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Philippines Choose Chinese Investment Over Territorial Defense

In early April, Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte made waves by promising to improve Philippine defenses on islands in the South China Sea. "We have to fortify. I must build bunkers there or houses and make provisions for habitation." Renovation and expansion of facilities on Paga-Asa (Thitu Island) "has my full support" ([Philippine Star](#), April 7; [Manila Bulletin](#), April 17). Additional comments claimed that the Philippine armed forces would seize unoccupied islands, and that Duterte himself would plant a

flag in Pag-asa. Duterte adopted this stance after questions were raised about his close relations with China and increasing number of apparent violations of Philippine sovereignty. Philippine defense officials announced in March, for example, that Chinese vessels were detected near Benham Plateau, a subsea formation to the east of Luzon, the Philippines main island ([Philippine Star](#), March 29). However, less than a week later Duterte rolled back these comments "Because of our friendship with China" ([ABS-CBN News](#) [Philippines], April 12). Earlier in March Duterte had declared that he did not wish to confront China in the South China Sea and that "I deeply believe the Philippines-China relations will scale new heights" ([Xinhua](#), March 17).

Despite winning a judgement against Chinese occupation of islands in the South China Sea before the international court of arbitration in July 2016, Duterte, then newly elected, put the Philippines on a path toward closer relations with China. Most importantly, he also appears to have adopted many of China's attitudes toward economic and strategic issues.

The Philippines are an interesting test case for the effectiveness of Chinese attempts to export values and win allies through economic incentives—even those with whom it has competing territorial claims.

During his October 2016 state visit to China, Duterte secured \$24 billion worth of loans and infrastructure projects (*China Brief*, November 11, 2016). Economic development is a core plank of Duterte's political appeal, one he is unlikely to risk through real action in the South China Sea. Moreover, his desire for better relations with China appears to go beyond a need for investment. During his meeting with CCP Liaison Department Head Song Tao (宋涛), Duterte expressed admiration for the CCP's governance of China, saying he wished to send members of his PDP-Laban political party to China to learn (*Guangming Daily*, February 24). Perhaps unsurprisingly, Duterte's national security policy appears to at least "rhyme" with Chinese President Xi Jinping's "Comprehensive National Security Outlook" (总体安全观).

Duterte's "National Security Policy 2017–2022", proposed in October 2016, places internal conflicts (Moro secessionism and the communist insurgency), economic and social threats, poverty, corruption, drugs, food security) as its focus—not external security (*Manila Bulletin*, March 14). **[1]** Fiery rhetoric about improving bases aside, budgetary figures indicate that the focus will be

