South Korean movies and dramas are now aired through global OTT streaming services such as Netflix, contributing to increased recognition of South Korean content. Simultaneously, new types of producing mechanisms are being deployed, including investing directly in the South Korean content and participating in the production process of dramas. For example, *Squid Game* was a Netflix original series in 2021 and was recently green-lighted for a new season following its phenomenal success. Another aspect of this generation is a global fandom for K-pop groups. BTS' ARMY, a transcultural global fandom, exists as a core factor that grew BTS into the world's top pop group.³³ Utilizing social media for promotion has become commonplace, but BTS members used social media actively to communicate with their fans through sharing their daily lives, which contributes to form a base of loyal fans.

The popularity of *Hallyu* is not only economically beneficial for South Korea and its economy but also increases the international audiences' interest in South Korea overall. Furthermore, the rise in the popularity of South Korean culture leads people to action, namely, visiting Korea for tourism and learning the Korean language. For example, the number of people who are interested in learning Korean has increased around the world, as confirmed by the number of applicants who have taken the Korean Language Proficiency Test (TOPIK) (*see*, fig. 1).

* The number of applicants decreased in 2020. It is known that TOPIK could not be conducted in many countries due to COVID-19.

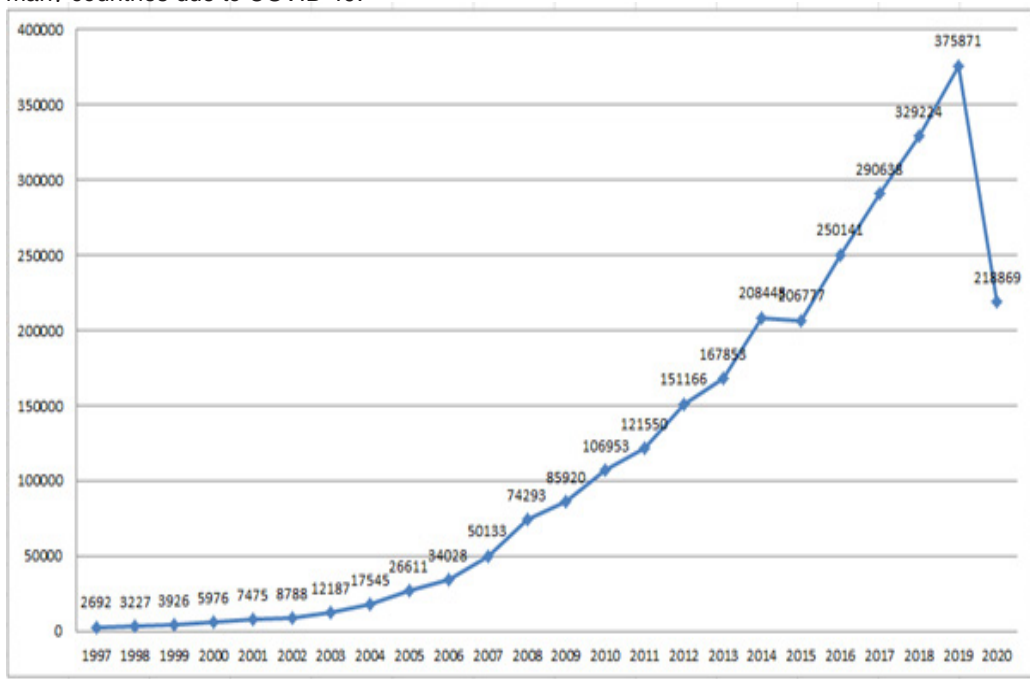


Figure 1. Number of applicants for TOPIK, 1997~2020. (Source: Author based on <https://www.data.go.kr/>; <https://www.donga.com/news/>; and <https://www.joongang.co.kr/>.)

However, the government's active cultural policies have not always received positive assessments. There are critiques that the South Korean government takes advantage of the popularity to heighten economic interest and promote the building of national image rather than to support the development of culture itself. Above all, Korea's soft power, which "attracts" people from different cultures, cannot be forced upon others no matter how much the government provides organizational support and physical resources. In this regard, it is more plausible that the Korean wave was unexpected in some ways and not deliberately planned for suc-

cess.³⁴ Nevertheless, government support is meant to raise global awareness regarding the value of the cultural industry and change the domestic ecosystem of the cultural sector through public policy. The role of the Korean government as the main driving force for the current popularity of South Korean soft power is undeniable; however, considering only this factor offers limitations in understanding the overall success of South Korean soft power.

The Competitiveness of South Korea's Soft Power: Convergence of Experience, Creativity, and Digital Technology

Fundamentally, one can view the success of the Korean wave as the result of an historical convergence of politics, economics, and culture. Against this backdrop, there are three considerable aspects contributing to the global attention on South Korean soft power. First, the historical background of South Korea represented as a rapidly developed economy and successful democracy is an essential factor in its culture flourishing and expanding. Despite the ruinous Korean War, South Korea emerged as a middle-power country over the course of a mere half century. It is currently the world's tenth-largest economy, with per capita income reaching more than USD 30,000.³⁵ In 1996, South Korea became the twenty-ninth member of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and became the twenty-fourth member of OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) in 2010. It also has been a member of the G20 since that grouping's foundation in 2008. Thanks to its economic growth, South Korea has global brands such as Samsung, Hyundai, and Kia and is a leading country in the digital economy and information and communication technology (ICT). Simultaneously, the country's democratization through direct elections and peaceful transition between different political parties is a crucial element in stabilizing its political system and its social environment. South Korea's democratic institutions and rapid economic growth serve to attract other countries—particularly developing nations—as a successful story of achieving hard power as well as establishing middle-power status in the liberal international order.³⁶

Second, the development of creative content leads to the competitiveness of South Korean soft power. This aspect is related to South Korea's historical background and competitive characteristics from limited domestic markets. Historically, South Korea's modernization took place within a short period of time, and globalization has also been rapidly achieved. This compressed experience made South Korean culture a mixture of traditional, modern, and global values and led to creative content appealing to international audiences.³⁷ For example, South Korean TV dramas reflecting the nation's traditional family-centered values in-

spire nostalgia in developed countries such as Japan. At the same time, South Korea's advanced social system and urban culture in dramas could positively influence audiences in developing countries.³⁸

In addition, the competitiveness of domestic cultural markets is a driving force in producing creative content that can be consumed in global markets.³⁹ The situation has improved a bit due to various platforms airing K-dramas, but it is still competitive to secure channels and advertisements because of the limited number available. In the case of K-pop popularity, there is an apparent uniqueness of K-pop style in explaining its creative content such as particular and addictive melodies combining various genres, well-executed choreography, the stylish look of singers, postmodern stages, and storytelling. However, since the number of singers who can debut and succeed is so limited, breaking into this industry is highly competitive as well.⁴⁰ It can be said that the high level of singing and choreography come from this limited market and competitive process; thus, such competitiveness due to the limited domestic market drives the development of creative content aimed at a wider international audience that offers greater opportunities.

Lastly, it is difficult to talk about the spread of South Korean soft power without discussing the development of digital technology, especially the change in the media environment and the advancement of networks. For example, the expansion of digital satellite broadcasting contributed to the popularity of South Korean television dramas in China, Japan, and Taiwan during the period of *Hallyu 1.0*. As the number of satellite broadcasts in neighboring countries increased, varied and numerous content was necessary for broadcasting. This changing media environment provided the K-drama market the opportunity to advance to other countries.⁴¹ In the case of K-pop, the SNSs—including YouTube, Twitter, and Facebook—facilitated K-pop global expansion and offered cost-efficient platforms for promotion. Such outlets also provide a global fandom the opportunity for real-time communication with the artists; thus, the fandom could spread further. This significantly contributed to the geographical expansion of South Korean soft power. Even in Europe and the United States, which historically have relatively high cultural barriers, social media provided a means for such expansion of the Korean wave and the resultant soft power.

South Korean Soft Power and Its Geopolitical Implications

Nye explains that a country cannot thrive on soft power alone, but a well-balanced level of hard and soft power can provide a state with significant opportunities for growth and prosperity. The development of such resources requires adept policy making. Nye also explains that soft power has three sources: the

country's culture, its values in the domestic domain, and its legitimate international policies. One can find those present in the case of South Korea. First, South Korean culture—such as K-pop and its spread worldwide—shows the influence of soft power. Secondly, in terms of domestic values, South Korea presents a “remarkable success story,” along with its economic development and great political success in transforming into a vibrant democracy. As the third pillar of soft power, Nye emphasizes, “Korea could be outstanding in demonstrating through its international policies what success means.” In this context, he suggests that South Korea can broaden its foreign policy agenda beyond security to climate change, human rights, and pandemic response. Therefore, South Korea could assume a more significant international role in terms of producing global public goods—a win-win situation for the country and the global community.⁴²

If that is the case, will the growth of soft-power influence provide the impetus to overcome South Korea's inherent and emerging geopolitical problems? Great powers—such as China, Japan, Russia, and South Korea's ally, the United States—geographically and/or geopolitically surround the Korean Peninsula. Their relational dynamics have posed political, economic, and security challenges to South Korea at the regional and global levels. In particular, current events, such as the intensifying US–China strategic competition and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, demand complex calculations from South Korean policy makers and test the country's diplomatic capabilities. Above all, North Korea poses a security threat through its continuous development of nuclear weapons programs, which serves as obstacle to the denuclearization of the Korean peninsula and as a detriment to the ultimate aim of reunification. Under the strengthening competition among states to protect their national interests, soft power can create opportunities to improve circumstances. For example, cultural exchanges in the private sector can help improve bilateral relations between South Korea and its neighboring countries. Additionally, global interest in South Korean soft power can also affect North Korean public perspectives. There are many news stories about North Koreans being punished for carrying pen drives containing South Korean dramas, films, and music that have been smuggled into the country.⁴³ However, it is still challenging to have a direct influence on a particular country or solve disputes through soft power.

Thus, it is necessary for South Korea to consider creating some niche through soft power that can complement its foreign policy. Soft power may be accommodating to secure national competitiveness and broaden Seoul's diplomatic space through its active influence in the global agenda. South Korea must make efforts to create leadership opportunities on specific global subjects and help in spreading international norms. The influence of South Korean soft power can

help facilitate such processes. South Korea can contribute to global cooperation through its accumulated soft power by providing leadership in the following three areas: development and cooperation, emerging technologies, and human rights.

