

The Impact of the Transfer of Power in South Korea on the Situation in Northeast Asia

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Abstract

With the Yoon Suk-yeol administration taking office in South Korea, the country's foreign and security policy are expected to undergo some changes. During the presidential election, Yoon announced a diplomacy and security pledge that included a policy against North Korea of "compensation after denuclearization measures" and a policy toward the U.S. of "rebuilding the South Korea-U.S. alliance and strengthening the comprehensive strategic alliance." Yoon's pledge emphasizes "strategic clarity" in South Korea's foreign and security policy, prioritizing the South Korea-U.S. military alliance and emphasizing the realization of "peace by force" in inter-Korean relations. At the same time, the Yoon administration's foreign and security policy risks strengthening the cooperative relationship between North Korea and China for having stimulated "geopolitical risk" in the Korean Peninsula. With the intensifying the U.S.-China rivalry and the Ukraine crisis, Yoon's foreign and security policy cannot break North Korea's will to build up its nuclear force. Moreover, it will likely strengthen triangular cooperation between China, Russia, and North Korea and thereby engender a confrontation in Northeast Asia between the U.S.-Japan-South Korea alliance versus a China-Russia-North Korea axis.

Keywords: South Korea, Transfer of Power, Yoon Administration, South Korean Foreign and Security Policy, Situation in Northeast Asia

I. Introduction

There are geopolitical confrontation factors and geoeconomic cooperation factors in the Korean peninsula. The Korean Peninsula is divided into North and South Korea,

and South Korea was severed from the Eurasian continent. From South Korea's point of view, North Korea is a stepping stone for geoeconomic cooperation with Eurasian continent countries, including China and Russia. At the same time, North Korea's nuclear and missile threats threaten South Korea's security and stimulate geopolitics on the Korean Peninsula. Therefore, the development of inter-Korean relations should create momentum in South Korea to reduce the geopolitical risks and create geoeconomic opportunities. However, after the breakdown of the U.S.-North Korea summit in Hanoi in 2019, the geopolitical risks in the Korean Peninsula became greater as inter-Korean relations once again plunged into a phase of tension. Resolving the North Korean issue and the division between the two Koreas is the core of South Korea's security and development interests. The South Korea-U.S. alliance is an essential foundation and vital element of South Korea's security against the North Korean military threat. Therefore, South Korea's policy against North Korea links North Korea and the U.S.

South Korea has two different approaches to formulating its policy regarding North Korea: security and unification. Conservatives have pressured North Korea based on security, while progressives have sought cooperation with North Korea from the point of view of unification. Because of this, the South Korean administration's policy toward North Korea, when the conservatives were in power, emphasized South Korea-U.S. relations and emphasized military and economic pressure. When progressives came to power, they tried to promote inter-Korean exchanges to build a peaceful and stable Korean Peninsula by mediating denuclearization dialogue with North Korea and the U.S. However, as the U.S.-China rivalry deepened, the strengthening of the South Korea-the U.S. alliance strained inter-Korean and South Korea-China relations, resulting in heightened geopolitical risks on the Korean Peninsula and limiting South Korea's diplomatic security.

The progressive Moon Jae-in administration maintained a position of strategic ambiguity, balancing diplomacy between the U.S. and China, adopting a policy of appeasement toward North Korea, and promoting the peace process on the Korean Peninsula. The Yoon Suk-yeol administration taking office on May 10, 2022, is expected to bring some changes to South Korea's foreign and security policy.



Figure 1. The U.S. President Joe Biden and South Korean President Moon Jae-in Meet in the White House

Source: The White House, “President Joe Biden and South Korean President Moon Jae-in,” May 21, 2021, *Wikipedia*, <[https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P20210521AS-2069_\(51224512406\).jpg](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:P20210521AS-2069_(51224512406).jpg)>.

