

The U.S.-Japan-ROK Trilateral: Better at Deterrence than Diplomacy?

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Once more, the United States, South Korea, and Japan have confronted a crisis with North Korea. The pattern is now well established. First, there is a provocation—a missile test, a nuclear test, and even worse, the use of force.¹ Next, the United States and its allies in Northeast Asia muster their forces, strengthen their trilateral policy coordination, and sanction the belligerent Pyongyang. The three nations advocate for the accompanying effort by the United Nations Security Council to condemn North Korea's behavior.² Setting aside their political differences, Seoul and Tokyo intensify their military cooperation and Washington calls for greater trilateral unity in confronting a shared security challenge.³

In 2017, policymakers in Seoul, Washington, and Tokyo found themselves in a similar cycle but with the threat of war ever more real. The dramatic escalation of tensions between President Donald J. Trump and the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un seemed to bring the region to the brink of a second Korean conflict. But today, just as dramatically, an accelerated series of high-level summits suggests that the Korean Peninsula could be on the brink of peace. President Moon Jae-in met with Kim at Panmunjom, and both Kim and Moon stepped across the line of demarcation at the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) between North and South Korea.⁴ The two leaders have embraced a “new era of peace,” with the promise of ending the state of war on the peninsula.⁵

Trump has also said he is willing to meet Kim to discuss denuclearization. CIA director Mike Pompeo visited Pyongyang on April 1 to test out that proposition, and as secretary of state, Pompeo had the lead in setting the stage for a meeting in Singapore. The Moon-Kim meeting set up the premise of a negotiated denuclearization process. Trump and Kim will define the contours of that path forward.

Transitioning from confrontation to negotiation, Japan's prime minister Abe Shinzo has sought to stay close to Trump. As Moon led the process of easing tensions Abe also seemed ready to give peace a chance, meeting with Kim's sister at the Pyeongchang 2018 Olympic Games and later voicing his willingness too to meet with Kim should the Trump-Kim summit succeed.⁶ In his meeting with Trump on April 17-18, Abe set forth the three Japanese equities in a negotiated settlement with the North.⁷ A complete, verifiable, irreversible denuclearization process is at the top of that list. But a close second will be Pyongyang's missile arsenal. While the United States undoubtedly will focus on the intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) Kim has been testing, Abe will urge a broader disarmament of the array of missiles at Kim's disposal. The ROK and Japan are well within reach of North Korea's short and medium-range missiles, and Abe will be unwilling to leave those in place. Finally, Abe will want Pyongyang's accounting of the Japanese citizens abducted by the North Koreans. Both Trump and Moon promised to take this up with Kim in their meetings. At their summit at Mar-a-Lago, Trump publicly repeated this pledge to Abe.⁸

It is too soon to see how these new negotiations will proceed. Only a few weeks after the South Korean government announced that Trump had agreed to meet with Kim, the diplomatic geometry seemed to proliferate and accelerate. After Kim Jong-un agreed to leave the North to meet Moon in Panmunjom, the designated meeting spot just south of the DMZ, South Korea's national security advisor appeared in Washington, and in front of the White House, announced the Trump-Kim summit.⁹ Not to be outdone, Abe made plans to visit Trump, which he did on April 17.¹⁰ Not long after that, Kim Jong-un set out for Beijing in his armored train, accompanied by his wife, to visit with Chinese president Xi Jinping

and his wife, once again showing how important these talks will be to the future balance of power in Northeast Asia.¹¹ On May 7-8 Kim went to Dalian, China for a second summit with Xi. On May 9 another trilateral summit was held in Tokyo, as Abe hosted Moon and the Chinese premier, Li Keqiang.¹² Later in May, Moon travelled to Washington to consult with Trump. The diplomatic track had grabbed the spotlight.

Ironically, negotiations with North Korea could put even more strain on the trilateral framework that Washington has been striving to establish with its allies in East Asia. The bilateral relationship between Seoul and Tokyo, in particular, could suffer. This was apparent in the nervousness visible in Japan, particularly after the surprise decision by Trump to hold a summit with Kim. While the U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral has faced pressures in negotiating with North Korea before, this round of talks could be even more fraught. There is far more at stake in Northeast Asia; the region's military balance, the political futures of Moon, Trump, and Abe, and the geopolitics of the region.

The Military Challenge of Confronting Pyongyang

North Korea is closer than ever to being able to threaten the United States, thereby testing the proposition that Washington will want to risk an attack on behalf of its regional allies. Kim Jong-un has developed his military arsenal in a deliberate attempt to change the status quo on the Korean Peninsula, and, by extension, in Northeast Asia. The U.S. allies in Asia have directly felt the impact of his willingness to risk confrontation by using these rising military capabilities.