The first pillar is development and cooperation. As a beneficiary of the liberal international order in terms of its own economic growth and democratic values, South Korea can provide its active and practical lessons learned in this area. Along with its status as a member of the OECD DAC, South Korean experience in development and cooperation can be of particular relevance to developing countries. Seoul has engaged in various development activities through international organizations and the Korea International Cooperation Agency, but there is a need for further expansion of such engagement.

Specifically, South Korea must focus on Asia, especially Southeast Asia, where the Korean wave began. Based on Southeast Asian interest in the field of development and cooperation, Seoul can aid in proactively and practically implementing the global agenda at the regional level. Through diverse joint projects between South Korea and Southeast Asian countries, confidence building with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its member states can be achieved, and South Korean soft power could contribute to positively stimulating the process. At the same time, the overall process can provide diplomatic opportunities for South Korea to implement its regional strategy in Southeast Asia in a more reliable way. Climate change, energy, health care, and quality education—all of which Southeast Asian countries are intensely interested in—can be considered as possible agendas for joint projects with South Korea. Such collaboration can also contribute to creating a favorable environment for tackling the geopolitical challenges facing South Korea, including building a consensus against the North Korean nuclear program.

The second pillar is cooperation in the development of emerging technologies. The field of digital technology—especially 5G, ICT, and cyber security—in which South Korea has a leading status and that is closely linked to the cultural industry, should be at the forefront of the country's cooperative efforts with other countries. Notably, many synergic effects have evolved in the cultural industry converging with those emerging technologies. Through the development of 5G, IoT (Internet of Things), and ICT cooperation, collaboration with South Korea will be beneficial for countries in building reliable infrastructure. Additionally, South Korea will also be able to spread its technological support through those cooperative works. For example, such cooperation can help address the partner nations' concerns of cyber security, particularly from North Korean attacks. The recent increase of cyberattacks emanating from North Korea, including transactional threats, is serious, and the damage in economic, financial and security sectors is

cumulative.⁴⁴ North Korea has hacked government institutions, especially in South Korea, for Pyongyang's political and security reasons, but recently North Korean state-sponsored cybercriminals are increasingly targeting global financial services, particularly digital currency. This trend raises the international and regional concerns and requested global networked cooperation. In this regard, South Korea's advanced IT sector and Seoul's willingness to tackle this issue can contribute greatly toward mitigating and countering such attacks from Pyongyang and setting international norms to strengthen cybersecurity. In this process, Seoul's active engagement is necessary, and its soft power based on South Korean innovative power will be influential.

Finally, the third pillar is global cooperation on human rights issues. As a liberal democracy, South Korea ascribes to the preservation and promotion of human rights as a core value. South Korea's active stance to promote both domestic and global human rights issues, including in North Korea, can be highlighted and ultimately strengthens Seoul's soft power. Article 2 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status. Furthermore, no distinction shall be made on the basis of the political, jurisdictional or international status of the country or territory to which a person belongs, whether it be independent, trust, non-self-governing or under any other limitation of sovereignty."⁴⁵ Additionally, Article 10 emphasizes, "Everyone has the right to freedom of expression. This right shall include freedom to hold opinions and to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of frontiers."⁴⁶ Human rights represent a universal norm, and the values of democracy and human rights are harmonized together. Together these have served to influence the growth of soft power in South Korea. Seoul's active participation in the human rights agenda could build South Korea's national identity as a state committed to protecting the universal value. Thus, by implementing the recommendations outlined above, South Korea can enhance its soft power in the international community.

Conclusion

South Korean soft power has thrived, and the country's global impact could contribute to emphasizing the value of global public goods. Members of BTS delivered a speech on the Sustainable Development Goals at the UN General Assembly, and Blackpink talked about climate change at the UN Climate Change Conference summit. To that extent, these artists' voices are influential in the international community. This reflects the current status of South Korean soft power

as well. In this sense, soft power can be regarded as complementing the limitations of hard power, specifically those related to South Korean diplomatic and foreign policy issues, which are mainly driven by geopolitical factors. Recently, the Yoon Suk-yeol government addressed the aim of being a global pivotal state, with “a focus on promoting freedom, peace, and prosperity based on the South’s liberal democratic values and—crucially—cooperation.”⁴⁷ This has been and should continue to be the direction that South Korea takes, regardless of successive administrations’ placement on the political spectrum, and in this context, soft power should be cultivated and promoted. For the sustainability of the liberal international order, policy makers must make efforts to create public goods by leading international norms in specific for spreading these goods, norms, and values beyond the Korean peninsula. Through its active engagement and leadership on various global agendas, South Korea could contribute to creating public goods. Its dedication for the international community ultimately benefits South Korea in the long run. In this process, South Korea’s soft power will play a positive and important role. ★

Dr. Minsung Kim

Dr. Kim is a research professor at the Ilmin International Relations Institute (IIRI), Korea University. She received her PhD in international relations from the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS), Korea University in 2019. Prior to the IIRI, she worked as a researcher in the Department of American Studies at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS), ROK Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade. Dr. Kim works extensively on nuclear nonproliferation and economic sanctions (cases of Iran and North Korea), the ROK–US alliance, and Indo-Pacific strategies.

Notes

1. Choe Sang-Hun, “From BTS to ‘Squid Game’: How South Korea Became a Cultural Jugernaut,” *New York Times*, 3 November 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.
2. “BTS and their 23 records enter the Guinness World Records 2022 Hall of Fame,” *Guinness World Record*, 2 September 2021, <https://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/>.
3. Anna Chan, “BLACKPINK Becomes First Musical Act to Reach 75 Million YouTube Subscribers,” *Billboard.com*, 28 June 2022, <https://www.billboard.com/>.
4. “Spotify Celebrates K-Pop With a Relaunch of Its Flagship Playlist, Now Called ‘K-Pop ON! (온),’” *For the Record*, 2 March 2022, <https://pr-newsroom-wp.appspot.com/>.
5. Paul Tassi, “‘Squid Game’ Is Now The #1 Show In 90 Different Countries,” *Forbes*, 3 Oct 2021, <https://www.forbes.com/>.
6. Joseph Nye, *Bound to Lead: The Changing Nature of American Power* (New York: Basic Books, 1990).
7. Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means to Succeed in World Politics* (New York: Public Affairs, 2004).
8. Nye, *Soft Power*, 5.
9. Joseph Nye, “Power and Foreign Policy,” *Journal of Political Power* 4, no. 1 (2011), 11.

10. Craig Cohen, Joseph S. Nye Jr, and Richard L. Armitage, "A Smarter, More Secure America," *Center for Strategic & International Studies*, 6 November 2007, <https://carnegieendowment.org/>.
11. International Monetary Fund (IMF), <https://www.imf.org/>.
12. "Lowy Institute Asia Power Index," 2021 Edition, <https://power.lowyinstitute.org/>.
13. *2022 South Korea Military Strength*, Global Fire Power, 2022, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/>.
14. John Walsh, "Hallyu as a Government Construct: The Korean Wave in the Context of Economic and Social Development," in *The Korean Wave* (New York: Palgrave, 2014), 13–31; Seung-Ho Kwon and Joseph Kim, "From censorship to active support: The Korean state and Korea's cultural industries," *Economic and Labour Relations Review* 24, no.4 (2013): 517–32; and "Hallyu! How Korean culture conquered the world," *The Times*, 10 October 2021, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/>.
15. Doobo Shim, "Hybridity and the Rise of Korean Popular Culture in Asia," *Media, Culture & Society* 28, no. 1 (2006), 32.
16. Sue Mi Terry, "The Korean Invasion: Can Cultural Exports Give South Korea a Geopolitical Boost?" *Foreign Affairs*, 14 October 2021.
17. Hwa Kyung Kim, Andrew Eungi Kim, and Daniel Connolly, "Catching up to Hallyu? The Japanese and Chinese Response to South Korean Soft Power," *Korea Observer* 47, no. 3 (Fall 2016), 536; Cho Youngha, "Desperately Seeking East Asia Amidst the Popularity of South Korean Pop Culture in Asia," *Cultural Studies* 25, no. 3 (2011), 385; and Milim Kim, "The Role of the Government in Cultural Industry: Some Observations from Korea's Experience," *Keio Communication Review*, no. 33 (2011).
18. Iain Watson, "South Korea's State-led Soft Power Strategies: Limits on Inter-Korean Relations," *Asian Journal of Political Science* 20, no. 3 (2012): 304–25.
19. Republic of Korea Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2010 *Diplomatic White Paper*, 228.
20. Song, "The Evolution of the Korean Wave," 132.
21. Terry, "The Korean Invasion."
22. Song Sung-hyun, "Government's Hallyu department announces plans to support Hallyu expansion," *Korea Herald*, 16 July 2020, <http://www.koreaherald.com/>.
23. Dal Yong Jin and Tae-Jin Yoon, "The Korean Wave: Retrospect and Prospect," *International Journal of Communication* 11 (2017), 2241.
24. Jin and Yoon, "The Korean Wave: Retrospect and Prospect."
25. Yeonhee Yoon, "The Anti-Korean Wave in Japan: Identity Clash," in *The Korean Wave from a Private Commodity to a Public Good*, eds. Yeonhee Yoon and Kiwoong Yang (Korea University Press, 2020), 118.
26. Sooho Song, "The Evolution of the Korean Wave: How is the Third Generation Different from Previous Ones?," *Korea Observer* 51, no.1 (Spring 2020): 125–50; Kim, Kim, and Connolly, "Catching up to Hallyu?," 527–58; and Ministry of Land Infrastructure and Transport, "The National Atlas of Korea I 2019," *The Korean Wave*, <http://nationalatlas.ngii.go.kr/>.
27. "Hallyu (Korean Wave)," *KOREA.net*, <https://www.korea.net/>.
28. Mary J. Ainslie, "Korean Overseas Investment and Soft Power: Hallyu in Laos," *Korea Journal* 56, no. 3 (2016), 7.
29. Song, "The Evolution of the Korean Wave," 130.

