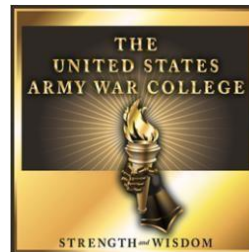


## Asia-Pacific Rebalance and U.S. Commitment to Korea

by

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### Abstract

The most recent and highly publicized major defense policy evolution the United States has pursued is the rebalance to the Pacific. Essential to stability and security of the greater Asia-Pacific is ensuring the stability of Northeast Asia, where maintaining a tenuous armistice on the Korean peninsula is vital. U.S. defense policy for the peninsula over the last half century has been remarkably resolute in maintaining this fragile peace. Although this policy has failed to deny North Korea the acquisition of nuclear weapons, it has ensured security and stability in a complex geopolitical environment where military options risk escalation, immense devastation, and de-stabilization of the region. The question is not whether the United States should maintain a forward presence on the peninsula; rather, how better can it maintain this defense posture within the U.S.-ROK alliance. Pre-occupation with events in Southeast Asia must not risk diminishing the strategic priority of the U.S. commitment to Korea.

## **Asia-Pacific Rebalance and U.S. Commitment to Korea**

The most recent and highly publicized major defense policy evolution the United States has pursued is the “pivot”, or rebalance, to the Pacific. Since the end of World War II, U.S. policy has sought to underpin stability and security in the Asia-Pacific by maintaining a military presence in East Asia and ensuring involvement in most major diplomatic developments in the region.<sup>1</sup> Essential to stability and security of the greater Asia-Pacific is ensuring the stability of Northeast Asia (NEA), where maintaining a tenuous armistice on the Korean peninsula is vital. Despite its broader purpose to hedge China as a rising regional power, the Pacific rebalance cannot afford to dilute the U.S. commitment to security and stability on the Korean peninsula. In an increasingly constrained resource environment, the pre-occupation with events in Southeast Asia (SEA) must not risk diminishing the strategic prioritization of committed U.S. defense policy for Korea. This Strategic Research Project (SRP) will show that U.S. defense policy for the peninsula over the last half century has been remarkably resolute in maintaining a fragile peace. Although this policy has failed to deny North Korean development of nuclear weapons, it has ensured security and stability in a very complex environment where military options risk immense devastation.

The long-term investment of the United States in the security and stability of Korea remains integral to the success of the greater Asia-Pacific rebalance. In order to better articulate the complexities U.S. defense policy must navigate, this paper will describe the broader strategic context shaping the U.S. decision to rebalance to the Pacific. Next, it will address U.S. interests in the region in order to further narrow this topic from greater regional purpose to the more micro, yet significant, strategic importance of the Korean peninsula. This work will then describe major historical events

involving America's role in shaping the geo-political environment of Korea and the consequence of subsequent U.S. policy choices. An understanding of America's engagement from the pre-Korean War period to the present is essential to understanding the U.S. commitment to Korea and why it remains relevant to the contemporary strategic environment. This work will conclude with broad recommendations for additional study and appropriate revisions to U.S. policy, even as North Korea continues to advance its military capabilities.

The Asia-Pacific rebalance is an expansion and intensification of America's already significant role in the region. In 2012, with the war in Iraq declared over, the downsizing of U.S. military operations in Afghanistan, and the emergence of China as a regional power, the United States shifted its global engagement focus to the Pacific. In a 2011 address to the Australian parliament, U.S. President Barack Obama signaled this policy shift in one crystal clear sentence, "As we end today's wars, I have directed my national security team to make our presence and missions in the Asia-Pacific a top priority."<sup>2</sup>

Since the United States still has interests and faces challenges in other regions, this rebalance is a matter of priority and focus, rather than a revolutionary change in U.S. engagement in the region. For example, the 2001 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) described Asia as gradually emerging as a region susceptible to large-scale military competition with a volatile mix of rising and declining regional powers. This document also put a premium on securing additional access and infrastructure means to mitigate the tyranny of distance that characterizes the region.<sup>3</sup> Since this QDR was published in the immediate wake of the 9/11 terrorist attacks in the United States,

prioritization of the Asia-Pacific was understandably eclipsed by the ensuing global war on terror. Also, in October 2009 then U.S. Secretary of Defense (SecDef) Robert Gates stated that North Korea continues to be a threat to South Korea and to the region. As such, he reiterated America's unwavering commitment to the alliance and defense of South Korea through extended deterrence, using the full range of military capabilities, to include the nuclear umbrella, to ensure its security.<sup>4</sup> The Asia-Pacific rebalance signals the U.S. Administration's intent to raise the regional priority in military planning, foreign policy, and economic policy.<sup>5</sup>