For South Korea, policy toward the U.S.-China and against North Korea is at the core of South Korea’s foreign security policy. Yoon announced a diplomacy and security pledge against the U.S and North Korea during the presidential election. His administration’s policy on North Korea is to promote inter-Korean dialogue focused on denuclearization and preemptive strike on North Korea’s nuclear sites and missiles, as well as the additional deployment of THAAD defense systems. His policy toward the U.S is to rebuild the South Korea-U.S alliance and develop a comprehensive strategic alliance. This diplomacy and security pledge emphasized “strategic clarity” centered on the South Korea-U.S. alliance. Therefore, the Yoon administration will prioritize the South Korea-U.S strategic alliance more than South Korea-China, inter-Korean relations. Inter-Korean relations, and the situation in Northeast Asia, are expected to

plunge into turbulence due to the significant shift in the Yoon administration's foreign and security policy. This article examines South Korea's foreign and security policy toward Northeast Asia, and the characteristics of the Yoon administration and their impact on the situation in Northeast Asia.

II. Recent Situation in Northeast Asia

The U.S.-China conflict in East Asia is deepening. Since 2009, China has adopted a more assertive form of diplomacy toward neighboring countries and the region. In response, the Obama administration adopted a strategy of rebalancing (or pivot) toward the Asia-Pacific to check China, and subsequently U.S.-China relations shifted from cooperation to conflict. In 2015, the Xi Jinping regime promoted the Belt and Road Initiative to establish a China-centered international order in Eurasia. In response, in 2017 the Trump administration adopted the Free and Open Indo-Pacific



Figure 2. China's One Belt, One Road Initiative vs. The U.S.' Indo-Pacific Strategy

Source: Silk Road Briefing, "Has China's Belt and Road Initiative Shifted the Geo-Political Regional Debate from APAC to the Indo-Pacific?" November 4, 2020, *East Asia Forum*, <<https://www.silkroadbriefing.com/news/2020/11/04/has-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative-shifted-the-geo-political-regional-debate-from-apac-to-the-indo-pacific/>>.

strategy to replace the rebalancing strategy. Consequently, the U.S.-China conflict continued to intensify. The Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy aims to build a network to contain China. The Trump administration also helped establish the Quad to bolster security cooperation between the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India.

The U.S. has also expanded its partnerships with Singapore, Taiwan, New Zealand, and Mongolia.¹ The Biden Administration, which took office in 2021, continued many of the elements of the Trump administration's Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy to enhance deterrence or containment against a rising China. The Biden administration's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" strategy increased the importance of the Quad and, at the same time, put greater emphasis on multilateralism and the rebuilding of alliances to restore the U.S.' global leadership.

Northeast Asia is the fiercest battleground between the U.S. and China. Northeast Asia includes China, Russia, North Korea, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Mongolia. South and North Korea on the Korean Peninsula and Taiwan and China across the Taiwan Strait are face the potential for military confrontation. The U.S.-China conflict is intensifying as it is linked to regional security issues in Northeast Asia. Significant issues in Northeast Asia are North Korea's nuclear and missile threats and the escalating tensions between Taiwan and China. The U.S. is allied with Japan and South Korea, while Taiwan, along with Singapore, New Zealand, and Mongolia are four democratic partners.²

The Moon Jae-in administration valued diplomacy to resolve the North Korean nuclear issue. It sought to establish peace in the Korean Peninsula through mediated

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1. The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, p. 21, *The Department of Defense*, <<https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>>.
 2. Howard Wang, "Taiwan's Security Role in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy," *The Diplomat*, June 27, 2019, <<https://thediplomat.com/2019/06/taiwans-security-role-in-the-u-s-indo-pacific-strategy/>>.