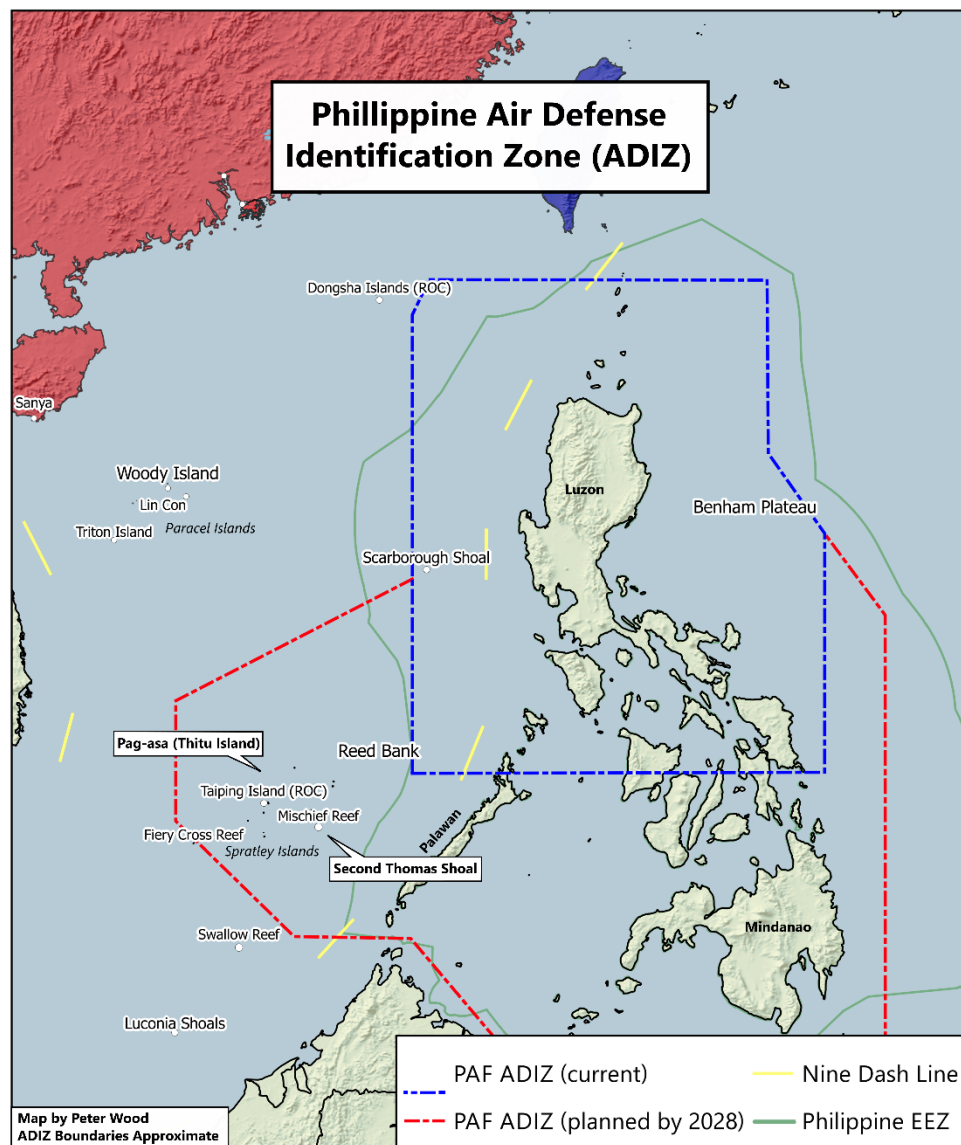
on these internal economic and security issues—not confrontation with China (*Rappler*, January 21).

A pronounced realignment of resources toward internal security will have long-term negative consequences for the Philippine Armed Forces' ability to challenge Chinese intrusions. A recurring problem with Philippine assertiveness is not just the tremendous imbalance in Filipino vs Chinese military capabilities (for example, the PLA Navy's 9th Zhidui, homeported in Sanya, Hainan province, has more firepower than the entire Philippine Navy) but also in terms of maritime and aerial surveillance. If possession is nine-tenths of the law, then being able to monitor airspace and ship traffic is its maritime equivalent.

The features and islands that the Philippines occupy in many cases lack proper facilities. A handful of Philippine Marines live in the BRP Sierra Madre, a 1940s-era ship run aground on Ayungin Shoal (Second Thomas Shoal). Pag-asa Island, for example, has a short unpaved airstrip, barely capable of handling C-130 transport planes. The largest occupied island in the Kalayaan municipality, it is home to less than 200 full-time residents. Palawan, the long and narrow island further east, was planned to be the home to an expanded U.S. presence.

"Flight Plan 2028", an overview of the Philippine Air Forces' modernization plans, which was drafted under previous President Benigno Aquino anticipates extending the Philippines' Air Defense Identification Zone to adequately cover the country's Exclusive Economic Zone and claims taking until 2028. Current radars and interception capabilities are insufficient to cover even the majority of Philippine territory, and most of the radars date to the 1960s (see map).

[2]



the cost of a single fighter jet, the government could build 2,000 classrooms ([Philippine Star](#), July 22, 2013). Duterte's acceptance of Chinese investment in exchange for not challenging territorial claims has important security implications for the rest of South-east Asia.

President Duterte has clearly changed the direction of Philippine defense policy, prioritizing achieving internal security and economic prosperity first. However, with Chinese island reclamation projects nearing completion, and expanded U.S. access to Philippine facilities uncertain, Duterte may have traded away the Philippines ability to effectively enforce their claims. It also sets a precedent for other states which face similar hard choices: improve defenses and bring

China to the negotiation table over territorial claims, or accept economic investment for acquiescence.