Seoul felt the brunt of this challenge early, even before Kim Jong-il passed away in 2011. The 2010 sinking of the *Cheonan* and the shelling of Yeonpyeong Island were widely attributed to Kim Jong-un's growing influence. Since coming to power in 2012, Kim has shown little restraint in the use of force or his willingness to risk provoking the South. Repeated news of executions in the consolidation of his hold on power brought this point home, especially the brutal execution of his uncle, Jang Song-thaek.¹³ North Korea is suspected of carrying out the 2014 hacking of Sony Pictures Entertainment, and the U.S. government accused North Korea of carrying out the May 2017 "WannaCry" cyber-attack, which hit over 150 countries and in some cases caused hospital closures.¹⁴ The open assassination of his half-brother in Kuala Lumpur—using a banned nerve agent called VX—further added to the impression that Kim Jong-un felt little if any restraint in the use of force if it meant a challenge to his hold on power.¹⁵

Japan too now feels the direct brunt of Kim's military ambitions. As North Korea's missile arsenal grew, new launchers allowed short to medium-range missiles to be launched without detection. Growing numbers of missiles and no warning time means that Japan is now in far greater danger than in the past.¹⁶ Missile testing in 2016 and 2017 demonstrated that Japan has few options on its own to defend itself from a missile attack. In 2017, ten of North Korea's tests landed in the Sea of Japan, including two ICBMs, and two missile tests overflew northern Japan.¹⁷ Japan's existing ballistic missile defenses are simply not enough to cope, should Kim provoke a war. U.S. bases in Japan also make it likely that in a conflict North Korea would seek to eliminate the ability of the United States to use its forces based there. Japan is now the only country in Northeast Asia that cannot retaliate with its own forces.¹⁸

Over the past year or more of missile testing by Kim Jong-un, Tokyo and Seoul have expanded their military cooperation. In 2017, as North Korea's missiles flew repeatedly over Japanese territory, the three militaries of the United States, South Korea, and Japan upped their coordination. Military signaling by each alliance provided a strong signal of military readiness. When North Korea tested a missile over Japanese airspace, South Korean forces demonstrated their ability to retaliate. When U.S. bombers were sent to signal American intent, Japan's Air Self Defense Force fighters accompanied them through Japanese airspace to meet up with South Korean Air Force fighters over the East China Sea, who then accompanied the U.S. bombers the rest of the way to Korea. When a second test of an intermediate-range ballistic missile occurred, U.S.-ROK forces conducted a combined strike exercise while U.S.-Japanese forces conducted a ballistic missile defense exercise simultaneously. Similarly, the U.S., Japanese, and South Korean militaries conducted a tabletop exercise on non-combatant evacuation. U.S. commanders had hoped to push this trilateral military exercising further, but South Korean sensitivity to having Japanese military on Korean soil continues to limit the full integration of alliance planning and exercising.

Asia's geopolitics are suggesting a new regional context within which events on the Korean Peninsula must be considered—one in which the trilateral relationship between Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington may be challenged by the new dynamics of major power military competition. Trilateral cooperation has proven very effective in mobilizing military force during moments of crisis. But if conflict emerges, will this be sustainable as Pyongyang approaches the ability to effectively target the United States? Will America's allies be confident in the extended deterrent that has long allowed them to avoid the nuclear option themselves? The governments of both the ROK and Japan have sought greater conventional military capabilities to redress their vulnerabilities. The ROK has enhanced its own missile arsenal, and Japan has recently decided to significantly increase its ballistic missile defenses.¹⁹ Both Seoul and Tokyo have begun to have open debate over the nuclear option as Kim tested his ability to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of delivering nuclear weapons to the United States.²⁰

The future of the U.S. alliances is further complicated by the Trump administration's desire to leverage allied defenses for better trade numbers. Allied concerns about the United States have only worsened with the election of Trump, who campaigned on ending U.S. alliances. In his interview with *New York Times*, candidate Trump said the ROK and Japan would one day have to defend themselves against North Korea. He has since embraced the U.S. alliances, but has held Moon and Abe accountable for their trade deficits with Washington, arguing that the United States is getting a bad deal on relationships that have been the mainstay of regional balances of power since the end of World War II. Even as the confrontation with Pyongyang deteriorated badly in the fall of 2017, Trump insisted on re-opening trade negotiations on the Korea-U.S. trade pact, using Seoul's weakness as leverage. In Tokyo in November of that year, Trump similarly told Abe he should buy expensive American weapons as a way to reduce the deficit, openly linking longstanding security assurances to increased U.S. arms sales.