30. Ingyu Oh, "The Globalization of K-pop: Korea's Place in the Global Music Industry," *Korea Observer* 44, no. 3 (2013): 389–409.
31. Song, "The Evolution of the Korean Wave," 133; Sangjoon Lee, "Introduction. A Decade of Hallyu Scholarship: Toward a New Direction in Hallyu 2.0," in *Hallyu 2.0: The Korean Wave in the Age of Social Media*, ed. Sangjoon Lee and Abé Mark Nornes (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), 1–28.
32. KOFICE, *2021 Global Hallyu Trends*, 30 July 2021, 28.
33. ARMY, a global fandom of BTS, is an acronym for "Adorable Representative M.C. for Youth."
34. 김윤지, "한류, 정책 산물인가 '설계되지 않은 성공'인가" 한겨레, 7 May 2022, <https://www.hani.co.kr/>.
35. IMF, <https://www.imf.org/>; and World Bank, "GDP per capita of Republic of Korea," <https://data.worldbank.org/>.
36. Joseph S. Nye, "South Korea's Growing Soft Power," *Foreign Affairs*, 11 November 2009, <https://www.belfercenter.org/>; and Terry, "The Korean Invasion."
37. 장원호, "한류의 전개와 글로벌 수용의 변화," *지식의 지평* 제27호, 2019, 7–8.
38. For understanding South Korean cultural features from its rapid modernization, Jang and Kim (2013) present the term *time/space hybridity*. See Wonho Jang and Youngsun Kim, "Envisaging the Sociocultural Dynamics of K-pop: Time/Space Hybridity, Red Queen's Race, and Cosmopolitan Striving," *Korea Journal* 53, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 93–94.
39. Sangjoon Kim, "Interpreting South Korean Competitiveness: From Domestic Rivalry to Global Competitiveness," *Korean Observer* 42, no. 4, (2011): 621–43.
40. It is well known that K-pop idols are trained for certain periods within the trainee system led by entertainment companies.
41. 장원호, "한류의 전개와 글로벌 수용의 변화."
42. CSIS, "Beyond Security: South Korea's Soft Power and the Future of the U.S.-ROK Alliance in a Post-Pandemic World," 18 October 2021, <https://www.csis.org/>.
43. Choe Sang-Hun, "North Korea Executes People for Watching K-Pop, Rights Group Says," *New York Times*, 15 December 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/>; and Jong So Yong, "Won-san man executed for illegally selling CDs and USBs with S. Korean movies, dramas and music videos," *Daily NK*, 25 May 2021, <https://www.dailynk.com/>.
44. Cyber Security and Infrastructure Security Agency, "North Korea Cyber Threat Overview and Advisories," <https://www.cisa.gov/>.
45. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/>.
46. *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, United Nations.
47. Ramon Pacheco Pardo, "South Korea as a 'global pivotal state': the role of partners," Centre for Security, Diplomacy, and Strategy, Policy Brief 7/2022, <https://brussels-school.be/>.

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

Seoul's Impaired Comprehensive Security

Adding "Water" to the Security Agenda of the Yoon Administration

YOONJIN KIM

Abstract

After assessing the urgency and existential threats of Korean water issues and the conditions of the security agenda referred to in securitization theory from national, regional, and international levels, this article argues that water needs to be added to Korea's comprehensive security approach. As water security is no longer limited to tackling national water supply or disaster management, a broader scope of water challenges needs to be understood. This new perspective will encompass national energy efficiency and carbon reduction in the water sector with technological innovation in response to the climate crisis, transboundary issues between the two Koreas that rarely recognized but have severe potential risks, and saturation of the domestic water market. This article concludes by calling for South Korea's security agenda to bolster the idea of securitizing water issues via highlighting the importance of the Mekong River for South Korea's proper geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific realm and stronger ties with its like-minded allies and partners by sharing strategic concerns of regional water issues as part of Seoul's national security agenda.

The Biden administration released its new *Indo-Pacific Strategy* (IPS) in February 2022, highlighting a more comprehensive concept of security that focuses on regional interconnectivity, particularly among economy, climate, energy, and technology.¹ As a key vehicle of the White House Action Plan on Global Water Security, issued in June 2022, the US Department of State released a plan on water through the *U.S. Global Water Strategy 2022–2027* and underlines that the United States views water security as an issue of national security and commits contribution to global water security. It also highlights anticipating and reducing conflict and fragility related to water as the strategic ob-

jective that underlines US encouragement to partner countries to build the political will to prioritize sound water management and to build their capacity for cooperative management of shared waters.² To enhance regional stability and counterbalance China's growing assertive influence, Washington is strengthening ties with its traditional allies and expanding new security partnerships with the Southeast Asian community. South Korea, as one of Washington's long-standing allies in East Asia, also has expressed its support for the *IPS* and Pres. Yoon Suk-yeol has stated that his administration's diplomatic and security strategy strongly aligns with that of the United States. The concept of *comprehensive security* that Yoon advocates for the Indo-Pacific era, however, seems to be missing a critical element of nontraditional security: water security. This article examines this missing element of comprehensive strategy for the Indo-Pacific security and explores possible policy options for Seoul.

Yoon's Comprehensive Security in the Indo-Pacific Era

When Yoon came into office in early 2022, he declared that comprehensive security would be the new administration's core concept. The term *comprehensive security* is often reiterated in Seoul's strategy and direction of policy. It incorporates economy, energy, technology, and environment, substantially broadening South Korea's scope of security while providing in-depth consideration of the regional geopolitical context. Additionally, President Yoon has shown his deep understanding of the value of the US-ROK alliance partnership across various sectors and the implications of the bilateral relationship for his security policy direction. At a closer look, the comprehensive security of the Yoon administration seems like an innovative and bold strategy that addresses a variety of challenges Seoul is facing from economic recessions, energy crises, and strategic positioning in the global supply chain that directly targets strategic sectors of technologies and resource-based industries. As South Korea seeks a bigger role as a responsible middle power in the Indo-Pacific to expand Seoul's influence, the successful implementation of this comprehensive security is likely to contribute to achieving South Korea's policy priorities.

The Importance of Securitization: Copenhagen School's Theory

The Yoon administration views security from a broader scope by securitizing different urgent issues and preparing solutions based on strategic cooperation with the international community. This helps in gaining the public's trust in the government by prioritizing problems of general livelihood as part and parcel of the security agenda and linking that agenda to critical global challenges. More-

over, this strategic approach aims at better positioning South Korea in the regional geopolitical milieu at the same time. The fact that a broad range of security issues require collective responses from geoeconomic, and geopolitical actors supports South Korea's drive toward strengthening cooperative ties with like-minded global partners.

According to the Copenhagen School's securitization theory, politicians and other decision-makers carefully choose national security policy rather than accepting it. When political concerns are described as *dangerous*, *menacing*, *threatening*, or *alarming*, leaders perceive them as extreme security challenges that must be addressed immediately. Theorists attempt to consider nonmilitary threats of various kinds by adding ideas like *human security* and *regional security*, which broadened the security agenda. These securitization theorists determined five sectors: economic, societal, military, political, and environmental. Each sector's specific threat is articulated as threatening a referent object.³

As securitization theory states, actions are often legitimized under the language of *urgency* and *existential threats* when an issue is securitized.⁴ This implies that securitization of an issue renders legitimacy for new policies and actions.⁵ The Yoon administration identifies *comprehensive security* as including "economy, energy, technology, and environment" as a notion of national and foreign policies. Among all issues included in Yoon's comprehensive security, energy and economic risks were well articulated in particular and responded to the imminence of the matters, positioning them at the center of a timely national agenda.⁶ This was well-received by the public in that energy and economic crises from the Russian invasion of Ukraine and an extended period of pandemics were imminent threats to the public.

In this regard, the efforts of the Yoon administration to strengthen ties among different urgent issues included adopting comprehensive security as its essential strategy. Domestic and international audiences also positively acknowledged the undertaking. In addition, the new approach was based on timely exposure of the risks via the administration's public announcement and policy adoption on broader-ranged national security agenda that is not limited to military security but nontraditional security. This may also imply the political needs of President Yoon: running advanced diplomatic and strategic policy with the broadened concept of security as an impactful political strategy differentiated from the former administration.

Comprehensive Security without Water Agenda

While nontraditional security issues that include climate, economy, environment, and technology are well securitized and prioritized in the notion of Seoul's

comprehensive security, another core security agenda is nowhere to be seen: water.⁷ Based on interconnectivity with other newly adopted security agendas, water security is also urgent and poses existential threats that have not been appropriately recognized.

The South Korean conceptualization of comprehensive security does not include water because of the government's and domestic audience's fragmented understanding of water issues. The public largely understands water merely as an in-nation-supplied resource that requires disaster management at times.⁸ According to UN Water, however, *water security* now encompasses ecosystem sustainability and energy efficiency in its total management beyond the scope of supply and resource management. The concept is also related to economic value creation and trade technologies outside the country, as well as food production and security.⁹ As comprehensive security suggests, there is no longer an independent sector to be developed or sustained without proper management of interlinkages among respective areas. Likewise, security enhancement of water does not only come from national water management but also in consideration of regional and international water issues together and how a nation-state is engaged in regional and international geopolitical contexts. Additionally, competing referents and priorities render water an instrumentally, rather than intrinsically, valuable resource critical in every other security agenda.

Understanding Water as a National Security Priority in South Korea

Water, as with other security priorities, has its *urgency* and poses an *existential threat*, evidenced by more frequent unexpected deviation of average precipitation at the national level and disasters caused by climate change domestically and globally. The security prioritization of the water sector in South Korea also refers to the ongoing transboundary river issues between the two Koreas that may bring unexpected damage to South Korea. In addition, there are already existing transboundary conflicts between China and North Korea, the issues of Ap-rok and Du-man Rivers that could be potential threats and challenges for a reunified Korea in the future.

South Korea typically has abundant rainfall but still suffers from a lack of available water resources. However, Koreans use water daily without realizing the water shortage, thanks to a stable and inexpensive water supply. Citizens cannot experience water scarcity as the water intake facilities are well equipped and maintained nationwide, and the cost of water is reasonable. Thus, Koreans do not feel the necessity to limit their water consumption.¹⁰

However, there is growing evidence that the meteorological cycle, on which most countries depend for water security, is deviating from traditional patterns

due to climate change. Thus, it will become increasingly more difficult for South Korea, and others, to maintain the current stability of water supply using the same water management practices in the future, mainly due to climate change, which brings unexpected water-related disasters. In winter 2021, Korea experienced a record drought—the worst in 50 years—with the accumulated precipitation amounting to less than 10 percent of the average year. In the subsequent spring, when water is most needed for agricultural pursuits, there were concerns about damage to crops such as onions and garlic due to drought. In response, the Korea Rural Community Corporation started supporting 165 cities, counties, farmers, and fishermen across the country to develop emergency groundwater in preparation for emergency disasters and for securing and managing groundwater better because groundwater charges only 10% of total water usage in Korea even though the groundwater can be a useful resource of water to use.¹¹ To compound the problem, in summer 2022, South Korea's worst flooding in 80 years focused attention on the global climate crisis' impact on the country. After storms dumped as much as 141 millimeters (5.5 inches) of water, President Yoon held an emergency meeting at the country's National Disaster and Safety Status Control Center.¹² These sequential crises—having two different extreme cases of drought and flood in one year—implied that one-size-fits-all resource management no longer applies, as Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM), the exemplary model of local-based customized water management denotes flexible, situation-tailored, and area-specific management systems dealing with urgent threats.