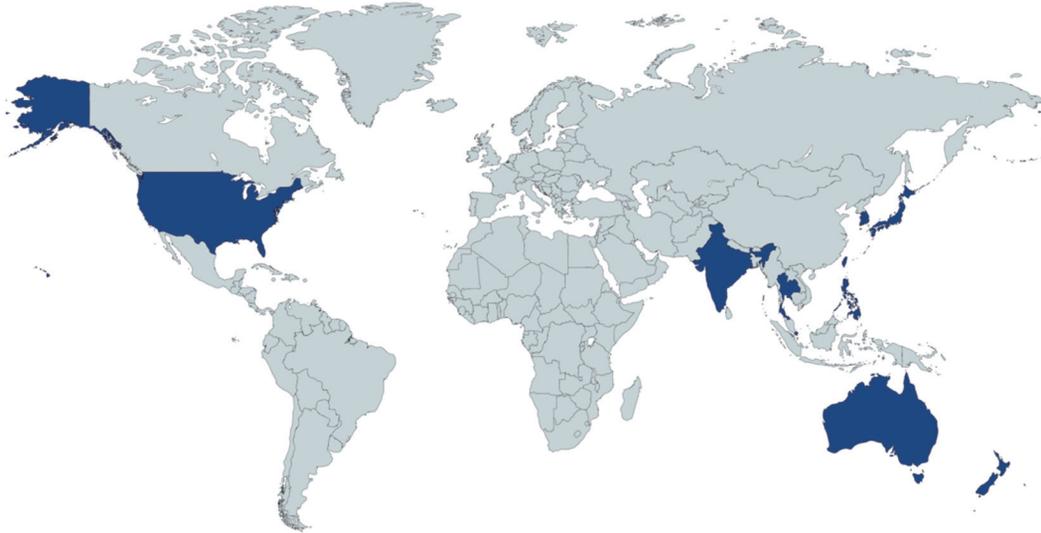


Figure 3. Partners of U.S.’ Indo-Pacific Strategy

Source: Joshua Ball “Balancing China: The Foundations of An Indo-U.S. Strategic Partnership,” June 10 2019, *Global Security Review*, <<https://globalsecurityreview.com/balancing-china-foundations-indo-u-s-strategic-partnership/>>.

denuclearization negotiations between the U.S. and North Korea.³ At the same time, North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missiles threatened peace and stability in Northeast Asia and South Korea, and thereby strengthened the South Korea-U.S. alliance, which responded hard to North Korea’s nuclear and missile threats. From the U.S. point of view, North Korea’s nuclear weapons and missiles threaten its allies’ security and that of the U.S.

Following the breakdown at the 2019 U.S.-North Korea summit in Hanoi, North Korea declared the enhancement of its nuclear weapons at the 8th Congress of the Workers’ Party of Korea (North Korea) in January 2021. This was ostensibly in response to U.S.-South Korea joint military exercises as well as U.N. and U.S. economic sanctions against North Korea. North Korea is developing better nuclear

³ Bum-sig Ha, “South Korea’s Pursuit and Challenge of Establishing a Peace Regime for the Korean Peninsula under the US-China Rivalry,” *Prospect & Exploration*, Vol. 20, No. 3, March 2022, pp. 93-98.

technology, making smaller and lighter nuclear weapons for greater tactical use, and developing solid-propellant intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), nuclear-powered submarines, and submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM) with nuclear warheads.

The Biden administration emphasized the importance of security cooperation between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea in the Indo-Pacific region to contain and pressure China and North Korea. It strengthened relations with Taiwan under the banner of alliances and shared values. The strengthening of U.S.-Taiwan relations, as well as Beijing's more aggressive posture, have escalated the U.S.-China conflict in the Taiwan Strait. Since the Tsai Ing-wen administration took office in Taiwan, as China adopted a tough stance toward Taiwan, cross-Strait relations have been more strained. The tensions in cross-Strait relations have led Taiwan and the United States to seek to strengthen bilateral security cooperation. Accordingly, the Biden administration expanded the scope of U.S.-Japan-Korea security cooperation to the Taiwan Strait. Further, it emphasized the role of South Korea in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. And then, the Biden administration requested that South Korea conduct joint military exercises with the U.S. in preparation for North Korean military action and intervention in the Taiwan Strait.⁴

South Korea has stated that its participation in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy is intensifying the U.S.-China conflict and straining relations between South and North Korea and the United States and North Korea. Meanwhile, the U.S. aims to strengthen trilateral security cooperation between the U.S., Japan, and South Korea.