The Trilateral and Diplomacy with Pyongyang

As the bilateral summitry of Northeast Asia took off in early 2018, the U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral once more faces considerable political hurdles. If the Trump-Kim summit is realized and a negotiation process results, this will usher in the third significant attempt to engage with a Kim on North Korea's military build-up. Each time negotiations have been tried, the diplomacy has been organized differently. In the mid-1990s, when Kim Jong-il announced his intention to deny access to his nuclear reactors to the International Atomic Energy Association, the Clinton administration responded by organizing its allies in a coordinated effort to entice him away from a path of nuclear development. The Trilateral Coordination and Oversight Group (TCOG) process resulted in economic incentives for North Korea, cooperation on providing it with light water nuclear reactors, and a largely shared vision by Seoul and Tokyo on the benefits of this approach. But this effort ultimately did not forestall the progression of Pyongyang's stockpiling of fissile material. The UN and the United States then imposed sanctions on the North, the former with the approval of the Security Council members, and the latter unilaterally and targeted on the bank used by the Kim family.

A second effort, led by the Bush administration, organized the six nations active in Northeast Asia to discuss a comprehensive path to denuclearization and ultimately a peace treaty that would end the militarized division of the peninsula. China played a leading role in hosting the resultant Six-Party Talks, creating the veneer of multilateralism around what was essentially a U.S.-North Korean dialogue. This approach, while lauded for its comprehensive approach to a settlement and its multilateral regional framework, left much to be desired for Washington's allies, as both Seoul and Tokyo found cause for disgruntlement in being left out of the U.S. negotiating strategy.

Prior attempts to negotiate with Pyongyang have demonstrated that the United States, South Korea, and Japan each have different interests at stake in a Korean settlement. The domestic politics of sustaining diplomatic initiatives and offering compromise needed to realize results are rarely in synch. For South Koreans, peace on the peninsula is paramount, for obvious reasons. Millions live in close proximity to North Korea's artillery, making any South Korean threat to use force lack credibility. For Americans, the proliferation of nuclear technology has long been the primary concern, and after 9/11, North Korea's role in exporting its fissile material to terrorist organizations took precedence over its missile development program. Japanese viewed this with chagrin, as they have long seen the North Korean missile program as having the greatest impact on their security. Add to that the domestic sensitivity to the abduction of Japanese citizens by the North in the 1970s, and Tokyo's stance on North Korea becomes ever more complicated. When Prime Minister Koizumi Junichiro's bilateral negotiations led to a visit to Pyongyang in 2002, his team negotiated with Kim Jong-il for the return of five of the 17 abductees thought to still be in North Korea. Instead of being praised for the success of bringing these five home, Koizumi and his team were criticized for not getting them all.²¹ Subsequent governments were hard pressed to engage in any effort at negotiation with the North without putting the abductee cause at the center of their talks.

Tokyo has been sensitive to being left out of the critical decisions in the diplomacy with Pyongyang. Japan preferred the early emphasis on the alliance trilateral to the larger Six-Party multilateral effort. The model used in the 1990s, TCOG, relied on close allied policy coordination, and this still appeals to many Japanese. But the broader regional dynamics seem to make this inconceivable. Today, no resolution on the Korean Peninsula is possible without China. The Six-Party framework that brought all regional powers to the table remains a preference for some, particularly in China, which hosted these talks.

The politics of when to compromise with Pyongyang reveals itself early, and who has compromised too much or too little becomes a source of tension. Tokyo worries about Seoul being too ready for compromise and thus sacrificing security in the interest of a peace regime. Seoul worries about Tokyo's harder military line and ultimately about Japan's "remilitarization." Both allies in varying degrees worry that Washington might either sacrifice their security interests in an attempt to reach a deal or become too rigid for compromise to emerge. Given Pyongyang's development of ICBMs potentially able to reach cities across the United States, there is ample reason for concern that Trump will prioritize ending this threat, leaving in place the threats to Japan and South Korea and also calling into question U.S. commitment to extended deterrence. In his confirmation hearings for secretary of state, Mike Pompeo confirmed these fears when he told senators that his primary aim was "to develop an agreement with the North Korean leadership such that the North Korean leadership will step away from its efforts to hold America at risk with nuclear weapons, completely and verifiably."²²

Today, neither of these past models seems just right. Moreover, there is far greater concern about China's ambitions in, and far less confidence in U.S. leadership of, a negotiating process. Kim Jong-un looks more assertive in shaping the context for negotiations, and his ability thus far to drive the talks indicates greater strategic savvy than many have been willing to admit. To be sure, it is early in the process, and there are conflicting accounts of what may have prompted Kim Jong-un to initiate this newest round of diplomacy. To date, however, Kim has asserted his country's right to have nuclear weapons and has already claimed North Korea as a nuclear power. What he seems to want is recognition of that status. While Beijing may be ready to provide that, Washington, Tokyo, and Seoul are not.

