ORDER from CHAOS
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Order at Risk: Japan, Korea and the Northeast Asian Paradox

JONATHAN D. POLLACK

Foreign Policy
at BROOKINGS

ABOUT THE ORDER FROM CHAOS PROJECT

In the two decades following the end of the Cold War, the world experienced an era characterized by declining war and rising prosperity. The absence of serious geopolitical competition created opportunities for increased interdependence and global cooperation. In recent years, however, several and possibly fundamental challenges to that new order have arisen—the collapse of order and the descent into violence in the Middle East; the Russian challenge to the European security order; and increasing geopolitical tensions in Asia being among the foremost of these. At this pivotal juncture, U.S. leadership is critical, and the task ahead is urgent and complex. The next U.S. president will need to adapt and protect the liberal international order as a means of continuing to provide stability and prosperity; develop a strategy that encourages cooperation not competition among willing powers; and, if necessary, contain or constrain actors seeking to undermine those goals.

In response to these changing global dynamics, the Foreign Policy Program at Brookings has established the Order from Chaos Project. With incisive analysis, new strategies, and innovative policies, the Foreign Policy Program and its scholars have embarked on a two-year project with three core purposes:

- To analyze the dynamics in the international system that are creating stresses, challenges, and a breakdown of order.
- To define U.S. interests in this new era and develop specific strategies for promoting a revitalized rules-based, liberal international order.
- To provide policy recommendations on how to develop the necessary tools of statecraft (military, economic, diplomatic, and social) and how to redesign the architecture of the international order.

The Order from Chaos Project strives to engage and influence the policy debate as the United States moves toward the 2016 election and as the next president takes office.

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Order at Risk: Japan, Korea and the Northeast Asian Paradox

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Northeast Asia's Unsettled Future

In a commentary appearing in *The Wall Street Journal* shortly before her election as President of the Republic of Korea in late 2012, Madame Park Geun-hye described East Asia as a bifurcated region. According to then-candidate Park, Northeast Asia (which she defined as China, Japan, and the two Koreas) was the primary engine of global economic growth, and (with the exception of North Korea) a singular example of regional cooperation, even without deeply rooted multilateral habits and practices. But she also observed that there was a "clashing Asia," characterized by North Korea's accelerated pursuit of nuclear weapons; the resurgence of historical and territorial rivalries; and heightened military competition. She described these competing narratives as "Asia's paradox."

Will this much darker alternative ultimately dominate the regional future? What are the consequences if the region is increasingly shaped by conflicting national identities and political-military polarization? What can the United States do to limit these possibilities? Answers must be sought in how regional leaders conceptualize their histories, strategic circumstances, and future expectations, including their perceptions of American power.

Any assessment must begin with America's core alliance relationships in Northeast Asia. For more than a half century, the United States has been the primary beneficiary of the development of Japan and South Korea as major industrial powers and pivotal U.S. security partners. The emergence of

two prosperous, powerful democratic allies with strategic and institutional identities closely aligned with the United States has been an undoubted success for U.S. policy. Building on this success presumes that both capitals will pursue compatible policy objectives and advance long-term goals that accord with American interests. At the same time, the United States must demonstrate continuity of purpose and strategic direction as it responds to the forces shaping Northeast Asia's future.

Is optimism warranted? To judge by the policy declarations of senior Japanese and Korean policymakers, neither alliance seems in serious jeopardy. Both countries have reaffirmed the centrality of their alliances with the United States to their vital political and security interests. At the same time, North Korea's open hostility toward Seoul and Tokyo, and its pursuit of weapons programs that directly threaten South Korea and Japan, has appreciably tempered some of the differences that have impeded closer relations between the two capitals. The Obama Administration has also undertaken major efforts throughout its tenure in office to strengthen collaboration with both countries.

But long-submerged forces are redefining national policies across Northeast Asia. These developments encompass renewed disputes over territorial sovereignty; heightened national identities as a source of domestic legitimation; and shifting power trajectories across the region. The ascendance of Chinese power, and the larger overlay of the long-term U.S.-China relationship, loom especially large in this process. As observed by Yoshide Soeya of Keio University, all regional states are "struggling to find an optimal strategy in the context of a shifting power balance between the United States and China."

Despite the apparent compatibility in Japanese and Korean policy agendas, there is palpable political and interpersonal distance between the leaders of Japan and South Korea. At the same time, the U.S. presidential campaign has exposed fault lines within the American electorate that threaten to undermine long-dominant premises of U.S. regional strategy. Regardless of the outcome of the Presidential election, these policy cleavages could directly affect future U.S. political, economic, and security relationships across Asia and the Pacific. America's role in regional geopolitics has helped keep the peace and enabled unparalleled prosperity for decades, but trends on both sides of the Pacific could prove very disruptive to regional order.

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On first examination, China, Japan, and South Korea all seem focused on domestic agendas, especially their economic futures. But all three countries are openly weighing their power relationships with one another and with outside powers. For America's two Northeast Asian allies, these issues concern their expectations of the United States, and how the United States responds to their hopes and fears. China, Japan, and South Korea are all assessing their respective ambitions and power trajectories. But they are also paying close heed to the dangers and uncertainties posed by North Korea, whose goals and longer-term prospects stand in stark contrast to all of its neighbors.

The prospect of disruption or major change in the regional order should concentrate the minds of American policymakers, but attention to these possibilities has been largely episodic. U.S. security planners are accustomed to regular consultations with their alliance partners. They judge the value of alliances by two principal criteria: whether they advance U.S. policy goals at acceptable levels of cost and risk; and whether modifications in alliance strategy enhance collaboration with American military forces. But a focus on operational military cooperation precludes a deeper understanding of the expectations and the anxieties of leaders and mass publics in Japan and Korea. These factors are often left unspoken, and suggest possibilities of political and strategic realignment which the next U.S. administration will have to confront.

In the years immediately following World War II, neither Tokyo nor Seoul could aspire to a major international role. Japan was under American occupation and in the initial throes of economic recovery from the war's devastation. South Korea was in the midst of civil war that soon became the major military conflict of the early Cold War era. Both countries were weak and highly dependent on American political and military support, and Japan and South Korea demonstrated ample deference to U.S. security needs and preferences. But that era has long since passed. Both countries increasingly voice ambitions as well as vulnerabilities of their own. Japan and Korea increasingly deem their separate national interests and perceived needs central to relations with the United States. The U.S. must therefore decide how to respond to the aspirations and anxieties of its long standing allies, and determine whether the core objectives of both countries accord with American interests.

China and North Korea will also be decisive considerations in Japanese and Korean policy making. Both operate outside the framework of U.S. alliances and have undertaken autonomous strategies in military development. If Tokyo and Seoul evaluate Chinese and North Korean actions in comparable fashion, then the implications for U.S. regional strategy (though very important) will prove much more manageable. The increased risks to regional security triggered by North Korea's pursuit of nuclear weapons have somewhat ameliorated the differences between Tokyo and Seoul. But Japan and Korea differ in their assessments of China, and their perceptions of Korean unification also diverge. The table on page 15 summarizes some of the differences in strategic perspective that will be analyzed throughout this essay.

Beijing and Pyongyang also represent vastly different policy challenges. China has returned to the front ranks of the world's powers, but there are persistent questions about how this transition will affect the existing international order. It is now the world's lead trading state, and (even as its economic growth has slowed appreciably) it dominates trade ties with virtually all Asian states. It is also America's largest trading partner. This interdependence incentivizes both countries to pursue cooperative strategies, though it does not guarantee their realization.

However, China is increasingly integrated in global commerce and economic development. It is fully vested in nearly all major international institutions and is an important factor in global diplomacy as a permanent member of the UN Security Council. Under the rubric of its "One Belt, One Road" initiative, Beijing hopes to achieve enduring infrastructural, economic and institutional connectivity between continental and maritime Asia and Europe. If this process proves successful, it could ultimately transform the geo-economic map of Asia and the Pacific.