Debate over the relative importance of Asia and Europe to the United States has been part of U.S. foreign policy formulation for centuries. NEA is of more importance to the United States today because the global economic weight is shifting from the North Atlantic to the Asia Pacific Rim. U.S. alliances with Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan keep it deeply vested in the region, along with its need to partner with China to preserve economic and regional stability. Underpinned by its growing economic and military strength, China's increasing regional assertiveness and growing international influence required a U.S. response. In a broad sense this is the underlying reason for the United States to shift resources from the Middle East, Europe, and the global war on terror to the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>6</sup> Thus, the 2011 Pacific rebalance policy shift is largely concerned with hedging China's rise as a regional hegemon, assuring U.S. allies, and protecting vital interests of the United States in the Western Pacific.

In January 2012, U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta published new strategic guidance in *Sustaining Global Leadership: Priorities for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Defense*, reflecting the President's defense policy and commitment in Asia. According to SecDef

Panetta, U.S. economic and security interests are inextricably linked to developments in the Asia-Pacific region, where the maintenance of peace, stability, the free flow of commerce, and of U.S. influence will depend on a balance of military capability and presence. More specifically, the document states that America will maintain peace on the Korean peninsula by effectively working with allies and other regional states to deter and defend against provocations from North Korea, which is actively pursuing a nuclear weapons program.<sup>7</sup>

Two additional U.S. strategic defense documents underpin the rebalance policy and correspond with the 2012 strategic defense guidance in highlighting the strategic importance of Korea to regional stability. The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review and the 2015 *National Military Strategy* (NMS) also affirm the North Korean threat and correlate the importance of a secure and stable Korean Peninsula to ensuring the greater stability of the Asia-Pacific. In particular, faced with North Korea's long-range missiles and weapons of mass destruction the QDR states that the United States is committed to maintaining peace and security on the Korean Peninsula. Further, as part of broader efforts for stability of the Asia-Pacific region, the United States will maintain a robust footprint in NEA while enhancing its presence in Southeast Asia.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, the 2015 NMS further points out North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons and ballistic missile technologies despite repeated international community demands to halt these efforts. The NMS states that such capability directly threatens its neighbors and in time could directly threaten the U.S. homeland.<sup>9</sup> Coupled with the 2012 strategic guidance, these U.S. national level security documents are consistent in their portrayal of the

threat that North Korea poses, America's commitment to remain the ultimate guarantor of the Republic of Korea's (ROK) security, and U.S. security interests in the region.

The 2015 U.S. *National Security Strategy* (NSS) echoes the security policy of the United States as historically anchored in forward presence and deterrence. The United States embraces the responsibility of underwriting international security because this serves America's interests, upholds U.S. commitments to allies and partners, and addresses global threats through forward presence and engagement.<sup>10</sup> The NSS states that the security dynamic that pervades the region includes contested maritime territorial claims and a provocative North Korea. Despite the plethora of other regional issues, these two are specifically illuminated as being the greatest risk to escalation and conflict.<sup>11</sup> Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the peninsula has been a focal point for competition.

Competition for Korea has historically involved China, Japan, Russia, and the United States. No other place had such importance to these countries because Korea was the only country in the world where the interests and security concerns of these four powers intersected.<sup>12</sup> In order to avoid post-World War II confrontation over Korea, the United States proposed an international trusteeship in which they, China, Great Britain, and the Soviet Union would participate. On December 1, 1943, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt, British Prime Minister Winston Churchill, and Chinese Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek issued the Cairo Declaration, which in part read: "The aforesaid three great powers, mindful of the enslavement of the people of Korea, are determined that in due course Korea shall become free and independent."<sup>13</sup> Preceding the Cairo Declaration Roosevelt, Churchill, and Soviet Premier Joseph Stalin met



November 28 to December 1, 1943 in Tehran, Iran to discuss military strategy and the post-World War II international era.<sup>14</sup> The concept of multilateral trusteeship of Korea was discussed by Roosevelt and Stalin at the Tehran Conference. The enduring theme between the Cairo and Tehran meetings of the great powers was that Korea would be subject to some period of external supervision. What these leaders failed to do was reach a formal agreement on the structure of a trusteeship or how it would in fact function. Of additional consequence, two developments would significantly alter the course of Korea's future and set the stage for its coming civil war.