A second concern today is the shape of Northeast Asia's security architecture beyond peace on the Korean Peninsula. The region today is no longer a backwater in global geopolitics. China's emergence as a global power has knit the choices about the region's security into the fabric of the global balance of power. The choices ahead on the Korean Peninsula are not simply about how to persuade Kim Jong-un to give up his military arsenal; they are now about what sort of strategic balance will be embraced by all of the region's major powers.

The future role of nuclear weapons in Asia's security has considerable implications for existing arrangements for managing global security. Particularly worrisome for U.S. allies are intermediate-range nuclear forces, which have altered the regional military balance. Theoretically, these theater nuclear forces do not threaten major nuclear powers beyond Asia and thus would allow nations to threaten their neighbors without necessarily drawing retaliation from the United States. The concerns in Seoul and Tokyo are similar to what NATO allies worried about in the 1970s. Soviet deployment of SS-20s missiles to its European theater prompted a U.S. deployment of Pershing missiles to offset this advantage in the military balance. The United States and Russia concluded an Intermediate Nuclear Forces

(INF) Treaty in 1987 designed to eliminate this threat of decoupling. Japan at the time wanted to ensure that Soviet SS-20s would not simply be moved from Europe to the Asian theater. Today, the regional military balance in Asia is similarly unsettled, and China is not subject to the INF Treaty's limitations. In fact, the absence of a serious Asian disarmament framework now means that the proliferation of missiles has as much strategic significance to China, Russia, and the United States as arsenals of weapons of mass destruction. For the non-nuclear states, such as Japan and South Korea, missile defenses have become a far more daunting task.

In the midst of this burgeoning problem for Asia, both South Korea and Japan are considering what may be needed to bolster the U.S. military's capabilities in the region and/or what they might do to bolster their own military power. The diplomacy that may be emerging over Kim Jong-un's arsenal will thus need to consider the broader context of Asia's rapidly evolving military balance. No longer is denuclearization sufficient. Pyongyang's missile arsenal will also be under scrutiny, and there are difficult questions for Beijing, Washington, and Moscow should a broader disarmament effort for Northeast Asia be pursued. Whether Kim Jong-un's neighbors are prepared to build a regional disarmament regime remains to be seen, but without it, the global management of nuclear technology will be difficult to sustain.

Trump, Moon and Abe: The Decisions Ahead

The U.S.-Japan-ROK trilateral has always faced the challenge of synchronizing national approaches to the North Korea problem. All three democracies elect leaders who put their own stamp on how to deal with Pyongyang. Since Kim Jong-il announced his withdrawal from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, all three nations have had multiple turnovers in government, and these leadership transitions have colored the effort to respond to North Korea's proliferation and shaped alliance responses.

In contrast, North Korea has had one family in power, three generations of dictatorship that have sought the wherewithal to build sufficient military power to ensure their regime's survival. Kim Jong-il's son now has the opportunity to realize the Kim dynasty's dream of becoming a nuclear power. Whatever their belief in how Pyongyang's nuclear testing and missile launches affect China's interests, China's leaders—three since the mid-1990s—certainly understand from their own history that acquiring a nuclear arsenal brings with it status and a considerable degree of independence from the whims of those with nuclear power.

Leaders matter—and have taken risks—in diplomacy with North Korea. In the United States, South Korea, and Japan, elections have often produced a reset in North Korea policy. Four U.S. presidential administrations have worked on the nuclear proliferation problem. In South Korea, five presidents have sought to cope with the North's nuclear ambitions; and in Japan, no less than fourteen prime ministers have wrestled with the problem over the past two-plus decades. Notable overtures by various leaders have caught others by surprise and created distrust in motives among the three allies. South Korea's progressive political leaders have produced more opportunity for dialogue with the North, starting with Kim Dae-jung's "Sunshine diplomacy" and his famous summit meeting with Kim Jong-il in 2000. Roh Moo-hyun, elected in 2003, continued that path of direct dialogue, and he too met with Kim Jong-il, in 2007. Now Moon Jae-in and Kim Jong-un will carry on that legacy,

once again asserting the primacy of the two Koreas in the effort to negotiate a lasting peace on the peninsula. Today, however, Moon faces the prospect of a North Korea that can threaten others far beyond the Korean Peninsula, and thus his hands are tied far more than his predecessors.