The prospects for regional order appear much more unsettled in light of Chinese political-military activism in East Asia and heightened nationalistic sentiment within China. Beijing's actions in contested maritime domains, including its heightened maritime and air presence in the East China Sea and the buildup of civil and military infrastructure on various shoals and reefs in the South China Sea, have generated increasing disquiet across East Asia. Japan views these changes with ample anxiety, and has

sought to extend its defense cooperation with India, Australia, and states in Southeast Asia. Tokyo confronts the reality of an ascendant China whose military power extends beyond the Chinese mainland for the first time. Notwithstanding extensive commercial and investment ties between China and Japan, the potential fault lines of an adversarial relationship between Beijing and Tokyo are readily discernible.

Seoul is fully cognizant of China's power emergence, but it has approached this issue very differently from Japan. Both geographically and politically, the ROK is the country in between. Since the normalization of China-ROK relations in 1992, the economic and political strategies of the two countries have become much more intertwined. The advancement of personal and political relations between Park Geun-hye and Xi Jinping has been particularly notable. Should unification ultimately transpire, China and Korea would then share a 1400 km-long common border.

Policymakers in Seoul therefore deem expanded relations with China very important to ROK strategy. In more optimistic characterizations, South Korea views itself as a bridge between the United States and China. But the ROK exhibits growing wariness about an overly encumbering relationship with Beijing, especially if it appears to entail costs to its alliance with the United States. There are also growing differences between China and South Korea on the role of the United States in regional security, in particular political and security measures designed to counter Pyongyang's missile and nuclear activities. However, irrespective of whether Korea remains divided or begins to move toward unification, all Korean policymakers view China as central to the ROK's economic and political future.

North Korea stands apart from all other states in Northeast Asia. It directly endangers regional security while also fearing that meaningful links to the developed world (and to the ROK in particular) could threaten its existence as an autonomous state. It is the region's conspicuous strategic outlier, grimly intent on pursuing nuclear and missile capabilities in the face of near-unanimous international opposition, including from China and Russia. It also confronts acute, seemingly unresolvable policy dilemmas if it is to ever overcome or at least ameliorate decades of isolation and economic privation. Pyongyang's disproportionate commitment of resources to its weapons programs and its open defiance of its prior denuclearization

commitments (all at the behest of Kim Jong-un, the North's impetuous young leader) make North Korea an immediate and growing risk to stability and security in Northeast Asia and possibly beyond.

By virtually every measure, the strategic stakes in Northeast Asia are much more consequential than the tensions between China and rival claimants over rocks, reefs, and land formations in the South China Sea. Economic and military power is highly concentrated in Northeast Asia, including the nuclear weapons capabilities of four separate states and the latent potential of nuclearization in several others. A severe crisis in Northeast Asia would therefore place regional order at acute risk. It could stimulate open-ended military rivalry and (in a worst case) result in direct military conflict. Any such crisis would be an unprecedented challenge to the future American role in Asia and the Pacific.

"By virtually every measure, the strategic stakes in Northeast Asia are much more consequential than the tensions between China and rival claimants over rocks, reefs, and land formations in the South China Sea."

At the same time, U.S. domestic debate has injected unanticipated uncertainty and pressure on long-standing conceptions of American policy. Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, has openly denigrated long extant burden sharing arrangements, arguing that the United States should not incur any financial costs in protecting the security of its regional allies. At times, he has even suggested that Japan and South Korea pursue the autonomous development of nuclear weapons, rather than continue to rely on U.S. security guarantees. He has also threatened American withdrawal from the World Trade Organization in the event that other states contest his proposed tariff increases, which would be a clear violation of WTO rules. In addition, Hillary Clinton, the Democratic presidential nominee, has declared her opposition to U.S. ratification of the Trans Pacific Partnership, the Obama Administration's flagship trade and investment initiative in the Pacific.

Despite the declared opposition of both principal candidates to multilateral trade agreements, it is impossible to determine whether either would sustain their opposition following the election. But some of the consequences are already apparent. Trump's remarks in particular have triggered doubts among U.S. regional allies and security partners about the credibility and durability of U.S. strategy. His statements have also heightened debate in Japan and South Korea about protection of their vital interests at a time of increasing volatility and geopolitical uncertainty.

The next administration will therefore face multiple challenges in Northeast Asia: (1) forestalling increased threats to stability and security, including the heightening of adversarial nationalism; (2) convincing America's Northeast Asian allies that U.S. policy commitments will be maintained regardless of shifts in U.S. domestic politics; (3) engaging China in a much deeper strategic discussion about the dangers to regional peace and security without undermining America's existing alliances; (4) fashioning a durable U.S. policy consensus on Northeast Asia's importance to long-term U.S. interests; and (5) encouraging and facilitating cooperation among security partners that extends beyond the existing "hub and spokes" model. A policy failure in any area could trigger larger political and security repercussions. At the same time, even as the United States remains mindful of the legitimate aspirations of its regional partners, the United States must seek to ensure that the expectations of Japan and Korea do not conflict with American interests.

The Premises of Regional Order

The foundations of U.S. regional strategy emerged in the half decade immediately following Japan's defeat in the Pacific war. As observed by Oxford historian Rana Mitter, there was no "Asian Yalta" to define the characteristics of post-war East Asia. In the space of only five years, expectations of a seamless transition to new regional order were quickly dashed. Tokyo's unconditional surrender and the U.S. occupation of Japan; the triumph of the Chinese Communist Party in the Chinese civil war and the establishment of the Sino-Soviet alliance; North Korea's invasion of the ROK; the U.S. intervention to prevent peninsular unification under Pyongyang's control; and China's intervention on the Korean peninsula as U.S. forces moved northward all occurred in very quick succession. These events established the essential contours of regional strategic geography (i.e., a divided Korea, the division between China and Taiwan and the undetermined status of rival claims to sovereignty in the maritime domain) that have persisted ever since.

Economic and political conditions in Japan and the ROK in the late 1940s and early 1950s necessitated highly asymmetric American relationships with both countries. Though nationalistic sentiment at times complicated U.S. dealings with Tokyo and Seoul, neither country had the power or the

incentive to overtly oppose U.S. policy. Japan had been severely damaged in the latter years of the war and South Korea was still acutely underdeveloped. As a result, the United States assumed a disproportionate role in building the economies and ensuring the security of both countries, with the strategic identities of Tokyo and Seoul largely subordinated to American national security requirements during the formative years of the Cold War.

However, from the earliest years of the Cold War, America's security relationships with Korea and Japan diverged in significant ways. The United States established a dominant military role on the Korean peninsula that remained undiminished for decades. The persistence of a direct threat posed by North Korea in immediate proximity to ROK territory and Pyongyang's enduring ideological hostility toward Seoul enshrined deterrence and defense as central features in the alliance.

As Korea advanced, the United States and the ROK established and developed a joint operational command (the Combined Forces Command) that has no parallel in the U.S.-Japan relationship. American forces were exclusively devoted to military contingencies on the Korean peninsula, and (despite a major enhancement of the ROK's military capabilities over the past several decades) still number close to 30,000 uniformed personnel. Moreover, the U.S. presence will very likely be strengthened by the simultaneous dangers of North Korea's nuclear and missile advances and by the potential for longer-term instability in the North. We will return to both issues later in this essay.

South Korea's internal evolution has been an equally consequential factor in U.S. strategy. The United States encouraged and facilitated the ROK's transition from highly autocratic rule and acute underdevelopment to its position as a vibrant if contentious democracy and its emergence as an economic powerhouse, including impressive skills in electronics, shipbuilding, autos and other industrial sectors. The ROK also appreciably broadened its diplomatic outreach, including the establishment of full relations in the early 1990s with its former Cold War enemies in Moscow and Beijing. Seoul's relationship with China has proven especially significant, in decided contrast to the growing alienation between China and North Korea.