During the Yalta Conference in February 1945, Stalin agreed that Russia would enter the Pacific War two or three months after the defeat of Nazi Germany to support American plans of establishing two strategic fronts against Japan.<sup>15</sup> Later this same year the strategic calculus for the United States changed and with it came changes to U.S. policy. President Harry Truman became U.S. president following the death of Roosevelt and was more influenced by advisors who favored a harder line toward Russia. The United States and Soviet Union were at perpetual odds on postwar Germany and Eastern Europe, fueling more distrust and frustration for both sides. By mid-1945 American efforts to achieve Soviet cooperation in an offensive against Japan were reduced significantly.<sup>16</sup>

In July 1945 the atomic bomb was successfully tested. This would fundamentally alter the U.S. Asia campaign strategy and Korea's future. The atomic bomb provided an option to compel Japan's capitulation absent a costly U.S. invasion envisioned by current war plans. Equally appealing was that the defeat of Japan could be achieved without the need for Soviet participation. Despite this development, the wheels were

already set in motion for Soviet participation. U.S. military planners realized that American military forces would not arrive in time to secure the Korean peninsula before the Soviets could overrun and occupy the whole of it.

As early as August 1944, the U.S. Joint War Planning Committee was directed to prepare plans for the occupation of Japanese held strategic territories in the event of Japanese withdrawal, collapse, or surrender. Little was initially accomplished of this directive, but it was renewed in earnest in May 1945. On the same day as the Potsdam Conference in July 1945, U.S. Army Chief of Staff General George C. Marshall directed the War Department Operations Division (WDOPD) to be prepared to move some troops to Korea. General John E. Hull, Chief of the WDOPD, conducted preliminary planning for possible ground boundaries on the peninsula between American and Soviet forces. A tentative dividing line was drawn north of Seoul, not exactly at the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel but generally along it.<sup>17</sup> Soviet troops were advancing rapidly, and ultimately the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel became the officially agreed boundary, haphazardly dividing Korea roughly in half.

Former U.S. Foreign Service Officer and noted Korea scholar Gregory Henderson wrote in 1974, "No division of a nation...is so astonishing in its origin as the division of Korea; none is so unrelated to conditions or sentiment...in none does blunder and planning oversight appear to have played so large a role." He concluded, "...there is no division for which the U.S. government bears so heavy a share of the responsibility as it bears for the division of Korea."<sup>18</sup> Many South Koreans consider the division of Korea as the second American betrayal (the first occurring in 1905 with the United States approval for Japan's domination of Korea in return for assurances that Tokyo

would not challenge U.S. colonial domination of the Philippines).<sup>19</sup> The division of the peninsula would also be followed by an equally haphazard occupation.

September 1945 marked not only the beginning of the occupation of a divided Korea, but a start of the march toward the Korean War.<sup>20</sup> Korean exile groups made repeated proposals to contribute to the war effort and a postwar Korea. The United States continued a policy of non-recognition of any exile group, marginalizing their potential roles in psychological operations or clandestine direct action missions.<sup>21</sup> Such policy negated Korean participation in structuring or even participating more fully in a post war reconstruction and governance role. The U.S. occupation force was unwisely content with allowing Japanese administrators to continue assisting the United States in its occupation of the “liberated” southern half of the peninsula, further fueling Korean malcontent. Within Korea, pent-up nationalist emotions and deep political and social schisms boiled. Despite its shortcomings, the U.S. occupation prevented the whole of Korea from becoming a Communist state.

The conclusion of World War II left only the United States and Soviet Union as the two great powers vying for the peninsula. Under the occupation of these powers, two antagonistic regimes were forged: Communists in the North and conservatives in the South. Both regimes espoused visions of reunifying the two Koreas under their rule, making the possibility of conciliation unlikely.<sup>22</sup> The division of Korea gave rise to a fissured polity with political rifts aggravated by regional, religious, and class divisions. Fighting among these factions claimed more than 100,000 lives even before the outbreak of the Korean War.<sup>23</sup> The underlying factor of the continuous struggle between the two Koreas is a competition for legitimacy amidst opposing ideologies.