Increasing energy efficiency is the core element of climate security in terms of carbon reduction, the globally shared value each nation-state makes efforts.¹³ Water in South Korea also is an area that needs developing policies and technologies for energy efficiency and carbon reduction in the industry as well as in households. For instance, South Korea has been developing and using alternative water resources, such as wastewater reuse, groundwater reservoir, and riverbank filtration, to increase the efficiency of water use and management that eventually links as a response to climate change.

Transboundary water issues between North and South Korea mainly come with high risks of sudden unnoticed discharges from North Korean dams with flood risk and long-term water shortage at the upstream dams. It is a serious challenge to be resolved and managed within the scope of national security. In summer 2022, North Korea released water from a dam near the inter-Korean border without giving prior notice to Seoul, as the North has been drenched by heavy downpours as recently as August 2022. The North was adjusting the Hwanggang Dam's water level to alleviate the problem of heavy rainfall. However, under an inter-Korean agreement signed in October 2009, Pyongyang was obligated to

notify Seoul in advance of North Korea's plans to release dam water—an obligation that was ignored.¹⁴

Looking more closely, the Bukhan and Imjin Rivers are transboundary rivers between the two Koreas that originate in North Korea and flow into South Korea. Since North Korea has built dams upriver, flow output and fisheries productivity have decreased in South Korea. At the Imjin River, fishermen have suffered from sudden, unannounced discharges by North Korean dams. After North Korea constructed the Imnam Dam on the upper reaches of the Bukhan River, the downstream flow was reduced. This also led to difficulty in the operation of hydroelectric dams and the maintenance of water supplies. Although dialogue on flood prevention from the Imjin River occurred several times after the Inter-Korean Summit in 2000, discussion on substantial measures was minimal. From 2001 to 2009, six unannounced water discharges from North Korea brought tremendous losses of property and fisheries in South Korea.¹⁵

As a security matter, water encompasses several different issues, including disaster risk management, climate resilience, transboundary conflict resolution, economic value creation, technology transfer, food production, energy generation, and industry vitalization aligned with carbon reduction. These are profound implications that water has sufficient features of urgency and threatening factors that must be included in South Korea's comprehensive security approach. It is essential to underline that water is the common area of most nontraditional security issues, including the economy, energy, climate, and food.

Understanding Water as a Regional Security Priority in Korea: Focusing on the Mekong Conflict as a Case Study

Understanding the geopolitics of the Mekong conflict as a case study will surely induce Seoul to place water on the list of South Korea's security priorities. The Mekong River is the largest river in Southeast Asia, with a length of 4,800 km. It flows into the South China Sea through China's Yunnan province and Guangxi Autonomous Region, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia, and Vietnam. The five Mekong countries not only have a population of 240 million living in an area of 1.94 million square kilometers but are also promising emerging markets with the fastest economic growth in Asia.¹⁶ The downstream regions of the Mekong—Laos, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Thailand—are substantially impacted by what happens upstream, which is mostly managed by China, and there is no standardized data to be shared. Sadly, there are continuous difficulties in providing consistent water management to help local riparian people because the states sharing this international river are not equally powerful.¹⁷ If Laos and Cambodia depend

on China on land, that dependence comes to consequences elsewhere, where China becomes more powerful. Competition for water can intensify as shared water resources between nations and communities deteriorate or become limited, escalating tensions and boosting the conflict. This is particularly true for shared water bodies for which there are no cooperation agreements in place.¹⁸

The Mekong River is essential for riparian nations and extraregional powers, including the United States, Japan, Australia, South Korea, and India. This is because the resource itself has a high value and because there may be conflict or collaboration among the various actors and stakeholders involved in regional development in terms of infrastructure, food and energy security, climate change, and disaster management.

In this context, the Mekong is at the center of Indo-Pacific geopolitics given its relationship with China. In the South China Sea, where the primary source comes from the Mekong and Chinese power has quickly grown, all the elements of national security, particularly China's growing military presence and economic investment, and an increasing number of dispatched diplomats at every meeting in the Mekong riparian countries to represent Chinese interests illustrate how Beijing sees the Mekong as more important than before.

The mismanagement of this transboundary water resource and other related resources has escalated tension among the riparian states and communities as water resource is not only used for households but industry, agriculture, and environment while the Mekong's economic and strategic value continues to rise. Chinese eleven new dam projects on the river's main stem are under consideration. Several studies have confirmed that, in the absence of transboundary impact assessment and coordinated planning, these projects have the potential to result in a water and food security crisis. Many factors are driving up the water demand, including population growth, urbanization, industrialization, intensive agriculture development, and energy demand.¹⁹

The Mekong region's geopolitical risks are unsustainable, with unfair management of transboundary water resources and its weak regional institutions. The most serious challenge to the Mekong comes from Beijing's rapid construction of hydropower dams along the mainstream of the Mekong River, which is drastically changing the ecological, geopolitical, and socioeconomic landscape of the Mekong region. The existing regional institutions, including the Mekong River Commission (MRC), have so far been unsuccessful in providing inclusive and practical solutions to riparian states and their security threats stemming from the mismanagement of water resources of the Mekong.²⁰ In this situation, aside from the efforts of China to cooperate with the Mekong institutions, the Mekong countries are engaged in a dilemma. What China can provide to the lower Me-

kong countries is intriguing—i.e., energy generated from the dams—while most Mekong countries are suffering from reduced fishery and degraded ecosystem that directly affects the livelihoods and agriculture that requires lower Mekong countries' common strategy and posture toward China to reduce disadvantages that come from Chinese Mekong usage and aggressive dam construction.

Despite the complexity and dilemma that China and the Mekong countries have, Washington and its bloc in the Mekong have insufficient power to balance Chinese interests and influence in the Mekong countries even though considerable cooperation has been initiated and planned among these allies and partners.

Moreover, the geopolitical significance of the Mekong basin is increasing as it becomes a battleground for development cooperation among rivals. China's participation and influence in the development of the Mekong basin are rapidly increasing through Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the Lancang–Mekong Cooperation mechanism. From 2009 to 2021, the US government provided more than USD 4.3 billion in bilateral and regional grant assistance to the five Mekong partner countries, including nearly USD 4.0 billion from the Department of State and USAID.²¹ The Mekong–U.S. Partnership includes collaboration on economic connectivity, energy and climate security, human capital development, transboundary water, natural resources management, and nontraditional security.²² The United States reorganized the Mekong–U.S. Partnership, launched in 2020, which is the expansion of the Lower Mekong Initiative, an effort fostering integrated subregional cooperation among Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam. It reflects how the US more gives attention to more concrete plans and investments for the Mekong region.²³ In this regard, the Mekong region is an emerging growth center and a strategic frontier in the Indo-Pacific as the geopolitics of water resource management and security, especially transboundary water resources, are becoming more complex based on different interests of each riparian states and regional partners who are engaged in regional politics.

Tokyo also sees Mekong-related collaboration as part of Japan's nontraditional security agenda for planning regional cooperation for political stability in international relations and for reaping economic benefits as a return for investments and a better position in changing geopolitical dynamics. Japan continued strategic cooperation with the Mekong riparian states by sponsoring an annual Mekong–Japan summit, developed in 2008. The collaboration formulates financing and investment projects, grants assistance for human security of the Mekong region, assists financial independence concerning the rule of law, fosters cooperation concerning ocean security, and strengthens supply chains.²⁴

Likewise, Australia views the Mekong conflict, which mainly comes from differing interests between China and the lower Mekong countries, as a shared re-

gional security threat. Along with incorporating and expanding on the former Greater Mekong Water Resources Program, the Mekong–Australia Partnership (MAP) has collaborated with Australia's other programs in Southeast Asia, including economic development, the environment, infrastructure (Partnerships for Infrastructure, or P4I), security, and transnational crime (MAP–TNC), and the Greater Mekong Water Resources Program (GMSP). Australia focuses on investing in the human capacity of education and training in the region, increasing economic resilience and supporting COVID-19 recovery, boosting trade and investment through business programs, building environmental strength to enhance water security, addressing riverine and marine pollution, promoting clean energy, and responding to climate change, as well as strengthening cyber and critical technology capabilities in the Mekong, particularly in telecommunications and critical infrastructure security.²⁵

Seoul's Response to the Mekong Issues

While others in the region are putting their efforts into addressing the Mekong issue and weaving it into their national security strategy, Seoul has not been as active. This seems to be changing slowly, as South Korea makes increased overtures toward cooperation and development in the Mekong region. Seoul upgraded relations with the Mekong nations as strategic partners in 2021, emphasizing the necessity of cooperation among the countries. South Korea also pledged to work closely with the UN to manage resources and promote ecological conservation in the region, offering to increase developmental aid through the Mekong–Korea Cooperation Fund. Further funding will be invested in specific industries throughout the Mekong, including culture and tourism, human resource development, rural development, environment, infrastructure, and information & communication technology.²⁶ Accordingly, the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs and water-related public and private organizations have emphasized the Mekong River as important to the nation's national diplomacy.²⁷

Notwithstanding these developments, however, Seoul has not recognized the Mekong conflict and its related challenges as security issues—despite the outlined important geostrategic implications. The region's significance in foreign investment and trade directly impacts the Korean national economy and energy security enhancement not to mention geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific theater. Considering the geopolitical importance of the Mekong and the South China Sea, it is evident that Seoul must include Mekong-related issue in South Korea's comprehensive security agenda.

Conclusion

President Yoon's comprehensive security policy must incorporate water security as a matter that entails threatening risks and urgency to formulate solutions in terms of geopolitics and national security. Water issues are no different from other issues that fall under the umbrella of comprehensive security such as economy, environment, energy, and technology. It is also noteworthy that the number of unpredictable water-related disasters is increasing, brought on by climate change. Moreover, transboundary conflicts between the two Koreas often lead to severe damage to property and the ecosystem. In this context, water issues must be included in the Yoon administration's national security agenda due to the urgency and existential threats these matters may pose to national and regional security.