For Duterte, backing down on territorial claims could mean that his government misses out on major economic windfalls. In addition to its importance for fishing, one contended area, Reed Bank is believed to have 115 million barrels of oil and 4.6 trillion cubic feet of natural gas ([Manila Bulletin](#), November 20, 2016).

Given the Philippines economic problems (12 million Filipinos live in extreme poverty), such a "guns vs butter" calculation is incredibly difficult ([Philippine Daily Inquirer](#), March 18, 2016). Even Duterte's predecessor, President Benigno Aquino backed off some aspects of his ambitious modernization program, noting that for

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Notes

1. National Security Council Secretariat, Briefing: "Our National Security Policy For Change and Filipinos Well-Being (2017-2022), October 7, 2016.

2. Philippine Air Force "Flight Plan 2028", December 17, 2014.

China's Power Projection in the Western Indian Ocean

By David H. Shinn

The People's Liberation Army Navy's (PLAN) recently participated in an operation to free the Tuvalu-flagged OS 35 bulk carrier with help from the Indian Navy in the Gulf of Aden (The Hindu, April 9). The People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) 24th task force in the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operation returned in March to its homeport of Qingdao following port calls in four Persian Gulf states (Chinamil.com, March 9, 2017). Since 2008, China has significantly increased its naval presence in the Indian Ocean, giving rise to Indian concerns of potential military encirclement and raising questions in American strategic thinking about China's ultimate objectives. Both the United States and India maintain a much stronger naval presence than China in the Indian Ocean, but the balance is beginning to shift. Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced in 2013 the strategic "One Belt, One Road" and "21st Century Maritime Silk Road" that stretches from the South China Sea across the Indian Ocean to the eastern Mediterranean. This initiative guarantees China will increase its economic and military engagement along Indian Ocean maritime routes. **[1]** The PLAN's continuing participation in the anti-piracy operation long after most pirate attacks had ended and the construction of a military base at Djibouti are tangible indications of China's power projection.

China's 2015 Military Strategy white paper states clearly that the PLAN will protect the security of strategic sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and overseas interests, and participate in international maritime cooperation so as to build itself "into a maritime power." The white paper adds that the PLAN will continue to carry out anti-piracy escort missions in the Gulf of Aden and gradually intensify its participation in international peacekeeping. The PLAN will also gradually shift to a combination of "offshore waters defense" together with "open seas protection" ([Defense White Paper](#), May 2015).

China's Naval Expansion in the Western Indian Ocean

The PLAN made its first visit to the Western Indian Ocean in 2000 with port calls in Tanzania and South Africa. In 2002, the PLAN made a round-the-world cruise with two ships passing through the Suez Canal, including a port call in Alexandria, Egypt. Six years passed without any PLAN port calls in the Western Indian Ocean until China began in 2008 participation in the Gulf of Aden anti-piracy operation. **[2]** Since 2008, twenty-five PLAN task forces comprised usually of two combat ships and an oiler have patrolled the Gulf of Aden. **[3]** These ships have made more than sixty port calls in Algeria, Bahrain, Djibouti, Egypt, India, Kenya, Kuwait, Morocco, Mozambique, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Seychelles, Sri Lanka, Tanzania, United Arab Emirates, and Yemen. **[4]**

The initial goal of the PLAN task forces was to protect Chinese shipping from pirate attacks in the Gulf of Aden. Coordinated suppression of piracy by a number of international navies was successful, and until March 2017, the last successful pirate attack against any commercial vessel occurred in 2012 ([Xinhua](#), March 15, 2017).

