

ISSN 1010-1608

Vol.29, No.2

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Fall/Winter 2015

The Journal of  
EAST  
ASIAN  
AFFAIRS

Institute for National Security Strategy



The Journal of  
**EAST ASIAN  
AFFAIRS**

**Vol.29, No.2**

Fall/Winter 2015



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Vol.29

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## CONTENTS

- IMPLICATIONS OF IRAN NEGOTIATIONS FOR NORTH KOREA 1  
**James Jay Carafano**
- 
- THE IMPORTANCE OF THAAD MISSILE DEFENSE 21  
**Bruce Klingner**
- 
- CHALLENGES AT THE CROSSROAD : 43  
THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL POLICY IN KOREA  
**Jongsung Kim**
- 
- INDIA AS A NATION OF CONSEQUENCE IN ASIA : THE PO- 67  
TENTIAL AND LIMITATIONS OF INDIA'S 'ACT EAST' POLICY  
**Lavina Lee**
- 
- HOPE BY ITSELF IS NOT ENOUGH : 105  
THE SOFT POWER OF NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS  
**Brandon K. Gauthier**



# IMPLICATIONS OF IRAN NEGOTIATIONS FOR NORTH KOREA

James Jay Carafano

*Heritage Foundation*

## Abstract

The international nuclear agreement with Iran has generated some speculation about the potential for resurrecting similar negotiations with North Korea. Indeed, the Obama administration's dramatic shifts in policy toward Burma, Cuba, and now Iran might suggest an analogous gesture toward Pyongyang. But, a number of factors mitigate against the U.S. initiating a similar outreach with North Korea.

From a domestic U.S. political point of view, the clock is running out for the Obama administration. With only a year and a half left, Obama has insufficient time to bring a complicated and contentious North Korean accord to completion. Moreover, after the failure of its 2009 and 2012 attempts, the Obama Administration is not inclined toward a third attempt at engagement with Pyongyang.

But the biggest obstacle to any potential nuclear agreement with North Korea is, of course, North Korea itself. Pyongyang's unceasing threats of nuclear annihilation against the United States and its allies, as well as cyber attacks and pledge of a "9/11-type attack," do not create an atmosphere conducive to diplomatic engagement. Not that there was any doubt, but North Korea publicly rejected any inclination to follow Iran into denuclearization negotiations with the United States.

**Key words:** North Korea, Iran, Nuclear Negotiations, Six Party Talks, Sanctions

## INTRODUCTION

North Korea typically alternates provocative actions with periodic diplomatic charm offensives in order to achieve its objectives. Pyongyang has raised tensions in order to garner benefits for returning to the status quo ante. While North Korea has repeatedly offered engagement and signed international accords, the regime's subsequent behavior led to the collapse of all agreements.

Despite this poor track record, the P5+1 international nuclear agreement with Iran generated speculation – particularly in the South Korean media – of the potential for resurrecting Six Party Talks nuclear negotiations with North Korea. Indeed, the Obama administration's willingness to drastically soften U.S. policy toward Burma, Cuba, and now Iran seemed to suggest an analogous gesture toward Pyongyang. But, a number of factors mitigate against the U.S. initiating a similar outreach with North Korea.

Similarly, there is little optimism that the August 2015 inter-Korean agreement resolving the landmine crisis represents a dramatic policy shift by Kim Jong-un nor that it will lead to lasting improvements in South-North Korean relations. Thousands of previous official inter-Korean meetings and numerous non-government initiatives similarly raised hopes, only to ultimately fail.

### LITTLE LIKELIHOOD OF IRAN-TYPE AGREEMENT WITH PYONGYANG

From a domestic U.S. political point of view, the clock is running out for the Obama administration. With only a year and a half left, Obama has insufficient time to bring a complicated and contentious North Korean accord to completion. Veterans of the Clinton presidency, such as Undersecretary of State Wendy Sherman, will



well remember their inability to conclude a missile agreement with North Korea in a limited time window.

While Sherman and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright claim that they were “this close” to a missile agreement at the tail end of Clinton’s term, the reality was that a chasm remained between Pyongyang’s demands and US willingness to move forward. North Korean intransigence at bilateral meetings in Kuala Lumpur in 2000 and insistence that the two country’s leaders hash out the terms of an agreement during a Clinton trip to Pyongyang doomed any potential for progress.

Some experts might argue that Obama’s trifecta of diplomatic initiatives with Burma, Cuba, and Iran gives him leverage and momentum to pursue a grand slam with North Korea. But it is more likely that the cumulative U.S. concessions and loosening of pressure on three still recalcitrant autocracies would limit congressional and public acceptance of yet more U.S. conciliation.

After the failure of its 2009 and 2012 attempts, the Obama Administration is not inclined toward a third attempt at engagement with Pyongyang. But even more so in the hyper-partisan atmosphere of the already underway 2016 presidential election campaign. Obama’s outreach to Burma, Cuba, and Iran is already fodder for criticism of perceived U.S. capitulation and weakness and a similar initiative to Pyongyang could be a diplomatic bridge too far.

But the biggest obstacle to any potential nuclear agreement with North Korea is, of course, North Korea itself. Pyongyang’s unceasing threats of nuclear annihilation against the United States and its allies, as well as cyber attacks and pledge of a “9/11-type attack,” do not create an atmosphere conducive to diplomatic engagement.

Not that there was any doubt, but North Korea publicly rejected any inclination to follow Iran into denuclearization negotiations with the United States. The North Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared in July that Pyongyang “is not interested at all in dialogue to discuss the issue of making it freeze or dismantle its nukes

unilaterally first, [since its nuclear arsenal] is not a plaything to be put on the negotiating table.”<sup>1</sup>

That statement is consistent with years of regime declarations that the Six-Party Talks were “null and void” while dismissing any possibility of it living up to numerous previous pledges to denuclearize. The Korea Workers Party Central Committee declared North Korea’s nuclear weapons “are not goods for getting U.S. dollars and they are neither a political bargaining chip nor a thing for economic dealings. [North Korea’s] possession of nuclear weapons shall be fixed by law and should be expanded and beefed up qualitatively and quantitatively until the denuclearization of the world is realized.”<sup>2</sup>

In 2013, North Korea even revised its constitution to enshrine itself as a nuclear state, and North Korean leader Kim Jong-un vowed to “increase the production of precision and miniaturized nuclear weapons and the means of their delivery and ceaselessly develop nuclear weapons technology to actively develop more powerful and advanced nuclear weapons [and] firmly bolster the nuclear armed forces both quantitatively and qualitatively.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jethro Mullen, “North Korea: We’re not interested in Iran-style nuclear talks,” CNN, July 21, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2015/07/21/asia/north-korea-not-interested-in-iran-type-deal/>.

<sup>2</sup> Report on Plenary Meeting of WPK Central Committee, KCNA, March 31, 2013, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2013/201303/news31/20130331-24ee.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Kim Jong-un, Report and Remarks (speech at the March 31, 2013 plenary meeting of the Korean Workers’ Party [WPK] Central Committee [CC], as disseminated by DPRK state media through Korean Central Broadcasting Station and Korean Central Television), <http://nkleadershipwatch.wordpress.com/kim-jong-un/kim-jong-uns-report-and-remarks-at-kwp-central-committee-meeting-31-march-2013/>.

## FOUR RED FLAGS ON THE IRAN DEAL

### **(The Neighborhood Will Race to Go Nuclear)**

The manner in which the deal was structured was bound to accelerate nuclear proliferation. Iran has violated its obligations under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and repeatedly thumbed its nose at oversight from the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Yet it winds up getting a great deal under the agreement—better, in fact, than the deal the United States gives its friends and allies through the 123 Civil Nuclear Agreements. If regional powers like Turkey, Egypt and Saudi Arabia believe that the likelihood of Iran getting a weapon is undiminished and the penalty for becoming a nuclear breakout power is plummeting, then the deterrent for them to cross the nuclear threshold drops as well.

### **(Teheran Keeps its Vast Nuclear Infrastructure and Missile Program)**

Other regional powers are likely to race to nuclear, in part because the deal does nothing to scuttle Iran's plans to build a weapon. The administration's pitch is that the deal slows down Iran's program, leaving plenty of time for "early warning" of a nuclear breakout. That's cold comfort for Teheran's neighbors. What's concerned them is knowing that Iran will eventually put a nuclear warhead on a missile—and this deal won't stop that.

Further, even if the administration does receive early warning (a dubious promise at best), it has never indicated what—if anything—it would do about it. Indeed, these promises from Iran only confirm the obvious: that the regime definitely has nuclear-weapons ambitions. After all, why have a massive ballistic-missile program and secret military nuclear facilities if the plan isn't to build nuclear weapons?

### **(Sanctions Relief Will Make the Region Less Safe)**

People will argue the numbers, but the sanctions relief and the renewed ability to sell more oil on the open market could wind up bringing \$300-400 billion into the Iranian economy. As in any thriving kleptocracy, that money will be funneled through the hands of the regime, whose leaders will use it to tighten their grip on the Iranian people and fund the most aggressive and destabilizing foreign policy outside of ISIS. Essentially, the deal will pay for undermining U.S. policy and interests throughout the region.

### **(The Deal is Temporary, By Design)**

Even the White House doesn't claim it will permanently keep Iran from getting a bomb. So, what's the point? Mr. Obama can't even guarantee it will outlive his presidency. After a couple of years of cashing in on sanctions relief, Teheran might just walk away.

The Oval Office insists that there are only two choices: this deal or war. But the choices are neither that limited, nor that simple. This deal is not the antidote to war. Rather, it makes increased conflict all the more likely, as a newly enriched and emboldened Iran increases its destabilizing activities throughout the region and its threatened neighbors pursue more extreme measures for self-preservation.

## **LESSONS LEARNED FROM NEGOTIATING WITH ROGUE REGIMES**

### **(Violations Make a Shaky Foundation)**

Nuclear diplomacy with both North Korea and Iran was precipitated by their violating previous agreements and UN resolutions—hardly the basis for confidence in that they will abide by yet more

accords. Pyongyang and Teheran serially deceived, denied, and defied the international community. Yet, arms control proponents responded to growing evidence of cheating by doubting, dismissing, deflecting, denouncing, deliberating, debating, delaying, and eventually dealing.

Experts initially rejected intelligence reports of North Korea's plutonium weapons program, its uranium weapons program, complicity in a Syrian nuclear reactor, and steadily increasing nuclear and missile capabilities. Similarly, after decades of debating whether Iran even had a nuclear weapons program, experts now claim that U.S. intelligence will be able to unequivocally identify and then convince US policymakers and UN representatives to impose sufficient penalties to deter Iran from nuclear weapons, all within one year.

### **(Verification is Critical)**

President Ronald Reagan's dictum "Trust but Verify" was reflected in the extensively detailed verification protocols that enabled the United States to have arms control treaties with the Soviet Union. Debate currently rages over the Iran agreement's verification measures, including the ability to conduct short-notice challenge inspections on non-declared facilities as well as the "snap-back" clause if Teheran is suspected of cheating.

The Six Party Talks collapsed since North Korea balked at the proposed verification regime. Pyongyang's subsequent exposure in 2010 of its extensive uranium enrichment program would necessitate far more intrusive verification measures than those North Korea previously rejected.

Despite the Obama administration's assurances of the strength of the snap-back clause, the United Nations has shown a remarkable ability to respond lifelessly when its resolutions are blatantly violated, then only after extensive negotiations and compromise. Hampered by Chinese and Russian obstructionism, the UN Secu-

rity Council has been limited to lowest-common denominator responses.

### **(Learning the Wrong Lessons)**

North Korea and Iran have had a decades-long missile relationship as well as cooperation on nuclear weapons development. The two countries also likely closely followed each other's negotiations to curtail their nuclear ambitions. Unfortunately, they learned that alternating provocative behavior and a perceived willingness to negotiate enabled them to manipulate the international community into timidity about imposing penalties and acquiescence to repeated violations.

By maintaining strategic ambiguity on their nuclear programs, North Korea and Iran, like the proverbial camel's nose under the tent, are gaining international acceptance of activities that were previously declared "unacceptable." Proponents of the Iran deal dismiss criticisms that it allows Teheran nuclear capabilities precluded by successive UN resolutions. They argue that it is unreasonable to expect Iran to give up capabilities that it has devoted great resources as well as national pride to develop. If nuclear negotiations were to resume with North Korea, it is clear that Pyongyang would cite the Iran precedent and demand terms far less restrictive than current UN resolutions call for.

### **(With No Negotiations Likely, the United States Talks About Sanctions...And Talks)**

The Six-Party Talks have not met since 2008. In February 2012, US and North Korean diplomats agreed to an interim agreement for Washington to provide nutritional assistance in return for Pyongyang's partial resumption of its previous commitments. North Korea's declared intent two weeks later to launch a long-range ballistic missile—yet another violation of UN resolutions—scuttled the accord.

In response to the North Korean hacking of Sony in late 2014, the White House announced in January 2015 a new executive order expanding US authority to sanction North Korean entities. However, it only included 13 entities—3 organizations already on the sanctions list and 10 individuals not involved in cyber activities. The White House vowed the measure was “a first step...this is certainly not the end.”<sup>4</sup> No subsequent actions have since been announced.

Similarly, Secretary of State John Kerry declared in May 2015 there was international intent to “increase the pressure and increase the potential of either sanctions or other means”<sup>5</sup> to alter Kim Jong-un’s behavior. The Obama administration has not yet announced any subsequent measures nor any human rights sanctions 17 months after the release of a UN Commission of Inquiry report which concluded Pyongyang had committed human rights violations so egregious as to constitute “crimes against humanity.”

## SANCTIONS : AN IMPORTANT AND VARIABLE COMPONENT OF FOREIGN POLICY

Sanctions (which includes targeted financial measures) are intended to deter, coerce, and compel changes in another country’s policy and behavior. The debate over the utility of financial pressure in foreign policy is usually incorrectly depicted in binary fashion, such as whether the U.S. should use sanctions or engagement.

The reality, of course, is that sanctions and engagement—along

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<sup>4</sup> “U.S. sanctions North Korea over Sony hacking,” *Dallas Morning News*, January 2, 2015, <http://www.dallasnews.com/news/local-news/20150102-u.s.-sanctions-north-korea-over-sony-hacking.ece>.

<sup>5</sup> Choe Sang-hun, “Kerry Calls for More Pressure on North Korea Over ‘Horrendous’ Acts,” *The New York Times*, May 18, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/19/world/asia/john-kerry-north-korea.html?\\_r=2](http://www.nytimes.com/2015/05/19/world/asia/john-kerry-north-korea.html?_r=2).

with economic assistance, military deterrence, alliances, and public diplomacy—should never be used in isolation from each other but rather should be components of a comprehensive policy.

Critics of coercive financial pressure question its effectiveness because they have not yet forced Pyongyang to abandon its nuclear and missile programs, but neither did repeated bilateral and multilateral negotiations or unconditional engagement. Adopting such a narrow viewpoint overlooks the multifaceted utility of sanctions, which:

1. Show resolve to enforce international agreements and send a strong signal to other nuclear aspirants. If laws are not enforced and defended, they cease to have value.
2. Impose a heavy penalty on violators to demonstrate that there are consequences for defying international agreements and transgressing the law.
3. Constrain North Korea's ability to acquire the components, technology, and finances to augment and expand its arsenal.
4. Impede North Korean nuclear, missile, and conventional arms proliferation. Targeted financial and regulatory measures increase both the risk and the operating costs of North Korea's continued violations of Security Council resolutions and international law.
5. In conjunction with other policy tools, seek to modify North Korean behavior.

## DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT NORTH KOREAN SANCTIONS

*Myth 1. Sanctions can't affect an isolated country like North Korea.* Even the most reclusive regime, criminal organization, or terrorist group is tied to the global financial order. Dirty money



eventually flows across borders. Since the U.S. dollar serves as the global reserve currency, the vast majority of all international financial transactions are denominated in dollars. As such, virtually all international transactions must pass through a U.S. Treasury Department-controlled bank account in the United States.

For banks and businesses, there are catastrophic risks to facilitating – even unknowingly – illicit transactions. The British bank HSBC was fined \$1.9 billion for money-laundering and sanctions violations, including financial dealings with Iran. French Bank BNP Paribas was fined \$8.97 billion for processing banned transactions with Sudan, Iran, and Cuba.

Beyond having to pay fines and having assets frozen or seized, financial institutions can be denied access to the U.S. financial system – and thus shunned internationally as a pariah – if labeled as a “money laundering concern.”

***Myth 2. North Korea is the most heavily sanctioned country in the world.*** President Obama has made that mistake.<sup>6</sup> It is simply not true. The U.S., EU, and UN imposed far more pervasive and compelling measures against Iran. Regardless of what one thinks of the recent nuclear agreement with Iran, the reality is that stringent international sanctions was a primary reason that Teheran returned to the negotiation table.

North Korea has withdrawn from the Non-Proliferation Treaty, developed and tested nuclear weapons, declared that its nuclear program is for military purposes, and threatened the United States and its allies with nuclear annihilation. Teheran has done none of these things. Yet the U.S., the European Union, and the United Nations imposed far less restrictive sanctions against Pyongyang than against Teheran.

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<sup>6</sup> “Best of Obama’s Interviews with YouTube Stars,” *The Wall Street Journal*, January 23, 2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wgJU7ou4zeQ>.

Washington has unilaterally targeted fewer North Korean entities than those of the Balkans, Burma, Cuba, Iran, and Zimbabwe. The U.S. has targeted more than twice as many Zimbabwean entities than North Korea. Nor has Washington designated North Korea as a primary money-laundering concern as it did Iran and Burma.

While the U.S. has targeted Zimbabwe, Congo, and Burma for human rights violations, it has yet to take any action against North Korea 17 months after the UN Commission of Inquiry report documenting Pyongyang's crimes against humanity.

To date, the United States has targeted zero—yes, zero—North Korean entities for human rights violations. By contrast, the U.S. has targeted Zimbabwe, Congo, and Burma for human rights violations. Washington sanctioned by name the presidents of Zimbabwe and Belarus but has yet to name Kim Jong-un or the heads of any of the North Korean organizations listed by the U.N. Commission of Inquiry report.

Nor has Seoul passed a North Korean human rights law after ten years of debate in the National Assembly. Nor did it consider any possibility to close the Kaesong Industrial Zone even after the North Korean attacks on Chonan-ham, killing 46 young South Korean naval soldiers, and repeatedly artillery attack on Yeonpung-do in 2010.

***Myth 3. There is nothing more the U.S. can impose on North Korea.*** The U.S. has pursued a policy in which it incrementally increases punishments on Pyongyang for its repeated defiance of the international community. Responding to indications of an impending fourth North Korean nuclear test, President Obama declared the U.S. would consider “further sanctions that have even more bite.”

Former Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell commented, “I thought North Korea was the most sanctioned country in the world, but I was (proven) wrong....Myanmar is sanctioned about 10 times

(more than) North Korea....It would be possible for us to put more financial pressure on North Korea..We can make life much more difficult through financial sanctions on North Korea.”

***Myth 4. Sanctions don't work against North Korea.*** Tougher measures were effective when applied. In 2005, the U.S. designated Macau-based Banco Delta Asia as a money laundering concern for facilitating North Korean illicit activities. North Korea was shunned by the international financial system due to the cumulative effect of the action, the clear signal that Washington would belatedly begin enforcing its laws, and a series of private meetings by U.S. officials throughout Asia which led to two dozen financial institutions throughout Asia voluntarily cutting back or terminating their business with North Korea.

A North Korean negotiator admitted to a senior White House official, “You finally found a way to hurt us.” Years later, Obama Administration officials declared that the Banco Delta Asia action was “very effective” and it was “a mistake” for the Bush Administration to have rescinded it.

***Myth 5. China would never go along with targeted financial measures.*** Unlike Iran, North Korea is small, weak, and undiversified in its economic or diplomatic contacts. It is singularly reliant on China, making Pyongyang more susceptible to sanctions if Beijing or Chinese banks comply.

China has shown itself to be part of the problem rather than part of the solution by turning a blind eye to North Korean proliferation crossing China and not fully implementing UN measures. But, the U.S. action on Banco Delta Asia compelled Chinese banks to make a choice — appear legitimate by scrutinizing North Korean illicit financial activity in their banks or risk becoming a financial rogue and losing access to the U.S. financial system.

Chinese financial entities could be persuaded to follow the U.S.

Treasury's lead and act against their government's own stated foreign policy and political interests.

## PYONGYANG CLOSES THE DOOR ON INTER-KOREAN DIALOGUE

Kim Jong-un's 2015 New Year's Day speech was interpreted by some experts as showing regime interest in resuming dialogue with South Korea and the United States. As occurs every year, the missive is scoured for signals of regime intent to reform and moderate its provocative behavior. Passages that are less vituperative than the preceding year are hailed as harbingers of peaceful engagement.

Despite inevitably rosy pundit predictions, there is less than meets the eye in the regime's annual missive. Such was the case this year, Pyongyang inevitably. A careful reading of the New Year's speech showed the conditionality of Kim's diplomatic outreach, calling for an end to the combined South Korean-U.S. military exercises. The regime added resuming the Mount Kumgang tourist venture, canceling post-Cheonansanctions, and preventing South Korean private citizens from sending anti-regime pamphlets into North Korea.

By late February, hopes of improved inter-Korean relations and a diplomatic resolution to the North Korean nuclear problem had, once again, dissolved. Kim Jong-un declared, "We are unwilling to sit down with [US] mad dogs anymore."<sup>7</sup> The regime also dismissed dialogue with Seoul: "It is only too apparent that no major change or transformation could be achieved in inter-Korean relations even if we were to sit down a thousand times with such government offi-

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<sup>7</sup> Son Won-je, "Kim Jong-un Says North Korea Isn't About to Sit Down with 'Mad Dogs,'" *The Hankyoreh*, February 2, 2015, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_northkorea/676421.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/676421.html).

cial.”<sup>8</sup>

### (Only to Open It a Crack)

After Pyongyang created a crisis by planting a landmine in South Korea and exchanging artillery fire, the regime subsequently reached an agreement to defuse the rising tensions. Both Koreas can claim they achieved what they wanted. But, as with any development on the Korean Peninsula, the agreement will be a Rorschach test for interpreting, as either the beginning of a long awaited breakthrough in inter-Korean relations, or yet another temporary defusing of confrontation that won't lead to significant change.

While the risk of an immediate inadvertent military clash has receded, the underlying causes remain in place and the tense status quo remains. Kim Jong-un has shown himself to be just as resistant as his father and grandfather to implementing the political and economic reform necessary to significantly improve relations with Seoul. Indeed, he has ratcheted up political repression and directed security services to augment measures to prevent the contagion of foreign influences. Kim has also repeatedly threatened nuclear attacks against South Korea, Japan, and the United States.

In the agreement, North Korea expressed regret, rather than issuing an apology as President Park Geun-hye demanded. South Korea claimed victory in forcing North Korea to acknowledge the landmine incident, though not its responsibility, and lowering its war-time status. However, the North Korean National Defense Commission later denied accepting any responsibility for the incident and warned inter-Korean relations “would return to confrontation”

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<sup>8</sup> “U.S. Imperialists Will Face Final Doom: DPRK NDC,” KCNA, February 4, 2015, <http://www.kcna.co.jp/item/2015/201502/news04/20150204-02ee.html>; and Son Won-je, “Propaganda Balloon Launches Again Presenting Obstacle to Inter-Korean Dialogue,” *The Hankyoreh*, January 9, 2015, [http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_northkorea/672915.html](http://www.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_northkorea/672915.html).

if South Korea continued its “distortions.”<sup>9</sup>

In return, Seoul vowed today that it would cease its propaganda broadcasts along the border that had infuriated the North Korean regime. South Korea had resumed the broadcasts in response to the landmine incident and vowed to expand them along the entire DMZ. Pyongyang agreed to suspend its “quasi-state of war” and allow resumption of separated family reunions and civil exchanges. Both sides pledged follow-on talks to improve bilateral relations.