Given the strategic and geopolitical significance of the Mekong in the Indo-Pacific region, China and the United States and US allies—like Japan and Australia—are strengthening their ties with the regional stakeholders and increasingly developing the water-security agenda. Although South Korea has set its own pace in engaging the Mekong with different types of cooperation through foreign aid and investment in development, a more strategic approach to regional security should be applied to the Mekong. This would assist Seoul in gaining a better political position in the Indo-Pacific and avoid isolation in strategic cooperation of like-minded states in the Mekong region.

To summarize, as an issue area reflecting national security imperatives as well as international geopolitics and interlinking all the other security agenda, water security is the most “comprehensive” security area and could be a game changer in terms of national and regional security and stability. ★

Yoonjin Kim

Ms. Kim is a director of the Asia Pacific Region and the 10th World Water Forum of the World Water Council, the world's largest international multistakeholder platform organization in water. She has expertise in regional coordination of governance and capacity building for sustainable water management and focuses on regional water cooperation in a multilateral framework.

Notes

1. Bibek Chand and Zenel Garcia, "Constituting the Indo-Pacific: Securitization and the Process of Region-Making," *International Quarterly for Asian Studies* 52, no. 1–2 (2021): 15–34, <https://hasp.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/>.
2. U.S. *Global Water Strategy 2022–2027* (Washington, DC: USAID, 2022), <https://www.usaid.gov/>.
3. Calra Eroukhmanoff, "Securitisation Theory," in *International Relations Theory*, ed. Stephen McGlinchey, Rosie Walters, and Christian Scheinplug (Bristol, UK: E-International Relations, 2017), 98–109.
4. Buzan, Barry, Ole Wæver, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1998), 26.
5. Eroukhmanoff, "Securitisation Theory."
6. Cha Do-hyun, "Diplomacy and Security of Yoon Administration," *KDI Review of the North Korean Economy* 24, no. 5 (May 2022), .
7. Cha, "Diplomacy and Security of Yoon Administration."
8. Eroukhmanoff, "Securitisation Theory."
9. *Water Security & the Global Water Agenda: A UN-Water Analytical Brief* (Hamilton, ON: Institute for Water, Environment, & Health, 8 May 2013), <https://collections.unu.edu/>.
10. Karen Choi, "New Solutions for Water Resources Management in South Korea," Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in South Korea, July 2020, <https://www.rvo.nl/>.
11. Jon Schneyer, "Three Things to Know: Historic Flooding in Seoul, South Korea," *Core-Logic*, 10 August 2022, <https://www.corelogic.com/>.
12. Han River Flood Control Office, Ministry of Environment, "Daily Precipitation Data," <http://www.hrfco.go.kr/>.
13. UN Nations, "Water and Climate Change," *UN Water*, 2020, <https://www.unwater.org/>.
14. Suhyung Jang and Gwang Man Lee, "Conflicts of South-North Koreans Shared Rivers and its problems," Korea Water Resources Association, 19 May 2015, <https://koreascience.kr/>.
15. Kim Ikjae, "Developing a Framework of Water Security and Cooperation in Transboundary Rivers of South and North Korea," Korea Environment Institute, 31 December 2010, <https://www.kei.re.kr/>.
16. Chheang Vannarith, "Water Security in the Mekong Region and Policy Interventions," in *Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific Regional Security Outlook 2020* (Kuala Lumpur: CSCAP, 2019), 68–71, <https://www.jstor.org/>.
17. Khen Suan Khai, "Threats to the Existence of Riparian Communities of the Mekong," *Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung*, 17 August 2021, <https://th.boell.org/>.
18. United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP), Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO), and Oregon State University, "Atlas of International Freshwater Agreements," 2002, <https://transboundarywaters.science.oregonstate.edu/>.
19. Vannarith, "Water Security in the Mekong Region."
20. Vannarith, "Water Security in the Mekong Region."
21. "The Mekong-U.S. Partnership and the Friends of the Mekong: Proven Partners for the Mekong Region" (fact sheet, US Department of State, 3 August 2021), <https://www.state.gov/>.
22. "White House Action Plan on Global Water Security" (Washington, DC: White House, June 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
23. "The Mekong-U.S. Partnership."

24. Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "The 12th Mekong-Japan Summit Meeting," 13 November 2020, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/>.

25. Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, "Mekong-Australia Partnership," 2022, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/>.

26. Vannarith, "Water Security in the Mekong Region."

27. Kim Taeyoon, et al., *Mekong Regional Development Cooperation with the Republic of Korea* (Seoul: Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, 2019), <https://www.kiep.go.kr/>.

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

Obstacles to US–South Korea Alliance Regional Contingency Planning and Considerations for US Policy

MAJ JESSICA RENÉE TAYLOR, USAFR

Abstract

Despite displays of closer US–South Korea threat perception alignment, indicators point to the Yoon administration likely maintaining a nuanced approach between the United States and China—specifically in regional security cooperation. This article provides background on why the US–South Korea alliance has so far abstained from regional contingency planning amid a growing China threat. In addition, the article argues that South Korea is unlikely to support the alliance cooperating on US-led regional contingency planning due to the continued enormous influence that Beijing bears on the trajectory of South Korea’s economy, the likely continued divide in Japan–South Korea relations, and the polarizing political environment within the South Korean and US governments. The article concludes with considerations for US policy toward the US–South Korea alliance.

In the waning months of South Korea’s 2022 presidential election, then-candidate Yoon Suk-yeol published a vision for his foreign policy agenda in *Foreign Affairs*, “South Korea Needs to Step Up: The Country’s Next President on His Foreign Policy Vision.”¹ Throughout the piece, Yoon criticized the outgoing Moon Jae-in administration for not taking a principled stance in the US–China “great-power competition” while also calling for strengthening South Korea’s alliance with the United States. Yoon assessed that the Moon administration allowed South Korea’s alliance with the United States to deteriorate while instead prioritizing achieving inter-Korean reconciliation despite the evolving threat from North Korea. However, what was most striking about Yoon’s foreign policy vision was his criticism that South Korea had “failed to adapt” amid the intensifying US–China competition. To this end he called for South Korea to take the initiative in the broader region, to consider joining multilateral regional

cooperation initiatives in phases, and to take part in trilateral security coordination with the United States and Japan.

During the US Trump and South Korean Moon administrations, the alliance remained divided toward constructing a unified approach to maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific region. For South Korea's part, the Moon administration's strategy of ambiguity—whereas it avoided taking sides between Washington and Beijing amid their growing interstate tensions—was seen as a significant obstacle to the alliance's ability to address the threat that China posed to the region's stability. However, this strategy was out of line with the South Korean public's sentiment as multiple public polls displayed a growing concern of the threat that China posed to South Korea and the region.² And notably, in some polls the public even identified China rather than North Korea as the greatest state threat to South Korea.³ In addition, polling displayed support for strengthening South Korea's alliance with the United States to serve as a bulwark to the growing threat China posed to South Korea.⁴ Thus, considering Yoon's foreign policy vision and the South Korean public's sentiment, observers speculated that with Yoon's ascendance to the presidency the US–South Korea alliance would finally expand its formalized and routine contingency planning beyond the peninsula to regional threats. However, as the realities of the office have settled in, indicators have pointed to the Yoon administration instead refraining from joining US-led regional contingency preparedness.

The Necessity of US–South Korea Regional Contingency Planning

As of this writing North Korea has reaffirmed its stance as a nuclear-weapon state. In addition, Pyongyang declared that it will never seek to rid itself of nuclear weapons if nuclear weapons exist elsewhere.⁵ Shortly after these declarations, North Korea followed up with a series of missile launches, including its first launch over Japan since 2017.⁶ Pyongyang's continued defiance of UN Security Council resolutions and destabilizing activities have led to increased South Korea, Japan, and US trilateral security cooperation aimed at the North Korean threat. Pointedly, this increase in cooperation comes as the Yoon administration has sought to improve relations with Japan. However, what remains to be seen is additional trilateral cooperation toward the growing threat China poses to regional stability.

While commentators debate whether China will seek to absorb Taiwan by force, President Joe Biden has gone so far as to unequivocally confirm that the United States will come to the aid of Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.⁷ And as a specific indication that the Biden administration means to make good on its declared commitment to Taipei, the United States and Japan are making

efforts to create formal contingency plans to respond to a Chinese invasion of Taiwan.⁸ Arguably, a growing US-led coalition dedicated to defending Taiwan amid growing cross-strait tensions will have implications for China's nuclear employment doctrine. Washington is specifically concerned that Beijing may seek to change its "no first use policy" and or increase the alert status of China's nuclear force.⁹ The growing concern about a Chinese invasion of Taiwan, coupled with the possibility of a shift in China's nuclear employment doctrine, poses a variety of complications for the US–South Korea alliance's force posture. For instance, a priority concern should be the alliance ensuring it is prepared for simultaneous contingencies across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula. This hypothetical situation could involve several simultaneous threats from the nuclear weapon states China, North Korea, and possibly even Russia. Russian president Vladimir Putin has alluded that the nuclear-use taboo that has held since 1945 is possibly not ironclad and that even great powers can threaten the use of nuclear weapons to hold annexed territory. However, recently, President Yoon avoided promising to commit that South Korea would move to join a US-led effort to come to Taiwan's defense in the event of a Chinese invasion.¹⁰ As cross-strait tensions continue to mount and the Biden administration continues to reiterate its commitment to come to Taiwan, the question is whether the US–South Korea alliance will finally evolve to expand its military cooperation beyond the peninsula to regional contingency planning.