Pirates did capture a Comoros-flagged fuel tanker off the coast of Somalia in March of this year. In April, a lone Somali gunman boarded and captured an Indian-registered dhow off the Somali coast ([Xinhua](#), April 5, 2017). Although piracy could return as a serious threat to international (and Chinese) shipping interests, China's primary goals now are to provide naval support for all Chinese security interests in the region. These include its peacekeeping forces, evacuation of its nationals from conflict zones as it has done in Yemen and Libya, and gaining experience for naval personnel far from China's shores. China currently has 235 military personnel assigned to nearby UN peacekeeping missions in Darfur in Sudan and 1,063 personnel, including a combat battalion, in South Sudan ([UN peacekeeping statistics](#), February 2017).

In 2014, China deployed for the first time a submarine with the anti-piracy task force and, in 2015 it sent a nuclear-powered submarine to the Gulf of Aden operation. Submarines are not well suited to combat piracy; the operation gave China an opportunity to test its submarines and train its personnel ([The Diplomat](#), April 12, 2015). In 2016, China began construction of a permanent "logistical facility" in Djibouti for the stated purpose of supporting its anti-piracy, humanitarian, and regional peacekeeping efforts. Most non-Chinese observers, including the commander of the U.S. Africa Command, describe the facility as a military base, the first such overseas base for China, and view the decision as part of China's long-distance power projection strategy ([China Brief](#), January 25, 2016; [BreakingDefense.com](#), March 27, 2017). China also reportedly plans to expand its "Marine Corps" from about 20,000 to 100,000 personnel to protect China's maritime lifelines and its interests overseas. Some of these personnel are expected to be assigned to China's facility in Djibouti and

at Gwadar in Pakistan ([South China Morning Post](#), March 13, 2017; [China Brief](#), December 3, 2010).

China's only aircraft carrier, the *Liaoning*, has been operating in the South China Sea and has not yet entered the Indian Ocean. Interviewed recently on Indian television, Admiral Harry Harris Jr., Commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, said there is nothing to prevent the Chinese aircraft carrier battle group from operating in the Indian Ocean. He noted that the *Liaoning* is unable to maintain the operational tempo of larger U.S. aircraft carriers that conduct operations day and night. Harris added that the Indian Navy has far more expertise in operating aircraft carriers than does the PLAN ([NDTV](#), January 19, 2017). Because of its operational limitations, the *Liaoning* may be used primarily to show the Chinese flag and project power.

China has been building major commercial ports in Myanmar, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Djibouti, and Tanzania. U.S. and Indian experts are debating whether China is pursuing a strategy of building commercial port facilities along the rim of the Indian Ocean that will one day be used for military purposes. **[5]** Indian Ocean expert David Brewster, argues, however, there is little evidence that China is pursuing a strategy of sea *control* although it appears to be developing sea *denial* capabilities. Brewster points to the increasing deployment of submarines in the Indian Ocean and the potential for land-based sea denial capabilities in the region. **[6]** While China is expanding its naval capacity in the Western Indian Ocean, it is important to understand that the PLAN's highest priorities remain along China's coast, the South China Sea, Strait of Malacca, and Western Pacific.

China's Interests in the Indian Ocean

Currently the world's largest oil importer, China obtains about 52 percent of its imported crude from the Middle East and 22 percent from Africa. About 82 percent of China's imported oil transits the Strait of Malacca and 40 percent travels through the Strait of Hormuz at the entrance of the Persian Gulf. [7] Almost 40 percent of China's foreign trade crosses the Indian Ocean.

[8]

Zhou Bo, a fellow at the People's Liberation Army's Academy of Military Science, wrote in 2014, before China began constructing a military facility in Djibouti, that "China has only two purposes in the Indian Ocean: economic gains and the security of sea lines of communication" ([China-US Focus](#), February 11, 2014). He added that China is interested in access—and not bases—in the Indian Ocean. However, the facility under construction at Djibouti begs a discussion of wider Chinese military engagement in the region. Jérôme Henry, lieutenant commander in the French Navy, argues that China's naval deployments in the Gulf of Aden are motivated by "power-projection capability, acquiring operational experience in a real operational environment, protecting Chinese interests abroad, and improving China's image on the international stage." [9]