China regards U.S. and South Korea policies as actions that destroy the strategic balance between China and the U.S. in Northeast Asia. North Korea believes the U.S. and South Korea seek to subdue North Korea militarily. Therefore, it strongly opposes the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy as well as South Korea's participation in

4. South Korea maintains a policy of non-intervention in the Taiwan Strait to maintain stable relations between South Korea and China for bilateral cooperation in economics as well as peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula.



Figure 4. U.S., Japan, and South Korea Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Hawaii

Source: The U.S. State Department, "Secretary Blinken Meets with Japanese Foreign Minister Yoshimasa and Republic of Korea Foreign Minister Eui-yong," February 12, 2022, *Flickr*, <<https://www.flickr.com/photos/statephotos/albums/72177720296557022>>.

trilateral security cooperation with the U.S. and Japan. South Korea's participation in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy and trilateral security cooperation has caused strains in South Korea-China relations and the deterioration of inter-Korean relations.

The Biden administration persuaded South Korea to show solidarity with its allies, focusing on the fact that peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait is essential to the security of the Indo-Pacific region. For this reason, during the U.S.-South Korea summit in May 2021, President Biden and President Moon emphasized the importance of maintaining peace and stability in the Quad and the Taiwan Strait. The Quad and Taiwan appeared in the official documents of the U.S.-South Korea administration

for the first time.⁵ Nevertheless, compared with the April 2021 joint statement by the U.S. and Japan, which referred to the importance of peace in the Taiwan Strait, the East China Sea, the South China Sea, Hong Kong-Uyghur human rights issues, and the importance of a trilateral security cooperation between the U.S., Japan and South Korea, the tone of the U.S.-South Korea joint statement was relatively modest. The Moon administration aimed to participate in non-security areas such as economic and climate change in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific strategy. It sought to maintain South Korea-China relations by minimizing opposition from the U.S.-South Korea alliance in response to North Korea's nuclear program.

III. South Korea's Transfer of Power and Changes in Foreign and Security Policy

The continued division of the two Koreas and the risks of military confrontation continue. Resolution of the North Korean issue remains a goal of the South Korean administration. However, the North Korean issue is linked to diplomacy and security issues such as the U.S.-South Korea alliance and South Korea-China relations. Since South Korea entered into diplomatic relations with China in 1992 and the progressive Kim Dae-jung administration took office in 1997, the liberal administration has implemented an engagement policy toward North Korea. Therefore, South Korea's foreign and security policy emerged in two streams: a hard-line approach toward North Korea based on the U.S.-South Korea alliance and an engagement approach centered on South Korea-China cooperation and inter-Korean exchanges.

In South Korea, political power has been divided into progressive (liberal) and conservative forces. The Democratic Party of Korea (South Korea) and the People Power party represent the progressive and conservative wings. South Korea's progressives and conservatives have different positions concerning the administration's policies on foreign affairs, security, the economy, and society. Diplomacy and security,

5. The White House, "U.S.-ROK Leaders' Joint Statement," May 21, 2021, *The White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/05/21/u-s-rok-leaders-joint-statement/>>.

above all, are the policy fields where the difference between the progressives and the conservatives is most evident. The goal of foreign and security policy is to protect South Korea's national security and survival. In inter-Korean relations, including divisions and military confrontation, the primary goals of South Korea's foreign and security policy is to resolve North Korean security threats and promote inter-Korean relations to build a stable and peaceful Korean Peninsula. The core of South Korea's security threat is the North Korean nuclear program; therefore, addressing this issue is the starting point of South Korea's foreign and security policy.

