

Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) of Strategic Outcomes in the Korean Peninsula

Part I: Key Findings

Editor: Dr. Allison Astorino-Courtois (NSI)

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This paper reports a number of the top-level findings from the Strategic Multilayer Assessment (SMA) Strategic Outcomes in the Korean Peninsula project requested by the Joint Staff J39 and USINDOPACOM. They are based on an integration of the results of the eleven different analytic efforts¹ included in the project.

Finding: There are impediments to North Korean denuclearization on multiple layers making it highly unlikely and extremely difficult to achieve under foreseeable conditions²

Results Synopsis by Dr. Tom Allen, Institute for Defense Analyses, Project Senior Review Group:

“Specific military efforts by the US, by themselves, will not have a positive impact on the short- or long-range outcome (and in some cases, will be counter-productive, particularly with regards to the DPRK.) However, better implementation of multi-lateral economic and diplomatic initiatives will support

Significant impediments to any meaningful progress toward North Korean denuclearization appear on multiple levels of analysis (i.e., cognitive, population, state, region).

- **Leader: KJU demonstrates limited aptitude for accomplishing the cognitive shifts necessary for FFVD.** *Cognitive analyses showing Kim Jong-Un to have the cognitive style of the proto-typical black-white thinker (e.g., high need for power, extremely low cognitive complexity) indicating that he lacks the information processing and differentiation skills one needs to identify and act on compromises, and/or change one’s core beliefs. Both, would be required in a decision to move toward even incomplete denuclearization. In addition, discourse analysis highlights Kim’s strong personal attachment to the DPRK nuclear program and its necessity as a deterrent to US military action which is described as a permanent condition.*
- **Population: DPRK nuclear weapons are closely tied to North Korean national identity and pride.** *The North Korean people have lived for 70 years with a persistent and remarkably consistent national narrative that honors strength and self-sufficiency in the face of external threats. As in Pakistan and other states, the scientific and technological achievement of North Korea’s nuclear weapons are used as a source of nationalist pride. The difficulty of, and time involved in, separating the population’s national identity and pride from North Korea’s nuclear weapons program should not be underestimated.*
- **State: Neither economic incentives nor threats are sufficient to raise the value of DPRK denuclearization –an outcome it can veto.** *Interest analysis indicates that achieving FFVD would require the Kim regime to agree to a path that is detrimental to multiple of its political, security and economic interests. Neither offers of economic and diplomatic rewards (carrots), nor threats of increased regional tension or US military action (sticks) are sufficient to make denuclearization appear as a favorable option for the North Korean regime. Moreover, North Korea is the only actor with the power to “veto” denuclearization, e.g., by stalling or taking half-*

¹ See table following this report for identification and brief descriptions of these efforts.

² While none is either a necessary or a sufficient condition, some analyses suggest changes that, *if taken together*, could shape the regional context in a way to make DPRK denuclearization more likely in the longer term. These include:

- Altering US objectives to allow for DPRK disarmament as a middle-step toward increased regional stability. However, softening the US stance in this way amounts to de facto acceptance of DPRK’s nuclear status, and could further erode allies’ confidence in US commitment to the region if not accompanied by credible messaging regarding US intent.
- Negating Kim regime’s perception that nuclear weapons are necessary to ensure regime survival against external and internal threats.
- Decoupling nuclear weapons from North Korean national identity and source of national pride.
- Developing trust between DPRK, US, Japan and other regional actors currently mistrustful of North Korea’s intent to fulfill any agreements it makes. However, SMEs note that US withdrawal from JCPOA complicates US ability to engender DPRK trust.
- Aligning and reprioritizing US and Chinese regional goals. Specifically, achieving DPRK denuclearization will require the US and China each to prioritize engagement with, and economic assistance to DPRK over their individual interests in increasing relative regional influence.

steps and is incentivized to do so as, especially as time goes on, these tactics produce de facto international acceptance of its nuclear status.

- **Region: Chinese incentive and ability to undermine FFVD.** *Both China's and North Korea's interests are better served by moderate regional tension (as in the pre-summit status quo) than by a US, or South Korean-brokered denuclearization plan. Both states also gain by drawn-out but inconclusive US-DPRK talks that keep regional tensions below the boiling point. China's incentive to undermine FFVD is driven by its interests in gaining regional influence rather than the security threat potentially posed by North Korean weapons. In fact, denuclearization talks become a security threat for China only if it appears that an agreement would extend US influence on the Peninsula, or failure would result in US military action. Finally, current Chinese and Russian media narratives continue to depict the US as the real threat to regional interests and, are well-poised to accuse the US of failure of commitment or aggressive intent in the event that talks breakdown.*
- **Region: The current US approach to regional leadership may be out-of-touch with regional interests.** *While no regional actor (except DPRK) gains from a nuclear DPRK, most do not consider North Korean nuclear weapons to be a pressing issue or major threat to their national security. At most, the main DPRK-related threats to regional stability are indirect; they are concerns about how others like Japan and the US would respond to nuclear-armed North Korean provocation. Interestingly although it is seen as major security concern by the US, the interests driving regional states' view of DPRK nuclear weapons involve their abilities to gain regional influence, either at the expense of the US specifically (China, Russia) or to establish regional norms of multilateral, peaceful conflict resolution (South Korea, Australia, Japan).*