In the coming months, Seoul is expected to release its Indo-Pacific strategy, the first of its kind for a South Korean government.¹¹ So far under the Yoon and Biden administrations, US–South Korea joint public statements have indeed included references to the alliance working together on regional stability issues. Of note are references to "supporting the stability of the Taiwan strait" and of "the South China Sea." which have led to speculation that the US–South Korea alliance may seek to expand its to regional contingency planning.¹² Adding to the speculation, the August 2022 Korea–United States Integrated Defense Dialogue joint statement reinforced "the importance of preserving peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" and pledging "to continue promoting defense and security in the Indo-Pacific region."¹³

However, indicators point to the Yoon administration likely maintaining a nuanced approach between the United States and China—specifically in regional security cooperation. As a point of clarification, due to the hallmarks of an alliance being the promise of retaliation on behalf of an ally, here the term *alliance* refers solely to the military cooperation between South Korea and the United States as formalized under the 1953 US–South Korea mutual defense treaty. As such, while South Korea and the United States have expanded their relationship

to areas beyond military cooperation, so far coordination in these areas lacks the guarantee of retaliation beyond kinetic attacks to legally owned territory.¹⁴ Also, like the alliance's cooperation on the North Korea threat, here *contingency planning* refers to the formalization of operational plans and their associated military exercises to ensure military preparedness for a possible contingency. In other words, debate as to whether South Korea will decide to join an ad hoc response to a regional conflict, such as its support of the United States in the Vietnam War or the Iraq War, is not within the realm of this article's analysis.

Abstaining from Regional Security Cooperation: The US–South Korea Alliance Status Quo

As concerns of a US–China conflict have risen in the decades following the Cold War, the status quo for successive South Korean governments has been a focus on the North Korean threat while maintaining a balance in Seoul's approach to relations with its sole security ally—the United States—and its now number-one trade partner: China. Amid the current rise in regional tensions, the current US Forces Korea commander, GEN Paul LaCamera, USA, has stressed the need to include South Korea in US-led regional contingency plans.¹⁵

Of importance surrounding the prospect of regional US–South Korea contingency planning the 1953 treaty emphasizes that the allies agree to work together to further regional stability.¹⁶ Meanwhile, concerns surrounding the trajectory of the Indo-Pacific's stability have become increasingly salient for South Korea. As its export-oriented economy is reliant on trade flow through the South and East China Seas it would be a natural evolution for the alliance to develop regional contingency response plans.¹⁷

President Biden's continued declarations that the United States would come to the defense of Taiwan in response to a Chinese invasion intensifies the debate surrounding whether the alliance should include a focus on regional contingency planning.¹⁸ Notably, former US and South Korean alliance military leaders have highlighted the necessity for the alliance to consider how a Taiwan Strait armed conflict would impact the alliance. For instance, US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper specifically warned that South Korea is unlikely to be able to avoid being drawn into the conflict.¹⁹ And US–South Korea Combined Forces Command (CFC) deputy commander and the current Korea Association of Military Studies president, General Leem Ho-young, ROK Army, retired, went a step further, warning that the alliance should consider the possibility of simultaneous contingencies across the Taiwan Strait and on the Korean Peninsula.²⁰

The pressure for the alliance to expand its contingency planning beyond the peninsula has been building for years. A crucial pivot for the alliance was when the George W. Bush administration decided that as the international threat environment continued to evolve the United States could no longer have troops stationed overseas dedicated to a sole purpose—such as the North Korea threat.²¹ To this end, the Bush and ROK Roh Moo-hyun administrations were able to reach a compromise on the US request to have the “strategic flexibility” to mobilize its forces from South Korea for contingencies external to the peninsula. However the Roh administration, out of concern South Korea would be drawn into a regional conflict, stipulated that the United States would first consult Seoul prior to the use of US Forces Korea personnel.²² Thus the alliance’s agreement of strategic flexibility for US Forces Korea along with South Korea’s implementation of a strategy of ambiguity has so far been the alliance’s approach to how the United States could respond to a regional conflict absent South Korean military forces’ involvement.²³

But as tensions across the Taiwan Strait and on the peninsula have intensified, questions continue to mount as to whether the alliance would collaborate in the defense of Taiwan in response to a Chinese invasion. This conversation has been increasing in public discourse. For instance, while serving on the US Forces Korea staff during the Moon administration, this author participated in roundtable discussions around this question with alliance key stakeholders. The frequent refrain was that the alliance could not cooperate on regional threats because the Korean public traditionally does not support such collaboration external to the peninsula. In addition, despite the likely impact of cross-strait instability to South Korea’s security, some even argued that the responsibility for a regional contingency response should solely fall to the US Indo-Pacific Command absent US–South Korea CFC support.²⁴ To this end, South Korean government officials have confirmed that, despite the simultaneous intensification of cross-strait and inter-Korean tensions, the alliance has yet to discuss implications of this scenario.²⁵ However, in a significant departure from historic sentiment, late 2021 public polling displays that the South Korean public would actually advocate for South Korean military forces supporting a regional coalition coming to the defense of Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion.²⁶

Russia’s invasion of its democratic neighbor, Ukraine, has likely heightened concerns of authoritarian states seeking to undermine the democratic freedoms and sovereignty of their neighbors. Notably, the South Korean public staunchly disapproved of President Yoon’s decision not to meet with US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi during her 2022 visit to Seoul. As her visit directly followed her trip

to Taipei, which sparked ire from China, the public notably viewed Yoon's actions as trying to appease China.²⁷

However, the Yoon government is still unlikely to signal support in his administration's Indo-Pacific strategy for the expansion of alliance to regional contingency cooperation. The remainder of this article will examine how South Korea's economic security, South Korea–Japan tensions and the polarized political environments in South Korea and the United States, are not conducive to the Yoon government supporting alliance regional contingency planning. The article will conclude by providing considerations for US policy.

Obstacles to Supporting US-led Regional Security Cooperation

China's Influence on the Trajectory of South Korea's Economy

While the Korean public increasingly assesses China as a threat, the public's actual number-one strategic concern is the state of South Korea's economy.²⁸ Complicating matters, South Korea has yet to attain its goal of diversifying its economy to have less reliance on China. Thus, any tensions with China, poses a risk of negatively impacting South Korea's economy.

Consequently, as Beijing is sensitive to US-led efforts to challenge China, Seoul must be diligent in what areas of its foreign policy South Korea is willing to risk tensions with China. For instance, the Yoon government has displayed its willingness to push back against China with reference to the Yoon government's desire to deploy more US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) anti-ballistic missile systems to South Korea.²⁹ Yoon's decision follows China's retaliation on South Korea's economy during the former Moon administration as a result of Seoul's decision to deploy the US THAAD system on South Korean soil in the first place.³⁰ However, for Yoon's current stance, Seoul is able to point to the North Korean threat and, thus, emphasize that South Korea's decision is not an effort to threaten China. On the contrary, Beijing would view Seoul joining US-led regional contingency planning as South Korea's participation in military plans for a future armed conflict with China.

President Yoon is likely also concerned about his limited options to improve South Korea's flailing economy in the near term. To this end, the Yoon administration currently is seeking to strengthen trade with China.³¹ Thus, considering Seoul's concerns about the considerable impact China currently has on South Korea's economic trajectory, the Yoon government is unlikely to risk joining US-led regional contingency plans.

Beijing has displayed that Seoul merely mentioning topics sensitive to China leads to China issuing heavy public rebukes and warnings to South Korea.³² Thus, absent successful efforts to lessen the impact of China's influence on the trajectory of South Korea's economy, Seoul will continue to avoid risking another round of Chinese economic retaliation.

As a result, China has devised an avenue to influence South Korea's strategic decision making within the US–South Korea alliance without triggering US treaty security guarantees. China demonstrating its ability and willingness to weaponize its economy will pressure the Yoon government to abstain from joining US-led regional contingency plans. However, complicating matters is the fact that regional contingency planning would need to incorporate Japan amid continued South Korea–Japan tensions.

The Necessity of Bridging the South Korea–Japan Divide

Amid a regional contingency, the United States will seek support from its allies. For instance, the US–Japan alliance is devising contingency plans in the event the alliance needs to come to the defense of Taiwan. But complicating matters, bridging the divide in South Korea–Japan relations is a crucial component to successfully integrating South Korea into US-led regional contingency cooperation.

The recent deterioration of South Korea–Japan relations stems from a divide over the terms of their reconciliation in response to Japan's manner of colonial era rule of Korea. Under the Moon and Abe administrations South Korea and Japan even struggled to collaborate on the traditional North Korean missile threat. While there has been an uptick on trilateral cooperation on the North Korean threat since the ascendance of the Yoon and Kishida administrations, trilateral cooperation on the regional China threat would truly be unprecedented.³³

The continued impasse in South Korea–Japan relations prevents the interstate trust and public support necessary to cooperate toward regional contingency plans. Although there has been some decrease in tensions, hurdles remain to reconciling the South Korea–Japan relationship. For instance, the South Korean court ruling that still calls for the liquidation of South Korea–based Japanese business assets to compensate Korean victims of Japan's colonial forced labor policies.³⁴ Despite the continued delay in implementation of the ruling providing diplomatic space to find another solution, so far neither Seoul nor Tokyo have displayed a willingness to give any ground on the issue. The Yoon government is in a particular conundrum, as seeking to influence the South Korean courts would amount to executive overreach of an equal branch of government. Concurrently, Japan's Kishida administration has warned that South Korea–Japan relations will

deteriorate to a point of no return if the South Korean courts go forward with the liquidation ruling.³⁵

Furthermore, Japan has not returned South Korea to its whitelist of trade partners and maintains key semiconductor industry-related materials on its export to Korea control list.³⁶ While these moves were seen in Seoul as a retaliation to the court ruling, Tokyo has asserted that the measures were due to export security concerns in South Korea of technologically sensitive items. During the Moon and Abe administrations, some Japanese government commentary even voiced disapproval of South Korea joining the G7 out of reported concern that Seoul had different regional threat perceptions regarding China and North Korea than the bloc.³⁷ Also complicating matters is the lack of expendable political capital of both the Yoon and Kishida governments. As of this writing, both governments are experiencing low approval ratings due to internal domestic strife.³⁸ In concert with South Korea's and Japan public's low approval for each other, there is little room, if any, for either the Yoon or Kishida government to make any concessions.

However, observers speculate that the antagonism between the South Korean and Japanese publics may ease due to shared growing concerns about China. But absent reconciliation on South Korea–Japan historical issues, South Korea's court order to liquidate Japanese businesses' assets, and South Korea–Japan trade issues, obstacles will remain to any South Korean government having the political space to join US-led regional contingency planning. But even absent concerns surrounding South Korea–Japan tensions, the increasingly divisive political environments of the South Korea and US governments also represent a considerable barrier to US–South Korea alliance regional contingency planning.

Political Polarization within South Korea and the United States

To make the historic shift of expanding the US–South Korea alliance to collaboration on regional contingency planning, the Yoon government would need the support of South Korea's major political parties and to have faith in the trajectory of the US government and its enduring dedication to the alliance. A review of these areas casts doubt on prospects for the Yoon administration moving to support South Korea's inclusion in US-led regional contingency planning.