The U.S.-Japan alliance relationship was very different throughout the Cold War. The U.S. was obligated to defend Japan, without Tokyo incurring equivalent obligations to the defense of the United States. The two countries entered into a mutual security treaty that was mutual in name only. The Japanese constitution, written under American auspices during the U.S. occupation, precluded any large-scale rearmament by Japan or any possibility of a more autonomous Japan. At the same time, Article IX of the constitution (the "no war" clause) ruled out meaningful Japanese participation in military activities beyond the immediate defense of Japanese territory.

The U.S.-Japan relationship was nonetheless perceived as advantageous to the interests of both Washington and Tokyo. Japan's export-led growth enabled it to advance to the front ranks of the world's economic powers, without Tokyo incurring burdens and responsibilities akin to those undertaken by America's major NATO allies, or by the ROK. The commitment to democratic development was strongly supported by most political forces within Japan. Tokyo also emerged as a major contributor to development assistance in Asia and beyond. Despite an unambiguous commitment to a lightly armed security strategy, Japan also became the indispensable logistics hub for America's regionally based forces, which did not obligate Japanese forces to a direct combat role. Tokyo also began to undertake substantial commitments to host nation support, thereby defraying increasing portions of the costs associated with the presence of approximately 50,000 uniformed American military personnel on Japanese territory.

Equally important for the United States, Japanese officials rarely questioned the underlying rationale for U.S. military activities in Japan. Highly sensitive issues such as the transit of U.S. nuclear weapons through Japanese waters remained a well-kept secret. Ample Japanese discretion persisted as the Soviet Union expanded its air, naval and strategic capabilities in East Asia during the 1970s and 1980s. American dependence on various base locations in Japan (most prominently on Okinawa) deepened steadily, even as Japanese public opinion remained highly pacifistic.

Japan therefore became the indispensable location for U.S. regionally-based military forces but not a major participant in U.S. defense planning. As Japan's technological base advanced to world class levels, there was also increasing collaboration and co-development of various weapons systems.

But Japan's security role did not extend beyond the defense of the home islands and logistical support for U.S. forces.

It was only as Japan emerged as a global economic power that burden sharing (as distinct from risk sharing) became a major source of contention in the U.S.-Japan alliance, especially in the months immediately preceding the first Persian Gulf War. Additional questions arose during the North Korean nuclear crisis of 1994, when the United States deemed Japan ill prepared for rear-area support that would have been vital as the United States contemplated the possible use of force against Pyongyang. At various junctures (generally associated periods of heightened tension in East Asia) this issue has again emerged. The debate over burden and responsibility sharing during the 2016 Presidential campaign, though not triggered by an imminent crisis, bears comparison to other instances when Japan's contributions to regional security have arisen as issues in U.S. policy debate.

Are America's Alliance Bargains Sustainable?

The bilateral alliances with Japan and South Korea have defined the basic contours of the U.S.-led regional security order for many decades. Tokyo and Seoul were both essential participants in the U.S.-designed and led "hub and spokes" system. Despite some consideration of a multilateral framework in the earliest years of the Cold War, the United States concluded that there was no need for an enlarged strategic concept explicitly premised on triangularity.

As Russian military power in East Asia declined sharply following the disintegration of the Soviet Union and with China not yet devoting major resources to military modernization, the United States focused its primary attention on deterrence and defense in Korea, stability across the Taiwan Strait and on various non-traditional security partnerships. These policy arrangements still remain largely in place. At present, nearly 90 percent of U.S. forward deployed forces in Asia and the Pacific remain based in Japan and the ROK. Tokyo and Seoul have both increased their contributions to alliance burden sharing, including heightened access arrangements, even as the U.S. military footprint is a matter of ample public contention across Asia and the Pacific.

Despite their clear support for U.S. policy, Japan and Korea are both seeking to redefine the center of gravity in their ties with the United States. In Japan, there has been episodic movement toward "normal country" status since the end of the Cold War, which many in Japan view as part of a larger search for national identity. This has extended to a more expansive conception of Japanese national security interests. A nuclear armed North Korea and (even more important) an increasingly powerful China are the explicit focus of Japanese policy deliberations. These shifts have enabled much more active U.S.-Japanese collaboration, especially in maritime matters and in ballistic missile defense.

However, repeated upheaval in Japan's political leadership; Japanese economic stagnation stretching over a quarter century; and intense local opposition on Okinawa to the pervasive presence of U.S. military personnel on the island have long stymied definitive policy change. It has only been during Shinzo Abe's second tenure as Prime Minister that more definitive shifts in national security policy have taken place. But Abe's actions have also generated strong political resistance among those portions of the population uneasy with major departures from long-standing Japanese policy; they have also triggered strong opposition in Korea as well as in China.

Local opposition to the pervasive American military presence on Okinawa affords a telling example of constraints underlying the U.S.-Japan defense relationship. In 1995, a horrific rape incident involving U.S. military personnel led to an agreement to relocate the Marine Air Station on Okinawa to a less populated location on the island. But this agreement has now entered its third decade without resolution, and it is an open question whether a new facility will ever be built. The April 2016 rape and murder of a young Japanese woman by a former U.S. Marine provoked massive public demonstrations in June, and seems likely to further complicate any relocation plans.

The ROK's security calculations diverge from those of Japan. They concentrate on the immediate, large scale threat posed by North Korea, and the continued need for a diversified deterrence and defense policy. The United States has consented to increased autonomy for the ROK across a spectrum of missions, including enhanced range for the South's ballistic and cruise missile capabilities designed to strengthen deterrence against the North.

Following Pyongyang's sinking of a ROK Navy corvette and the shelling of a coastal island in 2010, South Korea declared that it would retaliate in the event of future North Korean attacks.

The Korean military (with U.S. consent) is now pursuing a much wider array of preparatory options encompassing preemption as well as punishment. Though designed to increase Seoul's capacity to act more on its own initiative, the ROK has twice postponed agreements with the United States to return wartime operational control to the South's armed forces. Despite the ROK's stated desire for enhanced autonomy, these deferrals suggest continued unease in Seoul about diluting the close connections between the U.S. and Korean armed forces, potentially undermining both deterrence and war fighting capabilities.

These issues also bear directly on U.S. extended deterrence commitments to both countries. Throughout the Cold War, the United States pledged that it would uphold its declared obligations to Japan and the ROK, included its expressed commitment to a "first use" nuclear doctrine in the event of conventional attack on either country. The United States has repeatedly emphasized that nuclear weapons would only be employed as weapons of absolute last resort. The U.S. distinction between use of nuclear and conventional weapons has also become much more explicit. But the United States has concluded that its extended deterrence commitments remain essential for Tokyo and Seoul to uphold their non-nuclear commitments.

Japan has long been cognizant of the inherent disparity between its non-nuclear status and the strategic weapons capabilities of Russia and of China. At the same time, all Japanese leaders remain mindful of the fact that their country is the only nation ever to have suffered a nuclear attack. But the growth of North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities and Pyongyang's repeated nuclear threats against both countries have affected the security calculations of Tokyo and Seoul, in particular their expectations of the United States. Japan and the ROK have therefore sought more explicit nuclear guarantees from the U.S. to deter the possibilities of conventional military attack. Neither expects the U.S. to lightly contemplate the use of nuclear weapons. But neither state wants the U.S. to rule out all possible options as long as North Korea sustains its pursuit of an operational nuclear weapons capability, and threatens to employ them.