Japan too has had its moments of engagement with Pyongyang. In their 2002 Pyongyang Declaration, Koizumi and Kim Jong-il outlined a moratorium on missile testing and a sustained effort at finding the remaining Japanese in North Korea.²³ Even Abe has tried his hand at direct negotiations with Kim in 2013 over investigating the whereabouts of the Japanese abductees.²⁴

Washington, however, has insisted on prioritizing the North's nuclear program and has tended to see the idea of a direct meeting with Pyongyang at the leadership level as reward for denuclearization rather than as a step in the negotiating process. Pyongyang's desire for normal diplomatic ties with the United States could be realized if and when it gives up its nuclear weapons. The Clinton administration seemed ready to take a risk on a summit meeting, but it was insufficiently impressed with Kim Jong-il's follow-through on the 1994 Agreed Framework. When it was discovered that the Kim regime had a clandestine uranium enrichment program underway despite its pledge to end production of plutonium, the Bush administration abruptly shifted gears away from negotiations to coercive sanctions. Calling North Korea part of an "axis of evil," President George W. Bush condemned the Kim regime not only for its proliferation but also for its human rights abuses.²⁵

Sustaining engagement with North Korea requires keeping all three leaders committed to diplomacy and to a unified strategy for pursuing a common end game. Synchronizing this takes considerable effort—and trust. Today's moment is no different. As Abe and Trump argued for "maximum pressure" and sanctions in 2017, Moon was hoping to find a way to entice Kim Jong-un to the table. The stakes are always higher for Seoul, and as the Trump administration's rhetoric on the preventive use of force seemed increasingly real, the pressures on Moon only grew.²⁶

The unpredictability of the Trump administration's approach to Kim makes formulating a trilateral strategy far more difficult. Allied leaders were shaken as the U.S. president threatened Kim Jong-un with "fire and fury the likes of which have never been seen."²⁷

In Tokyo, Abe campaigned in Japan's October 2017 election on his ability to manage the North Korean crisis, and for many Japanese, his relationship with Trump was one of the reasons for his success.²⁸ Abe's close consultations with Trump are reassuring, but the lack of consultation before Trump decided to meet with Kim shook the confidence of the Japanese government. In South Korea, Moon is given a lot of credit for persuading Trump to pursue diplomacy with Kim. After his meeting with Kim, his support soared.²⁹ South Koreans are grateful for Trump's willingness to buy into the idea of a summit with Kim, even though there is ample reason to worry about what it will produce.

The Japan-South Korea Hurdle

Now that Moon has succeeded in realizing a summit with Kim Jong-un, the Japan-ROK relationship will need particular attention. The most often cited challenge to effective trilateral policy coordination has been the difficult relationship between Seoul and Tokyo.

Troubled by war memory politics in both nations, Seoul and Tokyo have had difficulty overcoming the raw sentiments surrounding residual South Korean grievances over colonial and wartime behavior by Japanese. The most recent effort to address those grievances was the so-called “comfort women” agreement forged by President Park Geun-hye and Abe in 2015. Before this agreement, two years of estrangement at the highest level of government had made for an explosion of anti-Japanese sentiment in South Korea and a similar rise in anti-Korean sentiment in Japan. Obama facilitated a leadership meeting at The Hague in 2014, opening the way for a restart of bilateral talks about how to overcome these differences. The result was the settlement by private Japanese companies of compensation for the forced labor of Koreans, and a government-to-government agreement to establish a fund to be administered by the South Korean government for the women subjected to forcible sex work in brothels used by Japan’s imperial military. Yet the Korean public rejected this agreement when Park was impeached, and in the campaign for president that resulted, all the candidates openly called for renegotiation of the agreement.

Once in office, however, Moon sought to separate the difficult issues associated with his country’s colonial and war legacy from contemporary diplomacy. Abe too had attempted the same path when he had come into office, and his chief cabinet secretary undertook a policy review of past statements on the “comfort women” to clear the political air at home for a new discussion with Park.³⁰ Both Abe and Moon organized a policy review and an oversight panel of various non-governmental experts and stakeholders on the past agreements on the “comfort women.” Facing pressure from within their own supporters and parties, both leaders have tried to find a resolution that will allow their relationship to develop in other areas. On December 27, 2017, Moon announced the results of his advisory committee, and while expressing his dissatisfaction with the 2015 agreement, he acknowledged it represented a formal commitment by the South Korean government, and he would not reopen it.³¹ Despite the difficult politics of the past, the rising tensions with North Korea brought Abe and Moon together. Not only did the two U.S. allies coordinate their military responses to Kim’s missile launches, but they also coordinated their sanctions against the North.