Senior Colonel Xu Qiyu, deputy director of the Institute for Strategic Studies at China's National Defense University, said China's principal security interests in the Indian Ocean are access to SLOCs, good relations with nuclear-armed India and Pakistan, general stability in the region, and protecting Chinese interests and citizens. Xu Qiyu added that protecting these interests requires that China counter the threat of piracy and terrorism, take into account Indian and

American influence, and be prepared for threats from other major powers. [10]

State-owned COSCO, China's largest shipping company, invested \$186 million in a joint venture to operate and manage the Suez Canal Container Terminal in Port Said at the northern end of the canal. The state-owned China Harbor Engineering Company subsequently invested \$219 million to construct a quay there and another \$1 billion to build a quay in al-Adabiya at the southern entrance to the canal. The goal is to secure reliable access for Chinese commercial shipping from the Indian Ocean and Red Sea to the Mediterranean Sea ([China Brief](#), October 10, 2014; [China Policy Institute: Analysis](#), February 2016). This includes access to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor; COSCO ships already call at Gwadar port ([Xinhua](#), November 16, 2016).

China has an additional interest in the Western Indian Ocean that is seldom mentioned. In 2011, it signed a 15-year contract with the International Seabed Authority to prospect for seabed polymetallic sulfides in a 10,000 square kilometer zone just south of Madagascar. In 2015, China's deep-sea manned submersible *Jiaolong* and research vessel *Dayang Yihao* both conducted missions in the Indian Ocean, underscoring China's interest in the underwater resources ([China Daily](#), May 7, 2015; [South China Morning Post](#), October 6, 2016).

Other Naval Actors in the Western Indian Ocean

The U.S. Navy projects more power in the Indian Ocean than any other country. The 5th Fleet is based in Bahrain and monitors the Persian Gulf, Red Sea, and Arabian Sea. Elements of the Pacific-based 7th Fleet routinely visit the Indian Ocean. Diego Garcia is a major U.S. naval and air

support base in the middle of the Indian Ocean. The United States has a counterterrorism facility at Djibouti with more than 4,000 personnel and a variety of land-based forces operating in the Gulf States and northeast Africa.

India, due to its geographical proximity, has the largest number of mostly coastal combatant ships that could be arrayed on short notice and has a huge naval advantage over China in the Indian Ocean. India has expanded its antisubmarine warfare facilities in the Andaman Islands to monitor Chinese submarines passing through the Strait of Malacca. France has a modest naval facility on Réunion, a French *département* southwest of Mauritius, ground forces on Mayotte, another *département* in the Mozambique Channel, and forces at Djibouti and Abu Dhabi. Japan has significant shipping interests in the Indian Ocean, and it established a modest military base in Djibouti in 2011.

Naval Competition or Cooperation in the Western Indian Ocean?

Both the United States and India want to ensure that China does not pursue hegemonic goals in the region. In addition, India, Pakistan, and China are developing naval nuclear forces and they all have nuclear weapons. China is assisting Pakistan in this effort. All three may eventually deploy nuclear weapons in the Indian Ocean. [11] This development would contribute to greater regional instability and would not be in the interest of the United States.

There seems little doubt that China is strengthening its ability to protect Chinese interests in the Western Indian Ocean region and setting the stage for power projection even further into the Mediterranean and around South Africa. So far, China's policy has not raised serious concerns in

Western Indian Ocean littoral states with the important exception of India. But China's strategy is raising increasing questions among U.S. analysts in addition to those from India.

A strong case can be made for maximizing U.S. cooperation with India in the Indian Ocean region while, at the same time, identifying areas where Washington and New Delhi can bring China into the picture in an effort to minimize future conflict among the three parties and enhance regional stability. [12] Potential areas for cooperation include joint training exercises, intelligence sharing, coordinating humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, counter-piracy and, conceivably, more sensitive ones such as counterterrorism, combatting drug and arms trafficking, preventing illegal fishing, and minimizing seaborne environmental threats. [13]

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Notes

1. Morgan Clemens, *The Maritime Silk Road and the PLA*, paper delivered at a China as a "Maritime Power" conference in Arlington Virginia, July 28-29, 2015. Available at https://www.cna.org/cna_files/pdf/maritime-silk-road.pdf.
2. David H. Shinn and Joshua Eisenman, *China and Africa: A Century of Engagement* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), p. 189.