Follow-on talks may provide the catalyst for long-awaited North Korean reforms and improvements in bilateral relations. But if history is any guide, the hope for the lasting effect of such talks is very slim.

Peace will continue to be maintained only through the continued presence of strong and vigilant South Korean and U.S. military forces. As George Orwell wrote, people “sleep soundly in our beds [only] because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm.” That has not changed on the Korean Peninsula.

## CONCLUSION

Regrettably, the world has now become largely inured to North Korea’s development of nuclear weapons, repeated violations of Security Council resolutions and international law, and belligerent threats. Evidence of North Korean nuclear and missile progress has often been dismissed until it became irrefutable.

The United Nations and the United States have both warned that North Korea’s escalating nuclear and missile capabilities are

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<sup>9</sup> Choe Sang-hun, “North Korea Denies Apologizing for Land Mine Blasts,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 2015.

a “clear threat to international peace and security.” Yet, both have pursued a policy of timid incrementalism in applying targeted financial measures.

This raises the question as to why does the United States hesitate to impose the same measures on North Korea that Washington has already implemented on other countries for far less egregious violations?

The Obama Administration’s policy of strategic patience is predominantly passive because it fails to impose sufficient pressure to effectively degrade North Korea’s capabilities or alter its behavior. The U.S. has sufficient tools. It has just lacked the resolve to use them.

The collective international finger-wagging and promises to be tougher the next time have allowed North Korea additional years to develop and refine its nuclear weapons and the means to deliver them. The inability and unwillingness to impose more comprehensive sanctions has emboldened North Korea, Iran, and other nuclear aspirants to believe they can defy the world until they present their nuclear status as a fait accompli.

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# THE IMPORTANCE OF THAAD MISSILE DEFENSE

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**Bruce Klingner**

*Heritage Foundation*

## **Abstract**

Despite escalating North Korean nuclear and missile threats, South Korea resists implementing a more effective defense of its populace and critical military targets. Seoul refrains from deploying more capable interceptors and linking its network into a more comprehensive and capable allied network. President Park Geun-hye maintains a policy of “strategic ambiguity” due to Chinese pressure against U.S. deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) to South Korea. Beijing claims that THAAD deployment would be against China’s security interests. However, a technical analysis reveals that Beijing’s technical objections are disingenuous and deploying THAAD to South Korea would not threaten China in any way.

The deployment of THAAD on the Korean Peninsula would enhance South Korea’s defense against potentially catastrophic nuclear, biological, and chemical attacks and advanced North Korean missile capabilities, would impede Pyongyang’s ability to engage in coercive diplomacy, and augment deterrence by reducing the potential of success of a potential North Korean missile strike.

The decision to deploy THAAD is a sovereign right that Seoul should base on national security objectives and the defensive needs of the nation. Seoul should not subordinate the defense of its citizens to economic blackmail by Beijing.

**Key words:** missile defense, THAAD, South Korea, North Korea, China

## INTRODUCTION

Pyongyang has made emphatically clear that it will never abandon its nuclear arsenal and has declared the Six-Party Talks “null and void.” The U.S. and its allies therefore need to deploy sufficient defenses to deter and defend against the growing North Korean missile and nuclear threats. Washington, Seoul, and Tokyo need a comprehensive, interoperable, and multilayered ballistic missile defense (BMD) system. Multiple systems providing complementary capabilities improve the likelihood of successful defense against missile attack.

Yet South Korea persists in resisting both deployment of more effective interceptors and incorporating its independent system into a comprehensive allied network. Even the potential U.S. deployment of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) to strengthen alliance BMD on the Korean Peninsula has been controversial due to Chinese pressure on Seoul.

The Park Geun-hye administration is pursuing a policy of “strategic ambiguity” in order to postpone public discussion on THAAD deployment. South Korea should instead articulate to its citizens—and the Chinese and Russian leaderships—the need for a more effective missile defense system to protect the country better. Seoul should rebuff Chinese interference and exercise its sovereign right to defend itself against the North Korean threat brought on, in part, by Beijing’s unwillingness to confront its belligerent ally.

## GROWING NORTH KOREAN NUCLEAR AND MISSILE THREATS

Pyongyang asserts that it already has the ability to attack the continental United States, American bases in the Pacific, and U.S.

allies South Korea and Japan with nuclear weapons. In March 2015, North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su-yong warned that Pyongyang now “has the power of conducting a pre-emptive strike.”<sup>1</sup> Pyongyang announced that its February 2013 nuclear test was of a “miniaturized and lighter” nuclear weapon that could fit on a missile, giving the regime the ability to “make a precision strike at bases of aggression and blow them up with a single blow, no matter where they are on earth.”<sup>2</sup>

North Korea has an extensive ballistic missile force that could strike South Korea, Japan, and U.S. military bases in Asia. Pyongyang has deployed at least 400 Scud short-range tactical ballistic missiles, 300 No-Dong medium-range missiles, and 100 to 200 Musudan intermediate-range ballistic missiles. The Scud missiles threaten South Korea, the No-Dong can range a portion of South Korea and all of Japan, and the Musudan can hit U.S. bases on Okinawa and Guam.

### **Experts Now Less Likely to Dismiss North Korean Threat**

For several decades, however, experts have tended to downplay progress in North Korean nuclear and missile programs. They have frequently underestimated North Korea’s nuclear and missile programs due to ideologically driven analysis, political expediency, and the belief that a technologically and economically backward nation could not achieve the necessary breakthroughs.

Skeptics initially dismissed evidence of North Korea’s plutonium-based nuclear weapons, highly enriched uranium (HEU)

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<sup>1</sup> “N. Korea Threatens Pre-Emptive Strike Against U.S.,” *ChosunIlbo*, March 4, 2015, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2015/03/04/2015030401080.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2015/03/04/2015030401080.html).

<sup>2</sup> Permanent Mission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to the United Nations, “Note Verbale from the Permanent Mission of the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea to the United Nations Addressed to the President of the Security Council,” S/2013/91, U.N. Security Council, February 13, 2013, <http://www.undocs.org/S/2013/91>.

program, involvement in constructing a Syrian nuclear reactor, and ability to develop long-range missiles. U.S. intelligence estimates of these programs were dismissed as politically motivated, until they were proven indisputably correct.

However, U.S. experts now estimate that Pyongyang currently has 10–16 nuclear weapons.<sup>3</sup> Dr. Siegfried Hecker, former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory, has concluded that North Korea could have 20 nuclear weapons by 2016.<sup>4</sup> Chinese nuclear experts have warned that North Korea may already have 20 nuclear warheads and could enrich enough uranium to double its arsenal by 2016.<sup>5</sup>

Enough unclassified evidence is available to conclude that the regime has likely achieved warhead miniaturization—the ability to place nuclear weapons on its No Dong medium-range ballistic missiles—and can threaten Japan and South Korea with nuclear weapons. Factors for such an assessment include:

1. The decades-long duration of North Korea's nuclear and missile programs;
2. The technology, expertise, and components acquired from collaborative involvement with Pakistan, the A. Q. Khan network, and Iran;
3. Pakistan, which received assistance from North Korea, is unquestioningly assessed by experts as having nuclear-capable short-range missiles;

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<sup>3</sup> Joel S. Wit and Sun Young Ahn, "North Korea's Nuclear Futures: Technology and Strategy," Johns Hopkins University, US–Korea Institute at SAIS, February 2015, <http://38north.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/NKNF-NK-Nuclear-Futures-Wit-0215.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> *Yonhap*, "N. Korea to Have 20 Nuke Bombs by 2016: U.S. Expert," December 10, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2014/12/10/13/0301000000AEN20141210010100315F.html>.

<sup>5</sup> *NBC News*, "China Warns U.S. of North Korea's Rising Nuclear Capabilities: Report," <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/china-warns-u-s-north-korea-could-double-nuke-arsenal-n346761>.

4. The scope and sophistication of the uranium enrichment program revealed to a U.S. scientist;
5. Repeated instances of experts underestimating North Korean nuclear and missile capabilities;
6. North Korean declarations of its ability to hit the U.S. and its allies with nuclear weapons; and
7. Recent U.S. and South Korean government assessments of North Korean breakthroughs.

### **Allied Reassessment of North Korean Capabilities**

In recent years, the United States and South Korea have revised their estimates and now see a more dire North Korean threat. After recovering components of the North Korean long-range missile launched in December 2012, South Korea assessed that it had “a range of more than 10,000 kilometers.”<sup>6</sup> In March 2013, Minister of Defense Kim Kwan-jin told the National Assembly that the missile could have reached the U.S. West Coast.<sup>7</sup> New York and Washington, D.C., are approximately 11,000 km from North Korea.

Following an August 2013 meeting between South Korean Minister of Defense Kim Kwan-jin and U.S. Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, a Ministry of Defense official commented that both countries agreed that North Korea could “miniaturize nuclear warheads small enough to mount on ballistic missiles in the near future.”<sup>8</sup>

In April 2015: General Curtis Scaparrotti, commander of US Forces Korea, testified “I believe [the North Koreans] have had time

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<sup>6</sup> “S. Korea Says Debris Reveals North’s ICBM Technology,” Voice of America, December 23, 2012, <http://www.voanews.com/content/north-korea-missile/1570703.html>.

<sup>7</sup> N. Korea Rocket ‘Could Fly 10,000 km,’ *ChosunIlbo*, April 16, 2012, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2012/04/16/2012041601302.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2012/04/16/2012041601302.html).

<sup>8</sup> Jeong Yong-soo and Kang Jin-kyu, “U.S., Korea See Larger Nuclear Threat,” *JoongAngIlbo*, August 29, 2013, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2976819>.

and capability to miniaturize a nuclear warhead. They have stated that they had had intercontinental missiles.... As a commander, I think, we must assume that they have that capability.”<sup>9</sup>

In April 2015, Admiral Bill Gortney, commander of NORAD, told reporters that the KN-08 road-mobile ICBM “is operational today. Our assessment is that they have the ability to put a nuclear weapon on a KN-08 and shoot it at the [U.S.] homeland.”<sup>10</sup> The South Korean Ministry of National Defense assessed that “North Korea’s nuclear weapon minimization has reached a substantial level, and it has a long-range missile that could be a threat to the continental U.S.”<sup>11</sup>

A South Korean National Assembly member revealed that some of the flight tests of No Dong missiles were flown on a higher trajectory in order to reduce their range to 650 kilometers. As such, a No Dong missile could be used to attack South Korea with a nuclear, chemical, or biological weapon.<sup>12</sup>

### North Korea Threatens Nuclear Attacks

North Korea has repeatedly threatened to use its nuclear arsenal in preemptive attacks against the United States, South Korea, and Japan. In 2013, the regime declared that inter-Korean relations were in a state of war after it revoked the armistice ending the Korean War, all inter-Korean non-aggression agreements, and all previous

<sup>9</sup> Tong Kim, “Military leaders: North nuclear weapons can hit U.S.,” *Korea Times*, April 17, 2015, [http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2015/04/137\\_177255.html](http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/opinion/2015/04/137_177255.html).

<sup>10</sup> Jon Harper, “NORAD Commander: North Korean KN-08 missile operational,” *Stars and Stripes*, April 7, 2015, <http://www.stripes.com/news/norad-commander-north-korean-08-missile-operational-1.338909>.

<sup>11</sup> J.J. Green, “North Korean nuclear weapons threaten U.S. West Coast,” *WTOP*, June 1, 2015, <http://wtop.com/national-security/2015/06/north-korean-nuclear-weapons-threaten-u-s-west-coast/>.

<sup>12</sup> “N. Korea’s Missile Tests Analyzed,” *ChosunIlbo*, November 4, 2014, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2014/11/04/2014110401088.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2014/11/04/2014110401088.html).



North Korean commitments to abandon its nuclear weapons.

The North Korean People's Army warned that "the [South Korean] presidential Blue House and all headquarters of the puppet regime will be targeted. If the South recklessly provokes us again, the sea of fire at Yeonpyeong will turn into a sea of fire at the Blue House."<sup>13</sup> North Korea also threatened to turn Seoul and Washington into "seas of fire" through a "precise nuclear strike."<sup>14</sup>

## INADEQUATE SOUTH KOREAN MISSILE DEFENSE

Despite the growing North Korean threat, successive liberal and conservative South Korean governments resisted deploying adequate missile defense systems and linking its network into a more comprehensive and effective allied BMD framework.

### (Only Low-Level Interceptors)

South Korea is instead developing the independent Korea Air and Missile Defense (KAMD) system, which would consist of only a terminal phase, lower tier land-based Patriot-2 missiles and SM-2 Block IIIA/B missiles deployed on Aegis destroyers without ballistic missile capability. Seoul plans to procure PAC-3 missiles and indignously develop a long-range surface-to-air missile (L-SAM).

### (Resisting an Allied System)

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<sup>13</sup> "N. Korea Threatens to Attack S. Korean Presidential Office," *Dong-A Ilbo*, November 23, 2013, <http://english.donga.com/srv/service.php3?bicode=050000&biid=2013112374388> (accessed April 30, 2015).

<sup>14</sup> Choe Sang-hyun, "North Korea Threatens to Attack U.S. with 'Lighter and Smaller Nukes,'" *The New York Times*, March 5, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/03/06/world/asia/north-korea-threatens-to-attack-us-with-lighter-and-smaller-nukes.html>.

Successive South Korean administrations, including President Park Geun-hye, have resisted joining a comprehensive allied program. In June 2012, Seoul canceled at the last moment the scheduled signing with Japan of a bilateral General Security of Military Information Agreement (GSOMIA), which would have enabled exchanging intelligence on North Korea's nuclear and missile programs.

The agreement would have provided Seoul with access to information collected by Japan's high-tech intelligence satellites, AEGIS ships, and early-warning and anti-submarine aircraft, thus improving South Korean defense against North Korean missiles. But lingering South Korean animosities stemming from Japan's occupation of the Korean Peninsula in the 20th century forced Seoul to cancel the agreement. In December 2014, a modified version of the agreement was signed which allows voluntary passing of intelligence about North Korean ballistic missile and nuclear activities between Japan and South Korea through the U.S. Department of Defense.

## NEED FOR LAYERED MISSILE DEFENSE

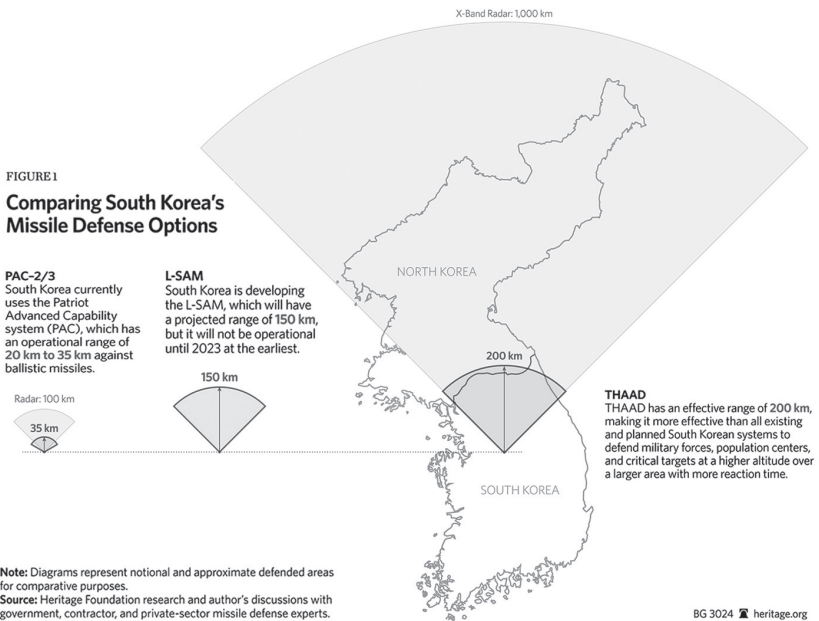
A basic precept of air and missile defense is “mass and mix”—having sufficient interceptors from different systems so that any one system's vulnerabilities are offset by the capabilities of another system. South Korea's insistence on relying on only lower-altitude interceptors will result in smaller protected zones, gaps of coverage that leave fewer Korean citizens protected, and minimal time to intercept a missile—all of which contribute to a greater potential for catastrophic failure.

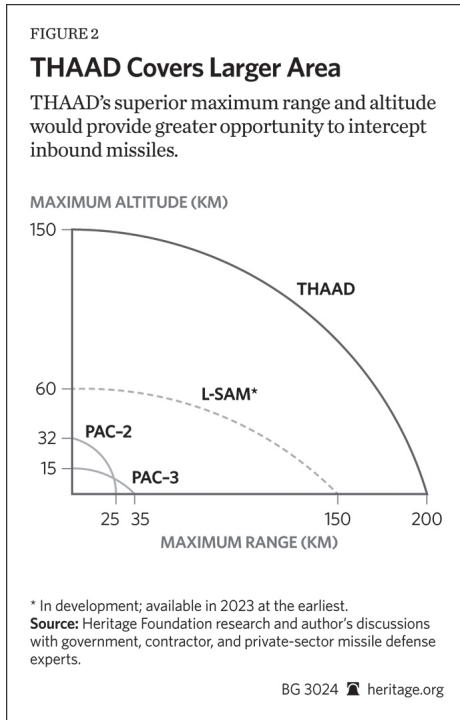
Successfully destroying a high-speed inbound missile requires intercepting it sufficiently far away from the target. The higher the altitude and range of the interceptor, the greater the likelihood of

success. Seoul's insistence on only a last ditch interceptor is like a soccer coach dismissing all of the team's players except the goalie, preferring to rely on only one player to defend against defeat.

The THAAD system is designed to intercept short-range, medium-range, and some intermediate-range ballistic missiles trajectories at higher altitudes in their terminal phase. In conjunction with the Patriot missile system, THAAD would create a multilayered defensive shield for South Korean military forces, population centers, and critical targets.

South Korea's planned indigenous L-SAM would have less altitude and range than THAAD and would not be available for deployment until at least 2023. However, that target date is unlikely since creating a missile defense system is a long, expensive, and difficult process. For example, the THAAD took approximately 30 years for the U.S. to fully develop, test, and field. The THAAD has already been developed, tested (scoring a 100 percent success rate of 11 for 11 successful intercepts), and deployed.



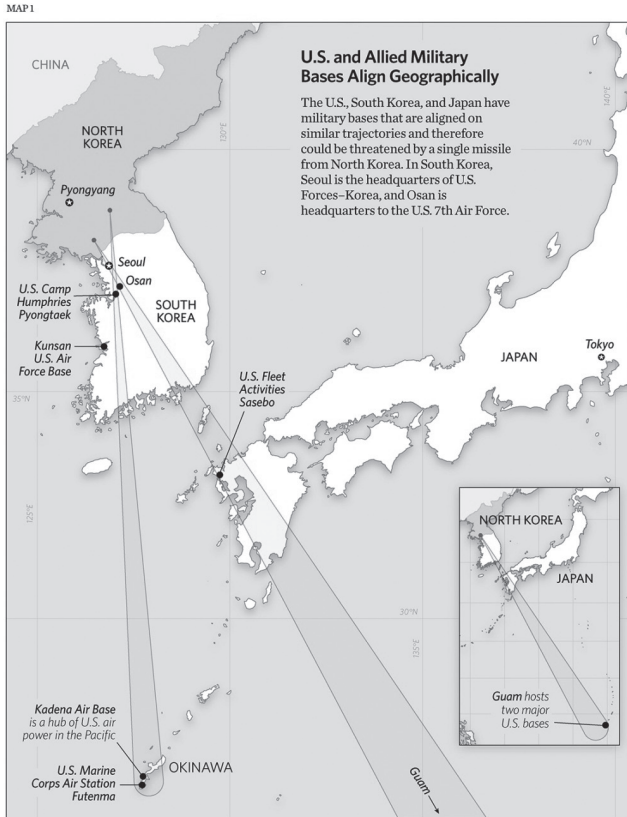


## NEED FOR ALLIED BMD INTEROPERABILITY

Missile defense is most effective when systems are incorporated into a seamless and cohesive network. Linking South Korean, U.S., and Japanese sensors would enable more accurate interceptions by tracking attacking missiles from multiple angles and multiple points throughout the flight trajectory, similar to three outfielders communicating with each other to coordinate catching a fly ball. In the instance of multiple inbound targets, interoperability would allow directing an individual outfielder (or BMD system) to specific targets to enhance success.

South Korea, Japan, and U.S. forces in both countries face a

common threat from North Korean missiles. Military bases of all three countries are aligned along a common azimuth and can be threatened by a single North Korean missile. A common threat should be addressed with an interoperable, multilateral defense.



Source: Heritage Foundation research.

BG 3024 heritage.org

## SOUTH KOREA AVOIDS DEPLOYMENT AND DISCUSSION

Given the increasingly dangerous North Korean threat, it is puzzling that South Korea continues to insist on a less effective defense

of its citizens, resisting even the U.S. deploying its own THAAD to the Korean Peninsula. The Park Geun-hye administration has avoided public debate on THAAD by claiming that there has not been any form of “official” discussion between Seoul and Washington on a critical security issue that is already the subject of heated domestic public and media debate, National Assembly inquiries, and Chinese arm-twisting at the presidential level. South Korean presidential spokesman Min Kyung-wook described Seoul’s position as three no’s: “no [U.S. deployment] request, no consultation, and no decision.”<sup>15</sup>

The Park Administration’s reluctance to even publicly discuss the issue is due to concerns of aggravating Beijing after several senior-level Chinese officials exerted pressure on Seoul. The prevalent South Korean media advice has been for Seoul to neither procure for itself nor allow U.S. deployment of THAAD so as not to offend China.

China has made it clear that it wants South Korea to eschew THAAD:

- In March 2015, China’s Assistant Foreign Minister Liu Jianchao publicly expressed that South Korea and the U.S. should make an “appropriate” decision on THAAD “taking account of China’s concerns and worries.”<sup>16</sup>
- In February 2015, Chinese Minister of Defense Chang Wanquan expressed “concerns” about the possible U.S. deployment of THAAD in South Korea during his talks with Repub-

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<sup>15</sup> Kim Hyo-jin, “Seoul to Begin THAAD Debate,” *The Korea Times*, March 13, 2015, [http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/03/205\\_175175.html](http://koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2015/03/205_175175.html).

<sup>16</sup> “Seoul Must Stand Up to Chinese Pressure over THAAD,” *The ChosunIlbo*, March 17, 2015, [http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html\\_dir/2015/03/17/2015031701802.html](http://english.chosun.com/site/data/html_dir/2015/03/17/2015031701802.html).

lic of Korea Defense Minister Han Min-koo.<sup>17</sup>

- In July 2014, Chinese President Xi Jinping told President Park Geun-hye to “tread carefully”<sup>18</sup> since the deployment of THAAD missiles on the Korean Peninsula went against China’s security interests. Xi asked Park to turn down any U.S. request so it “won’t be a problem between South Korea and China.”<sup>19</sup>
- In May 2014, China’s state-run Xinhua News Agency threatened, “South Korea will sacrifice its fast-developing relations with China if it should be seduced into the [missile] defense network, ignoring the protests of the largest economy in Asia.”<sup>20</sup>

Yet, a majority of the South Korean public supports U.S. deployment of THAAD. A February 2015 JoongAngIlbo poll showed that 56 percent of respondents favored THAAD deployment.<sup>21</sup> An Asan Institute poll revealed 61% support for THAAD and only 20% opposed THAAD.