South Korea has two approaches to North Korea: security and unification. The conservatives aim to force North Korea to give up its nuclear weapons through pressure and sanctions and emphasize inter-Korean exchanges in denuclearization from a security standpoint. Progressives emphasize creating an external environment in which North Korea does not need to possess nuclear weapons by promoting economic, social, and cultural exchanges between the two Koreas, thereby restoring trust between the two Koreas and easing tensions on the Korean Peninsula with the perspective of unification. Therefore, liberal (or progressive) administrations have adopted a foreign and security policy as an engagement policy with North Korea, which led to dialogue and exchange between North and South Korea. Conservative administrations, for their part, pursued a foreign and security policy focused on pressure and sanctions, with the goal of compelling North Korea to give up its nuclear program. However, the North Korean nuclear issue is still unresolved, and inter-Korean relations are not improving either. The conservatives have criticized the liberal administrations' North Korean policy as a "pervasive policy." They claim it has failed to solve the North Korea issue. The progressives have criticized the conservative administrations' North Korean policy with the argument that it has undermined the foundations of inter-Korean relations caused North Korea's hard-line response as North Korea brought hostility to South Korea and increased its military capabilities.⁶

Yoon Suk-yeol, the opposition party's presidential candidate, defeated Lee Jae-

6. Jihwan Hwang, "After 20 Years: North Korea Policy Since the Conservative-Progressive Debate," *Unification Policy Studies*, Vol. 26, No. 1, July 2017, pp. 29-49.

myung, the progressive ruling party candidate, in the March 9 presidential election and took office on May 10. The Yoon administration is expected to change South Korea's foreign and security policy. It will shift Seoul's foreign and security policy toward North Korea by strengthening the South Korea-U.S. alliance and military and economic pressure.

As the U.S.-China rivalry deepened in recent years, South Korea and the U.S. strengthened their alliances. This hardened inter-Korean and South Korea-China relations and strengthened North Korea-China relations, resulting in heightened geopolitical risks on the Korean Peninsula and a dilemma for South Korea's diplomatic security.



Figure 5. U.S. Allies Strengthen Their Stance Against China, Russia, and North Korea

Source: Nam Hyun-woo, "Korea's strategic importance growing amid US-China tensions," *The Korea Times*, August 8, 2021, <https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2021/08/120_314247.html>.

Accordingly, the progressive Moon Jae-in administration sought to promote a foreign and security policy based on strategic ambiguity to achieve balanced diplomacy between the U.S. and China. This policy aimed to prevent South Korea from strengthening its relationship with the U.S. or China, a move which would have damaged its relations with one or the other. To this end, the Moon administration sought to participate in the U.S.' Indo-Pacific Strategy by limiting cooperation in the non-security field. In addition, it sought to persuade the U.S. and North Korea to resume dialogue rather than sympathize with U.S. policy regarding the U.S.' hardline attitude toward North Korea due to the deadlock in the denuclearization negotiations between the Washington and Pyongyang.

Yoon Suk-yeol argues that the South Korea-U.S. alliance has drifted due to South Korea's embrace of "strategic ambiguity" amid heightened U.S.-China tensions and differences of opinion between South Korea and the U.S. on North Korea policy priorities.⁷ Therefore, during the presidential election, Yoon made a diplomatic and security pledge as compensation for North Korea's denuclearization measures, rebuilding the South Korea-the U.S. alliance, and strengthening the comprehensive strategic alliance. The primary purpose of Yoon's diplomatic and security pledges is to develop South Korean-U.S. relations into a comprehensive strategic alliance to jointly establish an order in the Indo-Pacific region. To this end, Yoon's pledge contained policies such as seeking to join the Quad, improving South Korea-Japan relations, and adjusting Korea-China relations. Yoon has taken a hard line against North Korea. On the North Korean nuclear missile threat, he has emphasized to strengthening the ability to implement extended deterrence (nuclear umbrella) through the U.S. military deploying strategic assets such as strategic bombers, aircraft carriers, and a nuclear-powered submarine, additional deployment of THAAD, and joint South Korea-U.S. exercises. He also stressed realizing North Korea's complete and verifiable denuclearization through principled negotiations. Contrary to the Moon administration's policy, Yoon's administration will emphasize "strategic clarity" in