3. Jérôme Henry, "China's Military Deployments in the Gulf of Aden: Anti-Piracy and Beyond," *Asie. Visions* 89 (November 2016): p. 6.
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5. Abhijit Singh, "China's 'Maritime Bases' in the IOR: A Chronicle of Dominance Foretold," *Strategic Analysis* 39 (3), 2015: pp. 296-97.
6. Australia India Institute, *China and India at Sea: A Contest of Status and Legitimacy in the Indian Ocean* (September 2015): pp. 11-12. Available at <http://www.aii.unimelb.edu.au/publications/china-and-india-sea-contest-status-and-legitimacy-indian-ocean>.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
8. Xu Qiyu, "National Security Interests and India Ocean: China's Perspective," research paper no. 16-11 published by Adelaide Law School January 12, 2016), p. 3. Available at https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2726377.
9. Henry, p. 24.
10. Xu Qiyu, p. 4.
11. Iskander Rehman, *Murky Waters: Naval Nuclear Dynamics in the Indian Ocean*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2015: pp. 41-45. Available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2015/03/09/murky-waters-naval-nuclear-dynamics-in-indian-ocean-pub-59279>.
12. Chunhao Lou, China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, seems to share this view: "US-India-China Relations in the Indian Ocean: A Chinese Perspective," *Strategic Analysis* 36 (4), 2012: pp. 633-36. Antara Ghosal Singh, "India, China and the US: Strategic Convergence in the Indo-Pacific," *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 12 (2), 2016: pp. 172-73.
13. Several of these areas for cooperation are urged in the U.S. Defense Department's 2014 *Quadrennial Defense Review*. See also Eleanor Albert, *Competition in the Indian Ocean*, Council on Foreign Relations backgrounder, May 19, 2016. Available at <http://www.cfr.org/regional-security/competition-indian-ocean/p37201>.

Bhutan's Relations With China and India

Sudha Ramachandran

The 14th Dalai Lama's April 4-13 visit to Tawang in the northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, over which China lays claim, drew thousands of followers. Among these were some 3,000 Bhutanese, who trekked across mountains to see the Tibetan spiritual leader ([India Today](#), April 9). Bhutan shares a disputed border with Tibet and has close ties with Tibetan Buddhism, complicating its relationship with China.

The Sino-Bhutanese border dispute involves 764 square kilometers (sq km) of territory. Beijing claims 495 sq km of territory in the Jakurlung and Pasamlung Valleys in north-central Bhutan and another 269 sq km in western Bhutan, comprising the Doklam Plateau ([Bhutan News Service](#), January 1, 2013). Doklam Plateau abuts Chumbi Valley, which like the Tawang salient that adjoins Bhutan's eastern border has enormous strategic significance for China, Bhutan as well as India. India's defense of its northeast would be undermined should Bhutan cede control over it to China.

Although this dispute is over a small area of land, a settlement has proved elusive since it is entangled in the region's geopolitics and the India-China border dispute. Indeed, of its land border disputes with 14 countries it is only those with Bhutan and India that Beijing is yet to resolve. Bhutan is also China's only neighbor with which Beijing does not have official diplomatic relations.

Chinese Claims

China and Bhutan became neighbors only after the Chinese annexation of Tibet in 1951. Prior to that, it was Tibet and Bhutan that shared borders, "had a close, although often conflicting" political relationship and strong cultural, religious and trade ties. Interaction between Chinese and Bhutanese officials began only in the early 18th century, when the Qing dynasty extended its rule to Tibet and sent its *ambans* (resident commissioners) there. It was during this period that Bhutan, according to Chinese sources, became a vassal of China when "the Tibetan ruler Polhane's alleged suzerainty on Bhutan...was supposed to have been passed on to Tibet's Chinese overlord." [1] It is on this basis

that China makes its historical claim to Bhutanese territory. [2]