Nuclear guarantees are also inherent in the non-proliferation bargain. In exchange for explicit U.S. defense pledges and American readiness to deploy nuclear-capable assets at times of crisis, Tokyo and Seoul have foregone consideration of independent nuclear weapons capabilities. Any steps in the latter direction would unequivocally signal that the American security commitment was no longer credible in the eyes of either state. U.S. deployments of air and naval assets and agreements to enhance ballistic missile defense on the peninsula following North Korea's recent nuclear and missile tests (to be further discussed below) have been an overt demonstration attesting to the American commitment.

However, Japan and Korea both believe that enhanced information sharing about U.S. nuclear policies and plans should be part of the bargain. Separate consultations with both countries do not approximate the arrangements in the NATO Nuclear Planning Group, and the U.S. seems disinclined to share information as fully as Tokyo and Seoul might wish. These concerns reflect the reality of relying on a distant but very powerful ally that does not deploy nuclear weapons on the territory of either state. But the continued large-scale presence of U.S. military personnel in both Japan and Korea underscores that American lives would be at immediate risk in the event of an acute crisis.

Following Pyongyang's fourth nuclear test in January 2016, there have been South Korean calls to reintroduce U.S. tactical nuclear weapons on the peninsula. (In 1991, all remaining nuclear weapons were withdrawn from Korea and from U.S. surface ships deployed in the western Pacific.) Some Korean politicians are again advocating pursuit of an independent nuclear capability. But these arguments are rooted in perceptions of inequality and asymmetry, rather than informed judgments about the feasibility, cost, and consequences of an actual nuclear program. Seoul has also been long dissatisfied by America's unwillingness to consent to the ROK's development of a full nuclear fuel cycle equivalent to that possessed by Japan.

The United States grasps that any major erosion in the non-proliferation commitments of Japan or South Korea would acutely undermine American leadership in the region and severely weaken global non-proliferation norms. Forestalling any such possibilities remains an essential U.S. policy objective. The contradiction underlying U.S. pledges of diminished reliance

on nuclear weapons pursued by the Obama administration is thus apparent: in order to render nuclear weapons development an ever more remote prospect, the United States has had to affirm its nuclear commitments in word and deed; heightened measures in ballistic missile defense are also part of the equation.

However, there are pronounced differences between the existential security concerns of Korea and Japan. Consideration of a nuclear option seems a more subliminal factor in Japan than in the ROK. Some observers believe that Japan's substantial inventory of separated plutonium constitutes a virtual nuclear capability that insulates Japan from any possible weakening of U.S. security guarantees. But both cases speak to the inherent perceptions of vulnerability and insecurity among non-nuclear weapon states living in immediate proximity to nuclear-armed adversaries.

Will modified alliance bargains prove sustainable over the longer run? This will depend on the strategic threats posited by Tokyo and Seoul and how the United States decides to respond to the respective needs of its two allies. As noted previously, despite the nominal equivalence of North Korea's nuclear threats to both countries, Tokyo and Seoul do not view the growth of Chinese power in comparable terms. Japan's anxieties extend to the full range of Chinese political, economic, and military capabilities, whereas Korea's do not. In Tokyo's darker moments, it fears it will be displaced as the primary U.S. security partner in East Asia and the Pacific.

Though Tokyo and Seoul continue to depend on American power and security commitments, in a longer-term sense both are intent on enhancing their freedom of action, without directly challenging the fundamentals of U.S. strategy. Both countries are led by nationalistic politicians determined to move beyond the traditional constraints of national policy. For Shinzo Abe, this would entail realization of the long-deferred dream of a Japan no longer shackled to the constitutional constraints imposed by the United States during the occupation. Park Geun-hye's vision focuses on the equally deferred dream of Korean unification. But the prospects for meaningfully advancing the larger aspirations of either leader remain very problematic, injecting added elements of tension and uncertainty in the strategies of both countries.

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Abe and Park's perceptions of China reveal a clear dividing line in the strategic orientations of the two leaders. This continued divergence has somewhat narrowed in light of North Korea's latest nuclear and missile tests, but the divergence remains very pronounced. America's Northeast Asian allies are maneuvering for advantage, and are seeking to align U.S. strategy as much as possible to favor their separate interests. But the differing security perceptions of Tokyo and Seoul are affecting the future strategies of both Japan and Korea, including their expectations of the United States.

Dominant Strategic Beliefs of Current Japanese and Korean Leaderships

	Japan	ROK
Assessment of China	long-term rival/ antagonist	economic partner; selective political-security collaborator
North Korean Threat	major but not definitive	core enduring threat
View of Korean Unification	wary, conditional	strongly favored
Role of U.S.	core deterrence provider	core deterrence provider
Alliance Operational Concept	facilitator/enabler	combined defense
View of Trilateral Security	selective advocate	conditional, limited

The United States seeks to retain the dual character of its regional strategy: separate but interdependent alliances with both Japan and Korea; and pursuit of closer relations with Beijing, without undermining the interests of either Japan or Korea. The region has thus far avoided an acute crisis akin to the turmoil in the Greater Middle East or the political upheavals affecting the European Union. In addition, Vladimir Putin's revanchist policies do not extend to the Russian Far East.

However, these are very edgy times in Northeast Asia. Officials and strategic thinkers in both Tokyo and Seoul express doubts that American power can remain decisive in the regional equation, a trend greatly accentuated by Donald Trump's campaign statements. Japan and Korea are weighing the dilemmas of security dependence on the United States as both seek a

larger say in their security strategies. But are the deliberations of its close allies fully understood by the United States, and what could they imply under shifting strategic circumstances?

Throughout much of its time in office, the Obama administration has advocated a strategy of political, economic and security rebalance toward Asia and the Pacific, which Tokyo and Seoul have both endorsed. U.S. policy has prompted accusations from Beijing that the underlying purpose of the rebalance is to inhibit the growth of Chinese power. But the need to counteract growing threats from North Korea (including efforts to enlist Chinese cooperation to inhibit Pyongyang's nuclear weapons development) have also been a principal element in U.S. strategy and policy.

North Korea: Dangerous and Endangered

North Korea is indisputably the principal source of regional instability. Pyongyang has been a primary factor shaping regional threat perceptions for decades, but the character of the threat has changed markedly since its first nuclear weapon test in 2006. The DPRK is the only state to ever withdraw from the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty. It has enshrined nuclear weapons in its revised constitution. It is also the only country to test nuclear weapons in the 21st century, and repeatedly makes extreme threats against the ROK, the United States, and Japan.

Many North Korean statements are intended for domestic effect, and they exaggerate the North's actual capabilities, in as much as Pyongyang asserts that its nuclear forces have already achieved notional equivalence with those of the United States. (This presumes acceptance of Pyongyang's claims that it has tested a miniaturized thermonuclear warhead and developed a reliable means to deliver this weapon both in the region and against U.S. territory.) Any use or threatened use of nuclear weapons in a crisis would be tantamount to national suicide, but the North's almost cavalier threats to employ these weapons (even with propagandistic purposes in mind) cannot be dismissed. North Korea's repeated threats to employ nuclear weapons and missiles in preemptive fashion have raised concerns that deterrence in Northeast Asia is not nearly as assured as many have long assumed.

Amidst its self-imposed isolation and acute economic dysfunction, North Korea is presumed to have little to lose in an acute crisis, whereas all other regional states would have everything to lose. But Pyongyang's verbal threats could also represent part of the North's deterrence calculus, as it seeks to forestall military actions that an external power might undertake, especially if there were signs of a loss of control in the North. They also represent a tool in legitimating the absolute power of the Kim dynasty.

Even without overt indications of internal crisis in the North, recent trends are deeply disquieting. In early January, Pyongyang undertook its fourth nuclear weapons test; if Kim Jong-un is to be believed, there is a near-term prospect of a fifth test. The North's continued efforts to advance its ballistic missile capabilities have included a test of a solid fuel rocket engine; multiple launches of the Musudan IRBM, with the sixth and latest test a partial success; and six attempts to fire the KN-11 sea-based ballistic missile. One of the latter missiles flew for 30 kilometers before breaking apart, but a late August test reached 500 kilometers and landed within Japan's Air Defense Identification Zone, and appears to have been an operational success.