Political Division in South Korea

South Korea's 2022 presidential election results illustrate the increasingly polarized nature of South Korea's political environment. While Yoon won the election, he did so by the smallest margin in the history of South Korea's democracy.³⁹ The slim margin of victory means that President Yoon does not have an over-

whelming political mandate to make drastic changes to South Korea's foreign policy, especially at the risk of further jeopardizing the country's economy.

The polarized environment will likely mean less cooperation between South Korea's leading political factions—the ruling conservative People Power Party (PPP) and its opposition the Democratic Party. Since taking office, Yoon, like previous South Korea presidents, has launched investigations into the former opposition administration, likely further entrenching the political divide.⁴⁰ Yet Yoon is in a particularly peculiar situation, as the opposition party maintains the majority of seats in the National Assembly, South Korea's legislative branch.⁴¹ Furthermore, the former Democratic Moon administration aimed to avoid acknowledging the threat China poses to South Korea. Thus, as the composition of the Democratic Party majority National Assembly is overwhelmingly the same as it was under Moon, the legislature is unlikely to support and fund foreign policy objectives that depart from the party's platform under the Moon administration. For instance, the Democratic Party's staunch criticism of Yoon's efforts to broker peace with Japan displays the opposition party's willingness to thwart Yoon's foreign policy agenda despite security concerns.⁴²

In addition, any moves such as joining regional contingency planning that lead to economic consequences will be feverishly criticized and used toward defeating the PPP in the next presidential and legislative elections. Thus, the PPP will also look to strategically formulate policies that do not risk the party losing future elections. However, a similar political environment in the United States also poses a significant impediment to South Korea joining US-led regional contingency planning.

Political Division in the United States

The polarization within the US government has shown that the division could possibly thwart the Biden administration from furthering its foreign policy objectives. Despite the bipartisan consensus on the US needing to address the China threat, political divisiveness has threatened to stymie the US government's efforts to address the China challenge. For example, US Senator Mitch McConnell (R-KY) threatened to withhold Republican support of the Creating Helpful Incentives to Produce Semiconductors and Science Act (CHIPS). As the name implies, the CHIPS contains provisions to address portions of the Biden administration's *Indo-Pacific Strategy* objectives related to ensuring US access to the global semiconductor supply chain.⁴³ Senator McConnell, the minority leader in the US Senate, threatened to withhold Republican support for the bill if the Democrats moved forward with an unrelated reconciliation bill package. In response, the Biden administration lamented that Senator McConnell was willing to “hold

hostage” legislation designed to make the United States more competitive with China.⁴⁴ The episode illustrates the inherent risk in allies joining US-led efforts. Senator McConnell’s threat to derail legislation on China should cause worry for US allies, especially South Korea. There are risks of allies supporting a plan that may threaten their strategic stability only for that initiative to possibly not obtain the necessary support in the US government to come to fruition in the first place. The specter of such a US legislative failure following displayed public support from the South Korean government for an initiative that might antagonize Beijing might well torpedo Seoul’s willingness to bear the wrath of China’s economic retaliation for South Korea’s strategic regional security alignment with the United States.

To complicate matters further, the political environment in the United States, could lead to the reelection of former president Donald Trump or another candidate that holds Trump’s confrontational views toward continued support of US alliances. While the US public has displayed continued support for the US–South Korea alliance, Trump’s questioning of the value of US alliances during the 2016 election was not enough to prevent voters from electing him.⁴⁵ During the Trump administration, this author observed South Korean officials voicing their concern that Trump could one day, on a whim, end the alliance or make concessions with North Korea or China that were not within South Korea’s interests.⁴⁶ Thus, the Yoon administration is likely watching the trajectory of the US political discourse to ascertain what are the different possibilities for the number of US 2024 presidential election contenders’ approaches to the future of the US–South Korea. As a result, the Yoon administration is likely seeking to hedge amid an uncertain future of the US government’s approach to the US–South Korea alliance.

It is reasonable for any South Korean government to be cautious against aligning with US-led efforts to deter and be prepared for Chinese regional armed aggression. Seoul is likely concerned US policies may not endure a change in administrations, or worse, a future US president could make the unfathomable decision to end the US alliance with South Korea. As a result, Seoul would be left to deal with China’s ire due to South Korea’s joining US-led regional contingency planning.

However due to proximity to China, a regional conflict with China is likely to impact US Northeast Asia allies irrespective of whether they supported US-led contingency planning. For example, simply due to the US military footprint in South Korea, China is likely to perceive South Korea as a threat amid a US–China kinetic conflict. To this end, Washington needs to consider how to better support its allies to enable for collective efforts toward regional security strategy.

Considerations for US Policy

Washington first needs to better consider Seoul's unique position when it comes to seeking South Korea's inclusion in US-led Indo-Pacific contingency planning efforts. Seoul's foreign policy will need to take into consideration South Korea's proximity to the nuclear armed states of China, Russia, and North Korea and the growing strategic collaboration among these three amid a global economic downturn. In addition, Seoul must consider that a continued fraught South Korea–Japan relationship, in tandem with concerns of possible future US abandonment, could lead to South Korea's isolation in an increasingly dangerous neighborhood.

In terms of US abandonment, while serving on the US Forces Korea headquarters staff, this author noted concerns among South Korea's alliance supporters and key stakeholders that Washington may seek to eventually end its alliance with South Korea in a manner similar to the Carter administration's 1979 decision to terminate its alliance with Taiwan.⁴⁷ Carter's decision to end the US–Taiwan alliance at China's behest is significant for the administration having done so without offering any security guarantee for Taiwan.⁴⁸ Regional observers usually proclaim that allies fear the United States may have what is often referred to another "Nixon moment" that rattled regional allies when Washington first moved to open ties with then previous foe Beijing in the early 1970s.⁴⁹ However, it is also fair to argue allies would be concerned that a US administration could have a "Carter moment," and possibly move to end an alliance with say South Korea to broker peace with Beijing. Thus, the United States needs to continue to reiterate its enduring support to the defense of South Korea while noting some of the damage done by previous administrations.

Furthermore, as the United States is South Korea's sole ally and was previously its number-one trading partner, the alliance historically had less concerns about external influences on the alliance's combined decision making. But when China surpassed the United States to become South Korea's number-one trading partner in 2004, the alliance should have considered how this shift would impact alliance coordination.⁵⁰ Thus, the United States needs to develop a more holistic approach to strengthening and expanding the US–South Korea alliance to meet South Korea's evolving regional threat environment more concretely. To better enable South Korea to participate in an expansion of the alliance, Washington should seek to evolve US security guarantees to Seoul. For instance, China's economic retaliation against South Korea's economy amid Seoul's THAAD deployment decision failed to elicit any response or retaliation from Washington. As a result, discourse among the South Korean public called for the exercise of caution

surrounding Seoul's strategic decision making within the alliance out of fear of further Chinese economic retaliation.⁵¹

Beijing's economic retaliation is particularly troublesome as China skillfully does not explicitly link any economic retaliation to a state's action viewed as harmful to Chinese interests. For instance, Beijing never portrayed its retaliation against South Korea's economy following the THAAD deployment decision as tied to that particular issue.⁵² China's economic attacks on its trade partners have so far been related to supposed unrelated concerns. This informal retaliation may render efforts toward US–South Korea economic retaliation collaboration that much more difficult. In the meantime, the concerns of further economic retaliation amid a global economic downturn will likely cause the Yoon administration, South Korea businesses, and the South Korean public writ large to be wary of supporting alliance decisions that could spark China's ire.

Furthermore, Washington should consider avenues for adding to Seoul's political space for making innovative decisions that aid in strengthening and evolving the alliance. For instance, as of this writing, the provisions of the Biden administration's Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) have incited significant uproar in South Korea.⁵³ The IRA provides tax breaks to electric vehicle (EV) companies that manufacture their vehicles in North America.⁵⁴ In response the South Korean public has expressed outrage, as most South Korea companies manufacture their EVs in South Korea prior to exporting them to the US.⁵⁵ South Korean companies have voiced concern they will lose out, as their vehicles may end up being more expensive than EVs manufactured in North America. Thus, in South Korea the IRA provisions are viewed as yet another protectionist agenda akin to those espoused by previous US administrations aimed at increasing the economic prosperity of the US economy with little regard for the impact to allies.

The uproar comes amid Seoul's limited near-term options to diversify the South Korean economy to have less reliance on China and as several of the country's companies have pledged increased investment in the United States. This increased investment in the United States, through projects such as Samsung's upcoming semiconductor fabrication facility, are expected to provide significant benefits to the US economy.⁵⁶ However, public discourse illustrates that South Koreans are questioning the benefit of this increased cooperation with the United States.⁵⁷ Debate has even included questions as to whether Korean businesses should go forward with their investments and if Seoul should continue to negotiate its joining of US-led initiatives, like the semiconductor alliance, that risk China's ire. Thus, some of Washington's policy decisions, such as exclusionary IRA tax breaks, risk limiting the political space in which Seoul must make risky decisions such as

supporting the expansion of alliance cooperation to regional contingency planning.

In addition, while Washington seeks to further US–South Korea–Japan trilateral security cooperation, it should consider the US approach toward aiding the resolution of South Korea–Japan tensions. First, Washington should move to remain neutral in the South Korea–Japan divide, while also privately considering the unique concerns on both sides of the conflict. For instance, South Korea disapproved of the Trump administration publicly admonishing Seoul’s threats to terminate its intelligence-sharing agreement with Japan.⁵⁸ It is understandable that Washington would want to ensure efforts toward trilateral intelligence sharing amid an increasing North Korean threat. However, it did not bode well for the US mediation position amid the continued deterioration of South Korea–Japan tensions when Washington did not also criticize Japan’s part in the deterioration of its relations with South Korea. For instance, Washington abstained from at least publicly criticizing Japan for its export controls on key semiconductor materials to South Korea, a move that has harmed industries in both South Korea and Japan.⁵⁹

The US move was particularly concerning as South Korea was seeking limited avenues to motivate Tokyo to reverse Japan’s course on its trade retaliation on the Korean. Thus, Washington’s pressure for Seoul to shift its stance on the intelligence-sharing agreement absent the same criticism of Japan lessened the political capital of the Moon administration. Thus going forward, Washington should seek to enhance the political space Seoul has to bridge its divide with Tokyo while remaining neutral to maintain each public’s support and its ability to be an honest broker.