Amidst continual violent outbreaks and the realization that Korea could not peacefully reunify, a United Nations (UN) sponsored election for a national assembly was conducted in South Korea in 1948. The new national assembly chose an impassioned nationalist, Syngman Rhee, to be the first president of the Republic of Korea (ROK). In September of this same year, former Soviet Army Captain Kim Il Sung was chosen by Russia to head the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK).<sup>24</sup> Under a UN agreement both the United States and the Soviet Union withdrew their forces from Korea in 1949, leaving only a large number of advisors on the peninsula. Skirmishes were instigated by both sides across the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel, as both leaders desired reunification under their respective ideological visions.<sup>25</sup>

With Stalin's backing, Kim began his war to "liberate" the South at dawn on 25 June 1950. Upon learning of the attack on South Korea, the United States called for an immediate meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). With the Soviets boycotting the meeting, the UNSC was able to quickly pass a resolution condemning the actions of North Korea and demanded its armies withdraw from the South.<sup>26</sup> This war would prove the first test of the post-World War II international order of collective security. Within a week American forces were committed to the fighting under the UN flag.<sup>27</sup> The UN sent combat forces from 15 nations and support forces from an additional five in order to assist the Republic of Korea in countering the North Korean invasion. UN entry into this war led to a rapid internationalization of what had previously been an internal struggle. The United States perceived the attack as evidence that Communism would challenge the free world and committed to maintaining a non-Communist South Korea. The United States was further adamant that this joint military action was crucial

in preventing the conflict from spilling over outside of Korea. This war would see advances and retreats between the geographic extremes of Pusan in the South to the Yalu River in the North until its stalemate in the summer of 1951. For the next two years both sides fought limited engagements while truce terms were excruciatingly discussed.<sup>28</sup>

At 10:00 a.m. on July 27, 1953, the U.S. led United Nations Command (UNC) and the Chinese-North Korean coalition signed the Korean Armistice agreement in Panmunjom. Twelve hours later the Armistice went into effect and combat operations ceased across Korea.<sup>29</sup> The U.S. and China achieved the short term goal of restoring the 38<sup>th</sup> parallel as the demarcation line, more commonly referred to as the demilitarized zone (DMZ). North and South Korea failed in a larger goal of reunifying the peninsula under their preferred political systems; however, the United States did preserve a non-Communist South Korea. The armistice was only a ceasefire agreement and not a peace treaty to bring a formal end to the Korean War.<sup>30</sup> The United States and ROK signed a mutual defense treaty on October 1, 1953 and entered it into force on November 17, 1954.<sup>31</sup> The 155 mile long DMZ remains the most fortified border in the world. Two million soldiers face each other along a two and a half mile wide strip of land straddling the DMZ.<sup>32</sup>

The Korean War proved definitive in solidifying the U.S. commitment to preserving a non-Communist South Korea and set in motion the fundamental basis of U.S. policy to confront the spread of Communism in the region. In the winter of 1949-1950 Paul Nitze, then director of policy planning at the U.S. State Department, produced the landmark National Security Council Paper 68 (NSC 68). This would

eventually become the U.S. master plan for the cold war as it espoused military buildup and the absolute need to contain Communism to stop the spreading of its ideology. This document was delivered to President Truman in April 1950.<sup>33</sup> Although politely ignored by Truman and not an impetus to U.S. defense policy for Korea at that time, this document would be at the heart of U.S. Cold War defense policy until the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991. NSC 68's grim message read, "The assault on free institutions is world-wide now, and in the context of the present polarization of power, a defeat of free institutions anywhere is a defeat everywhere... Thus unwillingly our free society finds itself morally challenged by the Soviet system."<sup>34</sup> On a greater scale the Korean War was the first armed confrontation of the Cold War era undertaken to preserve a non-Communist state. Despite Truman's dismissal of NSC 68, the war struck the first victory in containing the spread of the Communist ideology and galvanized America's enduring policy of forward defense. However, U.S. commitment and ability to sustain a non-Communist South Korea would be questioned as a consequence of U.S. President Richard Nixon's rapprochement initiative with China and America's failure in Vietnam.