According to data provided by the ROK Ministry of National Defense, North Korea has undertaken 34 ballistic missile tests over the past five years, more than double the number undertaken during Kim Jong-il's long tenure in power. Three of these tests in July were expressly designed to simulate nuclear weapons attacks on ports and airfields in the ROK. Two August tests included a Nodong MRBM that landed within Japan's EEZ. Had it been fired to its full range, it would have reached the Japanese homeland.

The North's open defiance of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions in the face of increasingly stringent economic sanctions has deeply unsettled Seoul and Tokyo. Though Beijing has also agreed to this larger strategy, its calculations are more complex. China displays a parallel or even greater unease about the effects of punitive policies on Pyongyang's internal and external behavior. An operational North Korean nuclear deterrent akin to that possessed by established nuclear powers still remains aspirational; the persistent policy issue is whether this objective can be inhibited or prevented outright. Regardless of widespread international opposition to Pyongyang's weapons programs, the possibility of a longer term maturation of the North's nuclear and missile capabilities cannot be precluded. All affect-

ed powers must therefore contemplate the prospect of a much less stable and far less predictable regional nuclear future. North Korea has thrown down the nuclear gauntlet, and this has altered the strategic stakes for all regional actors, as well as for the United States.

Moreover, the long-term survival of the North Korean regime cannot be assumed. North Korea has endured international isolation and acute economic privation for decades, and repeated expectations of its inevitable demise have failed to materialize. But the fault lines inside the DPRK appear to be sharpening and could trigger fissures within the regime. Kim Jong-un has executed, humiliated or purged various senior leaders, including many from the military ranks. The glaring disparities between a wealthy, privileged class in Pyongyang and stunted economic performance across most of North Korea continue to mount. Concerns about the longer-term viability of a nuclear-armed North Korea have heightened attention in the ROK and the U.S. to a wide array of worrisome scenarios. Internal upheaval in the North would very likely generate an acute international crisis not experienced in Northeast Asia since the Korean War, and the crisis could potentially extend to the use or threatened use of nuclear weapons.

As the contiguous powers to North Korea's south and north, the ROK and China have inherent concerns about the risks posed by North Korea. President Park contends that a fifth nuclear test by the North will accelerate Pyongyang's isolation and ultimate collapse. Wu Dawei, China's long-time lead negotiator on the Korean nuclear issue, has described continuation of the North's nuclear program as a "death sentence" for Pyongyang. North Korea is thus both dangerous and endangered, and potentially very unpredictable. It is impossible to know when, whether and how elite loyalty in the DPRK might erode or break down, but there is a growing need to assess these possibilities and weigh the risks and potential consequences. This cannot be undertaken by the United States alone: close cooperation with the ROK and China would be indispensable in reducing the risks of inadvertent conflict among involved powers.

Despite the absence of major armed conflict in Northeast Asia for more than six decades, there is a growing if inchoate sense that regional order is more at risk today than at any time since the 1950s. Unlike Europe at the end of the Cold War, Northeast Asia has not experienced any comparably

reconfiguring events. But there is also no collective security structure akin to NATO that could cushion an abrupt regional crisis or mitigate larger disruptive possibilities. Weighing future possibilities must therefore begin with the two bilateral alliances that have long defined U.S. regional strategy, and where China fits in this equation; how Tokyo and Seoul are weighing their strategic choices; and whether there are realistic possibilities for bridging the competing interests and policy goals of Japan and Korea.

"Abe and Park lead very different countries. The competing narratives of Japan and South Korea reflect deep, still contested nationalism within both societies. Japan and Korea are thus not able to fashion a true common identity, nor can the United States create one for them."

Comparing Japan and South Korea

Tokyo and Seoul appear to have much in common. Both are advanced industrial democracies led by proud, nationalistic leaders who want to keep the United States fully engaged in Northeast Asia's longer-term prosperity and security. But Shinzo Abe and Park Geun-hye are also determined to uphold the political legacies of parents or grandparents who in previous eras served as national leaders. Abe has voiced particular affinity for his maternal grandfather, Nobusuke Kishi, Japan's Prime Minister in the latter half of the 1950s. Park's core political identity derives from her father, Park Chung-hee, who led South Korea during its rapid industrialization of the 1960s and 1970s.

Abe and Park lead very different countries. The competing narratives of Japan and South Korea reflect deep, still contested nationalism within both societies. Japan and Korea are thus not able to fashion a true common identity, nor can the United States create one for them. Even if the U.S. sought to construct such a common identity, both states would strenuously object. These prevailing circumstances mean that the United States cannot pursue a genuine multilateral security strategy with the two capitals. The United States would very likely prefer that Tokyo and Seoul agree to a much more triangular conception of regional security, which would presumably enable more economy of effort for the United States. But this possibility remains very remote. Understanding the reasons will be essential to crafting U.S. policy under the next president.

The differences between Japan and the ROK begin with their very different histories. Japan's colonial domination of the peninsula in the first half of the twentieth century remains seared in Korea's national consciousness. At

the same time, President Park keenly feels the persistence of a divided peninsula more than seven decades after Japan's surrender. A divided Korea is by definition an incomplete Korea, which sees itself as the victim of the predatory behavior of various major powers. Japan's colonial record looms very large in Korean thinking, in particular for older generations.

Japan's historical grievances, though very different from those in Korea, also run deep. Tokyo's frustrations and vexations following its defeat and unconditional surrender in World War II and its subsequent subordination to the United States were greatly resented by Nobusuke Kishi and continue to deeply influence his grandson Shinzo Abe. These issues are also manifested by continued deliberations over Japanese identity since the end of the Cold War. This ongoing transformation entails a complex recalibration of Japan's relations with its neighbors and with the United States, even though Japan's political and psychological dependence on the U.S. remains very deep.

Personal animosities between the leaders of Japan and Korea (though somewhat eased as concerns about North Korea have heightened in both countries) are also a crucial factor. When Abe assumed leadership in late 2012 and Park followed in early 2013, the relationship was extremely icy. During his previous tenure as prime minister, China and the ROK were the first countries Abe decided to visit. Upon his return to leadership, Beijing and Seoul were the last major capitals that he visited. But he was not especially welcome in either country. Abe quickly renewed his advocacy of constitutional reinterpretation and distanced himself from the apologies of several of his predecessors for Japanese conduct during the Pacific war.

In March 2014, President Obama engineered a brief, three-way meeting with Abe and Park in The Hague following the Nuclear Security Summit. Since then, the two leaders and various subordinates have met in different multilateral fora, and other lower ranking officials are again addressing important bilateral issues. Both sides also sought to reach closure on the long-festering "comfort woman" issue in December 2015, when President Park appeared to make more of the crucial concessions. In August 2016, the two sides reached agreement on Japan's pledge to establish a fund to assist the dwindling numbers of comfort women, though other differences on this issue still linger between the two governments.

Pyongyang's mounting nuclear and missile threats have provided the clearest opportunity to narrow the long-standing breach in bilateral and personal relations. But the relationship between the two leaders remains devoid of warmth or trust, and this continues to limit relations on a host of issues, including assent to a long-pending but never consummated agreement on intelligence sharing first negotiated in 2014. A missile defense exercise among the United States, Japan, and Korea, conducted in Hawaii in July 2016, was a modest initial step in trilateral cooperation. But these cooperative defense activities continue to be managed and mediated by the United States, with no direct information exchanges between Tokyo and Seoul.