7. Suk-yeol Yoon, "South Korea Needs to Step Up: The Country's Next President on His Foreign Policy Vision," February 8, 2022, *Foreign Affairs*, <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/south-korea/2022-02-08/south-korea-needs-step>>.

South Korea's foreign and security policy, prioritizing the South Korean-U.S. military alliance and emphasizing the realization of "peace by force" inter-Korean relations.



Figure 6. Yoon Suk-yeol vs. Kim Jong Un

Source: Gabriela Bernal, "Yoon to take hard line against 'main enemy' North Korea," *Nikkei Asia*, March 14, 2022, <<https://asia.nikkei.com/Spotlight/N-Korea-at-crossroads/Yoon-to-take-hard-line-against-main-enemy-North-Korea>>.

IV. The Impact of the Yoon Administration's Foreign and Security Policy on Northeast Asia

The Yoon administration seeks greater alignment with U.S. foreign policy and away from earlier efforts to balance the great powers in the Asia-Pacific region.⁸ According to the Indo-Pacific strategy report released in February 2022, the Biden administration intends to expand trilateral cooperation between U.S., Japan and South Korea as a critical action plan for the next one or two years to counter North Korea

⁸ John Feffer, "Yoon's foreign policy of two noes and one yes," March 28, 2022, *Hankyoreh*, <https://english.hani.co.kr/arti/english_edition/english_editorials/1036571.html>.

and contain China.⁹ Yoon's foreign and security policy, coupled with the Russia-Ukraine war and North Korea's military tests, will further increase uncertainty in Northeast Asia.

At the 8th Party Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea in January 2021, Kim Jong Un emphasized that North Korea will continue to develop its nuclear preemptive and retaliatory strike capabilities by producing super-large nuclear warheads and expanding the range of new ICBMs. Kim has also stressed the need to deploy nuclear-powered SLBMs.¹⁰ With these pronouncements, Pyongyang sent a hardline message to the U.S. that North Korea would increase its nuclear forces, leaving room for negotiations if such policies were abandoned. However, the Biden administration has maintained a policy of unconditional dialogue with North Korea and imposed additional sanctions on North Korea in December 2021. In January 2022, Kim Jong Un renewed missile launches and nuclear tests, which had been suspended since 2018, and foreshadowed the adoption of a brinkmanship strategy against future sanctions by the Biden administration.

During the South Korean presidential election campaign earlier this year, North Korea expressed its displeasure against the U.S. and South Korea by launching various missiles, including a new hypersonic missile, a railway-borne missile system (RBMS)—types KN-23, KN-24, and Hwasong-11, Hwasong 12. Presidential candidate Yoon revealed his policy of preemptive strikes against North Korea, the additional deployment of THHAD, and the early strengthening of trilateral cooperation between South Korea, the U.S., and Japan.¹¹

9. The White House, *Indo-Pacific Strategy of The United States*, February 11, 2022, *The White House*, <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>>.

10. The Rodong Sinmun, *The great program of struggle that leads our style of socialist construction to a new victory: Regarding the report of the dear Comrade Kim Jong-un at the 8th Congress of the Workers' Party of Korea*, January 9, 2021, *The Rodong Sinmun*, <http://www.rodong.rep.kp/ko/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2021-01-09-0002>.

11. Mitch Shin, "What to Expect from Yoon Suk-yeol's Policy on North Korea," *The Diplomat*, April 13, 2022, <<https://thediplomat.com/2022/04/what-to-expect-from-yoon-suk-yeols-policy-on-north-korea/>>.