If little progress on North Korean denuclearization is to be expected, what is the best approach for retaining US regional influence and leadership?

Overall, the analyses suggest retaining the current posture of containing and deterring North Korean aggression and/or enhancements to its nuclear program. However, continuation of the maximum pressure approach to sanctions, and clear messaging to the DPRK and regional states that the US remains committed to the region, and to denuclearization should be supplemented by enhanced non-militarized engagement including maintaining consistent diplomatic communication with regional stakeholders and signaling a willingness to help foster regional solutions to regional issues. Engaging other regional actors in the process through multilateral negotiations would further reduce concern over US commitment to denuclearization, and the regional more broadly.

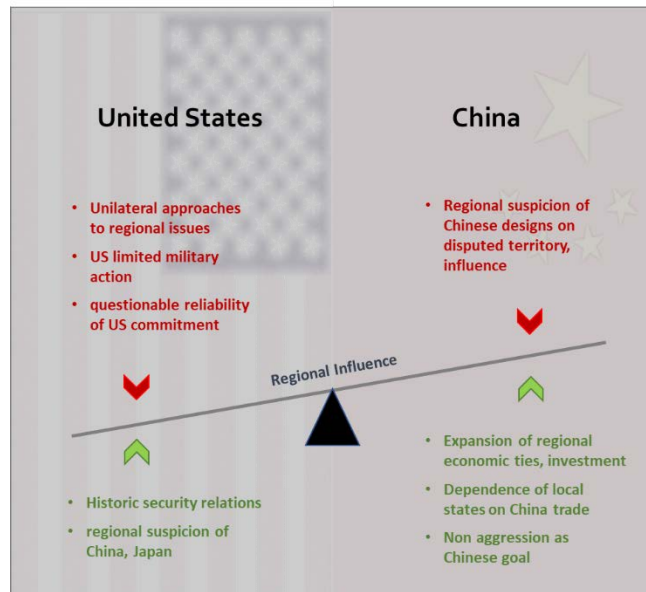
Finding: Increased US-PRC tensions (the “new Cold War”) may work to Chinese advantage if regional actors are forced to choose between US guns and Chinese butter; US seen as disruptive or unengaged

Today, expanding regional dependence on China trade coincides with increasing uncertainty about US regional objectives, and is encouraging US allies (e.g., Japan, Philippines, Australia) and others to explore closer security and economic ties with China, enhance their security self-sufficiency and turn to multilateral regional institutions as insurance against US policy changes. With sufficient regional stability to allow for economic growth, regional states have managed to balance their economic relations with China and security ties to the US.

Chinese economic influence in the region could become a potent lever to coerce regional states including dividing US and its allies during security crises. With North Korea as the notable exception, the strength of the national economies of regional states is directly and critically tied to their governing legitimacy and regime support. That is, regional trade is a domestic political issue. As a result of its economic weight in the region, China has significant capability to influence the actions of US allies and other regional actors either by promising investment or disrupting trade. China's trump card is economic coercion.

Provoking Chinese regime insecurities with potential external threats (e.g. US military action, significantly improved relations with North Korea, new deployments of sophisticated weapons) or internal threats to the regime (e.g., by impeding Chinese economic growth) could lead to Chinese economic retaliation or pressure on US allies and regional states. Analysis of their full ranges of interests suggests that even US allies may react negatively to perceived US actions that disrupts their ability to balance regional trade with security relations, and could cause a further drag on US regional influence and undermine other US objectives.

The criticality of trade and economic growth to Western Pacific governments (i.e., rather than security or ideological disputes as in other parts of the world) means that actions perceived as escalatory and/or aggressive even in the service of North Korea denuclearization are likely to be unpopular and could push US allies to side with China (not unlike the predicament of US European allies regarding the Iran nuclear deal. In fact, analysis of European politics indicates that in light of existing strains in transatlantic relations dating to 2016, increased US-DPRK tensions and certainly US military action/ armed conflict on the Korean Peninsula would reverberate not only in Asia and the Pacific but in Europe as well. There it would increase sympathy for Russia and likely generate significant doubts about both the quality and continued value of US international leadership.)