With British influence in Bhutan growing in the latter half of the 19th century, China began asserting its suzerainty over the Himalayan kingdom, intervening in its affairs and even sending its troops to emphasize its claims there. [3] In 1910, China laid claim to Bhutan along with Nepal and Sikkim and in 1930, Mao Zedong named Bhutan and Nepal, among other countries, as falling within the "the correct boundaries of China." The People's Republic of China asserted its claims over Bhutan even more aggressively. Maps in official publications showed parts of Bhutan as Chinese territory. During its annexation of Tibet, China occupied eight Bhutanese enclaves in western Bhutan. Such actions "scare[d] the small state of Bhutan." [4]

Bhutan Turns to India

China's assertive claims over Bhutan prompted it to pull away from its long association with Tibet and draw closer to British India and subsequently, to independent India. In 1949, Bhutan signed the Treaty of Perpetual Peace and Friendship with India, under which it agreed "to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations" ([Ministry of External Affairs \[MEA\]](#), India). This legitimized India's advisory role in Bhutan's foreign policy making, including relations with China, providing Beijing with reason to castigate India for treating Bhutan as a "protectorate" ([Global Times](#), August 4, 2013).

Bhutan's anxieties vis-à-vis China deepened following China's brutal suppression of the Tibetan uprising in 1959. The flight of the 14th Dalai Lama and his followers from Tibet impacted the

Bhutanese immensely. Refugee accounts of Chinese atrocities against the Tibetans convinced them that the Chinese were “out to destroy Buddhism and Buddhists.” There were “real fears that Chinese troops would pursue the Tibetan refugees into Bhutan.” [5]

This and Chinese incursions prompted Bhutan in 1960 to accept India’s offers of economic and military aid. The defense of Bhutan, which was a “key component of the unwritten portion of the 1949 treaty,” received a boost with India establishing in Bhutan a 1,000-member-strong Indian Military Training Team (IMTRAT) to train the Royal Bhutan Army (The Pioneer, July 24, 2013). Bhutan also snapped all ties with Tibet and thus China, shut down its northern borders with Tibet and banned trade with it.

Events in the 1960s and 1970s prompted Bhutan to rethink its policy of distancing itself from China. Although the 1962 Sino-Indian border war reaffirmed its concerns over China’s territorial ambitions in the Himalayas, India’s defeat in that war raised doubts in Thimphu over Delhi’s capacity to defend itself, let alone Bhutan in the event of a Chinese aggression. [6] Additionally, India’s assimilation of Sikkim, another Himalayan kingdom lying between China and India, in 1973–75 “created considerable apprehension in Thimphu over India’s territorial ambitions as well. [7] These developments led Thimphu to seek some distance from India by engaging China too. It culminated in Bhutan reaching out to Beijing and preferring to settle the border with China directly through dialogue.

Package Deal

Direct talks between China and Bhutan commenced in 1984. [8] China has preferred settlement of the border dispute through a “package

deal” rather than a sector-by-sector settlement. It presented the “package deal” in 1996 under which it offered to give up claims on Jakurlung and Pasamlung Valleys in exchange for the Doklam Plateau (Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses [IDSA], January 19, 2010). Additionally, it has pressed for establishment of trade and diplomatic relations and has made that a quid pro quo for a border settlement. In fact, it seems to be willing to give up claims on Jakurlung and Pasamlung Valleys only after Bhutan establishes formal trade and diplomatic relations with Beijing. As for the Doklam Plateau, Beijing appears willing to make only “minor adjustments” here (Chennai Center for China Studies, January 15, 2010).

Doklam Plateau’s strategic value drives China’s bid to wrest control over it via the “package deal.” The plateau has a commanding view of the Chumbi Valley, which lies at the tri-junction of India, Tibet and Bhutan and is near the Siliguri Corridor, the narrow strip of land that links the Indian mainland to its restive northeastern states. A military push down the Chumbi Valley would enable Chinese troops to quickly cut off India’s overland access to its northeast. But Chumbi Valley being narrow makes any military maneuver here difficult. Hence, China wants to extend the valley by incorporating the neighboring Doklam Plateau (South Asia Monitor, May 12, 2016). Given Doklam Plateau’s importance to India’s defense, India has stationed a “sizeable” IMTRAT at Ha and Thimphu. It has built Bhutan’s roads and “provides its inventory of weapons and fire power” (The Tribune, February 15, 2008)

Bhutan’s Dilemma

Accepting the “package deal” would bring Bhutan a stable and settled border with China. How-

ever, it will not be easy for the Bhutanese government to sell the deal at home. Ceding Doklam Plateau would involve giving up rich pastoral land that supports the livelihoods of people living in the western border districts and Bhutanese legislators from these districts are opposing the “package deal” in the National Assembly ([IDSA](#), January 19, 2010).