Again, as the diplomatic breakthrough with Kim Jong-un develops, the interests of Seoul and Tokyo are likely to diverge somewhat. Seoul welcomes the opening of talks and is cautiously optimistic about the prospects for a peace regime on the peninsula. Moreover, it is difficult to ignore the emotional impact on South Koreans of the unified Korean teams at the Olympics and the visit of Kim Jong-un’s sister to the games. A South Korean K-pop group performed in Pyongyang—an amazing display of optimism in a country that rarely experiences unscripted performances, let alone the globally recognized talent to be found in South Korea.³² But the historic meeting between Moon and Kim at Panmunjom has raised the bar on past summitry between South and North Korea. Today, in its wake, South Koreans visit a movie set to perform the scene of crossing the divide between those blue huts to embrace the notion of peace.³³

Japanese views on North Korea are also emotional, but in a far different way. Angered by Kim Jong-il’s admission that his regime systematically abducted citizens from Japan’s shores and from European travel destinations, Japanese continue to see North Korea as a nation that violated their borders and stole their people. Many blame past Japanese governments for weakness in allowing the country to be so easily penetrated by a foreign nation. But

the more widespread sentiment in Japan is one of sympathy for the families of those taken decades ago. The parents of those abducted as children or young adults are now elderly. Their faces are now well known to all Japanese, and their personal losses are felt keenly across society.³⁴ Most important, Japanese blame their government for not protecting them from these abuses and for failing to gain their return to Japan. Even Abe cannot ignore this national sentiment as he considers this newest opening to Pyongyang.

Conclusion

The negotiating process unfolding with North Korea will test the U.S. allies in Northeast Asia far more than the military crisis that Kim Jong-un's missile launches created. Once more, Seoul will be looking for engagement and talks with Kim Jong-un to end hostilities and to ensure peace. Tokyo, on the other hand, will want more. It will want not only complete, verifiable, and irreversible nuclear disarmament; it will also want a reduction in North Korea's missile arsenal. Japan has felt an escalating military pressure from Pyongyang. With China's rise as a backdrop, Japanese policymakers are feeling their country's vulnerability in a rapidly changing Northeast Asia. Furthermore, an unpredictable U.S. president with an increasingly hardline cabinet also suggests a more fraught sense of the steps forward. Trump's insistence on America First has left both allies worried that their interests will be abandoned in the course of negotiating with Kim Jong-un. Close consultations among the three leaders can mitigate those fears, and yet there is still a sense that anything might happen.

Kim Jong-un has proven more adept at diplomacy than most in the region imagined. Kim's rapprochement with Xi Jinping reveals a far more geostrategic impulse at play in these sequential summits. Knitting together a strategy for Seoul, Tokyo, and Washington in the midst of this chess game will be a challenge. Moon, Abe, and Trump will need to be adroit and adaptive. But they must also look beyond the next summit. Nothing less than the future of Northeast Asia is at stake, and with it, seventy or more years of alliance history is up for grabs. Old grievances cannot hold sway here if Japan, South Korea, and the United States are all to emerge with greater security from this process of peace building on the Korean Peninsula.

Endnotes

¹ See the Council on Foreign Relations conflict tracker on North Korea, <https://www.cfr.org/interactives/global-conflict-tracker#!/conflict/north-korea-crisis>; and the Center for Strategic and International Studies' North Korean missile tracker, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/north-korea-missile-launches-1984-present/>.

² UN Security Council Resolutions on North Korea, <https://www.un.org/sc/suborg/en/sanctions/1718/resolutions>.

³ Japan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), details trilateral cooperation towards North Korea, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/area/n_korea/juk.html; The Republic of Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs covers the most recent trilateral foreign minister meeting, on

January 16, 2018, http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=319608 ;The U.S. Department of State provides a transcript of the meeting, <https://www.state.gov/secretary/20172018tillerson/remarks/2018/01/277470.htm>.

⁴ Full coverage of the summit is available at South Korea’s Blue House website, http://english1.president.go.kr/korea/korea.php?srh%5Bboard_no%5D=29&srh%5Bpage%5D=2&srh%5Bview_mode%5D=detail&srh%5Bseq%5D=20431&srh%5Bdetail_no%5D=318; North Korean media too was positive, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/04/28/asia/north-korea-state-media-summit-intl/index.html>.

⁵ The Panmunjom Declaration is at <http://documents.latimes.com/panmunjom-declaration-peace/>.

⁶ Chief Cabinet Secretary Suga Yoshihide briefed the press on Abe’s meeting with Kim Yong-nam, the president of the presidium of the Supreme People’s Assembly, North Korea’s parliament, https://japan.kantei.go.jp/tyoukanpress/201802/26_a.html, on March 26, 2018; Abe confirmed that his government was reaching out to Pyongyang to explore the possibility of a meeting, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/26/national/politics-diplomacy/abe-says-hes-contact-north-meeting-kim-suggests-diet-hed-open-trilateral-summit-u-s/#.WvCjoaQvy70>.

⁷ Transcript of Trump-Abe press conference on April 18, 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-prime-minister-abe-japan-joint-press-conference/>; See MOFA coverage of the summit, http://www.mofa.go.jp/na/na1/us/page3e_000845.html.