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<sup>17</sup> Agence France-Press, “China Voices Concern About US Missile Defense in South Korea,” *Defense News*, February 4, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/asia-pacific/2015/02/04/china-voices-concern-us-missile-defense-south-korea/22869879/>.

<sup>18</sup> *Yonhap*, “China’s Xi Asked Park to ‘Tread Carefully’ over U.S. Missile-Defense System,” August 26, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2014/08/26/73/0301000000AEN20140826002100315F.html>.

<sup>19</sup> *Yonhap*, “China’s Xi Asked Park to ‘Tread Carefully’ over U.S. Missile-Defense System,” August 26, 2014, <http://english.yonhapnews.co.kr/national/2014/08/26/73/0301000000AEN20140826002100315F.html>.

<sup>20</sup> Kim Oi-hyun, “Washington and Beijing’s Conflict Growing over Missile Defense,” *The Hankyoreh*, June 9, 2014, [http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english\\_edition/e\\_international/641453.html](http://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/e_international/641453.html).

<sup>21</sup> Lee Ka-Young, Kwon Ho, and Sarah Kim, “More Than Half of Public Supports Use of Thaad,” *Korea JoongAng Daily*, February 25, 2015, <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/Article.aspx?aid=3001196>.

## CHINA'S RED HERRINGS ON THAAD

Beijing claims that THAAD deployment would be against China's security interests, overlooking, of course, that North Korean development of nuclear weapons and missiles—and the repeated threats to use them—go against South Korean and U.S. security interests.

### (THAAD Cannot Intercept Chinese Ballistic Missiles)

While deploying THAAD would improve South Korean defenses against a North Korean attack, it could not intercept Chinese intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) launched against the United States.

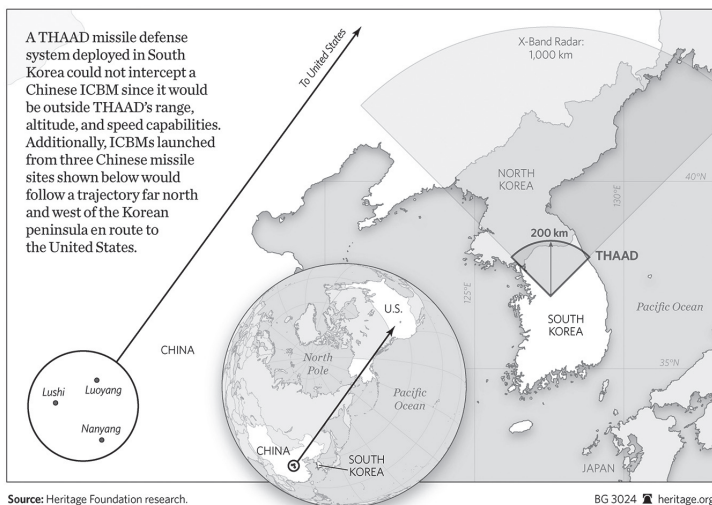
- Chinese ICBM trajectories would exceed THAAD interceptor range, altitude, and speed capabilities. Only ground-based interceptors based in Alaska and California are designed to intercept an ICBM launched from Asia toward the United States.<sup>22</sup>
- THAAD interceptors based in Korea would offer the wrong interception profile. They are designed to attack missiles heading toward the interceptors in the terminal inbound phase, not an outbound ICBM flying away in its boost and mid-range phases.
- THAAD's X-Band radar could not see or track the ICBMs. The radar, which can only see in a 90-degree arc, would be directed at North Korea, not China. Chinese ICBM trajectories would be outside the X-band radar range.

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<sup>22</sup> Ian E. Rinehart, Steven A. Hildreth, and Susan V. Lawrence, "Ballistic Missile Defense in the Asia-Pacific Region: Cooperation and Opposition," *Congressional Research Service Report*, April 3, 2015, <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/nuke/R43116.pdf>.



### THAAD in South Korea Poses No Threat to China's Global Security Interests



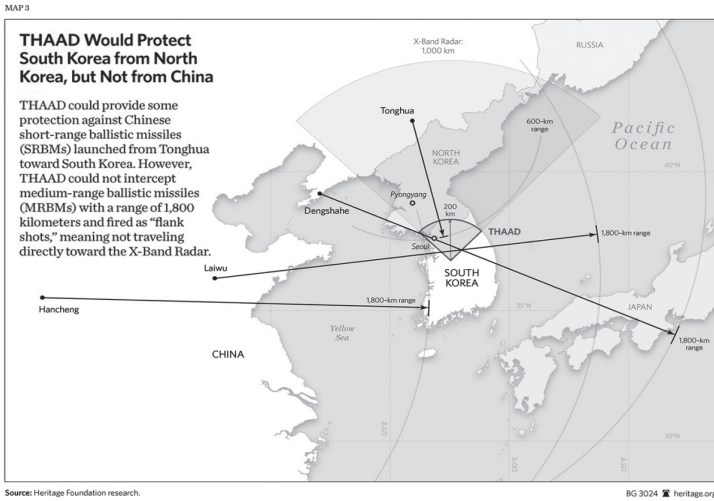
### (THAAD Poorly Positioned Against Chinese Medium-Range Missiles)

Examining the locations of Chinese short-range ballistic missile (SRBM) and medium-range ballistic missile (MRBM) units indicates that THAAD could theoretically help to defend against a Chinese DF-15 SRBM attack on South Korea from Tonghua in northeast China since those missiles would fly along the same trajectory as a missile launched from North Korea. However, the THAAD radar would not be optimized to do more than its assigned task of looking at designated North Korean areas for missile launches.

However, THAAD missiles could not intercept Chinese DF-21 MRBMs launched from Dengsha-he, Laiwu, or Hanchang eastward toward South Korea or Japan. Interceptors have to be deployed in front of the radar, making intercepting a “flank-shot” missile that is not traveling directly toward the radar and interceptors extremely difficult if not impossible.

The THAAD X-Band radar would have minimal, if any, capabilities

to monitor Chinese missiles attacking South Korea or Japan. Shifting the radar toward China would eliminate coverage of North Korea—the primary objective of deploying the THAAD to South Korea.<sup>23</sup>



## IMPLICATIONS OF CHINESE PRESSURE

Deploying THAAD to South Korea would not threaten China in any way. Chinese technical objections are disingenuous. The THAAD deployment issue is a microcosm of the greater North Korea problem. Once again, China has shown itself to be more critical of South Korean reactions than to the precipitating North Korean threats, attacks, and violations. China has again taken Pyongyang’s side over that of Seoul, disregarding South Korea’s legitimate security concerns and fundamental sovereign right to defend itself against an unambiguous danger.

<sup>23</sup> Rinehart et al., “Ballistic Missile Defense in the Asia-Pacific Region.”

Beijing again characteristically pressures Seoul rather than Pyongyang. This is consistent with previous Chinese behavior when it impeded a more effective international response to North Korea's sinking of the South Korean corvette Cheonan, artillery shelling of Yeonpyeong Island, and repeated violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions.

In essence, China wants to exercise a veto over Seoul's defense procurement and national security decisions. China may be Seoul's largest trading partner, but it clearly does not have South Korea's best interests at heart in national security.

## CONCLUSION

The deployment of THAAD on the Korean Peninsula would enhance South Korea's defense against potentially catastrophic nuclear, biological, and chemical attacks and advanced North Korean missile capabilities, would impede Pyongyang's ability to engage in coercive diplomacy, and augment deterrence by reducing the potential of success of a potential North Korean missile strike.

The decision to deploy THAAD is a sovereign right that Seoul should base on national security objectives and the defensive needs of the nation. Seoul should not subordinate the defense of its citizens to economic blackmail by Beijing. Seoul and Washington should make clear to Beijing that pressure tactics would be better applied to its ally North Korea, which has developed nuclear weapons and missiles that have caused South Korea and the U.S. to take appropriate defensive actions.

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# CHALLENGES AT THE CROSSROAD : THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL POLICY IN KOREA

Jongsung Kim

*Bryant University*

## Abstract

Korea's economic recovery after the 1997 Asian financial crisis has been called miraculous by some but it unsheathed the major social challenges that had been neglected for years. Among them were inequalities stemming from the workplace to income disparity, rapidly aging population coupled with low fertility rate and a stagnating labor market. This paper examines the expansion of the Korea's social welfare policies since 1997 and how the Korean government has responded to these challenges amidst the time of economic contraction. It also examines why Korea is continuing to promulgate more social policies in times of deficit and moving toward a more universal welfare state as it attempts to make its own special type of progressive but selectively expansive welfare branding.

**Key words:** Korea's stagnating labor market, Social Policy, Welfare State, Aging, 1997 Asian Financial Crisis

## INTRODUCTION

The rising income inequality, aging population, and stagnating labor market are the major current challenges facing Korea. Despite the fact that Korea transformed from one of the poorest country in the world to the 13th largest economy in 2014 nominal GDP terms <sup>1</sup>, the Korean society and economy have been undergoing a series

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<sup>1</sup> <http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP.pdf> (Accessed in October 15, 2015)

of events that can potentially undermine the country's stability. In the aftermath of the 1997 Asian financial crisis that engulfed the Korean economy in a whirlwind of turmoil and trauma, Korea had to implement a massive industrial restructuring.

To reduce labor costs and promote the flexibility of firms in making business decisions, large scale layoffs followed. A direct consequence was the demise of "lifetime employment" that was implicit and inherent in the Korean corporate culture. In April 2013, Korean National Assembly passed a revision bill that raised the mandatory retirement age to 60<sup>2</sup>. However, it is still a common practice for workers to retire earlier in the corporate culture— as early as in their 40s. Workers sometimes voluntarily retire in the form of so-called "honorary retirement" in exchange of monetary compensation (usually a bonus and advanced salary payment representing a certain period) or involuntarily in the form of "restructuring" by an elimination of the position. When the 1997 Asian financial crisis hit Korea, there was little social safety net to meet the demands of the unemployed. In order to assist these disenfranchised population, the Korean government exerted extra efforts to develop social welfare and insurance programs to meet the soaring demands created by the crisis.

The increasing aging population in Korea has added an extra burden on the already strapped financial resources for social insurance and welfare policy. As the life expectancy in Korea reached 80 in 2014, an average worker who retires at 54 (51 for office workers and 54 for all workers) is likely to face economic difficulties in later life and government has to prepare to meet the demands of their growing aging population. The stagnating labor market and unstable employment system further exacerbate the conditions of already increasing number of people who are structurally unemployed or

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<sup>2</sup> The new revision will take effect from January 2016 for employers with more than 300 employees, while the rest will be affected by the new revision from January 2017.

displaced, and are engaging in either temporary or short-term position where there is no job security.

Against this background, this paper will answer the following two questions. First, how has the Korea's social insurance and welfare policy evolved since 1997 Asian financial crisis? Second, what are current challenges facing Korea?

## **CHALLENGES FACING KOREA AFTER THE 1997 ASIAN FINANCIAL CRISIS**

In order to finance the growing current account deficits, the Korean government adopted a policy of capital account liberalization in 1991 by amending the Foreign Exchange Management Act to induce capital inflows. The government's neglect of adequate prudential financial regulation led to a rise in the Korean financial institutions' short-term foreign currency debt. This eventually led firms and banks to finance long term investment with short term foreign debt. The resultant maturity and currency mismatches along with a weak and not well planned risk management supervision for rapidly expanded financial institutions which grew in numbers and other factors such as the movement of U.S. dollar, bankruptcy of major chaebol<sup>3</sup> groups and the contagious impact of Southeast Asian countries' financial crisis, eventually led Korean government to officially seek an IMF bailout in November 21, 1997 (Kim K 2006).

## **LABOR MARKET TAKES A BEATING LEADING TO RESTRUCTURE AND REFORMS.**

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<sup>3</sup> Korean conglomerates are many family owned companies strongly clustered around one parent company.

The 1997 Asian financial crisis affected Korean economy and society in many aspects. The globalization in general and the labor market reform condition in the IMF bailout package to Korea in particular undermined the economic base of the unionism with corporate management aimed at creating a flexible labor force benefiting the employers. The economic restructuring that Korea implemented to overcome the crisis was based on a renewed commitment to neo-liberalism promoting “privatization, deregulation, cuts in the social budget and the increase in the use of contingent workers with temporary jobs and immigrant labor.”<sup>4</sup> The severity of the crisis felt in Korea was magnified by “capacity-driven policy, loose market discipline and lack of transparency” (Choi & Chung 2002, p.3). Companies were allowed mass layoffs to reduce their labor costs and increase labor market flexibility contributing to the decline in number of regular workers.

The official unemployment rate reached 8.5 percent in the first quarter of 1999 with the number of the unemployed being over 1.7 million. The income distribution became more unequal as the Gini index rose from 0.271 in 1995 to 0.323 in 1999. During the same period, the absolute poverty rate also rose from 9 to 16.4 percent for all urban households in Korea (Yoo 2009). The resultant unemployment from the financial crisis occurred most heavily in construction, trade and manufacturing sectors. Especially hit hard were non-professional workers such as day laborers and workers engaging in service and sales-related occupations. The financial crisis also changed the employment structure by raising the proportion of temporary workers while that of permanent workers declined since the mid-1990s. An increase of irregular or contingent workers who earn much less than regular workers and were denied union membership or welfare benefits, further fragmented the labor force and

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.solidarity-us.org/site/node/435> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

widened the gap of income inequality.

The decline of union membership is also correlated to the fact that while regular workers in large companies and services may enjoy the benefits, contingent workers and employees in smaller companies may not be able to be a part of a union. The tradition of employer-biased policies has not faded away and workers' rights continue to be compromised. Although Korea was in a better place than most other Asian countries in that there was already some form of relatively better social safety network system in place prior to the financial crisis, the system was quite limited leaving many workers ineligible for benefits (Choi & Chung 2012, p. 5).

## WITH THE CRISIS, AN AGING POPULATION INVERTS THE PYRAMID

The aging society is defined as the one where the proportion of population over 65 years is 7 percent of total population. If the proportion is over 14 percent, the society becomes an aged society. Korea became an aging society in 2002 when the proportion of population over 65 years old reached 7.2 percent, and the country is expected to be an aged society in 2020.

From 2004 to 2014, during which the proportion of population over 65 rose from 8.7 to 12.7 percent, the proportion of elderly household, defined as the one where the household head's age is over 65, also rose from 15.2 to 20.1 percent from 2005 to 2014.<sup>5</sup> The improving life expectancy and declining fertility rate in Korea have contributed to its rapid demographic transition into an aging society. The financial difficulties and uncertain employment opportunities

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<sup>5</sup> Statistics of the elderly in 2014: Statistics Korea, 2014. [http://kostat.go.kr/portal/korea/kor\\_nw/2/1/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=330349](http://kostat.go.kr/portal/korea/kor_nw/2/1/index.board?bmode=read&aSeq=330349) (Accessed in October 15, 2015)

also contributed to the substantial decline of marriage rate until early 2000s (Cheon et al. 2013) which also contributed to lower fertility.

The rapid speed of the transformation from an aging to aged society is quite remarkable when it is compared with that of France (115 years), the United States (71 years), and Japan (24 years).<sup>6</sup> With this trend, Korea expects to become the 2nd oldest society after Japan in 2050 (Pew Research Center 2014). According to the OECD data, the share of the total public expenditure on old-age population to GDP in Korea was 1.9 percent in 2009, while the shares in Japan, the U.S. and the OECD average were 8.8 percent, 6.0 percent, and 6.8 percent respectively.<sup>7</sup> Korea has expanded its aging-related public expenditure from mere 0.6 percent of GDP in 1995, but still the 2009 level is comparable to the bottom two OECD countries: 1.4 percent for Mexico and 1.7 percent for Iceland. The rapid aging process in Korea will lead to the shortage of labor supply of younger workers and the surplus of older retirees most of whom will need support from their society and the government. This will mount another fiscal and financial difficulty on government and society.

The elderly poverty rate in Korea – share of elderly households earning less than half of the median income – rose from 44.6 percent in 2007 to 48.6 percent in 2012, ranking the highest among the OECD countries.<sup>8</sup> The share of total social expenditure to GDP in Korea was 9.2 percent in 2010, while those in Japan, the United States and the OECD average were 22.3 percent, 19.8 percent, and 22.2 percent respectively.<sup>9</sup>

Although the average Korean workers leave employment at age

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<sup>6</sup> [http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/070321\\_gai\\_agingkorea\\_eng.pdf](http://csis.org/files/media/isis/pubs/070321_gai_agingkorea_eng.pdf) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>7</sup> <http://stats.oecd.org/> (Accessed in October 15, 2015). Switzerland is not included due to missing data.

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.ytn.co.kr/\\_ln/0102\\_201311181813164991\\_004](http://www.ytn.co.kr/_ln/0102_201311181813164991_004) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>9</sup> Turkey is not included due to missing data.

54, they still continue to engage in part-time or low-wage employment until the age of 68 before retiring completely. Between the increasing life expectancy and early retirement ages, Korean workers are facing longer time in retirement (National Institute on Aging 2007). For many older workers who involuntarily retire before the National Pension System (NPS) kicks in, there is no alternative but continue to find other employment opportunities to earn a living.<sup>10</sup>

## EFFECT OF AGING AND LABOR MARKET CHANGES ON INCOME INEQUALITY

Korea has been regarded as a country with relatively even income distribution prior to 1998. Such lack of income inequality may be partly due to the effectiveness of the labor unions. From late 1980s and into the 1990s prior to the financial crisis, labor movement played pivotal roles in winning important social protections in Korea (Lee and Jeon, 2009). During the same period, wages also rose significantly. The average level of wage in 1989 was twice as high as that of 1985, and the wage level for all industries rose 61 percent from 1989 to 1992. The similar trend of rapid wage rise continued until the financial crisis (Ahn 2013, p.81). However, the 1997 Asian financial crisis with globalization has undermined the strength of these unionized regular workers by replacing them with contingent workers (Park and Mah 2011).

In the process of restructuring, the companies were reshaped from maximizing assets on their portfolio to maximizing profits as a priority agenda. Accordingly, Korean companies began to actively outsource labor to countries with cheaper labor. This process especially impacts the unskilled workers who are more likely to be dis-

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.oecd.org/employment/emp/33906935.pdf> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

placed further creating income polarization (Park and Mah, 2011). In sum, the overall effect of the 1997 Asian financial crisis on Korea was a rise in unemployment, a decrease in wages for unskilled workers and the increase of part time and irregular workers which also contributed to widening income gap. These issues still persist in the Korean labor market today.

## **SOCIAL POLICIES : BIRTH OF NOT UNIVERSAL BUT A LIBERAL CAPITALIST WELFARE SYSTEM IN KOREA**

A welfare state usually refers to a concept of system whereby the government plays a central role in contributing to the well-being or taking care of its citizens, especially those in financial or social need, by means of grants, pensions, and other benefits. In Korea, although the institutional legacies such as “enterprise unionism, the plurality voting system, and chaebol-dominated economy” (Yang 2013, p.470) have prevented the country from developing into a welfare state, the urgent needs stemming from the financial crisis have forced the government to allocate a larger portion of the budget for welfare programs.

After the democratic breakthrough in 1987, Korea witnessed an explicit politicization of welfare agenda. Active civil social welfare movements were organized to protest to reform the distributional inequalities and drawbacks in the public welfare system (Ringgen et al.2011). For example, the People’s Solidarity for Participatory Democracy, a non-governmental organization, was established in 1994 and has actively advocated its pro-welfare agenda, especially regarding inequality and distribution. The growth of Korean economy changed its industrial structure of productivity-driven model to a more sophisticated one. Accordingly, the government responded



by enacting labor-related policies such as Basic Employment Act in 1993. The Employment Insurance System (EIS) was also introduced in 1995 as the “main pillar of the social safety net” (Martin and Torres 2000, p.281).

In 1998, tripartite talk(s) among the government, employer, and workers was designed to mend the strained labor-management relationship mainly caused by the large-scale layoffs from the corporate restructuring. A social agreement was adopted by the Korea Tripartite Commission to overcome the difficulties driven by the financial crisis. The agreement turned out to be a catalyst not only for economic revitalization but also for enhancing the labor position by granting trade unions to also participate in political activities, thus helping to expand the workers’ rights. The agreement also allowed redundancy dismissal system and the workers dispatch system, thereby raising the flexibility in the labor market.

President Kim Dae-jung took office in the brink of the 1997 Asian Financial crisis. Because the government had to facilitate massive layoffs to increase the labor market flexibility, it was urgent for the new administration to prepare for the consequences arising from the sudden creation of financially-strapped people. In 1998, the poverty rate for urban household rose to 16.1 percent from 7.3 percent in 1997 (Yoo 2009). With the national budget plunging to -4.4 percent of the GDP and significant increase in income inequality, economic measures to reform and deregulate with transparency was not enough – it had to be in conjunction with an overhaul of the social policy reforms (Yang 2000). Under the Kim Dae-jung administration, the welfare spending (government budget for social security, medical and unemployment benefits) spiked to 10.9 percent in 1998 in their total national budget from the previous year’s 6.5 percent, which was still less than 2 percent of the GNP (Kim Y 2006; Kwon S 2001).

The so called “Productive Welfare” was one of the principles governing democracy and market capitalism during Kim Dae-jung

administration (Choi Y 2012) to deal with the consequences from the financial crisis and to implement social policy reforms. At the center of the reform lies the establishment of the “Productive Welfare State,” that expanded the coverage and the benefits of the four major public insurance schemes. The four major public insurances, obligatory for full-time workers, still in effect today are: national pension, health insurance, employment insurance, workers’ accident compensation insurance.<sup>11</sup>

The Korean National Pension Service (NPS) was set up in 1987 to provide Korean Nationals with income security and promote welfare by providing pension benefits in old age or in the event of disability or death. The NPS covers all employees, employers and the self-employed.<sup>12</sup> The employment insurance system (EIS) was introduced in 1995 for businesses with more than 30 full-time employees. The coverage has expanded since then and now includes all businesses with one or more employees. As of October 2013, the coverage rate of employment insurance for wage workers is 68.4 percent (73.6 percent for male and 61.5 percent for female) and 97 percent for regular workers.<sup>13</sup>

Although the Health Insurance Law was enacted in 1963 in Korea, the Workplace Health Insurance was introduced in 1977 for businesses with more than 500 employees. In 1989, the coverage has expanded to include all Korean nationals except those who are protected by other similar coverage. The merge of more than 370 separate health insurance unions under the single system through the National Health Insurance Act in 1999 also contributed to improve the social safety net since the new system was more inclusive

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<sup>11</sup> Employers are required to pay entire amount of the payment for workers’ accident compensation insurance.

<sup>12</sup> [http://english.nps.or.kr/jsppage/english/about/about\\_05.jsp](http://english.nps.or.kr/jsppage/english/about/about_05.jsp) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>13</sup> The current status of social insurance participation in Korea (Statistics Korea, 2014).

and redistributive.

The comprehensive coverage for all citizens was also upheld by the judiciary. In 2000, the Constitutional Court of Korea opined that the government's assistance in health insurance premium for the low-income subscribers was merely fulfilling its social obligation to provide the health insurance benefits to the socially and economically disadvantaged.<sup>14</sup> This means the transition in to a universal health care system where all citizens are entitled to access medical care regardless of their social or income status, thus making the health care a social and common good in Korea.

