The North Korean Strategic Dilemma

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Outline

1. Kim Jong-un: a threat to regional stability
2. North Korea: catalyst for geopolitical change
3. US-Japan-ROK: strategic response
4. China: challenge to Xi’s governance
Kim Jong-un
A Threat to Regional Stability

- Irrational?
  - assassination of his half-brother Kim Jong-nam
  - regime rationality: uncertain

- Dangerous
  - nuclear program
  - missile launches, particularly over Japan
  - artillery threat to South Korea

- Revisionist
  - rejects international law & rules-based order
  - rogue state (unlike Iran)
North Korea
Catalyst for Geopolitical Change

• Japan
  • “Diamond Security” concept
  • Abe’s post-election mandate

• United States
  • preparation of diplomatic/military options
  • prepared to go to war if Guam or homeland attacked
North Korea Catalyst for Geopolitical Change

- China
  - Will not be the dominant power in Northeast Asia (militarily or economically)
  - North Korean crisis complicates Xi’s regional ambitions

- Other powers
  - South Korea
  - Russia
US-Japan-ROK Strategic Response

• Enhanced cooperation
  • Trilateral agreement
  • Joint deployments
  • Missile defense

• Geopolitical challenge to China
  • US intention: compel Chinese cooperation on North Korea, not box it in
  • alternatively, does Beijing benefit?
China
Challenge to Xi’s Governance

• Last 3 North Korean missile tests occurred during
  • April: Xi-Trump meeting in Mar-a-Lago, Florida
  • May: One Belt One Road Summit (Xi’s keynote)
  • September: BRICS Summit in Xiamen

• Sino-Russian partnership
  • Interests don’t converge for North Korea policy
The North Korean crisis is enabling the US and Japan to organize a new security architecture based on “Diamond Security”

- Japan’s strategic role is changing → more important for regional and global stability
- India cooperative, Australia possible

China’s decision to denuclearize the Korean Peninsula could further alter geopolitical dynamics

- Xi’s maritime and regional ambitions are complicated by the emerging security architecture
- Beijing’s perception of “containment” → will China adopt Russian-style geopolitical paranoia about Diamond Security