On July 9, 1971, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger landed secretly in Beijing in order to begin the historic Sino-American rapprochement with China. U.S. President Richard Nixon desired to end the two decades of hostility with China, which began with Chinese intervention in the Korean War. He was excited by the prospect of the resultant geopolitical shift that would openly split the Communist world. By simultaneously improving ties with both Moscow and Beijing, Nixon hoped to demonstrate to North Vietnam that it was an increasingly vulnerable client of the two giants of international communism. As a consequence, both Korean regimes felt more

vulnerable than ever before.<sup>35</sup> In Seoul, President Park Chung Hee began to raise doubts about the reliability of the ROK's great power sponsor. Coupled with the Nixon Doctrine, that Asians should provide the manpower for their own wars, this rapprochement appeared to him to be an indication that the United States was moving steadily toward disengagement. Despite U.S. reassurance, Park perceived these developments as a message that if North Korea invaded again the United States would not come to the rescue.<sup>36</sup>

Further eroding confidence in U.S. security policy for Korea was America's failure in Vietnam. President Park was alarmed by the American pullout from Vietnam and at the betrayal of South Vietnam in the Paris negotiations with North Vietnam. From Seoul, U.S. Ambassador Richard Sneider appealed for an urgent review of American policies in view of "declining ROK confidence in [the] U.S. commitment," and "risk of North Korean provocation to test U.S. intentions and ROK capabilities." For Park the prospects and plight of South Vietnam, another U.S.-backed anticommunist half of a divided country, bore an uncomfortable resemblance to the situation in his country.<sup>37</sup> Despite these events, the only time that the U.S. leadership ever contemplated abandoning the peninsula was during President Jimmy Carter's administration.

Soon after announcing his candidacy in 1975, Carter called for a phased and eventually complete withdrawal of U.S. combat forces from Korea. His rationale was based on a perception of low threat from North Korea and the increasing capacity of the South Korean military to ensure the security of the ROK. As U.S. President, he was unable to fulfill his campaign promise since the North Korean threat proved more formidable than previously known. In addition, the American presence had become a

vital source of regional stability during a period of intensified conflicts among Communist nations in Asia. Ironically, both Russia and China secretly opposed a U.S. withdrawal from the peninsula. Beijing was paranoid about the Soviets reasserting their long-standing interest over Korea. The Russians preferred continued American presence to maintain the delicate balance of influence over the North and to restrain Kim Il Sung from resuming the war.<sup>38</sup> Even to its adversaries, U.S. defense policy for Korea was invaluable to ensuring the stability of the region.

Since 1950, the U.S. has ensured South Korea's security against the threat of aggression from the North through credible military presence and numerous diplomatic initiatives. The South's economic growth and increasingly evolving democratic political institutions have transformed it from a bastion against Communism to a vigorous international actor.<sup>39</sup> The U.S.-ROK defense alliance has served to provide continental basing of U.S. forces in Asia to facilitate forward defense, assure allies, and furnish a U.S. nuclear umbrella. This has enabled South Korea to flourish while North Korea has stagnated.

Until the end of World War II, Korea had remained a single ethnically and culturally homogenous country for over a thousand years.<sup>40</sup> Since the division of Korea, the DPRK and ROK have been engaged in a relentless rivalry to be recognized as the only legitimate state on the peninsula. The failure of reunification through the Korean War spawned a "legitimacy war" in which both have attempted to undercut each other in many ways. Presently, it is apparent that the North has lost this race to the South. As South Korea gained recognition in the international community, North Korea has increasingly become isolated.<sup>41</sup> The South's success in economic, military, and



diplomatic realms stands in stark contrast to the North's perpetual decline. Food and energy shortages have been prevalent, forcing North Korea in 1995 to launch an international campaign to seek help from all available sources, including assistance from its adversaries.<sup>42</sup> In the face of such isolation the DPRK has proven astonishingly resilient in its ability to survive.