⁸ The Abe-Moon phone call was reported in the Japanese press, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/03/16/national/politics-diplomacy/south-korean-president-moon-jae-agrees-phone-help-abe-resolve-abduction-issue-amid-norths-overture-trump/#.WvDDqKQvy70>; Foreign Minister Kono Taro visited South Korea to meet with his counterpart, Foreign Minister Kang Kyung-wha on April 11, http://www.mofa.go.jp/mofaj/a_o/na/kr/page4_003915.html.

⁹ For the March 8 statement by South Korean national security advisor Chung Eui-yong on the grounds of the White House, see, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-republic-korea-national-security-advisor-chung-eui-yong/>, and Trump confirmed the meeting in a Tweet that night, <https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/971915531346436096https://twitter.com/realDonaldTrump/status/971915531346436096>.

¹⁰ Abe spoke with Trump over the phone hours after Chung announced a Trump-Kim meeting, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/readout-president-donald-j-trumps-call-prime-minister-shinzo-abe-japan-7/>.

¹¹ Coverage of Kim Jong-un’s visit with Xi Jinping is available at Xinhua, March 28, 2018, http://www.xinhuanet.com/english/2018-03/28/c_137070598.htm.

¹² See Japan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mofa.go.jp/press/release/press4e_002019.html.

¹³ See <https://www.cfr.org/blog/removal-jang-song-taek>.

¹⁴ U.S. officials believed North Korea to be behind the 2014 attacks, but no formal accusation was released, see David E. Sanger and Nicole Perlroth, “U.S. Said to Find North Korea Ordered Cyberattack on Sony,” *New York Times*, December 17, 2014.

¹⁵ For a careful analysis of the Kim Jong-nam assassination, see *38 North*: <https://www.38north.org/2017/03/gtoloraya030717/>.

¹⁶ See “北朝鮮による核実験・弾道ミサイル発射について Ministry of Defense, http://www.mod.go.jp/j/approach/surround/pdf/dprk_bm_20180126.pdf.

¹⁷ *The CNS North Korea Missile Test Database*, Nuclear Threat Initiative, <http://www.nti.org/analysis/articles/cns-north-korea-missile-test-database/>.

¹⁸ The Liberal Democratic Party’s Defense Affairs Committee released a report in March 2017 recommending the acquisition of a conventional strike capability to deter a possible missile attack, https://jimin.ncss.nifty.com/pdf/news/policy/134586_1.pdf.

¹⁹ For information on 2015 additions to South Korea’s missile arsenal, see Yonhap News, September 9, 2015, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2015/09/09/0301000000AEN20150909009700315.html>.

²⁰ South Korea’s Liberty Party’s platform calls for the redeployment of U.S. tactical nuclear weapons to the Korean Peninsula, http://www.libertykoreaparty.kr/web/eng/gnpPolicy/readPolicyView.do?bbsId=EBD_000000001247732; In May 2017, a study group comprised of former government and academic security experts in Japan, the Society of Security and Diplomatic Policy Studies, published a report, “Facing the Inconvenient Truth: Re-examining Policy for Peace and Denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula,” <http://ssdpaki.la.coocan.jp/en/proposals/4.html>. The report suggests the time has come for more careful consideration of Japan’s options, should the United States not be able or willing to continue its security commitment to Japan’s defenses. In February 2018, a former ambassador to the United States, Kato Ryoza, wrote an op-ed in *Sankei Shimbun* also calling for a debate in Japan about the pros and cons of acquiring nuclear weapons, <https://www.sankei.com/column/news/180202/clm1802020004-n1.html>.

²¹ The “secret diplomacy” of the Koizumi cabinet was also criticized, and while Koizumi returned to Pyongyang to bring the families of the five returned abductees out of the North, the Japanese public lost interest in offering the Kim regime economic assistance. Moreover, the advocacy of the families of those left behind intensified, and they had strong public support in Japan. See their position at the website of the National Association for the Rescue of Japanese Kidnapped by North Korea, <http://www.sukuukai.jp/narkn/>. Also, for a recent English language account of the lives of Japanese abductees in North Korea, see Robert S. Boynton, *The Invitation-Only Zone: The True Story of North Korea’s Abduction Project* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016).