Figure 7. North Korea's Railway-Borne Type KN-23 Missile

Source: Vann H. Van Diepen, "Implications of North Korea's January 14 and 17 Short-Range Ballistic Missile Launches," *38 North*, January 25, 2022, <<https://www.38north.org/2022/01/implications-of-north-koreas-january-14-and-17-short-range-ballistic-missile-launches/>>.

The election of the hardliner Yoon has compelled North Korea to move to build its nuclear force. On March 24, 2022, North Korea resumed test-launches of an ICBM capable of striking targets in the U.S. for the first time since such launches were banned in 2017 and revealed plans to resume nuclear tests by restoring the nuclear test site at Punggye-ri in North Hamgyong Province. Furthermore, it emphasized that the scope its using nuclear weapon policy was expanded from preventing war to countering any attempt to usurp the state's fundamental interests.¹² The impact of the Ukraine crisis on North Korea's decision to increase its nuclear force also cannot be

¹² Zubaidah Abdul Jalil & Frances Mao, "North Korea: Kim Jong-un vows to step up nuclear weapons programme," *BBC News*, April 26 2022, <<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-australia-61225675>>.

overlooked. Ukraine, along with Russia, the U.S., and the U.K., signed the Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances in 1994. The agreement promised security and respect for state sovereignty in return for abandonment of nuclear weapons. North Korea sees the crisis in Ukraine as an example of the necessity for a state to possess nuclear weapons, seen as a form of assurance against external aggression. North Korea stressed that if Ukraine had possessed nuclear weapons, the Russian invasion would not have occurred.¹³

If North Korea had nuclear weapons, South Korea's conventional military superiority would disappear instantly. Such an imbalance would hang over South Korea like a bomb. Although their approach to denuclearization is different, South Korean administration, both progressive and conservative, adamantly oppose North Korea's possession of nuclear weapons. This has made the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula a significant component of Seoul's policy toward North Korea. The Yoon administration's North Korea policy seeks to promote inter-Korean exchanges and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula after the denuclearization of North Korea. The goal is to subdue North Korea's nuclear strategy by strengthening the South Korea-U.S. alliance.

After the crisis over the deployment of THAAD in Songju County, north Kyongsang Province, in 2016, South Korea-China relations on their way to being mended thanks to the Moon Jae-in administration's "Three Noes" stance¹⁴ and efforts to improve Korea-China relations. China sees South Korea's "Three Noes" as leverage that balances power with the U.S. in Northeast Asia amid intensifying rivalry with the U.S. As such, Beijing would regard South Korea's abandonment of the "Three Noes" as an act of hostility toward China.

¹³ Seulkee Jang, "Many N. Korean party cadres believe Ukraine's 'abandonment' of nuclear weapons caused current crisis," *Daily NK*, March 7, 2022, <<https://www.dailynk.com/english/many-n-korean-party-cadres-believe-ukraine-abandonment-nuclear-weapons-caused-current-crisis/>>.

¹⁴ Three noes is that no additional THAAD deployment, no participation in the U.S. missile defense network, and no establishment of a trilateral military alliance with the U.S. and Japan.

Yoon's foreign and security policies have a role in strengthening bilateral cooperation between North Korea and China, resulting in amplifying the geopolitical risks in the Korean Peninsula. Those risks stem from the fact that the Korean Peninsula is located at the intersection of continental powers including China, Russia and maritime powers like the U.S. and Japan. North Korea is at the center of Northeast Asian geopolitics. As the U.S.-China rivalry intensifies, North Korea's geopolitical value to China will inevitably arise. Thus, China supports the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and opposes North Korea's nuclear weapons, but has adopted a policy of maintaining the survival of the North Korean regime and opposes any action that could lead to regime collapse in Pyongyang. North Korea seeks to maintain its security by increasing its nuclear capabilities, but the regime is also desperate for foreign trade. North Korea and China are therefore deepening bilateral relations through the economy, such as resuming the trade fair this year (2022)¹⁵ after international sanctions in 2015. North Korea needs China to achieve a strategic balance in the Korean Peninsula due to its inferiority vis-à-vis the United States in terms of overall national power. North Korea also needs economic trade with China to survive economically amid the COVID-19 pandemic, sanctions against North Korea, and natural disasters. As competition between the U.S. and China intensifies, cooperation between the U.S. and China for the denuclearization of North Korea will inevitably deteriorate.