This resilience can be accredited to North Korea's cult-like adherence to the *Juche* ideology. This ideology is deeply embedded into the North Korean belief system. It is taught early and reinforced throughout the lives of North Koreans. It was made a national ideology in the late twentieth century and emphasizes independence, national self-reliance, and the worship of the supreme leader.<sup>43</sup> This ideology promotes a belief that North Korea represents a sovereign polity embodying a national spirit, while depicting South Korea as a state politically, economically, and militarily reliant on "imperialist powers". The North's fundamental reunification policy has been consistent over the years, that reunification should be achieved free from any foreign intervention.<sup>44</sup> It is the power of this ideology that galvanizes the loyalty of the North Korean people despite their suffering and lies at the heart of the regimes' monolithic pursuit of its interests along with providing a level of regime stability.

Pyongyang possesses the fourth largest military in the world, is investing in a technologically advanced military-industrial complex, and developing a nuclear weapons capability at the expense of improving the welfare of its impoverished people. The country remains reclusive, rejecting contact with the outside world as much as possible.<sup>45</sup> The DPRK surely realizes that reunification of the peninsula by force is no longer a realistic endeavor, in large part due to the U.S. defense policy commitment to

the ROK, the DPRK's increasing isolation, and the South's ascendancy on the world stage.

South Korea has won the world's respect with rapid industrialization, participation in the world market and international organizations, and democratization.<sup>46</sup> The obvious contrast between a rich and more powerful South Korea and an impoverished and isolated North leaves little doubt as to which has won the war of legitimacy.<sup>47</sup> Once one of the poorest countries in the world, South Korea has become the 13<sup>th</sup> largest trading nation and boasts the 10<sup>th</sup> largest military power in the world. It has hosted high profile summit meetings, such as the G-20 and the Nuclear Security Summit; the incumbent UN Secretary General is South Korean.<sup>48</sup> The country has inter-twined itself firmly into the international community, boosting its equity among a growing number of allies and partners.

Since achieving democratization in 1989, the foremost issue facing South Korea remains whether to encourage North Korea toward reconciliation or to confront it.<sup>49</sup> Combined with relative economic and political stability, national identity and political attitudes in the South have taken on a more pragmatic form toward both the United States and North Korea.<sup>50</sup> Despite the ebb and flow of political friction between the United States and the ROK over the years, a consistently strong defense partnership has effectively deterred an increasingly intransigent Pyongyang.

U.S. defense policy for the Korean peninsula has effectively deterred resumption of the Korean War for over 62 years. Maintaining security and stability on the peninsula is the premier objective of this policy. Should armed conflict resume on the peninsula it would, at a minimum, result in mutually assured devastation for the two Koreas and

calamitous consequences for the region. An estimate provided by General Gary Luck, commander U.S. Forces Korea during the 1994 nuclear crisis, provides a sobering example of the potential devastation. Based primarily on the immense lethality of modern weapons in the urban environments of Korea, he estimated that as many as 1 million people would be killed, including 80,000-100,000 Americans. The direct costs to the United States would exceed \$100 billion. In addition, the destruction of property and interruption of business activity would cost more than \$1 trillion to the countries involved and their immediate neighbors.<sup>51</sup> Any military action on the peninsula risks immediate escalation and immense destruction. Deterrence of military conflict should be the determining criterion in assessing the effectiveness of U.S. defense policy for the Korean peninsula. What this policy has been limited in achieving is the continued progression of the North Korean nuclear weapons program.

A major concern of regional stakeholders is North Korea's continued development of ballistic missile and nuclear weapons technology. Facing growing uncertainty that Russia and China would provide defensive support, Pyongyang pursues independent military capabilities necessary to defend itself. North Korea's nuclear program began with a small nuclear research reactor from the Soviet Union in 1965 and has continued to expand since.<sup>52</sup> In December 1985 North Korea ratified the Nuclear Non Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Since early 1993, North Korea has used its nuclear program to bargain for international recognition, security assurances, and economic benefits. Threats to withdraw from this treaty and the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) public declaration that Pyongyang was in violation of its international obligations led to a crisis that engaged the major powers in the spring of

1994.<sup>53</sup> The 1994 nuclear crisis could have easily developed into a military conflict if not for a crucial reversal of U.S. foreign policy and the negotiation of an Agreed Framework that provided for international assistance to North Korea's nuclear electric power program in return for an end to its nuclear weapons program.