Under the Kim Dae-jung administration, the public assistance program was also thoroughly overhauled. The prime example is the establishment of the National Basic Livelihood Security System (NBLSS) in 1999 to guarantee the minimum standard of living regardless of age or capability to work. The introduction of the NBLSS, providing cash and in-kind assistance to eligible families, was path breaking because the government for the first time recognized the state's responsibility to guarantee every citizen's right to a decent living (Lee-Gong 2011). The NBLSS was a step toward a more universal welfare system from a conservative one because the new system based the eligibility solely on income while decoupling from the previous labor market attachment criterion (Peng 2009).

Social insurances (health, pension and unemployment) were also expanded to cover the entire working population following the western models of contributory social insurance costs by both employer and employees (Yang 2013). Further, although the firms wanted to abolish the retirement allowance - a lump-sum payments upon retirement, fierce resistance from the labor organization led to a compromise in 2005 to establish a company or occupational pension system in place (Chung 2014). The Kim Dae-jung admin-

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.lawnb.com/lawinfo/link\\_view.asp?cid=63BE43034C614ED1A136DCD571C31184](http://www.lawnb.com/lawinfo/link_view.asp?cid=63BE43034C614ED1A136DCD571C31184) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

istration was able to make giant leaps toward progressive welfare policies not only in response to Korea's economic scheme but also because he had been a political underdog all his life. Unlike his predecessors, Kim Dae-jung, characterizing his administration as the Government of the People, was able to use the financial crisis to propel his welfare policy expansion. In such economic and social hard times, his progressive left wing partisan liners went head on to combat the crisis.

After the Kim administration, another progressive five year tenure followed by another left wing liberal Roh Moo-hyun from the same party. During the Roh administration, welfare policies could not have expanded with such force and liberal characteristics if the policies were promulgated just for economic productiveness and social reform minded civic groups were not present. Roh Moo-hyun's government essentially inherited Kim Dae-jung's principles and aimed for "a social investment state" (Choi Y 2012, p.281) by improving social services and enhancing human capital investment.

By 2003, income disparity has become a central issue of concern in Korea. The advancement of "neo-liberalistic globalization" (Kim Y H 2013, p.20) brought the onset of problems and the new administration was faced with increased poverty and social polarization with low birth rate and aging that could shake the entire welfare system. Roh Moo-hyun administration marks an era where "economic and social policy interlock is most evident" and shifting from "economy first, welfare later" to "economic growth with welfare" (Peng 2009, p. 11). In that policy stance, economic productiveness and labor market flexibility are counterbalanced by expanded social security and welfare system. Further, government subsidized elderly and child care are seen as social policies that have support functions for economic growth (Peng 2009).

Departing from his predecessor, Roh Moo-hyun's welfare reform was presented as a social investment in people to stimulate economic growth (Park 2011). While he expanded the social programs he in-

herited from the Kim administration, both his government and welfare system have been characterized as one of “participation” where a balanced nation was achieved through a participatory democracy (Kim Y 2013, p. 9). His social welfare system was decentralized, giving regional autonomy with an expansion in social services. During his tenure, Roh administration managed to outspend all his predecessors’ welfare expenditures (Park 2011). Undoubtedly, under both Kim and Roh administrations, universal and institutional welfare expanded in critical areas. However, the welfare system that was set in motion was hardly an all-encompassing institutionalized system like the Nordic nations where the government is the primary provider of all social services. The Korean welfare scheme has in place the theme of self-reliance and autonomy, characteristics that are found in residual welfare. In order to promote the participatory welfare and to improve the quality of life, the Roh administration introduced a series of residual welfare policies which emphasized “family-oriented independence, self-support, and diligence” (Park 2011, p. 24).

Regardless, there were undeniable progressive social welfare policies especially for single parents and women. In 2005, burden of paying maternity leave shifted from employers to state and social insurance to lessen discrimination for women. In 2006, a parental leave legislation was implemented for more equitable care of children between men and women as well as Affirmative Action legislation to protect women from discrimination in the workforce. In 2005, Mother-father-children Welfare Act was in effect extending child care, high school tuition assistance for children, housing assistance and vocational support to both single mothers and fathers. The Act is a spinoff from the Self Reliance Programs for people who receive income assistance from the NBLSS, in particular, to aid single mothers to go back into the workforce (Peng, 2009). Another important policy initiative enacted by the Rho administration which became effective in 2008, was the pension reforms and in-

insurance policy for the elderly. They were Elderly Care Insurance, a long term care for people over 65 and also for those under 65 who suffered from age related illness (Kwon S 2009) and the Basic Old-age Pension.<sup>15</sup>

With the social welfare system well on its way and now a part of the fabric of Korean social policy, Lee Myung-bak's conservative government followed in 2008 with the policy of "positive welfare" which had substantially the same meaning as the those of more liberal predecessors Kim and Roh (Choi Y 2012). Social reforms under Lee Myung-bak has been characterized as "Market centered neo-liberal welfare" (Kim Y H 2013, p. 19). During his term, Lee continued his predecessor's Long Term Care Insurance and Basic Old-age Pension programs. Although Lee was known as a conservative, the welfare programs did not contract during his tenure. According to the OECD, the average social expenditure under Lee Myung-bak administration was 9.3 percent of GDP from 2009 to 2013, which is higher than 5.3 percent in 2000 during Kim Dae-jung's tenure and 6.9 percent in 2005 during Roh Moo-hyun's tenure.<sup>16</sup> There were two notable social programs that were implemented (other than continuing and expanding previous administrations' social programs) during Lee Myung-bak's administration. First, in July of 2010, Pension System for Disabled was enacted for approximately 260,000 people with serious disabilities. Second, infant care service was provided for working single parents also in 2010.<sup>17</sup>

Park Guen-hye who took the presidential office in 2013 ran on a platform with promises of "welfare without tax hikes" and "permanent retirement pension for the elderly." In her inaugural speech,

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<sup>15</sup> <http://web.yonsei.ac.kr/shpark/contents/Park&Osawa%282013%2905.pdf> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>16</sup> [http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX\\_AGG](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX_AGG) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Economic Policy Successes since 2008. At [http://english.mosf.go.kr/pdf/policy\\_focus\\_MB3yr.pdf](http://english.mosf.go.kr/pdf/policy_focus_MB3yr.pdf) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

she represented that social welfare will be a national priority.<sup>18</sup> Due to funding shortages, Park has not been able to make good on her promises and she is now considering not only reprioritizing her welfare policies but also raising taxes.<sup>19</sup> With the world's economy generally in stagnation, the growth of the economy to raise tax revenue (which is ideal) is not a likely scenario at this moment. The realities that face the Park administration is that she must renege on her campaign promises especially regarding raising taxes since she cannot implement new social welfare policies without funds.

This is not to suggest that Park administration has cut back on social welfare programs that are in effect or the social welfare programs remain dormant. In 2013, Welfare of the Aged Act (first enacted in 1981 and amended in 1997 and again in 2007 to promote the "health and welfare of the aged" to include the Long-Term Care Insurance for Senior Citizens) was further amended to relieve some of the burdens on families who take care of incapacitated elderly people with support services and to provide better living conditions and security for those elderly who cannot take care of themselves. Approximately 70 percent of seniors began to receive monthly government subsidies ranging from 100,000 to 200,000 won from July 2014 July.

With a longer life expectancy and weaker employment prospects of the elderly which also has contributed to the rise in elderly poverty, Korean government policy initiatives offer numerous solutions including job opportunities for the elderly.

Some critics argue that aging population, income disparity and fiscal deficits are some of the reasons that Korea's tax codes have to be revisited. They argue that the government is too lenient with

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<sup>18</sup> <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/park-geun-hyes-troubled-year/> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2014/05/11/business/s-koreas-economy-elderly/#.VCITYRawTQ9> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

corporate taxes while putting more tax burdens on the working class when proposing to put tax levies on cigarettes and vehicles. What these new proposed taxes reflect is the dire conditions of local governments that have been experiencing financial difficulties stemming from the expansion of generous welfare policies such as free school meals (approximately 70 percent of elementary, middle and high school students), free childcare and the basic old-age pension. What critics propose instead is an expansion of income taxes so those with high incomes and assets like the conglomerates would pay more taxes.<sup>20</sup> These suggested tax reforms also come at a time when Park's administration has been criticized for reneging on her campaign promise to rein in the conglomerates that interfere with fair competition in the marketplace.<sup>21</sup> Budget deficits, together with a surge in spending needs and the declining tax revenue due to stagnating economy, are clear signs that it will be more difficult for the Korean government to implement and expand the social policies coverage at least in the near future. For instance, due to the insufficient budget, President Park Geun-hye's presidential election pledge to unconditionally pay a 200,000 won old-age basic pension to all senior over 65 was not fulfilled, which left the old-age pension at the center of political debate.

## WHAT IS THE FUTURE OF KOREA'S SOCIAL WELFARE REFORMS AND CHALLENGES?

The family cohesion and support that has been underlying principle of the Korean welfare regime may see its last days. According

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<sup>20</sup> [http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2014/09/488\\_165050.html](http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/biz/2014/09/488_165050.html) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>21</sup> <http://thediplomat.com/2014/01/park-geun-hyes-troubled-year/> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).



to the report by the Ministry of Health and Welfare in 2009, less than 30 percent of adult children live with their elderly parents in 2008 compared to 80 percent in the 1980s (Choi 2012). The rapid expansion of the social welfare program as previously cited by the OECD statistics may be a result of this change. And moving away from family responsibility is further attributed to the fact that as Korea's fertility rate fell to the lowest level in the developed world,<sup>22</sup> and Korea is expected to be an aged society by 2020.

While Korea is unlikely to transform into a complete or universal welfare society where the government is the primary social provider, rapid growth rate in welfare spending indicate that traditional views deeply rooted in their Confucian culture, for example, filial piety toward the elderly, are changing. Despite the fact that Confucianism has dictated certain moral ethics, it also has been used in the past as a “political rhetoric” (Choi 2012, p.277) when East Asian governments had little resources to pay for and expand social policy. Taking care of the elderly, health care and job prosperity are no longer viewed just as a personal burden but rather a national burden and a social good in the long run. Korea's welfare assistance program NBLSS has been criticized because the “family responsibility rule” sometimes led to the benefit loss of the needy families if the household income is higher than the eligibility level.

Although Confucianism may be used as a backdrop to understand certain aspects of the East Asian welfare system, especially the influence of strong family networking and support, the cultural divergence, intent behind the social policy and economic crisis that triggers development of each country may better explain the extent of the social welfare system in East Asia and why Korea, in particular, has become a pro-welfare state with “strong liberal characteristics” (Choi 2012, p.291).

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<sup>22</sup> <http://www.ft.com/intl/cms/s/0/3be6ec40-4dd4-11e2-9e71-00144feab49a.html#axzz3EfUsNQUV> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

## CHALLENGES AHEAD

When one examines the national budget and the GDP share of expenditures on social welfare, the wealthiest nations do not necessarily spend the highest percentage of their GDP or budget on social welfare (see U.S. as an example).<sup>23</sup> The highest spenders on social welfare reforms are Nordic nations where policy makers have a strong intent behind it to drive the Universalist social welfare reform as a priority agenda. Thus, it is not the wealth of the nation that drives the strong social welfare policy but the reform minded policy makers in sync with the nation who are ready to embrace the change to progressive social welfare policy reforms.

Although the financial crisis preceded the reforms, Korean welfare reforms would not have come about without policy makers who had the nation's sentiment. These two factors— prioritization by policy makers and people's consensus - must take the front seat before the money can be spent. This may be the explanation behind the dramatic shift to the liberal welfare reforms of Korea following the Asian financial crisis.

### **KOREA'S PROBLEMS RECUR IN OTHER NATIONS : WHAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM SUCCESSFUL MODELS?**

The globalization process that usually comes with modernization contributes to the decline in status of the older population in a society since they are likely to lack the skills to compete in the rapidly developing labor markets. The elderly in Korea face difficulties

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<sup>23</sup> [http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX\\_AGG](http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=SOCX_AGG) (Assessed in October 15, 2015).

stemming from economic insecurity: first, insufficient economic means due to the lack of employment and overspending on their children; and second, rising health care cost resulting from the lengthier life span.

Growing elderly population and low birth rate, increase of part time and static workers including immigrant workers, increased poverty, unemployment, and income inequality are not problems that are isolated to Korea. The recent changes in social policy especially in Korea, Japan and in some extent in China have been created to counter the rapid aging population and low fertility rate (Choi 2012) which will reduce the vibrant workforce a country needs to stay competitive in the international market. Korea's low birth rate has even outpaced Japan, where adult diapers outsell baby diapers due to having the fastest aging population in the world.<sup>24</sup> Both Japan and Korea addressed this issue by forming social policies giving incentives to have more children.<sup>25</sup>

A growing aging population force would require a larger share of the welfare budget in health, pension and public assistance. While China's single party system may impede a more progressive welfare programs that comes from party competition, in democratic countries, constraints of a limited national budget in hard economic times and reluctance of citizens to shell out their money in taxes for social programs become a problem in multi-party systems. Thus, it is not surprising that during elections, "no tax raise" is an attractive campaign slogan in multi-party systems.

Korea's social policies are borrowed from Western countries much like that of the U.S. with pension, health care, unemployment, industrial injuries (similar to workmen's compensation) and

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.canadianbusiness.com/economy/south-korea-is-headed-for-big-trouble-its-only-hope-is-immigration/> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>25</sup> Sōma Naoko. "South Korea's Explicit Family Policy and Japan's Implicit Approach." At <http://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a01003/> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

public assistance. Other programs include child and elderly care, free meals for school children and long-term care insurance. Such expansion of welfare policies, some argue, is motivated by civic movements and pro-welfare politicians whose goals are not just in response to economic productivity (Choi 2012).

While Korea most likely will not be turning into a complete universal welfare system where the state is the primary provider of all social services, there are some aspects that not only Korea but Asia in general can learn from other countries, in particular, the Nordic welfare system. The Nordic system, although there are variances among Nordic countries, combines free market economy with social welfare system.<sup>26</sup> Korea seems to be closer to the U.S. system where free market capitalism is ultra competitive with high levels of income inequality with a wide gap and selective welfare system for it to be known as “cut-throat capitalism”.<sup>27</sup> Nordic countries, on the other hand, are free market countries “with sustained egalitarian distribution of incomes, high levels of employment, extremely low rates of poverty, and public sector provision of income and health insurance as well as of high levels of social services”<sup>28</sup> and consequently among the highest scorers on the 2013 World Happiness Report.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Sōma Naoko. “South Korea’s Explicit Family Policy and Japan’s Implicit Approach.” At <http://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/a01003/> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>27</sup> <http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/politicsandpolicy/lower-levels-of-inequality-are-linked-with-greater-innovation-in-economies/> (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.bi.edu/FellesFiles/06-2-Hagen\\_Sitter.pdf](http://www.bi.edu/FellesFiles/06-2-Hagen_Sitter.pdf) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

<sup>29</sup> [http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/WorldHappinessReport2013\\_online.pdf](http://unsdsn.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/WorldHappinessReport2013_online.pdf) (Accessed in October 15, 2015).

## CONCLUSION

Major social challenges Korea have faced after the 1997 Asian financial crisis are stagnating labor market, aging population, and the rising income inequality. Although these three issues are seemingly separated from one another, they are closely intertwined. From its rapidly aging society to low fertility rate and other issues such as immigration are expected to raise the already rising trend of welfare budget even faster in Korea. Although the Korean welfare policy has become increasingly progressive and expansive and in some areas even universal, there is an inherently conservative or residual aspect about Korea's social policy system that keeps it from being totally institutionalized, i.e., an individual must diligently expend his efforts toward self-sufficiency. This participatory system of welfare where the government consistently expands to address the needs of the people but supports with a firm hand is the marking of the Korean social welfare brand.

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# INDIA AS A NATION OF CONSEQUENCE IN ASIA : THE POTENTIAL AND LIMITATIONS OF INDIA'S 'ACT EAST' POLICY

**Lavina Lee**

*Macquarie University*

## **Abstract**

This paper will look at India's likely role in Asia under the leadership of Narendra Modi. It first outlines the historical basis for the Look East Policy and the objectives pursued by earlier governments. Second, it analyses the economic, diplomatic and security objectives and strategies pursued by more recent Indian governments to deepen relations in Asia, and seeks to explain why the region has largely embraced Indian partnership. Finally, it analyses the main factors that impede an expansion of India's economic and strategic role in the region.

The paper argues that whilst India's economic integration in the region has improved, its potential has yet to be realised. The greatest scope for an expanded role for India is clearly in terms of its capacity to play a soft-balancing role to manage the rise of China. India could assist other strategic players by exerting additional costs and constraints on China to discourage behaviour that disrupts and undermines the normative and strategic basis of Asia's regional order. However, I conclude that India's own strategic culture may be the greatest impediment to it playing this role.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Six months after taking office in May 2014, India's newly elected Prime Minister, Narendra Modi addressed the 12th India-ASEAN Summit and declared: "a new era of economic development, industrialization and trade has begun in India. Externally, India's 'Look East Policy' has become 'Act East Policy'" (MEA 2014). Whilst it

was unclear at the time exactly what ‘acting East’ was to mean, it marked the next phase in what is thought to be one of India’s most successful foreign policy initiatives. The Look East Policy was launched in 1994 at a time when India was in economic crisis and bereft of powerful friends. In looking East India realized that it needed to look beyond the confines of South Asia, where it was often viewed with suspicion by its smaller neighbors, to the emerging centre of the world economy. Whilst the first phase of the Look East policy was primarily focused on economic and institutional relations with the countries of ASEAN, the second phase took on an expanded definition of ‘East’ to include Japan, South Korea and Australia, and took on a much more strategic flavor.

Whilst initially strategic engagement focused primarily on naval cooperation in terms of disaster relief, counter-terrorism activities and protection of sea-lanes for trade, India has increasingly been viewed by major states in the region and elsewhere as a nation of consequence that has the potential to play an important role in maintaining regional stability. As the world’s largest multi-ethnic, liberal democracy, committed to a policy of non-intervention in the affairs of other states, and no direct conflicts with Asian states, India is viewed as a benign power that is willing to support the existing rules of the road. This expectation – or hope – has become more pronounced as China’s growing confidence has resulted in heightened tensions in the South China and East China Seas, and direct competition between China and the United States and its allies has begun to more clearly emerge in the Asia-Pacific.

With the Modi government continuing to emphasize the importance of its economic and strategic relations in Asia, and committing to ‘act’ more ambitiously to further these interests, this paper will focus on the potential role India will play in Asia including any factors that may limit its ambitions. It first outlines the historical basis for the Look East Policy and the objectives pursued by earlier governments. Second, it analyses the economic, diplomatic and se-

curity objectives and strategies pursued by more recent Indian governments to deepen relations in Asia, and seeks to explain why the region has largely embraced Indian partnership. Finally, it analyses the main factors that impede an expansion of India's economic and strategic role in the region. The paper will argue that whilst India's economic integration in the region has improved, its potential has yet to be realized. The greatest scope for an expanded role for India is clearly in terms of its capacity to play a soft-balancing role to manage the rise of China. India could assist other strategic players by exerting additional costs and constraints on China to discourage behavior that disrupts and undermines the normative and strategic basis of Asia's regional order. However, I argue that India's own strategic culture may be the greatest impediment to it playing this role.

## THE HISTORICAL BASIS OF INDIA'S 'LOOK EAST' POLICY

Historically, India has long exerted a considerable cultural influence over East and Southeast Asia as the birthplace of Buddhism. The British used India as the main strategic base for its colonial presence in the rest of Asia (Muni 2011, 4) making India highly integrated with the region's economy. In the period after gaining independence however, after a promising start, India soon became largely isolated and inward focused. Upon gaining independence in 1947, India's new leaders sought to re-set Indian foreign policy to achieve a number of aims: to distinguish the nation's foreign policy from that of its colonial masters; to assert a leadership role in the international system – despite its developmental challenges – based on India's size and civilizational legacy; and to preserve the country's new found autonomy despite growing pressure to do otherwise. In the inter-war period, Indian nationalist leaders such as

Mahatma Gandhi promoted the idea of a common Asian identity in opposition to the West based on ideals of non-violence, Hindu and Buddhist spirituality, anti-materialism, and communal solidarity over individualism. It was thought that this identity could then be drawn upon to unite the region in the common quest for colonial liberation under Indian leadership (Jaffrelot 2003, 39-41).

In Nehru's view, India's size and cultural influence over Asia (through the spread of Hinduism and later Buddhism) gave it standing to lead Asia. More than that, India was obligated to use its capacity as the first Asian state to achieve liberation to assist other Asian states to do the same. To achieve these aims, India asserted for itself a leadership role in major diplomatic meetings focused on anti-colonialism such as the Conference on Asian Relations in March 1947, the 1949 Conference on Indonesia in New Delhi and the 1955 Bandung Conference of the non-aligned countries (Malone 2011, 201).

From this point on however, New Delhi's broader pan-Asian ambitions were diverted by the imperatives of the deepening Cold War and unanticipated problems with its immediate neighbors. Whilst the official guiding principle of India's foreign policy was non-alignment, staying aloof from one or other the super-power blocs proved to be more difficult to achieve in practice. After formally recognizing China's sovereignty over Tibet in the Sino-India Panchashila Agreement in 1954, and lobbying for China's admission to the UN, Prime Minister Nehru was caught off-guard by China's invasion of its northeastern border areas in 1962. India's military defeat there changed Indian views about the intentions of Chairman Mao, the prospects for pan-Asian solidarity and spurred a greater emphasis internally on the importance of developing strong military capabilities. India was disappointed with the United States lack of support during this episode, and after the Sino-Soviet split of the 1960s, India began an arms relationship with the Soviet Union, and the two countries signed the Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation

in 1971 which included obligations to support one another in the event of an attack by a third party. The Soviet's proved the worth of this treaty in the Bangladesh liberation war by warding off Chinese involvement on Pakistan's side, vetoing US-sponsored UN resolutions aimed at supporting Pakistan, and sending two nuclear powered submarines to the Bay of Bengal in response to the dispatch of USS Enterprise (Lee 2014, 126; Bakshi 1999, 108; Duncan 1989, 20). Other Asian states were also unable to stay aloof from the pressures to align with one or other superpower. India did not join the South-east Asian Treaty Organization founded in 1954, which it viewed as a tool of the United States, and later assessed the Association of Southeast Asian Nations created in 1967 in the same vein.

As Asia divided on Cold War lines, India's ability to exert leadership in the region based on a common Asian identity fell away and so did its economic connection with the region. This was exacerbated by New Delhi's domestic commitment to developing a semi-socialist economy, that is, an economy which had capitalist elements but was also moderated by the communal ownership of resources, a heavy reliance on state-owned enterprises in important sectors such as banking and manufacturing, extensive subsidization of important goods and services and a focus on developing self-sufficiency in production.

These features meant that India's economy was inward focused and thus became marginalized from the boom in trade and investment between Asia's maritime countries such as Japan, South Korea, Singapore and Malaysia. In terms of external trade and investment, between 1964 and 1985, the Soviet Union and India had a strong economic relationship: India was the largest non-communist recipient of Soviet aid, and its largest trading partner in the developing world (Duncan 1989, 3). As a consequence of these policies, for almost four decades after independence, India suffered from what many derogatively termed the 'Hindu rate of growth' – where per capita GDP growth per year averaged about 1.3%.