In response to the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy, China has built a trilateral cooperation system between China, Russia and North Korea while strengthening China-Russia and China-North Korea relations. Combined with the Yoon administration's policy of active participation in the U.S.' Indo-Pacific strategy and the Quad, these developments are consolidating a confrontational structure in the Korean Peninsula.

¹⁵ "N. Korea-China trade fair resumes after 7-yr halt over U.N. sanctions," *Yonhap News Agency*, April 29, 2022, <<https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20220429003800325>>.



Figure 8. Chinese Leader Xi Jinping, Russian President Vladimir Putin, and North Korea Supreme Leader Kim Jong Un

Source: “China, Russia, North Korea reportedly have successful hypersonic missile tests on heels of America’s failure,” *STATESIDE alternatives*, January 7, 2022, <<https://statesidealternatives.com/news/china-russia-north-korea-reportedly-have-successful-hypersonic-missile-tests-on-heels-of-americas-failure/>>.

V. Conclusion

The Moon Jae-in administration mediated relations between North Korea and the United States and improved inter-Korean relations through dialogue and negotiations amid a deepening U.S.-China rivalry. It also restored relations between South Korea and China, which had deteriorated after South Korea decided to deploy the THAAD defense system. Furthermore, Moon promoted a peace process in Korean Peninsula and mediated with the U.S. and North Korea. However, his successor predicted that the Korean Peninsula Peace Process promoted by Moon would not lead to the denuclearization of North Korea and at the same time would weaken the South Korean-U.S. alliance. Yoon therefore stated that the sound policy should aim to strengthen the South Korea-U.S. alliance. The Yoon administration’s foreign security policy characteristic is ABM—Anything But Moon. In other words, it denies the

foreign and security policy achievements of the Moon administration and aims to review or reverse them.

Depending on how South Korea does from the standpoint of the United States and China, the balance of power in Northeast Asia may be favorable to the U.S. or China. For the U.S.' emphasis on alliances, South Korea is indispensable: the country combines democracy, military power, and technology. From China's perspective, South Korea is a significant "middle zone" and Beijing also wants South Korea to take its side in its confrontation with the U.S.

The foreign security policy emphasized by the Yoon administration seeks to rebuild the South Korea-U.S. alliance and participate in the U.S.' Indo-Pacific strategy to expand cooperation with the U.S. and Japan. In addition, it will develop a united front with the U.S. and Japan in dealing with the North Korean nuclear issue, one that builds upon the existing South Korea-U.S. alliance. South Korea believes that North Korea's strategic importance is rising for China and Russia, and therefore trilateral cooperation between Pyongyang, Beijing, and Moscow is deepening. The Yoon administration's policy toward North Korea is to force North Korea to denuclearize in response to North Korea's ICBM and nuclear tests with renewed pressure. Cooperation between China and Russia is also needed for the Yoon administration to pressure North Korea to denuclearize effectively. However, due to the confrontation between the two camps, China and Russia have already opposed strengthening sanctions against North Korea in response to its missile tests. The end result of all these pressures is the deterioration of inter-Korean relations and South Korea-China relations.

※This work was supported by the Seed Program for Korean Studies through the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Korea and Korean Studies Promotion Service of the Academy of Korean Studies (AKS-2020-INC-2240001).