At the same time, Seoul and Tokyo retain divergent conceptions of China's growing power and ambitions. Relations between Seoul and Beijing have become much closer over the course of Park's tenure in office, and the economic interdependence between China and South Korea has grown appreciably. For example, a recent Bloomberg study estimates that the ROK's exports to China comprise approximately 10 percent of South Korea's GDP; the study also notes that one half of the tourists visiting Korea are from China.

Though China and Japan remain very important economic partners, Prime Minister Abe views China as an increasing, long-term threat to Japanese security. Beijing's maritime and air challenge to Japan's claims to uncontested sovereignty over the Senkakus/Diaoyus is a central policy concern in Tokyo, but the return of China to true major power status represents Japan's larger preoccupation, and one that Abe feels keenly.

The principal justification for Abe's advocacy of Constitutional reinterpretation (as distinct from his ultimate goal of Constitutional revision) and for the shifts in Japan's defense strategy concern Beijing's increased capacity for military operations beyond the Chinese mainland. North Korea is also an important variable in Japan's threat equation, primarily focused on facilitating U.S. responses to "an emergency on the Korean peninsula," including Tokyo's contributions to missile defense, evacuation of Japanese nationals, and minesweeping operations. But Japan's preoccupations with China run much deeper.

The ratification of laws by the Japanese Diet in March 2016, enabling Tokyo's participation in collective self-defense, hypothetically permits Japan

to undertake military actions beyond Japanese territory. Any Japanese responses would be premised on a determination that actions by another state directed against a nation closely aligned with Japan "threatens Japan's survival and poses a clear danger to fundamentally overturn the people's right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" and "when there is no other appropriate means to repel the attack." These criteria are laden with imprecision and ambiguity, but they have also prompted warnings from Seoul that the new legislation does not give Tokyo the right to intervene on the Korean peninsula without Seoul's explicit concurrence. Any outcome that would enable Japan's military return to Korea seems almost unimaginable.

From the earliest months of her presidency, Park Geun-hye considered closer relations with Beijing an essential element in Seoul's hopes for the ultimate unification of the Korean peninsula. President Xi and President Park exchanged state visits and have met on seven separate occasions. According to President Park, these meetings have included some limited discussions about unification, though these conversations have not advanced very far. Even more telling, in a decision freighted with symbolic meaning, President Park appeared on the Tiananmen podium with Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin at the September 2015 events commemorating the 70th anniversary of China's "victory over Japanese imperialism," replete with extensive displays of China's newest military hardware passing in review.

Park Geun-hye's initiatives toward China have correlated closely with Beijing's increased objections to North Korean behavior, especially Kim Jong-un's willful defiance of Chinese calls for restraining its nuclear weapons and missile programs. Xi Jinping has openly objected to Pyongyang's conduct, but Beijing remains highly skittish about the possibility of disruptive internal change in the North. He has also dissented from more coercive strategies under development by the United States and the ROK. The immediate consequence is that Chinese policymakers seem unable to choose between a strategy that aligns more closely with the ROK and the United States, or one that provides added breathing room to Pyongyang. Growing numbers of Chinese analysts concede that the DPRK is more a liability than an asset, but there is no closure on a long-term strategy to manage the risks to Chinese interests.

This lack of closure presumably reflects indecision or divided counsel within policy making circles. Xi Jinping has yet to meet Kim Jong-un, and there

seems little immediate prospect for such a meeting. By most accounts Xi holds the North's young leader in contempt, even as the North's economy depends heavily on trade and aid from China. China's ultimate willingness to consent to much tougher sanctions against North Korea following its latest nuclear test and satellite launch attests to Beijing's movement away from Pyongyang and toward Seoul. Though Beijing's disassociation from Pyongyang is cumulative, it is not yet definitive, leaving unanswered whether China can truly envision peninsular unification, and whether it is prepared to facilitate moves in this direction.

China's policy dilemmas toward North Korea also bear directly on Beijing's calculations about American strategy in Northeast Asia. They also reflect the divergent trajectories in ROK-China relations and in Japan-China relations, and how Korean and Japanese expectations of the United States differ. Tokyo and Seoul both want to remain partners of choice for the United States, but in different ways. For Abe, no foreign policy objective is more important than tethering the United States unambiguously to Japan, hoping thereby to preclude any U.S. distancing from Japan and providing Tokyo more latitude in its own security strategies. His views suggest deepening anxieties about Japan's longer-term security vulnerabilities, with China (and U.S. policies toward China) as the unspoken subtext of Japanese security strategy.

Comments by various senior Japanese officials and scholars about China's power potential nonetheless remain highly contradictory. In important respects, there is a broad consensus in Tokyo that China represents a long-term danger to Japanese security interests. However, some leading experts in Japan are openly dismissive in discussions of China's economic and political prospects. These analysts depict Chinese elite politics (including the relationship between the political and military leadership) as highly factionalized, and some openly question Xi Jinping's dominance atop the system. Others depict the Chinese economy in particularly dire terms. These contrarian views seem designed to challenge U.S. arguments advocating increased cooperation with China, and may therefore represent policy advocacy, rather than considered analytic judgment.

In contrast, Park Geun-hye opted for an explicit bridging strategy with China, believing that deeper engagement with Beijing would both advance

Korea's economic goals and provide China with clearer incentives to favor Seoul over Pyongyang. Shared Korean and Chinese antipathies toward Japan (and to Abe in particular) were an unspoken element in Park's thinking. She did not perceive the need to choose between Beijing and Washington, even as a close relationship with the United States was far more important to the ROK's vital security interests.

However, the presumed benefits of a bridging strategy are more questionable in light of Beijing's harsh reactions to the U.S.-ROK July 2016 agreement to deploy a Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) missile battery and associated radars on Korean territory. As Seoul has sought to address mounting threats from Pyongyang over the past several years, enhanced missile defense cooperation with the United States became a central part of the conversation. Seoul has repeatedly emphasized that the decision to deploy THAAD was exclusively focused on defense against incoming North Korean missiles.

Chinese technical experts argue that installation of a THAAD battery exceeds the security requirements necessitated by North Korea's missile threats. They contend that the radars linked to the THAAD batteries would provide the United States with a surveillance capability against Beijing's land-based missiles launched from the Chinese interior. Senior Chinese officials (including Xi Jinping during his 2014 visit to Seoul) conveyed these reservations in private discussions with Korean interlocutors, including with President Park, urging the ROK to forego any decision to deploy additional missile defense capabilities against North Korea.

Throughout 2014 and 2015, South Korea demurred from any explicit decisions on THAAD, but thinking changed sharply in the aftermath of the nuclear and missile tests in early 2016. President Park's decision also correlated closely with her conclusion that pursuit of a "trustpolitik" policy toward North Korea was no longer a viable policy option. The president and ranking defense officials openly disclosed accelerated negotiations with the United States in subsequent months, culminating in the announced decision in early July.

South Korea has sought to address Chinese objections to THAAD, explaining that the decision resulted exclusively from North Korea's accelerated

testing programs and the prospective threat posed by a more diversified and fully realized North Korean missile capability. Seoul has also emphasized that the agreement with the United States was exclusively bilateral in scope, with no implication that the ROK was linked to a region-wide arrangement with the United States and Japan. Though left unspoken by South Korea, China's inability to slow or prevent advances in Pyongyang's ballistic missile and nuclear development was very likely an additional factor governing the THAAD decision.

The ROK's defense of the THAAD decision has been harshly criticized by Beijing. China has been unwilling to accord legitimacy to ROK security needs in the face of North Korean threats. It even argues that enhanced ballistic missile defense will be more destabilizing than the North Korean nuclear and missile activities that prompted the THAAD decision in the first place. Worse, China has repeatedly accused Seoul of subordinating ROK interests to U.S. strategic designs. Beijing claims that the long-range radars associated the THAAD missile battery will provide the United States with the ability to monitor missile testing well into China's interior. Some Chinese assessments have also raised the almost unimaginable prospect of a U.S.-China strategic nuclear exchange, asserting that the THAAD decision will invalidate China's ability to respond to a hypothetical attack on the Chinese mainland.