The collapse of the Soviet Union created the impetus for a dramatic change of approach strategically and economically towards the world, including Asia. In 1991, India was hit with a serious balance of payments crisis. With the Soviet/Russian economy and political system in disarray, India effectively lost its major diplomatic benefactor, arms supplier and largest trading partner. Between 1990 and 1995 trade volumes between the Soviet Union/Russia and India plunged from US\$4.2 billion to US\$2.2 billion, declining further to US\$1.6 billion by 1997–98 (Lee 2014, 127). Even then, India's economy was also very inwardly focused, with only 11% of GNP coming from trade in 1988-89. This meant that the 21.9% rise in the cost of imported oil during the 1990-1991 Gulf Crisis had a magnified effect on the balance of trade. This led to a downgrade in India's international credit rating, and by June 1991, India only had enough foreign exchange reserves to cover two weeks worth of imports. To avoid a default the IMF granted India a loan for US \$1.8 billion (Hakkip 2011, 242).

This serious economic crisis provided a political space for meaningful economic reform that created the basis for economic engagement with Asia. Under the leadership of Prime Minister Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh a series of market oriented economic reforms were undertaken to make it more open to trade and investment and ultimately more competitive. Singh and others looked at India's years of commitment to a centralized planned economy as a wasted opportunity, with the tiger economies of East Asia lauded as a model to emulate. In this phase of liberalization the goal of import substitution was abandoned, and the private sector was given room to grow as the state's control over various sectors of the economy through a complex array of licenses, quotas, permits and other regulations was gradually loosened (Lee 2009, 6). The rupee was floated in 1993, foreign ownership was allowed in some sectors of up to 51%, tariffs on imports and excise duties were lowered, company tax was substantially reduced, and

the government began the process of offering up to 49% of shares in state owned enterprises for private sale (Haokip 2011, 244).

This created the conditions for a boom in economic growth, which over the next two decades averaged between 6-8%, and an increase in exports as a percentage of GDP from 16.7% in 1991 (WITS 2015) to 23.6% in 2014 (World Bank 2015). Whilst these economic reforms were born out of both necessity and a change in ideological approach to the economy, they also furthered the national interest externally. The concept of non-alignment that had guided Indian foreign policy during the Cold War no longer had any clear purpose in terms of staying aloof from a bipolar confrontation. However, the ultimate aim of non-alignment to maintain a deep level of independence or autonomy in decision-making remained.

Autonomy in a post Cold War context meant a number of things: ensuring no one state came to dominate economic and political relations in the Asian region, as well as globally; establishing strong ties – short of alliances – with states with common interests and similar strategic viewpoints in different global power centers; defending open access to key markets and securing opportunities for trade growth; securing India's geo-strategic dominance over the Indian Ocean and defending a sphere of influence in its South Asian neighborhood; and establishing the means to secure recognition of India's status as a Great Power. India's "Look East" policy, unofficially launched in 1992, which aimed to establish closer and deeper relations with countries in Asia would be key to achieving these aims.

## ECONOMIC AIMS AND STRATEGIES OF THE LOOK EAST POLICY

With reforms to create a more open, nimble, and export oriented economy in train, New Delhi main aim of the Look East policy was connecting India's economy through trade with ASEAN and the 'tiger' economies of East Asia. In 1993 and 1995, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao led economic missions to Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam and South Korea to spread the message that India was open for business. Expanding opportunities for trade was viewed as key to India's future as trade would not only provide domestic employment for the country's ever-growing working age population, it would also increase the capacity of the government to develop much-needed infrastructure. Higher levels of economic growth and a growing middle class would in turn make India attractive for foreign direct investment as a vast consumer market, and potential manufacturing base. As China has increasingly become the center of gravity for Asian trade, India's economic engagement of the region has aimed to ensure that Asian states do not become so dependent upon China, that economic opportunities become closed to India, or that its influence is irreparably weakened. India has had varying success in enmeshing its economy with the rest of Asia.

Economically, India's efforts to increase trade with ASEAN have succeeded in absolute terms, but the results have been disappointing overall. In 2014, India was ASEAN's 9th largest trading partner, with total trade between the two reaching US\$67 billion in 2014, from a base of US\$2.9 billion in 1993 (ASEAN.org 2015a; Indian Department of Commerce 2015). In contrast, China remains ASEAN's largest external trading partner, with two-way trade reaching US\$366 billion, and ASEAN exports to China worth US\$150 billion in 2015 (ASEAN 2015b). India and ASEAN have set a target



of US\$100 billion in two-way trade by 2015, which at the present trajectory seems very ambitious. All hopes have been pinned on the establishment of an ASEAN-India Free Trade Area, which covers trade in goods (as of January 2010), as well as services and investment (as of July 2015). With a comparative advantage in services, India is hoping that its trade deficit with ASEAN states will diminish.

Of particular emphasis under the Modi government's 'Act East' policy is the dismal physical infrastructure connections between India and ASEAN markets. Past governments have pursued a number of initiatives, including the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor, and the Mekong-India Economic corridor, India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project, and India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway Project (RIS.org.in 2012). The latter highway projects, will connect India's economically depressed and insurgency ridden North East with Myanmar and then onwards to Thailand and the rest of ASEAN. Most of these projects have however, progressed at a languid pace, with a lack of political commitment being shown by all parties. If progressed, these projects will play an important part in undercutting the lure of insurgency in India's North East, as well as expanding opportunities for trade with ASEAN (Lee 2014).

Apart from ASEAN countries, India has also pursued stronger economic relations with Japan and South Korea. India's attempts to find an export market in Japan have not met with great success. Bilateral trade has increased from US\$5.36 billion 2004-2005 to US\$15.5 billion in 2014-2015, however Japanese exports make up approximately 2/3rds of this figure. In 2014-2015, Japan was only India's 15th largest trading partner, accounting for a tiny 2.05% of India's total trade (Indian Department of Commerce 2015) despite the fact that the two countries successfully concluded a free trade agreement in 2011. India does not even feature in the list of Japan's top 10 trading partners and accounts for only 1% of Japanese trade overall (Kojima 2014).

It is on the investment front where Japan has proved its economic worth for India. Japan has created a great deal of good will in India through the granting of substantial Overseas Development Aid in the form of very low interest loans for basic infrastructure projects in electricity, power and gas production, telecommunications and transport. This includes funding for high profile metro projects such as the Delhi Metro as well as projects like the Delhi-Mumbai Industrial Corridor and Chennai-Bengaluru Industrial Corridor that will be key to attracting foreign investment. Between 2009-2013, total loan aid by Japan came to US\$44.5 billion (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan 2015) with India becoming the highest recipient of Japanese ODA since 2004 (Varma 2009, 244).

Foreign direct investment plays the most prominent role in the two countries economic engagement. In the period 2000-2015, Japan was the fourth largest source of FDI for India at US\$18.8 billion, accounting for 7% of all inflows (Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion 2015). In cementing the announcement of a 'special strategic and global partnership' between the two countries in September 2014, Japan pledged to double its private and public investment into India to US\$35 billion over 5 years to be used toward infrastructure projects, including the introduction of Japanese high speed trains to India. As will be discussed further below, under the leadership of Shinzo Abe, Japan has looked to India to play a stronger strategic stabilizing role in the region, with India being named as one point in Abe's democratic security diamond. Such initiatives also meet both Abe's domestic objectives of creating outward investment opportunities for Japanese firms, as well as building up India's capacities to play a stronger regional role. For Prime Minister Modi, greater FDI from Japan fits neatly with his 'make in India' pitch to the region, aimed at enticing foreign firms to view India as a low cost manufacturing base to rival China (The Economic Times 2014). Some Japanese firms have already entered the Indian market, lured by the country's growing consumer class, with the number of

Japanese firms in India increasing from 438 to 1072 between January 2008 and October 2013 (Kokima 2014, 9). This includes the establishment of automobile assembly operations by Suzuki, Nissan, Toyota and Honda, and the entry of electronics manufacturers Sony and Panasonic (*ibid*), as well as others in pharmaceuticals, foods, stationary, cosmetics and sanitary goods.

India's economic engagement with South Korea exhibits similar patterns to the relationships that have been discussed so far: increased trade in absolute terms, low trade volumes, with India suffering a significant trade deficit. Bilateral trade between South Korea and India grew from approximately US\$600million in 1993 (Brewster 2010, 410) to US\$18.1billion in 2014-2015, with the trade balance being heavily in favor of South Korea with a ratio of imports to exports of almost 3 to 1 (Indian Department of Commerce 2015). South Korean investment in India is also relatively low, ranking only 14th as a source of Indian FDI with total investments of US\$1.6 billion from 2000-2015. Whilst this is much less than that invested by Japanese firms, South Korean firms have already demonstrated that Modi's 'making in India' ethos can work. Many have chosen to base manufacturing plants in India and integrated them into their regional and global operations attracted by India's lower wages, and growing consumer market. First movers that have established a dominant position in the Indian automotive, appliance and consumer electronics markets include LG, Samsung, Hyundai, and Daewoo (Brewster 2010, 411). The free trade agreement or "Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement" signed by the two countries that came into effect in January 2010, has had positive results so far with bilateral trade increasing over 70% in 2011, and Korea's imports from India increasing by 37%. This suggests, that over time, some correction in the trade imbalance will occur in India's favor.

Overall, India's 'Look East' policy has achieved a core objective of the policy – opening up export markets for India in absolute

terms, and ensuring India is not left out of economic integration initiatives. Trade with ASEAN plus Korea and Japan accounts for approximately 1/6th of India's total export trade in 2014-2015 (ASEAN.org 2015c; Indian Department of Commerce 2015). After negotiating free trade agreements with all major states in the region, India has been included in negotiations toward a Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). On the negative side, trade volumes with India remain very low, and in each one of the trade relationships discussed India has a significant trade deficit. Furthermore, India has failed to successfully integrate its economy into the region's manufacturing supply chain to any significant extent. From an economic perspective, there is much potential for India to improve its position in the region, but so far the results have been disappointing and does reduce India's influence over economic affairs. In economic terms at least, India is yet to prove that it is a nation of consequence. Significant limitations need to be overcome domestically for this to change.

## DIPLOMATIC AIMS AND STRATEGIES OF INDIA'S 'LOOK EAST' POLICY

The primary diplomatic aim of India's Look East policy was to become embedded in the region's ASEAN led institutional architecture. This aim has been achieved completely. ASEAN granted India 'sectoral dialogue' partner status in 1992, full dialogue status in 1995, membership of the security focused Asian Regional Forum (ARF) in 1996, and equal status with China and Japan as an ARF summit level partner in 2002. In 2003 India, along with China, were the first states outside of ASEAN to sign the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and in 2004 ASEAN and India signed a Partnership for Peace, Progress and Shared Prosperity agreement.

By December 2012, the relationship between India and ASEAN was declared by both sides to have the status of a 'strategic partnership'. India was included as a founding member of the East Asian Summit in 2005, overcoming the objections of Malaysia and China, with the sponsorship of Singapore and Japan.

Both India's reasons for seeking membership in key regional institutions and the welcoming response it has received from both ASEAN and Japan and South Korea should be understood within the context of the shifting balance of power in Asia caused by China's rise. India's main objective in joining these organizations is to obtain a platform to pursue closer economic integration and advance strategic interests whilst at the same time maintaining its economic and strategic autonomy. Membership of these institutions allows India to pursue national interests through the formation of ad-hoc issue specific alliances with like-minded states, whilst avoiding formal alliances with major powers in the region like the United States and Japan, and the expectations to take common positions that this would entail. India's own perception of itself as great Asian power representing a grand civilization, as well as its history of non-alignment, has meant that India has shown no desire to formally join the US Hub and spokes military alliance system in Asia. India's elites could not accept being a junior partner of the United States. Ad-hoc coalitions within these regional institutions afford India greater flexibility than a formal alliance would allow. This is consistent with a broader 'multi-alignment' strategy of forging 'strategic partnerships', short of alliances, with key global and regional states that have similar interests (elaborated below) and fears in relation to the emerging balance of power in Asia.

From the perspective of the countries in ASEAN and important East Asian states like Japan and South Korea, India's involvement in the regions key architecture has been welcomed for a number of reasons. ASEAN states seek to preserve their economic and strategic autonomy vis-a- vis extra regional great powers. Whilst many of

them are formally part of the US hub and spokes system, adding India to the mix of players in these forums serves both to dilute the influence of not only China, but also potentially that of the United States which may at times be needed.

Whilst ASEAN states may fear entanglement, they are also fearful of abandonment by the United States and are keenly vigilant for signs that the United States is losing its commitment to playing a stabilizing role in Asia, up-ending the credibility of hub-and-spokes system. Whilst the US 'pivot to Asia' was certainly welcomed, given America's actions to limit, rather than expand its involvement in military conflicts around the world (Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria for example) many in the region fear that this policy is more of a rhetorical flourish one backed by hard power or intention. Japan and South Korea also share similar concerns about the commitment of the United States to the region, and the credibility of its military assurances. All are concerned about the rise of China and the extent to which it will rise peacefully within the existing regional order, or seek to challenge that order. Should the US commitment to Asia weaken – or its power wane – India is looked upon as a benign rising power in the region, with shared apprehensions about the rise of China, with the capacity to play a significant part in protecting the existing basis of regional order.

India's benign intentions in the region have been assumed because of four factors. The first is identity: as the world's largest multi-ethnic, plural democracy with a liberal economic system and a commitment to free trade India is assumed to have a direct stake in the existing liberal order. Secondly, India has consistently based its foreign policy on the principle of non-intervention, a principle strongly held within ASEAN. Third, India has no direct conflicts of interests strategically or any territorial disputes with the states of ASEAN or Japan and South Korea. Finally, and most importantly, India has an uneasy relationship with China after suffering a humiliating defeat in the 1962 'border war' between the two countries.

Like the states a number of states in South Asia and East Asia, India too has intractable border disputes with China in Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh, which appear to flare unpredictably but with regularity (Wall St Journal 2011). From India's perspective, China shows no intention of resolving these disputes, and tests the line of actual control as a means of keeping India insecure. India was open about the fact that its need to conduct a nuclear weapons test in 1998 was driven by China's conventional and military modernization program, and its military support for with India's erstwhile nemesis, Pakistan. From the 1990s onward, India has also been concerned about potential encirclement by hostile states in its own South Asian region, as China has developed deeper relations with Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Nepal and Myanmar. This has also included China's provision of funding for the construction of deep-water ports in Pakistan, Myanmar and Sri Lanka that enable the PLA Navy to have a greater presence in the Indian Ocean.

In East Asia, India has successfully forged closer strategic ties with South Korea and Japan. South Korea and India elevated their relationship to the status of a "strategic partnership" in 2010, and have signed a number of Memorandum's of Understanding (MOUs) on cooperation in defense, industry and logistics in 2005, on coast-guard cooperation in 2006, cooperation in humanitarian assistance and international peace-keeping as well as co-development and production of defense products in 2010. So far their strategic relationship has revolved around defense procurement, with India keen to access South Korea's advanced defense technologies particularly in aircraft and ship building, whilst South Korean companies are keen to profit from India's defense modernization drive.

South Korea and India have been drawn together strategically by a shared concern about the relationship between Pakistan and North Korea and the trade in nuclear technology by the former in return for ballistic missile technology by the latter that was revealed by the exposure of the A Q Khan network. With Pakistan, North

Korea and China having signed a formal technical assistance agreement on cooperation to develop missile and guidance systems in January 1994, it has been concluded by many that China has tacitly supported these activities (Panda 2011, 21-22). For India, Chinese involvement in these activities had the direct purpose of destabilizing India's immediate neighborhood to undermine its ability to project power beyond South Asia. Support for North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile program would similarly limit Japan and South Korea's freedom of movement in the region. In this sense, a shared apprehension about the implications of China's rise has drawn the two countries together.

Japan has been even more determined to forge a closer strategic relationship with India. Only two years after India's 1998 nuclear weapons tests, Japanese Prime Minister Yoshiro Mori visited India and inaugurated a Japan-India Global Partnership. Diplomatic exchanges between the two countries have expanded at all levels, with annual prime ministerial visits taking place since 2005, foreign ministerial exchanges since 2007, and regular dialogues between defense ministers and National security Advisors taking place more recently. As mentioned above, in September 2014 Japan and India elevated their relationship to that of a "special strategic and global partnership" for "advancing peace, stability and prosperity in Asia and the world" and noted their "convergent global interests, critical maritime inter-connection, and growing international responsibilities" (Government of India and Japan 2014).

Why has Japan become a major success story for India's Look East policy? In broad terms, India is key to the implementation of Abe's strategic vision of a 'broader Asia' connecting the Pacific and the Indian Oceans in an inter-connected network of goods, services, investment, technology and human capital flows. In a speech to a joint sitting of the Indian Parliament in August 2007 titled "Confluence of the Two Seas" Abe (2007) stated:



“Now, as this new ‘broader Asia’ takes shape at the confluence of the two seas of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, I feel that it is imperative that the democratic nations located at opposite edges of these seas deepen the friendship among their citizens at every possible level.”

Foreign Minister Fumio Kishida has echoed this idea characterizing the Pacific and Indian Oceans as the ‘oceans of freedom and prosperity’ (Kishida 2015) and outlined three major shared interests driving the relationship between the two countries: supporting a regional order based on democratic values, open economies and the rule of law; melding Abe-nomics and Modi-nomics for their mutual benefit, strengthening economic connectivity between South, Southeast Asia and East Asia; and supporting ‘open and stable seas’ from the Indian Ocean through the South China Sea to the Pacific Ocean.

Unstated in these public pronouncements are mutual concerns about ensuring China’s rise takes place within existing economic frameworks and that territorial and maritime disputes are resolved peacefully according to international law. Japan has been keen to include India the region’s web of free trade agreements, as well as regional institutions such as the East Asia Summit where India can and has lent its weight in support of existing regional norms, particularly in relation to disputes over the South and East China Seas (discussed below). Multi-lateralizing and internationalizing these disputes allows smaller states to multiply their power, and has been strongly resisted by China.

Finally, it should be mentioned that India’s embrace by ASEAN, Japan and South Korea has only been possible because of the warming of relations between the United States and India after the latter’s 1998 nuclear weapons tests. The signing of the 2005 US-India Nuclear cooperation agreement, and US support for a waiver in the Nuclear Suppliers group, has greatly elevated India’s global

status. Whilst the US championed India as a 'responsible' nuclear power that deserved to be recognized as a de-facto nuclear weapons state, it is clear that the Washington viewed India was the most important 'swing state' in Asia. The United States has actively encouraged its allies in the region to form closer strategic partnerships with India and to include it in regional institutions where it can use its weight to support the existing regional order.

In sum, the combined actions of all of these players can be explained as the formation of a soft balancing strategy, defined by T. V. Paul as: "limited, tacit, or indirect balancing strategies largely through coalition building and diplomatic bargaining within international institutions, short of formal bilateral and multilateral military alliances" pursued by second-tier great powers to "balance a powerful state or a rising or potentially threatening power" (Paul 2005, 58). China's rapid military modernization drive, economic weight and assertive actions in the South China Sea (discussed below) have raised threat calculations in the region, but all are keen to play down perceptions of 'containing' China. China's position as the major trading partner of many states and centrality to processing trade raises unacceptably the costs of outright hard balancing. Including India into the region's institutional architecture, given its status as a rising great power, increasingly formidable land and sea forces and shared interests in open economies, sea lanes of communication, and the peaceful resolution of territorial claims adds further weight to forces for stability. China is well aware of India's strategic weight in these institutional forums. Tellingly, Beijing was a strong opponent of India's inclusion as a founding member of the East Asian Summit, preferring that the EAS be restricted to an ASEAN plus 3 formation (China, Japan and South Korea), where it would not have to deal with either the United States or India.

## DEFENSE AND NAVAL SECURITY OBJECTIVES OF INDIA'S 'LOOK EAST' POLICY

India has embarked on a concerted defense modernization program since the end of the Cold War that has seen its reputation rise in a region as a nation of consequence. Whilst China still dominates overall military spending in the region, India's naval modernization program has given it significant capabilities to exert influence and play a constructive role in protecting the maritime commons. The Indian navy has been transformed from a brown water local coastal force to a blue water navy that from 2000 has regularly deployed into the South China Sea, and further into the West Pacific since 2007. India now claims to have established a sea-based nuclear deterrent for the first time, with the launch of an indigenously built nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine 'INS Arihant' in 2013, and the lease of another from Russia in 2012. Further, in November 2013, India acquired its first aircraft carrier, the INS Vikramaditya, from Russia after a \$2.3 billion upgrade and in 2018, an indigenously built aircraft carrier, the INS Vikrant, is expected to enter into service (Ganguly 2015, 196).

These developments have been noted by the region with an eye to India's potential as a maritime security partner. The major security objectives pursued by India in its Look East policy has been to develop closer strategic relations with like-minded states to defend its core trade interests in the region. As mentioned above, India, ASEAN, Japan and South Korea share common interests, as trading nations, in physically protecting shipping moving through the Persian Gulf, Indian Ocean, South and East China Seas; supporting international norms on freedom of the maritime commons and open sea lines of communication; and the peaceful resolution of maritime disputes using international legal principles contained in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. This involves cooperation to

combat piracy in international waters, and key choke points like the Malacca Straits. It also involves diplomatic and naval cooperation measures to deter expansive territorial claims over international waters, and attempts by states to physically restrict access to trade routes.

In terms of the latter, the maritime and territorial disputes between China and a number of ASEAN states, as well as Japan have the direct potential to impinge upon freedom of navigation through important shipping lanes in the South China Sea. This includes the bilateral dispute between China and Vietnam over the Paracel Islands; disputes between China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, and the Philippines over various features of the Spratly Islands; and the bilateral dispute between the Philippines and China over sovereignty over the Scarborough Shoal. In addition, states in the region that are not in direct territorial dispute with China have been alarmed by its expansive claim of sovereignty over 80% of the South China Sea, represented on Chinese maps lodged with the UN by a 9 dash line.

Whilst China has not officially clarified what this 9 dash line map represents legally, its de-facto position is that it represents a claim to “sovereignty over all of the disputed islands, an EEZ and continental shelf generated by those islands, as well as ‘historic rights’ to the entire maritime space, including entitlement to all living and non-living resources” (Storey 2013, 147). China’s assertion of a right to regulate navigational activities in this asserted EEZ zone and within the 9 dash line (Storey 2013, 149) – including the movement of commercial shipping as well as warships - directly curtails freedom of navigation, open access to sea lines of communication in the South China sea by all states involved in trade there, as well as disrupting the US’s uncontested naval power in the region that has underwritten stability since World War II.

Apart from these legal claims, threat perceptions in the region and elsewhere have been heightened by China’s physical assertion of these maritime claims as the capabilities of the PLA navy and

maritime law enforcement agencies have increased. In 2012 for example, the Philippines was forced to abandon control over the Scarborough Shoal to superior Chinese maritime forces. Threat perceptions have been further exacerbated by China's declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea in November 2013, and land reclamation and fortification activities in the Spratly Islands in 2015. After tensions flared between Japan and China over effective control of the Senkaku/Diaoyu Islands in 2012 (Smith 2013) for the first time Japanese Prime Minister Abe explicitly linked Japan's firm defense of its control over these islands with disputes in the South China Sea stating (Abe 2012; Storey 2013, 146; Smith 2013):

“Japan must not yield to the Chinese government's daily exercises in coercion around the Senkaku Islands... By making these boats' presence appear ordinary, China seeks to establish its jurisdiction in the waters surrounding the islands as a *fait accompli*... If Japan were to yield, the South China Sea would become even more fortified.”