In conclusion, it is within Seoul’s vested interests for there to be a strong deterrent to Chinese regional aggression. While the Yoon government is so far vague on its position regarding participating in a US-led defense of Taiwan, the stability of Taiwan and the South and East China Seas is crucial to South Korea’s strategic stability. However, South Korea will likely continue to focus more narrowly on the existential threat North Korea poses to South Korea and China’s influence on South Korea’s economic trajectory. Therefore, absent an evolution in how Washington views and responds to threats to South Korea’s stability, the US–South Korea alliance will continue to struggle to adapt to threats to regional stability that emanate beyond the Korean Peninsula. 🌀

Maj Jessica René Taylor, USAFR

Major Taylor is a logistics officer in the US Air Force Reserve (USAFR), a geopolitical strategist, and a PhD student in security studies at Princeton’s School of Public and International Affairs. Jessica has served in the Department of

Defense in military and civilian capacities since 2005. Just prior to coming to Princeton, from 2019–2021, Jessica was serving as an Indo-Pacific geopolitical strategist on the headquarters staff of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command and US Forces Korea. While at Princeton, she will focus on US Northeast Asia alliance cooperation.

Notes

1. Yoon Suk-yeol, "South Korea Needs to Step Up: The Country's Next President on His Foreign Policy Vision," *Foreign Affairs*, 8 February 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>.
2. Sea Young Kim and Sook Jong Lee, "South Korea Perception of the United States and China: United States, a more favorable Partner than China," East Asia Institute, 21 July 2020, <http://www.eai.or.kr/>.
3. Sangsin Lee et al., *KINU Unification Survey 2021: US-China Conflict & South Korean Public Opinion* (Seoul: Korea Institute for National Unification, 2021), 41, <https://www.kinu.or.kr/>.
4. Kim and Lee, "South Korea Perception of the United States and China."
5. "Second-day Sitting of 7th Session of DPRK Held," *Rodong Sinmun*, 9 September 2022, <http://www.rodong.rep.kp/>.
6. Hyonhee Shin, Josh Smith and Kantaro Komiya, "North Korea conducts longest-range missile test yet over Japan," *Reuters*, 3 October 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
7. President Joe Biden, interview with Scott Pelley, "Biden tells 60 Minutes U.S. troops would defend Taiwan, but White House says this is not official policy" *60 Minutes*, 18 September 2022, <https://www.cbsnews.com/>.
8. "Japan and U.S. draft operation plan for Taiwan contingency," *Japan Times*, 23 December 2021, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>.
9. Center for Strategic and International Studies, "How is China Modernizing its Nuclear Forces," *China Power*, 28 October 2020, <https://chinapower.csis.org/>.
10. Yoon Suk-yeol, President of South Korea, interview with Fareed Zakaria, "South Korean President: North Korea remains an imminent threat," *Global Public Square*, 25 September 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/>.
11. Andrew Yeo. "Can South Korea chart a path between the US and China in the Indo-Pacific," *Order from Chaos* (blog), 15 August 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.
12. "United-States Republic of Korea Leaders' Joint Statement" (briefing, White House, 21 May 2022), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/>.
13. "Joint Press Statement for the 21st Korea-U.S. Integrated Defense Dialogue," 17 August 2022, <https://www.defense.gov/>.
14. *Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea*, 1 October 1953, <https://www.usfk.mil/>.
15. Gil Yun-hung, "USFK command nominee: S. Korea-US alliance can cooperate beyond Korean Peninsula," *Hankyoreh*, 20 May 2021, <https://english.hani.co.kr/>.
16. Mutual Defense Treaty Between the United States and the Republic of Korea.
17. Center for Strategic and International Studies, "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea," *China Power*, <https://chinapower.csis.org/>.
18. David Brunnstrom and Trevor Hunnicutt, "Biden says U.S. forces would defend Taiwan in the event of a Chinese invasion" *Reuters*, 19 September 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
19. Esther Chung, "Esper predicts Korean involvement in any Taiwan conflict," *Korea Joongan Daily*, 13 July 2022, <https://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/>.

20. “Agenda,” (Third Harvard Korean Security Summit: “Korea—A Catalyst of Global Trends, 19–21 July 2022), <https://www.belfercenter.org/>.
21. Scott Snyder, ed., *The US–South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2012), 1.
22. Scott A. Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads: Autonomy in an Era of Rival Powers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018), 122.
23. Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 139–40.
24. The author served as an Indo-Pacific geopolitical strategist on the Headquarters Staffs of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command and US Forces Korea, 2019–2021
25. Josh Smith, “Home to 28,000 troops, South Korea unlikely to avoid a Taiwan Conflict,” *Reuters*, 26 September 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/>.
26. Lee et al., *KINU Unification Survey 2021*, 41.
27. Min Joo Kim, “South Korea’s president skips Nancy Pelosi meeting due to staycation,” *Washington Post*, 4 August 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.
28. Michelle Ye Hee Lee and Min Joo Kim, “South Korean conservative candidate wins close-fought, divisive presidential election,” *Washington Post*, 9 March 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.
29. Jeong-Ho Lee, “South Korea Says Missile Shield ‘Not Negotiable’ with China,” *Bloomberg*, 11 August 2022, <https://www.bloomberg.com/>.
30. Dongwoo Kim, “The Politics of South Korea’s ‘China Threat’,” *The Diplomat*, April 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/>.
31. “China, S Korea made substantial program for 2nd phase FTA talk: China’s Ministry of Commerce,” *Global Times*, 21 July 2022, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/>.
32. Kim Sang-Min, “U.S. Lifts Missile Limits on South Korea,” *Arms Control Today*, June 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/>.
33. Gabriel Dominquez, “North Korea provocations boosting U.S., Japan and South Korea security cooperation,” *Japan Times*, 6 October 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>.
34. Jo He-rim, “Foreign Minister to meet with victims of Japan’s forced labor,” *Korea Herald*, 31 August 2022, <https://www.koreaherald.com/>.
35. “Japan, S. Korea to accelerate consultations over wartime labor issue,” *Kyodo News*, 4 August 2022, <https://english.kyodonews.net/>.
36. “Japan Officially Ousts South Korea from Export Whitelist,” *Nikkei Asia*, 28 August 2019, <https://asia.nikkei.com/>.
37. Kang Seung-woo, “Japan opposes Korea’s G7 participation,” *Korea Times*, 29 June 2020, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
38. Will Fee, “Kishida Cabinet’s approval rating falls as headwinds mount,” *Japan Times*, 8 August 2022, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/>; and Kim Yoo-chul, “Yoon’s poor support rate burdens his foreign policy,” *Korea Times*, October 2022, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/>.
39. Martin Weiser, “Did South Korea’s left help Yoon Suk-yeol win the presidency?,” *East Asia Forum*, 29 April 2022, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/>.
40. Scott A. Snyder, “South Korea’s Presidential Election: What to Know,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, 3 March 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/>.
41. Darcie Draudt, “What President Yoon Suk-yeol’s Election Means for South Korean Democracy,” *The Diplomat*, 23 March 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/>.

42. "DP Floor Leader Criticizes Yoon's Liberation Day Speech," *KBS World*, 16 August 2022, <https://world.kbs.co.kr/>.
43. "H.R.4346 - 117th Congress (2021–2022): Supreme Court Security Funding Act of 2022," 9 August 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/>.
44. Morgan Chalfant, "McConnell threatens semiconductor bill, prompting White House rebuke," *The Hill*, 30 June 2022, <https://thehill.com/>.
45. Victor Cha, "The Unintended Consequences of Success: U.S. Retrenchment from Korea?," *Korea Journal of Defense Analysis* 31, no. 2 (June 2019), 165–91.
46. The author served as an Indo-Pacific geopolitical strategist on the Headquarters Staffs of United Nations Command, Combined Forces Command and US Forces Korea 2019–2021.
47. Andrew Glass, "U.S. recognizes communist China, Dec. 15, 1978," *Politico*, 15 December 2018, <https://www.politico.com/>.
48. Carter left the alliance without proffering any security guarantee.
49. Charles Kraus "Nixon's 1972 Visit to China at 50," *Sources and Methods* (blog), 21 February 2022, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/>.
50. Snyder, *South Korea at the Crossroads*, 230
51. Laura Silver, Christine Huang, and Laura Clancy, "How Global Public Opinion of China has shifted in the Xi Era," *Pew Research*, 28 September 2022, <https://www.pewresearch.org/>.
52. Andrew Salmon, "Korea still taking Chinese hits over US missiles," *Asia Times*, 6 December 2019, <https://asiatimes.com/>.
53. William Gallo, "Worse than MAGA—South Korea Erupts Over Biden's Trade Policy," *VOA News*, 14 September 2022, <https://www.voanews.com/>.
54. "Text - H.R.5376 - 117th Congress (2021–2022): Inflation Reduction Act of 2022," 16 August 2022, <https://www.congress.gov/>.
55. Gallo, "Worse than MAGA."
56. Sue Mi Terry, "Yoon's Strong Start in Foreign Policy," *Foreign Policy*, 18 August 2022, <https://foreignpolicy.com/>.
57. Gallo, "Worse than MAGA."
58. Victor Cha, "The Meaning of GSOMIA Termination: Escalation of the Japan-Korea Dispute," *CSIS*, 22 August 2019, <https://www.csis.org/>.
59. Yen Nee Lee, "The Japan-South Korea dispute could push up the price of your next smartphone," *CNBC*, 23 July 2019, <https://www.cnn.com/>.

Disclaimers

The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JIPA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Department of the Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.

The Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies (TSC) and Air University Press (AUP) are pleased to announce the forthcoming publication of the

Journal of Arctic and Climate Security Studies (JACSS)

JACSS will be an official publication of the new Ted Stevens Center for Arctic Security Studies. We anticipate the first issue to be published in February 2023 and actively encourage regional researchers, operators, and policy makers to submit their work to the editorial team at jacss@au.af.edu

We hope to have a website and social media accounts established in the next few months. Please watch AUP's social media feeds for the upcoming JACSS and social media launch.

Anticipated first issue of publication:

February 2023



<http://TedStevensArcticCenter.org/>
<https://www.AirUniversity.af.edu/AUPress>



AirUnivPress



AUPress



Air_University_Press



company/Air-University-Press/

