South Korean Defense  
Resolution Overview by Chris Jeub

  
*Picture of the U.S. Pacific Command’s Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system.*

The morning the National Speech and Debate Association released its Sept/Oct Public Forum resolution to the league, the Washington Post headlined: “North Korea now making missile-ready nuclear weapons, U.S. analysts say.” The article claimed:

North Korea has successfully produced a miniaturized nuclear warhead that can fit inside its missiles, crossing a key threshold on the path to becoming a full-fledged nuclear power, U.S. intelligence officials have concluded in a confidential assessment. The new analysis completed last month by the Defense Intelligence Agency comes on the heels of another intelligence assessment that sharply raises the official estimate for the total number of bombs in the communist country’s atomic arsenal. The U.S. calculated last month that up to 60 nuclear weapons are now controlled by North Korean leader Kim Jong Un. Some independent experts believe the number of bombs is much smaller. The findings are likely to deepen concerns about an evolving North Korean military threat that appears to be advancing far more rapidly than many experts had predicted. U.S. officials last month concluded that Pyongyang is also outpacing expectations in its effort to build an intercontinental ballistic missile capable of striking cities on the American mainland.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Nicely timed. The NSDA resolution makes South Korea the center of the Sept/Oct resolution: “Resolved: Deployment of anti-missile systems is in South Korea’s best interest.” PRO teams will be tasked with promoting missile defense in South Korea, and CON teams tasked with opposing them.

This article’s intent is to give a history of the Korean Peninsula’s conflict, a history of North Korea’s nuclear ambitions, the latest antagonism of that ambition, how missile defense plays a part in South Korea’s defense, and an attempt to hope for Korean reunification. I suspect that the latter of this list is how the CON will position themselves against South Korea’s need for self-defense. Any which way, understanding the history and the status quo will empower students to create strong PRO and CON positions.

# History of the Korean Peninsula

The Korean Peninsula was one nation for several centuries. In the early 20th century, Japan held control of the empire under its rule. At the end of World War II when Japan fell to unconditional surrender to the United States, Korea was shot into chaos. Communism encroached in the North, but American interests prevailed in the South. An agreement was made to draw what became the 38th Parallel, a cease-fire dividing the country in half. The line was meant, at first, to be temporary, but it eventually drew the border between the North and South.

Sixty years ago [in 1945] North and South Korea ended the “Korean Conflict” by agreeing to the Armistice Agreement for the Restoration of the South Korean State. The agreement—a cease-fire, not a peace treaty—called for the Korean peninsula to be divided by a Military Demarcation Line (MDL) and a buffer, the demilitarized zone (DMZ), whose function would be to “prevent the occurrence of incidents which might lead to a resumption of hostilities.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Four WWII victors of interest in the area (US, Britain, Russia and China) were supposed to establish a national government for Korea, but the politics of the Cold War dissolved such hopes. A three-year war broke out—Russian-backed Communists in the North, US troops in the South. The history was a contentious one.

The United Nations General Assembly formed a temporary commission in 1947 to plan for a national election and a government for all of Korea. The United States and most South Koreans favored that move but the Soviet Union and the North’s leaders rejected it. After elections in the South in May 1948, the Republic of Korea was proclaimed in Seoul in August. North Korea proclaimed the Democratic People's Republic in September. On June 25, 1950, a strong armored force from the North crossed the 38th parallel and captured Seoul four days later. A three-year war ensued, with United Nations forces, primarily those of the United States, backing South Korea. A cease-fire was signed on July 27, 1953, and a demilitarized zone was established along the 38th parallel.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Following the devastating war, both sides attempted to pick themselves back up and rebuild. This is where the history of the two countries part from one another. Today, the two countries are hardly comparable.

The South prospered:

South Korea’s development over the last half century has been nothing short of spectacular. Fifty years ago, the country was poorer than Bolivia and Mozambique; today, it is richer than New Zealand and Spain, with a per capita income of almost $23,000. For 50 years, South Korea’s economy has grown by an average of seven percent annually, contracting in only two of those years. In 1996, South Korea joined the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, the club of rich industrialized countries, and in 2010, it became the first Asian country and the first non-G-7 member to host a G-20 summit. To call South Korea an emerging market, therefore, is a bit of an anachronism. The country is a rich, technologically advanced, mature democracy with an impressive record of innovation, economic reform, and sound leadership.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The North, not so much. The Kim family were established “supreme leaders” under Kim Il-sung in 1948, of which three generations have remained in power. Kim Jong-il came into power in 1974, and the current leader Kim Jong-un took over in 2011. All three leaders have run North Korea into the ground economically. Compared to its southern half-sibling:

According to 2013 figures, the GDP of North Korea is estimated at $33 billion, while that of South Korea is $1.19 trillion. The GDP per capita is $33,200 in South Korea, while it is $1,800 in the North, according to the CIA World Factbook. South Korea’s trade volume was a gigantic $1.07 trillion in 2013. By comparison, North Korea reported a relatively minuscule $7.3 billion.[[5]](#footnote-5)

There is one saving grace for North Korea: its nuclear program.

# History of North Korea’s Nuclear Ambitions

North Korea had always had nuclear ambitions, but it became most apparent in the 1980s and 1990s when Kim Jong-il managed to negotiate and sign the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Kim, at the time, promised to stop its nuclear ambitions as long as the United States withdrew its nuclear missiles from South Korea. The US kept its end of the bargain, but the North Koreans kept working on their program.

In 2006, the first nuclear test happened:

North Korea said Sunday night that it had set off its first nuclear test, becoming the eighth country in history, and arguably the most unstable and most dangerous, to proclaim that it has joined the club of nuclear weapons states.[[6]](#footnote-6)

From 2006 to 2016, despite heavy UN condemnation and international sanctions, North Korea launched four more nuclear tests. And since October 2016, five additional missile launches have made North Korea arguably the most potent rogue nation in the world.

For decades, undeterred by sanctions and international isolation, North Korea has been increasing the power and range of its arsenal of missiles. It is in a position today to rapidly hit densely populated targets throughout East Asia. With an intercontinental ballistic missile, its reach would become global. The missiles shown here include those already in the Kim regime’s arsenal—the Scud series, the No-dong, and the KN-02—and those in development.[[7]](#footnote-7)

# The Latest Antagonism

There are nine countries who own nuclear warheads, the vast majority of the warheads with the US and Russia. As early as the day before the release of the NSDA public forum resolution, US analysts were of the opinion that North Korea was years away from nuclear bomb capability. However, as reported in the Washington Post, intelligence has changed:

While more than a decade has passed since North Korea’s first nuclear detonation, many analysts believed it would be years before the country’s weapons scientists could design a compact warhead that could be delivered by missile to distant targets. But the new assessment, a summary document dated July 28, concludes that this critical milestone has already been reached. “The IC [intelligence community] assesses North Korea has produced nuclear weapons for ballistic missile delivery, to include delivery by ICBM-class missiles,” the assessment states, in an excerpt read to The Washington Post. The assessment’s broad conclusions were verified by two U.S. officials familiar with the document. It is not yet known whether the reclusive regime has successfully tested the smaller design, although North Korea officially last year claimed to have done so.[[8]](#footnote-8)

The UN adopted a harsh penalty on North Korea and drafted stiff sanctions in a recent UN resolution. It was the largest repudiation of North Korea’s nuclear program to date. North Korea did not respond kindly, but its response contained an aggressive strength of a rogue nuclear power:

North Korea threatened Tuesday [August 8] to take “physical” actions in response to the United Nations Security Council’s adoption of a new sanctions resolution, calling it a U.S.-led terrorist act against Pyongyang. The warning by the North’s Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee came one day after North Korea’s government rejected the U.N. sanctions over its long-range missile tests and vowed retaliation against Washington “thousands of times.” “(Enemies) should not forget that we are ready to ruthlessly take strategic measures involving physical actions by fully mobilizing our national power,” a spokesman at the committee was quoted as saying by the North’s official Korean Central News Agency. The Korea Asia-Pacific Peace Committee is an agency affiliated with the Workers’ Party of Korea. North Korea on Monday warned of a stern action of justice against the U.S., accusing Washington of committing heinous crimes against the North and its people.[[9]](#footnote-9)

There couldn’t be a testier time for this NSDA resolution.