The common position taken by all claimants opposing China is that competing claims should be resolved peacefully according to existing norms enshrined in the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. China has steadfastly refused to either clarify its legal claims, or allow international arbitration. Rather it has taken what Storey describes as a 'talk and take' approach: using the rhetoric of peaceful negotiation, whilst simultaneously taking physical control over contested areas with the view to coercing weaker states into a favorable settlement in the future (Storey 2012).

Whilst many states in the region, like India, do not have direct maritime disputes with China, most are indirect stakeholders in the both the East and South China Sea disputes because of geo-economic considerations: as the region's economies become more interdependent and trade oriented, and all are to varying degrees reliant

on energy supplies from the Middle East and Sakhalin, a threat to open sea lines of communication for trade should these disputes be resolved through force is a core threat to their security. South Korea, for example, relied on fuel imports for 97% of its consumption in 2014, exclusively delivered by sea, with 84% of its oil imports coming from the Middle East (US EIA, 2015). In 2014 Japan was the third largest oil importer in the world, and relied on the Middle East for 84% of its supply. As an island trading nation poor in natural resources, free access to the global sea commons is viewed as essential to survival of the state. India is no different. It has been estimated that almost 95 percent of India's overseas trade is conducted by sea (Anderson 2008, 24), with nearly 55% of India's trade passing through the Strait of Malacca joining the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea (Scott 2013, 55). India's Maritime Military Strategy of 2007 specifically includes this choke point as a primary area of strategic interest. In 2012, India's External Affairs Minister described the South China Sea as "the property of the world" stating that "No-body has control over it and India is capable enough of safeguarding its interests" (Ibid Scott; Hindustan Times, 2012).

India has more recently acquired a more direct economic stake in the South China Sea disputes. In 2006 and 2010 Indian government owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Ltd (OVL) established partnership agreements with Petro-Vietnam for joint exploration and production in offshore oil exploration and production rights over two offshore gas areas under dispute with China. Despite China's protests, India has maintained a right to transact with Vietnam "as per international laws, norms and conventions" (Ministry of External Affairs, 2011).

With the confluence of interests between India and Asian states on ensuring freedom of navigation in the South China Sea and in regional stability generally, India has been embraced by the region in two ways. First, as part of a strategy to counter moves by China to maintain its greater leverage by keeping these disputes at the

bilateral level, the various claimants and other interested states like Japan, the United States and Australia, have been keen to internationalize the conflict by putting the resolution of these disputes directly on the agenda of regional institutions such as the ARF and the EAS. Adding India to this effort serves to further isolate China as the only country blocking the establishment of a binding code of conduct for the South China Sea, and the resolution of the disputes through the application of UNCLOS.

India supported this broad approach under the Singh led government, however, Prime Minister Modi's government has advocated this position much more vocally. In the US-India "Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean Region" declared on January 15, 2015 for example, both countries affirmed the "importance of safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea" and called on "all parties to avoid the threat or use of force and pursue resolution of territorial and maritime disputes through peaceful means, in accordance with universally recognized principles of international law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea" (White House, 2015). To underscore its commitment to international law, India agreed to submit its 40-year maritime boundary dispute with Bangladesh to the UN Permanent Court of Arbitration and accepted the un-favorable result (Panda, 2014; Panda 2015b).

Secondly, the states of ASEAN as well as Japan and South Korea have been keen to establish closer bilateral maritime cooperation to encourage India to play the role of a secondary balancer in the Indian Ocean, and now also in the South and East China Seas. To this end, India has included South China Sea littoral states such as Indonesia, Brunei, Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore and the Philippines in the MILAN exercises held by India in the Nicobar and Andaman Islands since 1995. Bilaterally, India has conducted naval exercises with Singapore since 1994 (SIMBEX exercise) in

the Bay of Bengal and South China Sea, Vietnam from 2000, and Australia (AUSINDEX) in September 2015 as well as conducting coordinated patrols with Indonesia and Thailand (Upadhyaya 2014, 184-185). In addition, the Indian Navy makes friendly port calls to Singapore, Thailand, Cambodia, Brunei, the Philippines and Vietnam thereby passing regularly through the South China Sea. India has developed a strategic partnership with Vietnam as of 2007, which has progressed to an agreement on defense cooperation in 2009. India-Vietnam relations have taken a more obvious China focused turn after China's state-owned China National Offshore Oil Company (CNOOC) moved an exploratory oil rig into waters within Vietnam's EEZ in May 2014 and successfully defended it for around two months using PLA Navy and coast guard ships. Taking a clear stand in the Vietnam/China dispute in September 2014 India agreed to extend a US\$100 million line of credit for defense purchases to Vietnam and announced the sale of four offshore patrol vessels to Vietnam the following month that will undoubtedly be used to defend Vietnamese control over disputed Islands (Miglani, 2014; Panda 2014a).

In East Asia, South Korea and India naval cooperation is being spurred by China centric concerns. In 2012, India purchased eight warships from South Korea and awarded a \$1.2 billion contract to South Korea's Kangnam Corporation for eight mine countermeasures vessels. Naval cooperation between the two countries is still in its infancy with the first joint exercises being conducted at Pusan in 2012. Whilst South Korea's maritime disputes with China over the reach of their EEZ's have not reached the same levels of conflict as those elsewhere, it is clear that Seoul has become alarmed by China's expanded naval capabilities and willingness use them to assert its claims. This is evidenced by South Korea's construction of a naval base on Jeju Island and challenge to China's unilateral declaration of an Air Defense Identification Zone in the East China Sea (David Scott 2014; 317). Greater Chinese assertiveness has been



viewed with alarm in Seoul and interpreted as attempts by China to re-establish its dominance of Asia at the height of the 'middle kingdom' (Yoon 2014, 137). Forging closer ties with India serves as part both India and South Korea's soft balancing strategy against China, with the latter looking to India for external support as a supplement to its US alliance.

Japan's newfound willingness, under the leadership of Shinzo Abe, to make a 'proactive contribution to international peace', is driven by a desire to play a more active role in defending the existing US led regional order against disruption by the rise of China, particularly in light of China's assertive behavior in the South and East China Seas and the challenge this poses to freedom of navigation in the maritime commons. Japan has eagerly pursued closer relations with India because of the latter's naval capabilities to defend this norm of the existing regional order in the Indian Ocean and potentially further afield in the South and East China Seas. Adding India to a soft-balancing coalition raises the effective costs and constraints that could be applied to discourage disruptive behavior by China. The two countries have intensified their naval cooperation in recent years. Bilateral exercises have taken place since 2012 (JIMEX), as well as through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS). Ignoring China's previous protests in 2007, Japan has been invited to participate in the US-India MALABAR naval exercise in 2009, 2011 and 2014 where the exercises were held in the North West Pacific.

Whilst the Japanese government has passed legislation to reinterpret article 9 of its constitution to allow its self-defense forces to participate in collective self-defense, the circumstances in which this is possible has been defined very narrowly. It is still effectively impossible for Japan to be militarily involved in any of the South China Sea disputes in support of the United States or any of the other claimants (Lee 2016, 43). What is of greater significance are Japan's new principles guiding the transfer of defense equipment.

These are now written broadly enough to allow arms transfers, and joint development and production of defense equipment for the first time since World War II. Under these new rules Japan has agreed to export US-2 amphibious planes to India, including the transfer of technology, and has expressed its interest in pursuing other collaborative defense projects in the future (Government of India and Government of Japan 2014). It has also agreed to supply new civilian patrol vessels to the Philippine Coast Guard, and is also flagging a similar agreement with Vietnam. So whilst Japan cannot become militarily involved in the South China Sea disputes, it is using its superior defense technologies to help smaller claimants develop or acquire the capabilities to resist coercive behavior by China, and more broadly defend the norm of freedom of navigation that is key to the existing open and liberal order.

In sum, India's defense and naval objectives under its Look East policy have been successfully achieved i.e. the development deeper strategic relations with like-minded states to defend its core trade interests in the region. China's disregard for international legal principles and willingness to use these capabilities to assert its claims in the South China Sea have drawn claimant states, and other trading nations in the region together and towards India, as a soft-balancing strategy to defend existing norms of freedom of navigation in the maritime commons. India appears to be becoming more comfortable about taking a position on these South China Sea disputes that may suggest a growing confidence in its naval capabilities and commitment to defending the existing basis of regional order.

## THE LIMITS OF INDIA'S ROLE AS A STRATEGIC AND ECONOMIC PLAYER IN EAST ASIA

So far, we have discussed India's economic, diplomatic and secu-

rity aims and strategies pursued through the Look East policy. The most disappointing aspect of the Look East policy, from India's perspective, has been economic engagement with the region. As mentioned above, trade has expanded with the region in absolute terms, and India has been able to negotiate a number of key bilateral and regional free trade agreements to gain greater access to the region's markets. However, trade volumes with Japan and South Korea remain low, and at present, India has yet to significantly penetrate any one of the major Asian markets for its exports. This is expected to improve as free trade agreements begin to take effect. For now however, from India's perspective the significant trade imbalance it suffers in economic relations in the region is far from ideal.

Prime Minister Modi's 'make in India' policy, and focus on building road, rail and electricity infrastructure in India to establish an export -manufacturing sector in the country is one means to arrest this deficit and is certainly important as a means of creating employment for India's expanding working age population. Establishing India as an export- manufacturing hub for the world, may not however, necessarily increase India's influence in the region. This is because India would then be in direct competition to many of its current ASEAN partners. Should Modi fail to achieve his 'make in India' objectives, India will still exert influence in the region based on the sheer size of its potential consumer market. If Modi succeeds in legislating much needed economic reforms including the reduction of regulation in the labor market, the introduction of a goods and services tax, clarification of property rights and land acquisition laws, and the general reduction in red tape (Kojima 2014, 16), then foreign companies will be keen to set up operations in India lured by the attractiveness of such a vast consumer market.

Ironically, it is the two areas where India's Look East policy has met with considerable success that limitations on India's role in Asia are likely to emerge. These are self-imposed limitations derived from India's strategic culture, and imply that expectations about

India's stabilizing role in the region may not necessarily be met. Whilst the Modi government appears to be enthusiastic about forming closer ties with Japan and the United States, it is unlikely that India will reliably conform to the idea of a group of democracies working in partnership to ensure the peaceful rise of China. This is for a number of reasons.

Firstly, ideologically, Indian foreign policy remains wedded to the central aim of maximizing strategic autonomy. Whilst the concept of non-alignment has been put aside, India has remained averse to formally joining any alliance system, including the US hub-and-spokes alliance system in Asia. Rather it has sought to maximize its strategic autonomy by pursuing a strategy of multi-alignment i.e. simultaneously deepening strategic partnerships with competing global power centers without allowing any one to become supreme (Gupta 2014, 49; Kugelman 2014, 61). To this end, India has maintained its 'special and privileged strategic partnership' with Russia, has improved relations with the United States, the EU, Japan and ASEAN states, whilst simultaneously taking contrary views to developed countries on trade and climate change alone or in concert with other BRICs nations. New Delhi has proved to be wary of 'coalition of the willing' type security operations such as the US-led Proliferation Security Initiative and prefers to operate within official regional organizations such as ASEAN or the United Nations.

Second, India's key priority under Prime Minister Modi's leadership is to develop the nation's economy. For India to attract foreign investment in infrastructure and export manufacturing it must maintain a secure and stable neighborhood. India has good reasons to position itself as wary, but ambiguously independent of any moves in the region that may appear to Beijing as having the purpose of containing its rise. Like other states in Asia, India faces the dilemma that its largest trading partner is engaging in behavior that undermines its security interests. Indian strategists are also wary of the leverage China has over India in terms of re-igniting

the two countries border disputes, qualitatively expanding defense cooperation with Pakistan, and and/or further using economic incentives to influence the foreign policies of India's neighbors Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri-Lanka to gain strategic advantage (string of pearls) or energy resources. The price India pays for maintaining a multi-alignment policy, is of course that should China take this path, there is a great deal of uncertainty about the level of commitment that can be expected from its new friends in the region.

India's aversion to commitment has consequences for how much can be expected of it in terms of physically challenging Chinese assertions of sovereignty in the South China or East China Seas. New Delhi's priority is maintaining a naval advantage in the Indian Ocean, and securing recognition of a sphere of influence there, and genuinely appears committed to defending free an open access to these waters for trade. Beyond this geographical theatre, however, it is unclear how committed it will be as a partner of ASEAN, Japan, South Korea or the United States should conflict arise. The participation of the Indian Navy in bilateral exercises with Japan and the annual Malabar exercises with both Japan and the United States in the Sea of Japan and the western Pacific Ocean certainly suggests contemplation of a wider role, but this has not yet been tested other than rhetorically in the regions institutions. With its history of non-alignment and commitment to strategic autonomy, there will be doubts about how credible India will be as a security partner in a time of conflict. For now, however, as part of its own strategy of ambiguity and soft-balancing India is not keen to commit explicitly to taking on any role in testing China's assertive claims. It clearly sees the United States as shouldering the major burden in terms of maintaining peace and stability in the South and East China Seas.

## CONCLUSION

India is widely considered to be a major power and one of the key stakeholders in the emerging security dynamics of the South and East Asia. As a result of the Look East Policy, over the past twenty years it has become entrenched as a nation of economic, diplomatic and strategic consequence in the region. India's role in East Asia is taking shape: whilst not yet a substantial economic force, its military capabilities and common interests with states in Asia in defending the existing norms of regional order, have raised expectations about the role it can and should play if tensions continue to rise.

This paper has demonstrated that China's expansive claims in the South China Sea, and willingness to coerce changes to the status quo, have drawn Asian states together – and closer to India – more overtly for the purpose of soft-balancing against its rise. The primary purpose of this is to preserve the existing norms of Asia's regional order, particularly freedom of access to the maritime commons, and the resolution of disputes peacefully using accepted legal principles. Whilst major conflict is far from certain to arise over these disputes, India's greater willingness to diplomatically defend established principles of the regional order under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi, has raised expectations that India will be willing to go beyond rhetoric. This article however warns that India's strategic culture and preference for strategic autonomy make it an unreliable partner for this kind of endeavor.

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# HOPE BY ITSELF IS NOT ENOUGH : THE SOFT POWER OF NORTH KOREAN DEFECTORS

**Brandon K. Gauthier**

*Fordham University*

## **Abstract**

This article discusses the ever-growing body of English language memoirs by North Korean defectors, including popular works like *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, *Dear Leader*, *The Girl With Seven Names*, and a number of other publications that have appeared in print recently. In the current state of North Korean defector literature, detailing what these publications have told the world about 1) the North Korean prison camp system; 2) life in North Korean society during the 1990s famine; and 3) elite defectors who lack faith in the regime. The purpose in reflecting on these books is two-fold: to highlight how they have sought to influence foreign perceptions of the DPRK; and to encourage readers to recognize the agency of a growing number of vocal North Koreans who are playing an important role in reminding the global community about the humanity of the DPRK's people.

In discussing these books, I argue that the stories of North Korean defectors represent a form of soft power that is playing an important role in shaping how the American public, and the international community at large, views North Korea. It particularly emphasizes the ability of North Koreans to shape the future of the DPRK from beyond its borders and reminds readers that the fate of Kim Jong Un's regime remains closely intertwined with the agency of its own people.

**Key words:** North Korea, DPRK, Defectors, Human rights, Memoirs, Shin Dong-hyuk, Lee Hyeon-seo, Kim Yong, Jang Jin-sung, Kim Eun-sun, Kang Chol-hwan, Blaine Harden, Park Yeon-mi, No Kum-sok, Charles Robert Jenkins, Kang Hyok, Joseph Kim

## INTRODUCTION : FAITH IN THE PEOPLE OF NORTH KOREA

“We must place our faith in the people of North Korea, not in the system that imprisons them,” Jang Jin-sung concludes at the end of his recent memoir about fleeing from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK, North Korea).<sup>1</sup> The growing number of North Korean defectors speaking out about the injustices of that country’s political system affirms Jang’s point—the outside world must not lose faith in the strength and courage of the North Korean people themselves to bring about change in the DPRK. While foreign journalists and commentators of all backgrounds regularly report on Pyongyang’s missile tests and rumored purges in the North Korean government, they should also stress the soft power of ordinary North Koreans to influence the fate of their country in the global arena. It was, for instance, the testimony of North Korean refugees before the United Nations’ Human Rights Council that helped produce a scathing 372 page report on the North Korea government’s human rights violations.<sup>2</sup> As a result, the UN General Assembly passed a resolution in November 2014, calling on the UN Security Council to consider referring the DPRK’s leadership to the International Criminal Court for crimes against humanity. These events, leading to especially feverish denunciations from Kim Jong Un’s regime, marked an unprecedented effort to hold Pyongyang accountable for its atrocious human rights record.

Alongside the testimonies of North Korean refugees before the United Nations Human Rights Council and other international

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<sup>1</sup> *Dear Leader: Poet, Spy, Escapee—A Look Inside North Korea* (New York: Atria, 2014), 317.

<sup>2</sup> United Nations Human Rights Council, “Report of the detailed findings of the commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea,” February 7, 2014. <<http://www.ohchr.org/EN/HRBodies/HRC/CoIDPRK/Pages/Documents.aspx>>



organizations, a growing number of co-written memoirs by North Korean defectors are playing an important role in drawing public attention to the suffering of their people. Books by those who have left the DPRK, ranging from Kang Chol-hwan's *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*(2001)to Lee Hyeon-seo's *The Girl With Seven Names*(2015), have described the harsh realities of North Korean society and the desperate plight of those who flee to China. They have enabled readers to reflect on the common humanity of the North Korean people and to imagine—if only for a second—what it must be like to find one's own family facing starvation and/or imprisonment in a labor camp. Before recent years, observers all too rarely considered how ordinary families in North Korea have coped with hunger and political oppression. As the journalist Barbara Demick has noted in this regard, many did not stop "...to think that in the middle of this black hole, in this bleak, dark country where millions died of starvation, there is also love."<sup>3</sup> That reality has now changed as the stories of North Koreans themselves prompt observers to see the people of the DPRK as husbands and wives, fathers and mothers, sisters and brothers, sons and daughters—human beings first, "North Koreans" second.

Over the second half of the 20th century, popular media sources in the United State soften ignored the humanity of those who called the DPRK home. More commonly, journalists and politicians condemned North Korea as a foe that encompassed Kim Il Sung's government and its people as one and the same.<sup>4</sup> While Republic of Korea (ROK)officials repeatedly described the North Korean peo-

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<sup>3</sup> *Nothing to Envy: The Lives of Ordinary North Koreans* (New York, NY: Random House, 2009), 6-7.

<sup>4</sup> This is particularly true in the thirty years after the outbreak of the Korean War when sources in the U.S. media frequently described North Korea as a satellite of the Soviet Union or China and condemned the brutality of North Koreans at large. See chapters 1-3 of the author's forthcoming doctoral dissertation: "The Other Korea: Ideological Constructions of North Korea in the American Imagination, 1948-2000," (PhD Diss., Fordham University, 2016).

ple as victims of communism during the Cold War, there was little room in the Western media for reflection on the complexity of what it meant to be a product of the North Korean system—on what it was like to grow up in the DPRK through no choice of one's own.<sup>5</sup>

However, the North Korean famine over the second half of the 1990s—the so-called “Arduous March”—led the public to see the country in a new light. Media coverage of the famine—which killed at least 3% to 5% of the DPRK's population (between 600,000 and 1,000,000 people)—prompted many to consider the differences between ordinary North Koreans and the government that ruled them.<sup>6</sup> Even while a wide number of reporters remained focused on Kim Jong Il and nuclear weapons when it came to reports about the DPRK, for many North Korea came to symbolize a humanitarian tragedy and the suffering of innocent people. This transition played out in living rooms across the United States and beyond in the late 1990s as network news broadcasts, and particularly humanitarian officials like Andrew Natsios, told stories about widespread hunger on the northern half of the Korean peninsula.<sup>7</sup> In the process, North Korean refugees who poured across the Sino border to avoid starvation helped transform public perceptions of the DPRK. In

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<sup>5</sup> Exceptions arose when aid organizations and NGOs—particularly the Korean War-era organization, American Relief for Korea, Inc. (ARK)—described the people of Korea, north and south, as victims of the Cold War in-need.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen Haggard and Marcus Noland, *Famine in North Korea: Markets, Aid, and Reform* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 2007), 1. Other estimates of the death toll are far higher: the North Korean defector Hwang Jang-yop, a former mentor to Kim Jong Il, estimates that 3 million died; Ven. Pomnyun of the Korean Buddhist Sharing Movement, which conducted extensive interviews with refugees along the Sino-DPRK border, estimates 3.5 million. Former aid official Andrew Natsios—who helped lead the famine relief effort in 1997—thinks these estimates are more accurate than Haggard and Noland's.

<sup>7</sup> For an example of this type news coverage, see CNN *Evening News*, February 27, 1996, Vanderbilt University Television News Archive <<http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu/program.pl?ID=405169>> For an example of Natsios's efforts to bring attention to the famine, see: Natsios, “Feed North Korea: Don't Play Politics with Hunger,” *Washington Post*, February 9, 1997, C1.

account after account, they described malnutrition, starvation, and the brutally repressive dynamics of North Korean society. Their stories elicited sympathy for ordinary North Koreans who had no control over their ruling regime.

The publication of Kang Chol-hwan's defector memoir *The Aquariums of Pyongyang* in 2000 and 2001—in French and English, respectively—represented an effort to speak out about the harsh realities of North Korean society.<sup>8</sup> That work attracted widespread media attention in 2005 when U.S. President George W. Bush invited Kang to the White House to discuss his experiences.<sup>9</sup> Sales for *The Aquariums of Pyongyang* spiked in the months that followed and numerous co-written defector memoirs—as well as best-selling books and novels about the lives of ordinary North Koreans<sup>10</sup>—have appeared in print ever since. Most notably, Blaine Harden's *Escape from Camp 14* (2012) about Shin Dong-hyuk has stood out as an international bestseller translated into 27 lan-

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<sup>8</sup> Kang Chol-hwan and Pierre Rigoulot, translated by Yair Reiner, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang* (New York: Basic Books, 2001); originally published as *Les Aquariums de Pyongyang* (Paris: Editions, 2000).

<sup>9</sup> President Bush—who became aware of *Aquariums of Pyongyang* after former U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger recommended it to him—describes the memoirs “one of the most influential books I read during my presidency.” Speaking with Kang in the White House, Bush adds, “stirred up my deep disgust for the tyrant who had destroyed so many lives.” See George W. Bush, *Decision Points* (New York: Random House, 2010), 422.