The Agreed Framework was a controversial U.S. decision because it contradicted the prevailing U.S. foreign policy that favored negative economic sanctions or military action to deal with nuclear weapons ambitions of rogue states. The Agreed Framework temporarily defused the tension and averted military escalation with North Korea by implementation of positive economic sanctions.<sup>54</sup> Kim Il Sung agreed that the DPRK would suspend its nuclear weapons program in exchange for a package of benefits that would ease economic problems, exasperated by the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, and facilitate the construction of light water nuclear reactors to generate electrical power. The United States and North Korea signed the agreement in October 1994, effectively concluding the nuclear crisis and providing the two nations a certain level of détente throughout the late 1990s. However, by early 2003 the Agreed Framework collapsed as a result of President George W. Bush's administration adopting a hardline approach toward the DPRK and evidence that the North was pursuing a uranium enrichment program in violation of the spirit of the agreement.<sup>55</sup> Consequently, Pyongyang has progressed its nuclear weapons program despite numerous sanctions and international pressure to cease it. Any effort to curb this program will require another U.S. foreign policy initiative on a par with the Agreed Framework, backed by credible U.S. defense policy.

North Korea remains extremely provocative in its rhetoric and aggressive in its behavior. In a prepared statement for a House Armed Services Committee hearing in April 2015, U.S. Pacific Command's Admiral Samuel J. Locklear, III wrote, "North Korea remains the most dangerous and unpredictable security challenge. The regime continues its aggressive attitude while advancing its nuclear capability and ballistic missile programs."<sup>56</sup> Both Koreas remain technically at war and until at least an enduring reconciliation is achieved, all accomplishment to date could dissipate in resumption of the Korean War.

The question is not whether the United States should maintain a forward presence on the peninsula; rather, how better can it maintain this defense posture within the U.S.-ROK alliance. Strategic policy documents and U.S. Administration actions leave little doubt that America will remain committed to the security and stability of the Korean peninsula, as it has for the last half century. U.S. defense policy alone cannot solve the Korean reunification issue and risks inciting instability if military options are employed to hamper the DPRK's nuclear program. What U.S. defense policy must continue to do is provide a credible U.S. nuclear umbrella, enhance ballistic missile defense capabilities, and sustain sufficient combat power to deter and defeat potential North Korean aggression. This policy would underpin U.S. foreign policy by assuring regional allies and denying the DPRK coercive leverage. Currently, the U.S. foreign policy approach is "strategic patience" coupled with ratcheting up targeted economic sanctions against regime leaders and select sectors of the DPRK's economy.

Essential to stability and security of the greater Asia-Pacific is ensuring the stability of NEA, where maintaining a tenuous peace on the Korean peninsula is vital.

Given its engagement in the international polity and value to the global economy, the security and stability of South Korea is of interest to an increasing number of global actors. The ROK's vast political, economic, and military progress has enhanced its own stability and remarkably furthered its capacity for increased self-sufficiency. However, this should not be interpreted as sufficient in and of itself to deter North Korean aggression. U.S. defense policy has proven effective in deterring DPRK aggression and assuring regional allies for over 60 years. The policy of "strategic patience" has not dissuaded a resilient North Korea from developing nuclear weapons and long range ballistic missiles. U.S. assurance is equally essential to mitigate a nuclear and ballistic missiles arms race in the Asia-Pacific. U.S. defense policy and strategy must continue to evolve in close partnership with the ROK and regional partners in order to deny North Korea the leverage it seeks through increasingly capable military means.

Further study is warranted on how best to evolve a broader integrated strategy to hedge an increasingly capable and provocative North Korea. Perhaps a re-visit of the Agreed Framework of 1994 or pursuit of a Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, similar to the one for Iran, could provide more effective policy options. Although various factors differ and influence these possibilities, the constant will be an effective defense policy that predicates leverage for U.S. foreign policy options.

In an increasingly constrained resource environment, the pre-occupation with events in Southeast Asia (SEA) must not risk diminishing the strategic prioritization of committed U.S. defense policy for Korea. U.S. defense policy for the peninsula over the last half century has been remarkably resolute in maintaining a fragile peace. Although this policy has failed to deny North Korea its advancement in nuclear proliferation, it has

ensured security and stability in a complex geopolitical environment where military options risk escalation, immense devastation, and de-stabilization of the greater Asia-Pacific.

## Endnotes

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