- ²² Jesse Johnson, “Mike Pompeo optimistic on Kim-Trump summit, but ‘America first’ remarks likely to trigger concern in Tokyo and Seoul,” *Japan Times*, April 13, 2018, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2018/04/13/world/politics-diplomacy-world/no-reward-north-korea-without-irreversible-denuclearization-pompeo-tells-confirmation-hearing/#.WvCsaaQvy70>.
- ²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Japan-DPRK Pyongyang Declaration*, http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/n_korea/pmv0209/pyongyang.html
- ²⁴ Sheila A. Smith, “Pyongyang’s New Overtures and Abe’s Diplomacy,” *38 North*, May 30, 2014, <https://www.38north.org/2014/05/ssmith053114/>; Sheila A. Smith, “Reading Pyongyang’s Intentions with Japan,” *38 North*, November 25, 2014, <https://www.38north.org/2014/11/ssmith112514/>.
- ²⁵ For a transcript of Bush’s 2002 State of the Union speech, see <https://www.npr.org/news/specials/sou/2002/020129.bushtext.html>.
- ²⁶ Last fall, National Security Advisor General H.R. McMaster insisted that military options were on the table and may become necessary, see <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/press-briefing-press-secretary-sarah-sanders-national-security-advisor-h-r-mcmaster-u-n-ambassador-nikki-haley-091517/>. Victor Cha, at one point under consideration for the South Korean ambassadorship, argued against a pre-emptive strike: “Giving North Korea a ‘bloody nose’ carries a huge risk to Americans,” *Washington Post*, January 30, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/victor-cha-giving-north-korea-a-bloody-nose-carries-a-huge-risk-to-americans/2018/01/30/43981c94-05f7-11e8-8777-2a059f168dd2_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.9e4c36644848. For a recounting of the administration’s decision not to choose Cha as ambassador, see *Washington Post*, January 30, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/disagreement-on-north-korea-policy-could-derail-white-house-choice-for-ambassador-to-south-korea/2018/01/30/3a21191c-05da-11e8-94e8-e8b8600ade23_story.html?utm_term=.a9be0f0e8f29.
- ²⁷ For a transcript of Trump’s speech to the UN General Assembly on September 19, 2017, see: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-72nd-session-united-nations-general-assembly/>.
- ²⁸ Sheila A. Smith, “Foreign Policy,” in *Japan Decides 2017: The Japanese General Election*, eds. Robert J. Pekkanen et. al (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), 329-45.
- ²⁹ According to the Asan Institute, Moon’s approval rating in March after the announcement that Trump was ready to meet with Kim stood steady at 65.6 percent, but after the Moon-Kim summit, it soared to 78.3 percent; see <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/asan-korea-perspective-vol-3-no-5-2018-2-26-2018-3-11/> for March poll results and <http://en.asaninst.org/contents/asan-korea-perspective-vol-3-no-9-2018-04-23-2018-05-06/> for April polling.

- ³⁰The official report can be accessed at Prime Minister's Office, "Details of Exchanges Between Japan and the Republic of Korea (ROK) Regarding the Comfort Women Issue: From the Drafting of the Kono Statement to the Asian Women's Fund," June 20, 2014, http://japan.kantei.go.jp/96_abe/documents/2014/_icsFiles/afiedfile/2014/06/20/JPN_ROK_EXCHANGE.pdf. Suga explained the results in a press conference, "Press Conference by the Chief Cabinet Secretary (PM)," June 20, 2014, http://www.kantei.go.jp/jp/tyoukanpress/201406/20_p.html. I wrote about the report in *Japan's New Politics and the U.S.-Japan Alliance* (New York: The Council on Foreign Relations, 2014), accessible at https://cfrd8-files.cfr.org/sites/default/files/pdf/2014/07/Japans_New_Politics_Report.pdf.
- ³¹The advisory group's report can be downloaded here, http://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5674/view.do?seq=319637&srchFr=&srchTo=&srchWord=&srchTp=&multi_itm_seq=0&itm_seq_1=0&itm_seq_2=0&company_cd=&company_nm=&page=8&titleNm. After the review was concluded on December 27, 2017, Moon gave a statement reflecting on its conclusions and stating that more efforts would have to be made to resolve the "comfort women" issue, see Hiroshi Minegishi, "'Comfort women' deal not a solution: President Moon," *Nikkei Asian Review*, December 28, 2017, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Comfort-women-deal-not-a-solution-President-Moon>.
- ³²Choi Sang-hun, "Onstage, South Korean K-Pop Stars. In the Balcony, Kim Jong-un, Clapping," *New York Times*, April 1, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/04/01/world/asia/kim-jong-un-north-korea-k-pop-concert.html>.
- ³³Joohee Cho, "Movie set recreates Panmunjom zone where Kim Jong Un met Moon Jae-in," *ABC News*, May 8, 2018, <https://abcnews.go.com/International/movie-set-recreates-panmunjom-zone-kim-jong-met/story?id=54985349>.
- ³⁴One such story is the abduction of Yokota Megumi, see Arata Yamamoto and Alexander Smith, "Family of Girl Abducted by North Korea Hopes Trump Can Win Her Return," *NBC News*, November 2, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/family-girl-abducted-north-korea-hopes-trump-can-win-her-n816046>.