# Missile Defense of South Korea

Here’s where understanding South Korea’s current political climate will come in handy. There is a new president in South Korea. His name is Moon Jae-in, a left-of-center liberal who campaigned on the hope for more peaceful relations with North Korea. He entered office in May after his predecessor was ransacked with controversy of corruption. Moon’s main concern is apparently for the environment, but it was perceived as a friendly nod to North Korea and China. The THAAD missiles were removed June 7:

South Korea has suspended the deployment of a controversial American missile defense system, with the new liberal administration declaring that no further moves can take place until an environmental assessment is carried out — a process that could take a year or even two. The decision highlights the potential for a rift between the United States under President Trump and South Korea with its new liberal president, Moon Jae-in, who is due to visit the White House later this month for their first meeting. Moon’s office Wednesday said it would suspend the deployment of the Terminal High Altitude Air Defense (THAAD) system. The antimissile battery is designed to protect the South against North Korea, but it has elicited strong opposition, particularly where it is being deployed. The U.S. Army expedited the movement of the THAAD battery to South Korea ahead of Moon’s anticipated victory in a snap presidential election last month. Moon vowed to review the previous government’s decision to host the system.[[10]](#footnote-10)

That was then, and it was the time when NSDA members were asked to vote for a balanced public forum resolution. Moon Jae-in was a charismatic character who wanted to “give peace a chance.” More than 70% of the NSDA membership thought the same, and this resolution was the overwhelming choice.

But then, at the end of the summer, Moon Jae-in reversed his decision:

After the North’s ICBM tests, South Korea’s new president, Moon Jae-in, reversed his decision to suspend the deployment of an advanced American missile defense system. He also asked the United States to let the South build more powerful ballistic missiles, a move that would require Washington’s approval under the terms of a bilateral treaty. Some opinion surveys have indicated that most South Koreans favor their country developing nuclear weapons of its own, to counter the North’s, though Mr. Moon opposes the idea.[[11]](#footnote-11)

Here’s where the resolution rests on debaters for the next couple of months: Should South Korea enter into an aggressive weapons race with North Korea? Some tend to think so:

On Monday, South Korea’s conservative opposition group, the Liberty Korea Party, issued a statement favoring the deployment of American tactical nuclear weapons in the country, the Yonhap news agency reported. “Peace will come when we achieve a balance of power, not when we are begging for it,” the party’s leader, Hong Joon-pyo, was quoted as saying.[[12]](#footnote-12)

With all the nuclear hostility in the region, and with Moon Jae-in’s conversion to a more militaristic response to North Korea, it would be difficult to understand a CON position in this resolution. There are a couple.

First, China retaliation. China sees THAAD in South Korea as a threat to their military positioning in the Far East. According to The Diplomat:

China has long been vocal about its opposition to the deployment of THAAD in South Korea, basing its opposition around the powerful X-band AN/TPY-2 radar associated with the battery. Beginning last year, China began unofficially sanctioning South Korean entities on its soil in response to the deployment decision; this included additional scrutiny of operations by South Korea’s Lotte conglomerate, which swapped land with the South Korean government for the system’s deployment. Beijing’s opposition to THAAD has little to do with the interceptor batteries themselves. Chinese strategists fear that the AN/TPY-2 radar would be able to degrade China’s nuclear second strike capability against the United States by allowing U.S. early warning systems to better discriminate between real and decoy warheads.[[13]](#footnote-13)

Second, there exists out there a “Hope for Reunification.” More than half of South Koreans desire reunification, though that number is down significantly from polls of previous generations. Bringing the two countries back together as one does not seem to be a high priority anymore. However, there are benefits:

If the message [of reunification] proves persuasive, South Korea can prevent a 60-year-old consensus from devolving into an argument. Unification, the government’s reasoning goes, would reunite families, stabilize the peninsula and — eventually — generate new economic potential in a country whose population would be 73 million instead of the current 49 million. Likelier, though, is that the taxpayer-funded campaign will do little to change minds, leaving the South with new questions about whether its quarrelsome neighbor should be viewed like any other foreign country, albeit one that shares the same language and poses a security threat.[[14]](#footnote-14)

It can be argued that THAAD in South Korea would harm the progress toward a reunified Korean Peninsula. It would upset China as well as harm the opportunity for reunification. Former US ambassador to the UN, John Bolton, thinks there is a good shot for a win-win:

Do any diplomatic avenues remain open? Only one offers any possibility of a lasting solution, as opposed to resuming talks with North Korea in the diaphanous expectation that the 26th year of such negotiations will produce results not discovered in the first 25. That possibility — peaceful reunification of the Korean Peninsula — Washington has all but ignored these last decades, although the upside of potential success is enormous. The case for Korean reunification is not an appeal to China to help America. It is an argument for China to look to its own national interest, and to act accordingly.[[15]](#footnote-15)

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