<sup>10</sup> See Barbara Demick, *Nothing to Envy: The Lives of Ordinary North Koreans* (New York, NY: Random House, 2009); Melanie Kirkpatrick, *Escape from North Korea: the Untold Story of Asia's Underground Railroad* (New York: Encounter Books, 2012); Adam Johnson, *The Orphan Master's Son* (New York: Random House, 2012). For other examples of works about the lives of North Koreans, see: Daniel Tudor and James Pearson, *North Korea Confidential: Private Markets, Fashion Trends, Prison Camps, Dissenters and Defectors* (Rutland, VT: Tuttle Publishing, 2015); Ralph Hassig and Kongdan Oh, *The Hidden People of North Korea: Everyday Life in the Hermit Kingdom* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015); Lucia Jang and Susan McClelland, *Stars Between the Sun and Moon: One Woman's Life in North Korea and Escape to Freedom* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2014); Mike Kim, *Escaping North Korea: Defiance and Hope in the World's Most Repressive Country* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008); Kim Hyejin, *Jia: A Novel of North Korea* (San Francisco, CA: Cleis Press, 2007).

guages.<sup>11</sup> Just this year, publishers have printed four new defector memoirs. Their authors, from Joseph Kim to Lee Hyeon-seo to Park Yeon-mi, have been speaking out widely about their experiences in North Korea through diverse media outlets, including National Public Radio, TED Talks, and CNN.<sup>12</sup>

This collective group of defector works, I argue, represents the soft power of North Koreans to shape international perceptions of the DPRK. While scholars—including the historian Mitchell Lerner—have insightfully described how the soft power of foreign media threatens the future of Kim Jong Un’s regime, they should do more to emphasize the ability of defectors to influence the DPRK’s political destiny.<sup>13</sup> With this recognition, this article surveys the current state of North Korean defector literature, detailing what these publications have told the world about 1) the North Korean prison camp system; 2) life in North Korean society during the 1990s famine; and 3) elite defectors who lack faith in the regime. The purpose in reflecting on these books is two-fold: to highlight how they have sought to influence foreign perceptions of the DPRK; and to encourage readers to recognize the agency of a growing number of vocal North Koreans who are playing an important role in reminding the global community about the humanity of the DPRK’s people.

The disturbing stories of tens of thousands of North Korean refugees since the 1990s leaves little doubt that appalling human rights violations have occurred in the DPRK. But—as Professor Song Ji-young has recently noted—significant questions remain about the extent to which these narratives constitute “credible evi-

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<sup>11</sup> Blaine Harden, *Escape from Camp 14: One Man’s Remarkable Odyssey from North Korea to Freedom in the West* (New York: Viking, 2012).

<sup>12</sup> This article refers to these authors by the names they use to refer to themselves in their memoirs. Many of them, like Lee Hyeon-seo for example, are aliases taken by the defectors after leaving the DPRK.

<sup>13</sup> Mitchell Lerner, “Markets, Movies, and Media: The Growing Soft Power Threat to North Korea,” *The Journal of East Asian Affairs* 29, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 41-70.

dence” of such crimes.<sup>14</sup> Revelations of fabrications in some defector narratives, most notably in Shin Dong-hyuk’s story in *Escape from Camp 14*, have given many pause when it comes to believing the often-shocking stories of those who flee the DPRK.<sup>15</sup> These concerns, and the larger debates they raise, are important for weighing how the international community should hold the North Korean government legally accountable for its actions and preventing the exploitation of North Korean refugees for sensationalistic stories. However, the narratives discussed here—in a similar vein to Adam Johnson’s Pulitzer prize-winning novel, *The Orphan Master’s Son*—have undeniably played a major role in influencing the meaning of North Korea in a popular imagination. Their ultimate significance in this context is how they have sought to influence international perceptions of North Korea and its ruling regime. Their intentions, then, are as important as the disturbing stories they tell.

## PRISON CAMP WORKS : NO HOPE TO LOSE, NO PAST TO MOURN, NO PRIDE TO DEFEND

Of the many works about the experiences of defectors that have appeared in recent years, those focusing on life in North Korean prison camps have garnered particular attention in the press for

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<sup>14</sup> See: Song Ji-young, “In the Making of North Korean Defector-Activists,” July 23, 2015. <<https://songjiyoung.wordpress.com/2015/07/23/in-the-making-of-north-korean-defector-activists/>>.

The Guardian.com recently published an abridged version of this story, see: Song Ji-young, “Why Do North Korean Defector Testimonies So Often Fall Apart,” October 13, 2015. <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/13/why-do-north-korean-defector-testimonies-so-often-fall-apart>>.

<sup>15</sup> For an overview of these developments, see: Catherine E. Shoichet and Madison Park, “North Korean prison camp survivor admits inaccuracies, author says,” CNN.com, January 20, 2015.

<<http://www.cnn.com/2015/01/18/asia/north-korea-defector-changes-story/>>.

describing human rights abuses that sting the imagination. Among these include the Aquariums of Pyongyang(2001); Long Road Home(2009); and Escape from Camp 14(2012). These works all share a common theme in emphasizing how ordinary families have responded to extraordinarily grim realities in some of North Korea's most brutal prison camps. They describe the plight of political prisoners—sentenced to labor camps often as a result of the DPRK's policy of collective guilt—that are reduced to an almost animalistic state by physical abuse, starvation, disease, and overwork. Yet, they also highlight the will of individuals to survive no matter how extreme their degradation and dehumanization. Above all else, they prompt readers to reflect with awe and fury on the enduring humanity of innocent people forced to live in circumstances in which life seems all but impossible.

Kang Chol-hwan's aforementioned *The Aquariums of Pyongyang: Ten Years In the North Korean Gulag* remains one of the most widely known of these books. Co-written with Pierre Rigoulot, it describes the misery of Kang's family as they sought to survive a decade in Yodok prison camp, the largest and most feared in the DPRK. The family—originally Koreans from Japan—moved to North Korea in the late 1970s in hopes of living in a Socialist utopia. Despite the ideological enthusiasm of Kang's grandmother and the reward of an apartment in Pyongyang, they were arrested after Kang's grandfather, critical of the regime and uninterested in ideological indoctrination sessions, disappeared on what authorities claimed was an unexpected "business trip." Thereafter, North Korean authorities sent most of the family, including nine year-old Kang, to Yodok—a place where malnutrition, manual labor, physical abuse, and public executions were everyday occurrences. But it was starvation, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang* notes, that did the most to dehumanize the inmates and diminish their concern for others; "Hunger quashes man's will to help his fellow man...how thorough-

ly hunger alters reason,” Kang recalls of this fact.<sup>16</sup> After a decade at Yodok, the death of Kang’s grandfather eventually led to the family’s release. The author defected to China five years later after a peer informed on him for listening to South Korean radio programs. Today, Kang runs the North Korea Strategy Center in Seoul, working to educate defectors and smuggle information into the DPRK on USB drives.<sup>17</sup>

In the years after the appearance of *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, another survivor of the North Korean prison camp system named Kim Yong published his own book—*Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor*—on what it was like to live in a nightmarish North Korean prison in which survival seemed unlikely.<sup>18</sup> It remains one of few accounts from someone who has experienced the DPRK’s infamously brutal Camp 14 and lived to tell about it. Published in 2009, *Long Road Home* explains how Kim went in the 1990s from being a successful foreign trade official in Pyongyang to an imprisoned “spy” working underground in a mine, expecting to die of malnutrition and disease. Earlier in life, Kim Yong had grown up in a state orphanage until an elite couple in Pyongyang adopted him. Hard work and the connections of his new family in the years that followed enabled the author to attain a successful career and a comfortable life in the DPRK. It was, however, a potential promotion to colonel in the government’s Na-

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<sup>16</sup> Kang Chol-hwan and Pierre Rigoulot, *The Aquariums of Pyongyang*, 141-142.

<sup>17</sup> Kang shares an office with Ahn Myeong-chul—a former North Korean prison camp guard-turned-defector—who manages North Korea Watch, a NGO dedicated to documenting human rights abuses in the DPRK. See: Andrew Salmon, “Former foes unite against Pyongyang’s rule,” *AlJazeera.com*, January 6, 2015. <<http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2015/01/former-foes-unite-against-pyongyang-rule-20151653527452654.html>>.

<sup>18</sup> Kim Yong and Kim Suk-young, *Long Road Home: Testimony of a North Korean Camp Survivor* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009). This work originated from a meeting between Kim Yong and Professor Kim Suk-young after the former spoke at a human rights conference put on by Liberty in North Korea (LINK) at Cornell University in the fall of 2004.

tional Security Agency (Bowibu) that ruined his life. The position required greater scrutiny of his family background and revealed that his father had been executed as an American spy. As a consequence, North Korean authorities tortured Kim—a faithful and loyal follower of the regime to this point—and sent him to Camp 14. “Even by notoriously subhuman North Korean camp standards,” Kim states, it “was the worst of them all...immediate death seemed like an enormous blessing”<sup>19</sup> Glimpses of the sunlight proved rare there as Kim labored underground on starvation rations and endured beatings from guards. Hunger was so extreme, the author states, that cannibalism took place at one point. After two years, authorities allowed the author, who was cleared of the worst charges against him, to reunite with his birth mother in Camp 18. If it initially seemed like “heaven” in comparison to Camp 14, Kim states that incidents of shocking brutality were still common as prisoners starved to death and public executions occurred regularly. At one point, camp guards tortured Kim’s elderly mother and condemned her to death for an “escape attempt” after she fainted while collecting grass in the mountains around the camp. Enraged and determined to avoid dying in Camp 18, Kim escaped in 1999 and managed to flee to China. In March 2003, he came to the United States for the first time and has since settled in Los Angeles.

While Kim Yong has used his freedom to expose the horrors of life in North Korean prison camps<sup>20</sup>, Blaine Harden’s *Escape from Camp 14* (2012) about the experiences of the defector Shin Dong-hyuk has done the most to draw attention to the suffering of political prisoners in the DPRK.<sup>21</sup> Until recently, Shin was one

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 80, 81.

<sup>20</sup> For example, see Kim’s witness testimony in *The Hidden Gulag: Exposing North Korea’s Prison Camps* (Washington, D.C., 2003) by David Hawk and the U.S. Committee for Human Rights in North Korea.

<sup>21</sup> Shin originally published his story in Korean in the ROK under the title *세상밖으로 나오다* [Come Out Into the World].



of the most celebrated figures in the North Korean human rights movement. His January 2015 admission, however, that he had lied to Blaine Harden about spending the entirety of his captivity in Camp 14, among other revelations, has created a significant controversy.<sup>22</sup> As the scholar Andrei Lankov has noted, Shin's admissions have made it easier for skeptics to dismiss defector testimonies as fabrications—something the North Korean government is keen to do—and have thus done significant damage to the cause of North Korean refugees.<sup>23</sup> Responding to Shin's admission in a new foreword for *Escape from Camp 14*, Harden argues that the young man's enduring psychological trauma from his life in North Korea has made it difficult for him to recount his story; "The memories of trauma victims," Harden writes in this regard, "are often fragmented and out of sequence, and the stories they tell can be shields behind which they try to hide."<sup>24</sup> Regardless of Shin's recent revelations—and others that still might follow—extreme scars on the defector's body corroborate the most important fact of his story: that North Korean authorities brutally tortured him.<sup>25</sup>

In this context, the ultimate contribution of *Escape from Camp 14* is that it has prompted readers to reflect on the woeful plight of North Korean political prisoners, including children, who contend with the threat of starvation and constant physical abuse. According to that book, Shin's account is the story of someone born directly

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<sup>22</sup> On LiNK's reaction to Shin's admissions, see "What Shin Dong-hyuk's Revisions Mean for This Movement," LiNK Blog, January 21, 2015.<<http://www.libertyinnorthkorea.org/shin-dong-hyuks-revisions/>>.

<sup>23</sup> Andrei Lankov, "After the Shin Dong-hyuk affair: Separating fact, fiction," *NKNews.org*, February 3, 2015.<<http://www.nknews.org/2015/02/after-the-shin-dong-hyuk-affair-separating-fact-fiction/>>.

<sup>24</sup> This new foreword appears on the author's website: <[www.blaineharden.com](http://www.blaineharden.com)>.

<sup>25</sup> Ahn Myeong-chul, a former North Korean prison guard who worked for the DPRK's *Bowibu*, has confirmed that Shin's scars are consistent with techniques used by the *Bowibu*. He states: "Shin's body shows more scars from torture than any camp survivor I know who has come to South Korea, and I have met almost all of them...The scars prove to me that Shin was tortured at a *Bowibu* detention center." Quoted in *ibid*.

into the North Korean prison system. It describes the first 23 years of a life defined by hunger, manual labor, indoctrination, and abuse. Amid such an upbringing, Shin grew to hate his parents for having had kids who would never see beyond barbed wire fences. But he never lost the will to survive like many who came to the camp system from the outside. “A perverse benefit of birth in the camp,” the book explains, “was a complete absence of expectations...[Shin] had no hope to lose, no past to mourn, no pride to defend.”<sup>26</sup> Alas, his hopes and aspirations were exceedingly narrow: “finding food and avoiding beatings.” The overarching lesson Shin learned throughout his childhood was to trust no one and to inform regularly on his fellow prisoners—“to prey on others for my survival,” as he told Harden.<sup>27</sup> It was this survival strategy that led thirteen-year old Shinto inform on his mother and brother in April 1996 after overhearing them making escape plans; angry that such actions would endanger his life, he alerted a camp guard in an unsuccessful bid to gain more food for himself and a position as grade leader at school. The consequences, as described in *Escape from Camp 14*, were ghastly: guards tortured Shin for information by stringing him up over a fire and then made the young boy and his father watch as guards publicly hanged his mother and shot his brother. The guilt of Shin’s actions did not torment him at the time. He “hated his mother and brother with the savage clarity of a wronged and wounded adolescent,” writes Harden.<sup>28</sup> A little less than ten years later, Shin managed to attain freedom after attempting to escape with a friend; the latter became stuck in an electric fence in the process and died, but Shin succeeded by crawling over his lifeless body, using it to protect himself from the electricity.<sup>29</sup> After working in China for a time,

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<sup>26</sup> Blaine Harden, *Escape From Camp 14*, 73.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 190.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>29</sup> Shin, as Harden notes in his new foreword, has changed his story in the following ways:

Shin reached the ROK Consulate in Shanghai through the help of a reporter and then made his way to South Korea and the United States. Until just this year, he worked energetically with LiNK and other advocacy groups in the human rights movement. The conviction that one individual could help liberate those who remain in the DPRK by making their voice heard—Shin has declared—motivated those efforts.<sup>30</sup>

## PLEASE DON'T FORGET OUR STORIES : NORTH KOREAN FAMILIES AND FAMINE

Apart from books focusing on prison camps, an array of co-authored defector memoirs about the ordinary lives of North Koreans—including *This is Paradise!* (2005), *The Girl With Seven Names* (2015), *A Thousand Miles to Freedom* (2015), *Under the Same Sky* (2015), and *In Order to Live* (2015)—have described everyday North Korean life during the 1990s and 2000s to the outside world. All of these works reflect on the repressive nature of that society, emphasizing the cult of personality surrounding the Kim family dynasty. But they also put the humanity of the DPRK's citizenry front-and-center by describing loving families and happy childhood memories that enable readers to relate to the individuals in question. Another

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“Shin now says he twice escaped from Camp 18 [Not Camp 14] when he was a teenager, first in 1999 and then in 2001. After the first escape, he was caught within a couple of days. Following his second escape, he managed to travel to China. But police arrested him there, he said, and sent him back to North Korea. Guards returned him first to Camp 18 and then, for punishment and torture, to Camp 14...In *Escape from Camp 14*, Shin describes how guards tortured him by fire in that camp when he was 13 years old, when they suspected him of plotting to escape with his family...But in the phone interview, Shin said that he was actually tortured much later, when he was 20. It happened, he said, after his return from China. In Camp 14 in 2002, he said, guards confined him in an underground prison for six months, where he was repeatedly burned and tortured.”

<sup>30</sup> *Escape From Camp 14*, 191.

over arching commonality of these books is that they emphasize the intense suffering that arose in North Korean society as a result of the 1990s famine. They detail how DPRK citizens struggled with the painful contrasts that emerged between what their government taught them—that their country was the best in the world led by benevolent leaders who cared for them—and the unrelenting misery that came to define daily life during those years. Those who fled to China to avoid starvation, they also explain, faced a new series of disturbing evils.

Kang Hyok's *This is Paradise: My North Korean Childhood* reveals how the famine devastated one North Korean family.<sup>31</sup> The book, co-written with Philippe Grangereau, describes the first twelve years of Kang's life in the border town of Onsong, a city in the far northern tip of the DPRK near the Tumen River. While Kang's childhood revolved around the usual political indoctrination and mandatory work sessions on collective farms, his first years were relatively comfortable, filled with memories of loving family and friends. The onset of the famine changed everything. After mounting food shortages claimed the life of his grandfather in 1994, Kang's family began to survive on pine bark, rats, insects, birds, and anything they could forage in the years that followed. "There was," the author explains, "no more rice, no more potatoes. . . we moved on to noodles made of maize flower. . . Later our village started feeding itself on weeds. . . Then really vile food substitutes."<sup>32</sup> Families in Onsong—*This Is Paradise!* states—did everything they could to stave off hunger, selling their belongings and putting children to work in illegal mines for extra money. Others, particularly starving soldiers, resorted to theft. But by the summer of 1996, Kang recalls, his ten-

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<sup>31</sup> Kang Hyok and Philippe Grangereau, translated by Shaun Whiteside, *This is Paradise! My North Korean Childhood* (London: Little, Brown, 2005); originally published in French as *Ici, C'est Le Paradis!: Une enfance en Corée du Nord* (Paris: Michel Lafon Publishing, 2004).

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

year old classmates at school began to die one after another; five to six deaths followed every night in his neighborhood. Such desperate circumstances—alongside authorities' efforts to punish Kang's father for crossing into China for work—ultimately led his family to flee into Manchuria in March 1998. Kang's mother only did so with the greatest reluctance because she was still convinced that the DPRK was one of the best countries in the world. After years of "living like hunted animals in China," Kang made a perilous, yet successful, journey to the South Korean Embassy in Cambodia.<sup>33</sup> His parents followed shortly afterwards and the family started a new life in Seoul beginning in 2003.

Similarly to Kang's story, Kim Eun-sun's *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea*, co-authored with Sebastien Falletti, describes a largely happy North Korean childhood near the Sino border until the famine changed everything.<sup>34</sup> From 1996 to 1997, Kim explains, severe food shortages wrought devastation on her family, killing her grandparents and then her father. By December 1997, the author found herself alone writing a will at just eleven years old while her mother and sister desperately searched for food. "The only thing left for us to do here is die," her mother quietly announced after returning empty-handed.<sup>35</sup> Efforts to attain help from relatives in Chongjin, the book states, came to naught and the family sought to survive on the streets of Rajin for much of 1998 until they were able to flee across the ice of the Tumen River to China. It was the beginning of a harrowing nine-year struggle for freedom. After the family arrived in Manchuria, a human trafficker tricked them and sold them to a Chinese peasant who forced the mother to bear him a son. After a tip led to the family's arrest and

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<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>34</sup> Kim Eun-sun and Sebastien Falletti, *A Thousand Miles to Freedom: My Escape from North Korea* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2015).

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

deportation to North Korea in March 2002, they escaped to China a second time, eventually disappearing into the urban expanse of its cities. Kim worked as a waitress and saved money until she could pay smugglers to take her and her mother across the Gobi Desert to Mongolia.<sup>36</sup> That treacherous trip finally enabled the author to reach the safety of South Korea in 2006. Despite the trials of assimilating to life there, Kim has since become a successful student as well as a human rights advocate working for The Citizens' Alliance for North Korean Human Rights, an NGO based in Seoul. "Why must the people of my country," she now demands to know, "continue to live in such suffering?" "The misery in North Korea," she states, "is the fault of an absurd totalitarian regime."<sup>37</sup>

Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America, by Joseph Kim [born as Kim Kwang-jin] and Stephan Talty, echoes the memoirs of Kang Hyok and Kim Eun-sun about the devastating consequences of the famine.<sup>38</sup> Born in 1990, Kim's first memories—like theirs—are of a happy childhood in a border town. Circumstances, however, changed radically over the second half of the decade. "Everything disappeared slowly, as if by evaporation," the author states of the onset of the famine.<sup>39</sup> His father and mother, he recalls, initially stopped giving him snacks as a child; then they started selling their belongings, including the house and television. Stories followed in hushed tones about starving friends and neighbors. By 2002, Joseph watched his own father slowly starve to death, becoming "a wretched, writhing, foul-smelling body so bone-thin it pained me to touch him."<sup>40</sup> Those events,

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<sup>36</sup> The author's sister married a Chinese man and remained behind at that time.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

<sup>38</sup> Joseph Kim and Stephan Talty, *Under the Same Sky: From Starvation in North Korea to Salvation in America* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Co., 2015).

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 95.

Under the Same Sky explains, led his mother and sister to go to China in search of food and work. The former returned after her arrest by Chinese authorities and a brief stint in a North Korean prison. Explaining the absence of his sister, his mother said she was living with a Chinese man. Kim believes that his mother likely sold his sister as a “bride slave” to try and take care of him as the youngest.<sup>41</sup> That hope proved all but impossible though, and his mother soon entered into two different “famine marriages” to avoid starvation, largely leaving twelve-year old Kim to survive on the streets as a beggar and a thief. After living that way for three years, and enduring a traumatizing stint in a youth prison camp, Kim fled to China at age fifteen. The author was then fortunate to receive the protection of Christian missionaries who arranged for him to come to the United States in 2007. Kim has since gone on to attend college in New York City and speak out about the suffering of ordinary North Koreans. At a recent UN event on North Korean human rights in April 2015, Kim stated:

Even at this moment, the North Korean people are still fighting to survive, they have hope and they have not given up on life or the possibility of a better future. But hope by itself is not enough. I believe that with the attention of the international community, with your support, we can also make their hope of a better future into reality...please don't forget our stories.<sup>42</sup>

The experiences of North Koreans, Kim's words suggest, have their own power. They demand the world's attention and encourage those who have never thought much about North Korea to want to

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<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-118.

<sup>42</sup> Emphasis added. Quoted in Caroline Weisser, “Victims’ Voices: A Conversation on North Korean Human Rights,” DIPNOTE: U.S. Department of State Official Blog, April 30, 2015. <<https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2015/04/30/victims-voices-conversation-north-korean-human-rights#sthash.xyoPAngQ.dpuf>>.

help its people achieve a better life.<sup>43</sup>

Testifying before the UN Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in North Korea in April 2014, Lee Hyeon-seo has stood alongside Joseph Kim as an activist drawing greater attention to human rights abuses in the DPRK.<sup>44</sup> However, Lee's recently published memoir—*The Girl With Seven Names*, co-written with David John—differs from others in that it describes the famine from the perspective of a well-fed family.<sup>45</sup> Born in the town of Hyesan on the Yalu River, Lee grew up in a relatively privileged household thanks to her mother's ingenious trading abilities and her father's successful career in the military. Her life changed markedly at age 14 in January 1994 when Bowibu agents arrested her father—working for a trading company that enabled him to cross into China on business—on suspicion of “bribery and abuse of power.” He died shortly after his release. Thereafter, as the famine began to grip her town, Lee struggled to understand why her friends suddenly didn't have enough to eat; it didn't make sense within the context of her government's relentless propaganda about the DPRK's abundance. Reading a letter from a starving family bidding farewell for the final time, she wondered: “Why hadn't they eaten for weeks? This is the most prosperous country in the world.”<sup>46</sup> In the months that followed, the sight of dying people in the streets and bands of starving beggars looking for food did little to resolve her confusion. It was

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<sup>43</sup> Joseph Kim has also delivered a widely viewed TED talk about his experiences, see: Joseph Kim, “The Family I lost in North Korea. And the family I gained,” TED2013. June 2013. <[https://www.ted.com/talks/joseph\\_kim\\_the\\_family\\_i\\_lost\\_in\\_north\\_korea\\_and\\_the\\_family\\_i\\_gained](https://www.ted.com/talks/joseph_kim_the_family_i_lost_in_north_korea_and_the_family_i_gained)>.