Bottom Line: The US role and approach to satisfying its objectives in the Pacific may be at a crossroads. Long-term US influence in the Pacific may require a change in the way the US perceives “regional leadership” and the activities that go with it.

The US may be at a critical tipping point in terms of its role in the region and should consider carefully its interests and objectives in order to bring them into line with its actions in the Pacific.

- **Interested Observer versus Active Participant.** On the one hand, policy makers may decide that the preferred US role would be akin to an “interested observer,” providing security guarantees and intervening only when US interests are at stake. In this case, direct US leadership would not be a high priority and likely yield to regional actors and economic and security institutions. The risk is that over time, this tack may both diminish US security and deterrence-based regional influence relative to China’s economic ties, and fail to achieve DPRK denuclearization. On the other hand, policy makers may prefer to fashion the US role in the region as an “active participant.” This is the costlier approach and requires a sustained and even commitment in order to succeed. The US would provide security guarantees and actively participate in collective efforts to address regional concerns that may not pose direct threats to US interests.

If US regional influence and leadership in the Pacific is a priority, the analyses suggest the more effective approach is the US as “active participant”, emphasizing the following:

- ***Inclusiveness & Multilateralism.*** *There is broad regional support for peaceful, rules-based multilateral solutions. The first is a strong (and growing) desire among both US allies and potential adversaries for regional solutions to regional issues. There is a growing desire among most, if not all, regional actors for conflict resolution processes in which they are included, and thus have some influence, or at least can use to garner prestige. Even staunch US allies share interests in containing US unilateral action in the region. The US may not need to yield regional leadership as some analyses suggest, if it takes an inclusive approach to leadership in regional fora. A critical goal would be to help build the rules-based regional order that allies and smaller states favor.*

US leadership in diplomatic and security fora in a way that signals US recognition of the interests and constraints facing smaller states is likely to be well-received by US allies, could reduce concern over US regional commitment and essentially call the bluff on Chinese and Russian media narratives about US short-sightedness and aggressive intent in the region.

- ***Consistency with US values.*** *None of the analyses suggest that the US scuttle its containment and deterrence positions, or worse, accept North Korea as a nuclear state. Quite the reverse. Persistently and consistently working to maintain the ideals of non-proliferation and peaceful conflict resolution in the region can help “rebrand” the US role and interests in the region as more than what directly impacts the US. It also enables a straightforward US narrative (“what the US stands for”) that could remove some uncertainty about US objectives and commitment.*
- ***Appreciation for and engagement with regional concerns beyond security.*** *Energetic US engagement in regional economic institutions to match military engagement could demonstrate US commitment to the region in the area of greatest interest to regional actors. In addition, conducting Military Operations to support collective good, downplaying wargames and “aggressive” military exercises in favor of humanitarian or disaster-relief exercises including Chinese and perhaps Russian participation as well as allies and smaller states.*

Analytic Approaches

	Analysis	Method	Type
I-R-C	I-R-C Analysis of Regional Dynamics & Futures , NSI	Interest-Resolve-Capability (IRC) Analysis	Decision theoretic model with qualitative input and quantitative measures
ATHENA	Futures Analysis , TRADOC G-27	ATHENA model runs	Computational model made up of multiple PMESII agents
TIN	TIN Modeling , GMU	Timed Influence Net	Bayesian modeling approach beginning with outcome and working backward
IM	HAF/A9RI Holistic Simulations , Integral Mind	Analysis of Intel Products	
IB	Cog, Behavioral Assessments , Intelligent Biology	Cognitive Impressions of KJU	
ViTTa®	Virtual Think Tank (ViTTa®) , NSI	Global Subject Matter Expert elicitation on DPRK and regional actors	Qualitative reports
Discourse	Patterns in DPRK Discourse , NSI	Discourse Analysis	Quantitative analysis of KJU language use
Media	Messaging Strategies in Media , OK State	Global Media Narrative Monitoring	Quantitative and qualitative analyses of constructed strategic narratives in international media systems (RU and PRC)
IC	KJU Integrative Complexity and Motive Hierarchy Analysis , U British Columbia		Quantitative analysis of KJU integrative complexity and motive hierarchy
CC	KJU Cognitive Complexity Analysis , NSI		Quantitative analysis of patterns in causal maps of KJU belief system
GS-ECE/EU	GSE-ECE/EU re US-DPRK Relations , Western Carolina U.		Qualitative report on view of DPRK Denuclearization issue among German-speaking and East-Central European states