It is not possible to determine what China expects to achieve by its denigration of South Korea's security needs or by its insistence that Chinese preferences take precedence over those of the ROK. One possibility is that Beijing hopes to delay the THAAD deployment (presently scheduled for late 2017) until after the ROK presidential election in December of next year, in the hopes that President Park's successor would revisit this decision. It is also possible that the Chinese policy of attempting to undermine the ROK's decision will run its course, without major damage to Korea-China relations. However, in a more immediate sense China's fierce criticisms are generating renewed doubts in Seoul about the ROK-China relationship. President Park, a persistent advocate of closer relations with Beijing, has publicly criticized China's responses to the THAAD decision, suggesting that the political basis for continued accommodation between South Korea and China has been undermined. The coming months will reveal more about how China weighs the value of its relationship with Seoul,

as well as the ROK's ability to articulate and defend its interests in the face of China's heated objections.

The Regional Future

Northeast Asia appears on the cusp of major change, but its future is not easy to predict. However, the stakes for the United States in the region's transition are very substantial. The next U.S. president will need to determine how American interests align with changing realities, and long-term relations between Japan and South Korea will be among the most important of these issues.

Some observers contend that the divergence between Tokyo and Seoul reflects personal animosities that could readily diminish as new political leaders emerge in one or both countries. (President Park steps down in early 2018, and Prime Minister Abe's term of office also concludes in the same year, though some reports circulate that Abe might seek to extend his time in power.) But both leaders are intent on leaving political legacies that will extend beyond their current terms, though it remains to be seen how fully either might succeed. China's political and economic evolution; the prospects for North Korea's longer-term survivability; and the future of U.S. regional strategy loom as additional major factors for Tokyo and Seoul. At the same time, Northeast Asia's politics will be shaped by deep historical memories that show few signs of dissipating anytime soon. The possibility of Korean unification also continues to generate ample wariness and ambivalence on the part of Japan.

Larger economic and societal trends among China, South Korea, and Japan reinforce these judgments. The perceptions of China in both the ROK and Japan –in public opinion, in trade and investment, and in threat perceptions- have greatly diverged over the past half-decade. According to the Pew Global Attitudes survey, between 2010 and 2015, the percentage of Koreans with a "very favorable" or "somewhat favorable" of China increased from 38 percent to 61 percent, though these trends are not necessarily immutable. (Positive Korean views of the United States consistently ranked the highest.)

Japanese public opinion surveys showed a reverse pattern, with favorable views of Korea declining from 26 percent to 9 percent in the same half decade. Growing numbers of Japanese complain of "Korea fatigue," manifested by Seoul's repeated raising of historical issues, which Japan sees as a distraction from its much deeper preoccupations with China. The percentage of the Korean population with a "relatively unfavorable" or "very unfavorable" view of Japan has remained consistent (over 70 percent), while Japanese negative perceptions of Korea have increased sharply (from 37.3 percent in 2013 to 52.4 percent in 2015). Unless these trends shift, these sentiments impose major limits on what future leaders might be able to achieve.

Despite the Obama administration's efforts to reaffirm and strengthen its security ties with both countries, Japan and South Korea both give voice to the dilemmas inherent in dependence on a distant great power for their respective security guarantees. Pledges to defend an ally can be asserted and planned for, but only fulfilled in the most acute of crises (i.e., a direct attack by an adversary on the territory of an ally). Extended deterrence necessarily entails security guarantees in an acute crisis, but a more differentiated version also needs to focus on the emotional and political bonds with leaders and societies.

Relations with the United States run very deep in both Japan and Korea, but not between America's two Northeast Asian allies. Far more intensive social, informational and cultural ties exist at a popular level, but these have not resulted in political comity between leaders. This question requires an understanding of how both Abe and Park see the future strategic directions of their countries.

Some of these differences are immediately evident in threat perceptions. Dispensing with the ambiguity in earlier versions of national defense policy, Japan's Defense White Paper now explicitly defines China as a long-term national security threat; there is no comparable characterization in the ROK Defense White Paper. Japan's new defense legislation and its reinterpretation of previous prohibitions that precluded any commitment to collective self-defense focus heavily on adversarial planning vis-a-vis China. Though Korean contingencies are also among the scenarios discussed in Japan's defense legislation, Seoul casts an exceedingly wary eye at any prospective Japanese involvement on the peninsula.

The decision of Japan and the United States not to join the Asian Infrastructural Investment Bank are also revealing. Washington and Tokyo viewed the AIIB as a prospective competitor with the World Bank and the Asia Development Bank, with the latter two institutions closely identified with U.S. and Japanese leadership. The United States and Japan voiced additional wariness toward China's larger leadership role, though Washington and Tokyo now seem more prepared to cooperate with the AIIB on various projects. In decided contrast, the ROK became a founding member of the Chinese-led bank. It also has entered into a Free Trade Agreement with Beijing, and for a number of years its trade with China has surpassed its combined trade with Japan and the United States.

Abe's policy agenda has also entailed measures designed to jump start economic revival, without which Japan's longer-term prospects for economic revitalization are much more problematic. Following his return to power in late 2012, Abe pledged that higher wages, increased consumption, and heightened domestic investment (all presumably aided by a weaker yen) would energize a long moribund economy. But Abenomics has failed repeatedly to achieve its goals or to meet popular expectations. Despite major monetary easing and increased government spending, the economy continues to limp along, amidst a mountain of debt.

The prime minister's political position seems secure until 2018, and possibly beyond. But Abe's room for political maneuver has diminished. He has twice deferred plans for a major increase in the consumption tax, and (should he decide to retire in 2018) he will leave this decidedly unpleasant action to his successor. On paper, the resounding victory of the LDP and Komeito, its lead coalition partner, in the upper house elections in July place Abe in an unchallengeable position for the remainder of his term in office. But Japan's still lethargic economic performance and widespread public wariness about Abe's long cherished goal of Constitutional revision continues to limit the Prime Minister's ability to pursue his ambitious national security agenda.

This sobering picture relates directly to the continued debate within Japan over national purpose. Despite the country's highly sophisticated technological base and its standing as the world's third biggest economy, Japan is aging rapidly, and its population has begun to shrink. When he

first returned to power, Abe argued that three fundamental goals would be essential to a revived and more activist Japan: a robust economy better positioned to compete against an increasingly powerful China; removing long-standing inhibitions on Japan's fuller exercise of sovereignty in national security policy; and pursuit of a heightened Japanese security role in Asia and the Pacific, all premised on the need to counter balance Chinese power through closer political and security relationships with other neighboring states, including Australia and India.

Abe assumed that these initiatives would be strongly endorsed by the United States. By tethering Japan ever more closely to the existing alliance, Japan would remain an indispensable partner to the United States, thereby precluding any possibility that America's strategic affiliation with Japan could dissipate. His calculation has yielded undisputed gains for Japanese national security strategy. President Obama and other senior U.S. officials have explicitly noted that Article V provisions of the Mutual Security Treaty apply to any prospective threat to Japan's administrative control over the Senkakus/Diaoyus, where Beijing openly contests Japan's claims to sovereignty. The U.S. endorsement of Japan's new defense legislation presumably opens the door to much wider areas of security collaboration with Tokyo.

But to what end? The absence of any joint operational command severely limits any comprehensive U.S.-Japan national security framework, at least in so far as the United States interprets allied obligations under collective security arrangements. Admiral Harry Harris, commander of U.S. forces in the Pacific, argues that any military conflict in Asia and the Pacific (especially a major regional contingency) would be led by U.S. forces, and Japan would be expected to follow America's lead. In view of Tokyo's lack of warfighting experience over the past seventy years, obligating Japan to a much more demanding role would be well beyond its capabilities, and beyond its intentions.