<sup>44</sup> See Tom Malinowski, “North Korea's Systematic, Widespread and Gross Human Rights Violations Demand International Action,” DIPNOTE: U.S. Department of State Official Blog, April 17, 2014. <<https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2014/04/17/north-korea-systematic-widespread-and-gross-human-rights-violations-demand#sthash.8z3X9qxV.dpuf>>.

<sup>45</sup> Lee Hyeon-seo and David John, *The Girl With Seven Names: A North Korea Defector's Story* (London: William Collins, 2015).

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 80.



not hunger or disillusionment with the North Korean government, however, that led Lee to cross the Yalu River into China in the winter of 1997. It was curiosity. Before her 18th birthday, Lee wanted to see whether the prosperity in China that she had heard about was real; the allure of the halogen lights and neon signs across the Yalu River pulled at her like a magnet. Thus, Lee crossed into Manchuria, intending to return soon, but North Korean officials quickly discovered her absence and she could not return home without severe punishment. As a result, Lee had to make a new life in China. In the years that followed, she only narrowly avoided a forced marriage, sexual slavery, and deportation to the DPRK. While the author ultimately succeeded at blending into Chinese society, revelations from those around her that North Korea had started the Korean War and that Kim Jong Il had not been born at Mount Paekdu stunned her. These comments—she remembers—were akin to someone “telling me that the earth was flat.”<sup>47</sup> It was only as she came to understand that so much of what her government had taught her was a lie that she decided to go to South Korea. After flying to Seoul in January 2008 under an assumed Chinese identity, the author helped her mother and brother escape the DPRK and make a harrowing 2000-mile journey to the South Korean embassy in Laos. Lee, reunited with her family in the ROK, has since become a prominent voice in the North Korean human rights movement, emphasizing the power of its people to change their country from abroad. As she explained in a TED talk viewed by millions online, North Korean refugees “act as a bridge between the people inside North Korea and the outside world” by “send[ing] information and money that is helping to change North Korea from inside.”<sup>48</sup> That bridge, her comments make clear, offers the North Korean people a

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<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>48</sup> Lee, Hyeon-seo, “My Escape from North Korea,” TED2013, February 2013. <[http://www.ted.com/talks/hyeonseo\\_lee\\_my\\_escape\\_from\\_north\\_korea](http://www.ted.com/talks/hyeonseo_lee_my_escape_from_north_korea)>.

path to freedom.

Alongside the efforts of Lee Hyeon-seo, twenty-one year-old Park Yeon-mi has

Gained widespread attention in the last year for her courageous activism. In October 2014, Park delivered an emotional speech at the One Young World Summit in Dublin. Video footage of her address has gone viral, receiving over two million views on YouTube and attracting the ire of the North Korean government.<sup>49</sup> The recent publication of Park's *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom*, co-written with Maryanne Vollers, tells the entirety of her story to an even broader audience.<sup>50</sup> Born in October 1993 in the border town of Hyesan, Park's family avoided the worst of the famine because her father, a government civil servant, sold precious metals on the side for food. Throughout her childhood, Park learned to worship the Kim dynasty and never speak a word about glaring contradictions between its propaganda and daily life; "North Koreans," she explains in this vein:

can be experts at lying, even to ourselves. The frozen babies that starving mothers abandoned in the alleys did not fit into my worldview, so I couldn't process what I saw. It was normal to see bodies in the trash heaps, bodies floating in the river, normal to just walk by and do nothing when a stranger cried for help.<sup>51</sup>

Even if Park had understood the extent of her government's lies, she would not have dared complain; Kim Jong Il, she believed, could read her mind.

While Park's family avoided hunger throughout the 1990s, from

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<sup>49</sup> Park, Yeon-mi. "Escaping from North Korea in search of freedom," One Young World Summit 2014 <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufhKWfPSQOw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufhKWfPSQOw)>.

<sup>50</sup> Park Yeon-mi and Maryanne Vollers, *In Order to Live: A North Korean Girl's Journey to Freedom* (New York: Penguin Press, 2015).

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

October 2002 onward they struggled to survive after the government imprisoned her father for illegal conduct. Her mother sought to feed Park and her older sister through black market trading in the years that followed. After her father's release in early 2007, her sister went to China, prompting Park and her mother to go after her in March of that year. The brokers who led them across the Yalu, though, turned out to be human traffickers, one of whom raped Park's mother during the journey. The brokers then sold the mother and daughter to Chinese men. Park, just 13 years-old, fought off repeated rape attempts from her captor, threatening suicide, until she reached a deal with him: if he would reunite her with her parents, she would sleep with him; the man agreed, reuniting Park with her mother and helping her father join them in China. Under this disturbing arrangement, the family lived with the Chinese man until Park's father died from cancer and the former let Park and her mother go. They eventually succeeded in gaining the assistance of Christian missionaries who helped them cross over the Gobi Desert to Mongolia and go to South Korea in the spring of 2009. After struggling to adjust to the challenges of freedom there, Park has gone on to attend school in New York, becoming an internationally known human rights activist in just the last year. "I think everybody," she recently said on National Public Radio, "deserves to be free and to have a happy life," adding: "I want to show North Korean people that they have hope, and they can be free someday, like myself."<sup>52</sup> Park's courage and strength, as attested to in her memoir, is a symbol of what others in the DPRK can achieve despite immense suffering.

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<sup>52</sup> "After Escaping North Korea, Freedom Is 'Seriously, Deadly Hard,'" National Public Radio, September 27, 2015. <<http://www.npr.org/2015/09/27/443896351/after-escaping-north-korea-freedom-is-seriously-deadly-hard>>.

## MEMOIRS OF PRIVILEGED NORTH KOREANS : I AM READY TO GAMBLE MY LIFE

While memoirs from ordinary North Koreans provide an important “bottom-up” perspective on the experiences of the DPRK citizenry, English-language works by more privileged citizens offer unique views of the upper echelons of North Korean society. Among these include Jang Jin-sung’s *Dear Leader*; No Kum-sok’s *A MiG-15 to Freedom*(1996)—a Korean War-era story recently recounted in Blaine Harden’s *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot*(2015); and Charles Robert Jenkins’s *The Reluctant Communist*(2008), the memoir of a U.S. defector who became a citizen of the DPRK and lived in the country for nearly 40 years. These works, encompassing a broader time frame, provide readers with gripping narratives about those with relatively elite lives in North Korea who despise its ruling regime.<sup>53</sup>

In this regard, Jang Jin-sung’s *Dear Leader: Poet, Spy, Escapee—A Look Inside North Korea* tells the story of a high-ranking official in the late 1990s who became disillusioned with Kim Jong Il himself.<sup>54</sup> Jang, the book explains, received an appointment at just age 27 to work as a poet in the literature section of the DPRK’s United Front Department (UFD), a top-secret division of the Workers’ Party tasked with policy-making and espionage. There, Jang attained widespread acclaim, and the personal praise of Kim Jong Il, for

<sup>53</sup> For an extended look into the court of Kim Jong Il based on the account of the late Hwang Jang-yop, the highest-ranking defector to ever flee the DPRK, see: John H. Cha and K.J. Sohn, *Exit Emperor Kim Jong-il: Notes from His Former Mentor* (Bloomington, IN: Abbott Press, 2012). For more on his experiences, see: 황장엽, *나는 역사의 진리를 보았다* [*I Saw the Truth of History*] (서울: 시대정신, 2010).

<sup>54</sup> Jang Jin-sung, *Dear Leader: Poet, Spy, Escapee—A Look Inside North Korea* (New York, Atria, 2014). For a discussion of this book in greater depth, see: Brandon K. Gauthier, “An Individual Transformed: Review of Jang Jin-sung, *Dear Leader: Poet, Spy, Escapee—A Look Inside North Korea*,” *Yonsei Journal of International Studies* 6, no. 2 (Winter 2015): 372-376.

writing a poem on “Seongun Korea.” As a result, in May 1999 Jang found himself whisked away in the middle of the night to meet the North Korean leader at a luxurious dinner party. Complete with flaming ice cream and mood lighting for each course, the experience left the poet shocked. Jang had expected to meet a god-like figure, but Kim appeared as “an old man who looks nothing like the familiar image of the People’s Leader.”<sup>55</sup> The poet found Kim Jong Il’s use of crass language towards those around him—sycophants who mimicked his every move—deeply disturbing. “For the first time in my life,” Jang writes of the dinner, “loyal obedience makes me cringe.”<sup>56</sup> Following that encounter, Jang returned to his hometown of Sariweon and his disillusionment grew. The place he found was transformed by the horrors of the famine, its citizens tired and hungry. Yet everyone marveled at Jang because he had dined with the “Dear Leader”; “We heard you had dinner with the General! What kind of porridge does he like to eat?” a jaundiced neighbor asked Jang; “Oh, you know the song, ‘The Rice Balls of the General?’” the author replied, “Just like in that song, he shared a rice ball with us.”<sup>57</sup> Jang, living a life of luxury in Pyongyang and eating at Kim Jong Il’s table, was disgusted at having to participate in this charade. His propaganda work then became unbearable.

The poet’s decision to defect to China came in January 2004 after the loss of a forbidden South Korean book that Jang had snuck out of the UFD and lent to a friend. The offense meant certain execution. To avoid that fate, Jang and his friend fled to China in a desperate effort to reach the South Korean embassy in Beijing. What he learned about the plight of the North Korean people in the process made him loathe Kim Jong Il. How had China, Jang wondered, achieved so much economic success and North Korea re-

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<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, xvii.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, xxii.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

mained so impoverished? How could the North Korean government let human traffickers sell captured female refugees from his country as “pigs” in Manchuria? The author focused his anger on the “Dear Leader” himself, writing: “I felt disgust for Kim Jong-il, who didn’t seem to be humiliated at all by what he had reduced his nation’s women to, or to care enough to intervene.”<sup>58</sup> After reaching freedom at the ROK Embassy in Beijing through the help of South Korean intelligence agents, Jang began to use his literary talents to expose the hypocrisy of the North Korean government. His book of poems about the famine—I Sell My Daughter For 100 Won—describes the destitution of that period with disturbing poignancy. He has also created a news website—News Focus International—dedicating to analyzing the North Korean regime from the perspective of a former insider.<sup>59</sup>

If Jang’s memoir can attest to an underwhelming encounter with Kim Jong Il, No Kum-sok’s *A MiG-15 to Freedom* and Blaine Harden’s *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot* describe a similar experience with Kim Il Sung in the thick of the Korean War.<sup>60</sup> No, a fighter pilot, stood thirty feet from the North Korean leader in October 1951 as the latter reviewed MiGs with Kim Jong Il, ten years-old, in tow. At that moment, No fantasized about shooting Kim Il Sung. “With an inchoate rage,” Harden writes, “No blamed Kim for

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, 165.

<sup>59</sup> See: 장진성, *내딸을 백원에 팝니다* [*I Sell My Daughter for 100 Won*] (서울: 조갑제, 2008); available in English by: Sun Young Soon (trans.) and Jang Jin-sung, *Selling My Daughter for 100 won* (Tokyo: Banseisha, 2009); *New Focus International: Authentic North Korea News, Analysis and Features* <<http://newfocusintl.com>>.

<sup>60</sup> No Kum-sok and J. Roger Osterholm, *A MiG-15 to Freedom: Memoir of the Wartime North Korean Defector Who First Delivered the Secret Fighter Jet to the Americans in 1953* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Company, Inc., 1996); Blaine Harden, *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot: The True Story of the Tyrant Who Created North Korea and the Young Lieutenant Who Stole His Way to Freedom* (New York: Viking, 2015). For a review of this book, see: Brandon K. Gauthier, “A Tale of Two North Koreans: Review of Blaine Harden, *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot*,” *Yonsei Journal of International Studies* 7, no. 1 (Spring/Summer 2015): 140-144.

splintering his family and ruining his childhood...for poisoning Korea with communism, paranoia, and fear.”<sup>61</sup> Wanting to live, the young man restrained himself. No’s memoir and Harden’s book—the latter juxtaposing No’s story with Kim Il Sung’s—explains how the pilot later defected in 1953 after surviving as a secret anti-communist in the DPRK’s first years.

No Kum-sok was born in northern Korea in 1932 to a wealthy existence. His father worked for a Japanese company until 1945. Following Korea’s liberation from Japan, the creation of a communist state in the north disturbed No—an admirer of the United States. But he kept his thoughts to himself and faked the role of a loyal communist while looking for a way to go to South Korea. In the summer of 1949, he gained admission to the DPRK’s naval academy to avoid the North Korean Army. As the Korean War exploded on the peninsula shortly afterwards, No received a stroke of extraordinary good luck when authorities chose him to join a select few who would receive training as jet pilots in China. In the fall of 1951, No began flying MiGs over the skies of Korea, doing his best to avoid getting killed or killing anyone until he could defect to South Korea. That opportunity came in September 1953 when No flew across the DMZ on a training flight. As *A MiG-15 to Freedom* admits, he wrestled with the decision at the last moment, thinking to himself:

“But haven’t they [the North Korean government] treated me well? After all, isn’t this the land where I was born?”But the dreadful feeling that I might spend my whole life in that wretched and ruthless Communist country sustained my desire...I have never really been a Communist...I am ready to gamble my life...I shall be a happy man in a non-Communist country. I’m going!”<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> *The Great Leader and the Fighter Pilot*, 99; *A MiG-15 to Freedom*, 97-98.

<sup>62</sup> *A MiG-15 to Freedom*, 15.

While No knew he might have had a comfortable life in North Korea, he could not imagine living day-in and day-out in a political system he hated. His defection went smoothly, and he later moved to the United States, benefitting from a \$100,000 reward from the U.S. government that enabled him to study at the University of Delaware. After a long career as a highly successful engineer, No resides in Florida in the present, a living testament to the amazing potential of North Koreans who find freedom outside the DPRK.

Unlike the defector works discussed thus far, Charles Robert Jenkins's *The Reluctant Communist: My Desertion, Court-Martial, and Forty-Year Imprisonment in North Korea* stands out from this field in offering the perspective of a U.S. soldier who fled to the DPRK, became a citizen of that country, and then defected from it at the first possible opportunity—four decades later.<sup>63</sup> Jenkins, as he recounts with his co-author Jim Frederick, initially deserted the U.S. Army for North Korea in January 1965 to avoid a number of personal problems, including a potential deployment to Vietnam. When he arrived in the DPRK, he joined three other American soldiers who had defected before him. Of their decision to go north, Jenkins writes:

The three of them, also like me, walked across the DMZ without really thinking about the huge consequences of what they were doing and without understanding what North Korea was really like... they experienced a rude shock when it dawned on them that they were trapped, forever, in North Korea. All of them quickly grew to hate the country and would have left in a second if they could have...<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Charles Robert Jenkins and Jim Frederick, *The Reluctant Communist: My Desertion, Court-Martial, and Forty-Year Imprisonment in North Korea* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.



In June 1972, the North Korean government offered DRPK citizenship to Jenkins and his peers. After Jenkins asked what would happen if they refused the offer, a government official told him coolly: “Then you won’t be here tomorrow.”<sup>65</sup> Jenkins went on to have a number of jobs, including teaching English in a military academy, before marrying in 1980 to a young Japanese woman—Hitomi Soga—whom North Korean agents had kidnapped from Japan. Having two children together and living outside of Pyongyang in the 1990s, Jenkins experienced the deterioration of North Korean society during the famine. His family never went without food for more than a day or two, but they “saw a noticeable difference in the desperation of the people [around them] because of the hunger... hunger drove both the people and the army to bolder and more desperate extremes.”<sup>66</sup>

Only Kim Jong Il’s shocking September 2002 admission to Japanese Prime Minister Junichirō Koizumi that the DPRK had previously kidnapped Japanese citizens did a series of events begin that enabled his wife, and then his daughters and himself, to leave North Korea. Describing the DPRK as “literally a giant, demented prison,” Jenkins’s memoir stands out as a revealing account that details what it’s like for anyone—be they born in North Carolina or North Korea—to live in a repressive system that leaves so many to starve at the bottom of its class structure.

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<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 58.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 129.

## CONCLUSION : THE POWER OF THE POWERLESS

Blaine Harden recently noted in a review of the newest defector memoirs for the *Washington Post* that they “will, in all likelihood, change nothing inside North Korea.”<sup>67</sup> If this comment is true in the sense that these books alone will not suddenly lead to dramatic changes in the DPRK, it ignores the extent to which they are representative of the broader ways North Korean defectors are working to change the DPRK from the outside-in. From giving speeches on the world stage to publishing books in the mass media to sending USB drives into the DPRK, they are taking steps to expose the disturbing realities of life in North Korea, to shame its government in the global arena, and to disseminate subversive information to their countrymen.<sup>68</sup> They refuse to stop speaking for those in North Korea who cannot. It is the sum of their actions over years—not any single book—that threatens Kim Jong Un’s government.

This survey of defector memoirs has demonstrated how the individual stories of defectors are an important part of that effort. The suffering to which they attest—as U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Samantha Power recently stated—speaks to the fact that it is no longer enough to reflect on the misery of the North Korean people; it is time to consider what actions can be taken to improve their lives.<sup>69</sup> While any narrative that describes all North Korean

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<sup>67</sup> Blaine Harden, “Can we believe all the horrors described by North Korean escapees?” *Washington Post*, August 6, 2015.

<[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/can-we-believe-all-the-horrors-described-by-north-korean-escapees/2015/08/05/228b057e-1910-11e5-bd7f-4611a60dd8e5\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/can-we-believe-all-the-horrors-described-by-north-korean-escapees/2015/08/05/228b057e-1910-11e5-bd7f-4611a60dd8e5_story.html)>.

<sup>68</sup> See the efforts of the Activist Park Sang-hak and Fighters for a Free North Korea—for example: Elizabeth Shim, “South Korean activist launches ‘The Interview’ DVDs by balloon,” UPI.com, July 14, 2015 <[www.upi.com/Top\\_News/World-News/2015/07/14/South-Korean-activist-launches-The-Interview-DVDs-by-balloon/6171436898090/](http://www.upi.com/Top_News/World-News/2015/07/14/South-Korean-activist-launches-The-Interview-DVDs-by-balloon/6171436898090/)>.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Caroline Weisser, “Victims’ Voices: A Conversation on North Korean Human Rights,” DIPNOTE: U.S. Department of State Official Blog, April 30, 2015. <<https://blogs.state.gov/stories/2015/04/30/victims-voices-conversation-north-korean-human>>.

citizens as victims is far too simplistic, this dialogue is valuable in encouraging foreign publics to appreciate the shared humanity of those who live north of the Korean DMZ. We recognize from the memoirs of North Koreans—and works about their stories—that the individuals and families who still struggle to survive in the DPRK are more than the sum of their own oppression; they represent, above all else, the hopes and aspirations of millions of individuals in North Korea who want a brighter future for themselves and their families. Even the most ruthless political system cannot eliminate that innate human desire. As observers reflect on what the future will bring to the DPRK, these works remind us that the North Korean people—and their determination to achieve a better life—will play a decisive role in shaping its political destiny. North Korean defectors are the strength of the Korean nation personified.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

**James Jay Carafano** is Vice President of Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at the Heritage Foundation. Carafano's most recent publication is "Surviving the End", which addresses emergency preparedness. He also authored "Wiki at War: Conflict in a Socially Networked World," a survey of the revolutionary impact of the Internet age on national security. He is editor of a book series, *The Changing Face of War*, which examines how emerging political, social, economic and cultural trends will affect the nature of armed conflict. He is the co-author of *Wining the Long War: Lessons from the Cold War for Defeating Terrorism and Preserving Freedom*. As an expert on foreign affairs, defense, intelligence and homeland security issues, Carafano has testified many times before Congress. He is a regular guest analyst for the major U.S. network and cable television news organizations and his op-ed columns and commentary are published widely. Carafano, a 25-year Army veteran, rose to the rank of lieutenant colonel and served in Korea, Europe, and the United States. A graduate of West Point, Carafano holds a master's degree and a doctorate from Georgetown University as well as a master's degree in strategy from the U.S. Army War College.

**Bruce Klingner** is the Senior Research Fellow for Northeast Asia at the Heritage Foundation. He previously served 20 years with the Central Intelligence Agency and the Defense Intelligence Agency. From 1996 to 2001, Klingner was CIA's deputy division chief for Korea, responsible for the analysis of political, military, economic and leadership issues for the president of the United States and other senior U.S. policymakers. In 1993-1994, he was the chief of CIA's Korea branch, which analyzed military de-

velopments during a nuclear crisis with North Korea. Klingner has testified before the House Foreign Affairs Committee, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence and the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. He is a frequent commentator in U.S. and foreign media, including television news programs. His articles and commentary have appeared in major American, Korean, and Japanese publications. Klingner is a distinguished graduate of the National War College, where he received a master's degree in national security strategy in 2002. He also holds a master's degree in strategic intelligence from the Defense Intelligence College and a bachelor's degree in political science from Middlebury College in Vermont.

**Jongsung Kim** is a professor of economics at Bryant University. His research interests include various issues in the labor market such as gender/race inequality and poverty in the labor markets of China, Korea and the United States. Mostly recently, he published "Trends and sources of income inequality in the United States" with Edi Tebaldi. He holds a master's degree and a doctorate from Johns Hopkins University and had lectured at the Loyola college, Johns Hopkins University for 5 years between 1995 and 2000.

**Dr Lavina Lee** is a lecturer in the Department of Modern History, Politics and International Relations at Macquarie University, Sydney. She is the author of the book *US Hegemony and International Legitimacy: Norms, Power and Followership in the Wars on Iraq* (Routledge, 2010), and has published numerous articles and book chapters on Indian foreign policy including "Myanmar's transition to democracy: new opportunities or obstacles for India?" in *Contemporary Southeast Asia* in 2014, and "India, Central Asia and the Eurasian Union: a New Ballgame?" (with Graeme Gill) in *India Quarterly* in 2015. She periodically publishes opinion pieces in the *Australian*, the *Australian Financial Review*, *Hindustan Times* and the *New Straits Times*. She has commerce and law degrees from the University of NSW, an MA in International Peace and Security from King's

College, University of London, and a PhD in International Relations from Sydney University.

**Brandon K. Gauthier** graduated from Elon University in 2006 with a B.A. in political science and completed his M.A. in history at Fordham University in 2010. He is presently a Ph.D. candidate (ABD) in American history at Fordham University. Specializing in U.S. foreign relations, his dissertation examines the history of U.S.-DPRK relations from 1948 to 1996. Gauthier's research specifically historicizes competing cultural and political visions of North Korea in American society and explains the process through which integrated links between culture, identity, and foreign policy shaped U.S.-DPRK diplomatic history. He has previously written for the North Korea International Documentation Project, the Atlantic.com, Yonsei Journal of International Studies, the Oral History Review, the Shreveport Times, and the NK news.org. He has received fellowships and grants from the U.S. Department of State, the Organization of American Historians, and Fordham University. Gauthier has presented his scholarship at the annual conferences for the Society for Historians of American Foreign Relations, the Organization of American Historians, as well as Engage Korea's 2014 conference at Harvard University. Additionally, a student of the Korean language, Gauthier received a Critical Language Scholarship from the United States Department of State to study Korean at Chonbuk University in the summer of 2012.





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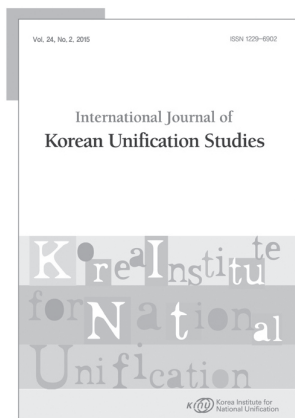
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