It is also beyond what Abe appears to seek. Though some senior officials appear to advocate a more ambitious national security agenda, the gap between concept and operational policy is prodigious. Japanese policy making, above all, is incremental and risk averse. It is also clear that any such ambitions would shatter the minimal policy consensus within Tokyo on a more externally-oriented defense policy. Abe sought and has received U.S.

consent for Japan to enlarge the strategic space in which it operates, but short of involvement in armed conflict. These will focus predominantly on building regional partnerships with states having a shared interest in responding to China's heightened maritime activities, and (at least notionally) serving as a counterbalance to Chinese power. But these activities stop well short of full contingency planning, and they are exceedingly unlikely to extend to heightened cooperation with the ROK, the primary locale where the dangers of severe crisis persist.

Even amidst increased political-military differences between the United States and China, neither country seems intent on a longer-term adversarial relationship. The most realistic outcome in bilateral relations would entail a combination of deepening cooperation and managed competition. But there is no assurance that this outcome can be realized to the satisfaction of both leaderships. Even as American and Chinese interests on global issues continue to grow, the larger challenges will be regional, and whether U.S.-Chinese differences can be kept bounded. This will require dedicated efforts by both leaderships, and even then there is no assurance of full policy success. At the same time, future U.S. China strategy must remain mindful of the existing array of U.S. relationships and policy commitments. In particular, can U.S. policy goals comport fully with leadership expectations in Japan, especially given the latter's longer-term anxieties about Chinese power? The answer is far from clear.

There are also major uncertainties on the Korean Peninsula, and how the ROK addresses its long-term future. The grim realities of countering a deeply antagonistic, nuclear armed neighbor—even as the longer-term sustainability of the North Korean system seems open to increasing question—have unnerved the South Korean populace. These circumstances have undermined the political standing of Park Geun-hye, whose party is now in the minority, leaving her in a weakened position as she approaches her final year in office. Laggard economic performance (in part attributable to the pronounced slowing of the Chinese economy) adds to this troubling picture that her successor will inherit in February 2018.

At the same time, the ROK would see a pronounced U.S. tilt toward Tokyo as fraught with potential downsides. Despite the downturn in relations with China resulting from the THAAD decision, South Korea does not share

antipathies toward China comparable to those of Japan. Seoul retains ample incentives to sustain cooperation with China in view of the uncertainties about the future of North Korea. The ROK does not want to trigger heightened strategic suspicions with Beijing, but it also does not want to be enveloped in any larger strategic designs that inhibit its capacity for policy initiative. The "shrimp among the whales" argument may no longer be entirely apt, but Korea's enduring fears of entrapment and abandonment should never be discounted.

The Road Ahead

"The United States would greatly prefer that its alliances in Northeast Asia are additive rather than divisive. But they are separate and distinct."

The United States confronts an array of unprecedented policy challenges in Northeast Asia that reflect both the dynamism and the uncertainties evident across the region. The U.S. has enjoyed great policy success in this locale across many decades, but it would be imprudent to assume that extant strategic patterns can continue indefinitely. The United States must therefore try to sustain the benefits that have long accrued to U.S. interests, but it must do so under conditions of major economic, political, and strategic realignment. The future of its major security relationships must be at the center of any recalibration of American strategy. The U.S. would greatly prefer that its alliances in Northeast Asia are additive rather than divisive. But they are separate and distinct. Can the needs and interests of both states be reconciled and integrated, and if not, why not? What are the potential costs and implications for U.S. strategic interests if the expectations of both partners diverge? The next president should not assume that either ally will easily or automatically comply with American policy preferences.

The United States thus needs to ponder its future goals with ample attention to the political realities and the leadership transitions in Japan and Korea. Does the United States perceive a need to favor one of its allies to the detriment of the other, and with what potential political costs? Are there ways that differences between Tokyo and Seoul can be bridged to minimize perceptions that either country enjoys a privileged relationship with the U.S.? Are there areas where the United States could cede increased responsibility to its long-standing allies? Perhaps most important, what does the United States do if either or both countries pursue courses of action that could reshape Northeast Asian geopolitics without sufficient regard for American preferences?

The United States therefore needs to understand much more fully the forces animating strategic debate in Japan and South Korea. But understanding must extend equally to leadership deliberations in China and in North Korea. (All four cases are explored in greater detail in my forthcoming book, *Endangered Order: Revisionism and Strategic Risk in Northeast Asia*, to be published by Brookings in 2017.) The table on page 15 attempts to capture the respective conceptions of national strategy pursued by Prime Minister Abe and President Park. They are rooted in the personal and political experiences of both leaders, as well as in the assumptions that shape their thinking about the longer term. Both leaders agree on the need for the United States to retain its singular role in strategic deterrence. But there is partial or pronounced divergence in other vital policy domains. A candid conversation among all three leaderships is much needed, and should be a high priority objective under the new American president.

As the U.S. election and ensuing transition approach, there is also a pressing need to repair some of the political damage created during the 2016 campaign. A renewed U.S. commitment to pursue sustainable, equitable trade accords that can elicit support from both Tokyo and Seoul is an immediate order of business. Heightened perceptions of the North Korean threat and China's harsh criticisms of the THAAD decision have made increased policy coordination between Japan and South Korea a more realistic near-term possibility; the United States should seek to sustain this partial accommodation.

The Korean Peninsula must be at the center of any serious discussion about Northeast Asia's future. It is impossible to predict with precision the paths that could ensue on the peninsula during the next administration's term of office, and the United States will need to prepare for discontinuous possibilities. These should encompass at least three decidedly different scenarios: continued advancement in North Korea's weapons development; heightened pressures on Pyongyang that create growing fissures within the regime; or abrupt movement toward unification. All are plausible possibilities, and it is imperative that Beijing become part of this conversation.

The new administration must also prepare for the 2018 leadership transitions in the ROK and Japan. It is impossible to anticipate the prospective outcomes of this process, or of whether the victorious candidates will

sustain the strategic directions enunciated under Park and Abe. But without credible demonstrations of an enduring American commitment to regional order, the risks of a frayed order and a darker Northeast Asian future will grow, to the pronounced detriment of long-term American interests. If the United States is to best ensure that it remains an essential contributor in the region, this process must begin with a full awareness of how Northeast Asia's leaders envision the region's future, and of America's place in it.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Jonathan D. Pollack is the Interim SK-Korea Foundation Chair in Korea Studies in the Center for East Asia Policy Studies and senior fellow in the John L. Thornton China Center at Brookings. He served as director of the Thornton Center from 2012 to 2014. Prior to joining Brookings in late 2010, he was professor of Asian and Pacific Studies and chairman of the strategic research department at the Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, where he is now professor emeritus. Between 1978 and 2000, he worked at the Rand Corporation in Santa Monica, California, in a wide array of research and management capacities. In addition, he has taught at Brandeis University, the Rand Graduate School of Policy Studies, UCLA, and the Naval War College.

Pollack's principal research interests include U.S.-China relations; Korean politics and foreign policy; U.S. strategy in Asia and the Pacific; and East Asian international politics. His edited publications include: *Strategic Surprise? U.S.-China Relations in the Early 21st Century* (2004); *Korea-The East Asian Pivot* (2006); and *Asia Eyes America: Regional Perspectives on U.S. Asia-Pacific Strategy in the 21st Century* (2007). His book on North Korea's nuclear identity and weapons development, *No Exit: North Korea, Nuclear Weapons, and International Security*, was published in 2011 by Routledge; a revised Korean language version was published by the Asan Institute of Policy Studies in 2012. His newest volume, *Endangered Order: Revisionism and Strategic Risk in Northeast Asia,* will be published by Brookings in 2017.

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The Brookings Institution
1775 Massachusetts Ave., NW
Washington, D.C. 20036
brookings.edu