More importantly, Bhutan will have to contend with Indian pressure. India is strongly opposed to the “package deal” as its defenses would be significantly weakened if Bhutan cedes control of the Doklam Plateau to China. Bhutan’s acceptance of the “package deal” despite India’s objections would not be illegal; the India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty, which replaced the 1949 Treaty in 2007, does not require Thimphu to be guided by Indian advice on foreign policy matters. It only requires them to “cooperate closely ... on issues relating to their national interests” ([MEA, India](#)). Still, India would pressure Bhutan if it shows interest in the package deal. Such pressure could involve economic measures. A landlocked country, Bhutan is heavily dependent on India for access to the sea, trade and development aid. Around 79 percent of Bhutan’s total imports are from India and India provides a market for 90 percent of its exports ([Embassy of India, Thimphu](#)). India is also Bhutan’s largest aid donor and has financed much of its Five Year Plans; its contribution of US\$750 million towards Bhutan’s Eleventh Five Year Plan (2013-18), for instance, represents 68 percent of the total external assistance that Bhutan received ([Embassy of India, Thimphu](#)).

While China would extend Bhutan financial and other support should it accept the ‘package deal,’ it is unlikely to be able to match India’s massive economic role in Bhutan. In the Himalayan region, geography favors trade with India,

not China ([China Brief](#), November 16, 2015). China’s limited and largely symbolic support to Nepal during the 2015 blockade crisis was noted in Bhutan ([The Bhutanese](#), October 1, 2015). Unlike Nepal and Sikkim (in the early 1970s), Bhutan has avoided playing the ‘China card’ so far. It has seen the impact of this strategy on Sikkim’s fate in 1973 and on Nepal in 1988, when India assimilated Sikkim and imposed an economic embargo on Nepal.

Toward Diplomatic Relations

So far, Bhutan has not accepted China’s package deal “due to India’s pressure and this situation is likely to continue.” However, diplomatic relations seem “a real possibility in the foreseeable future.” **[9]** Although there is concern in India over Bhutan establishing diplomatic relations with China as this would increase Chinese presence and influence in the Himalayan kingdom, Indian scholars on Bhutan recognize that Sino-Bhutanese diplomatic relations “cannot be deferred forever.” **[10]** Besides, there are “limits” to the kind of “pressure India can bring to bear on Bhutan especially in the era of parliamentary democracy in Bhutan” ([Daily News and Analyses](#), July 6, 2012). It is therefore “unlikely to oppose Bhutan’s diplomatic relations with China” ([Indian Express](#), June 28, 2012).

There is growing interest in Bhutan for establishing diplomatic relations with China. Democratization has ushered in “expanding space for public debate” and “highly sensitive” issues are being debated in the National Assembly. **[11]** Parliamentarians are raising questions on foreign policy issues and the government is under growing pressure from the private sector, including the Bhutan Chambers of Commerce to resolve the border dispute and importantly, establish

economic relations with China. **[12]** Public access to television and the Internet has enhanced public awareness about China, its robust economic ties with other South Asian countries, including India. Bhutanese would like to benefit from such relations too. Clearly, "more economic opportunities" lie ahead for Bhutan by engaging with China and Beijing "can help significantly" in developing Bhutan's "very small private sector."

[13]

In addition to desiring proximity to China for economic reasons, a 'normal relationship' with China is seen to be necessary for Bhutan to secure its sovereignty. "Ignoring China at the behest of India" is seen to be "in itself a long-term peril to Bhutanese sovereignty." **[14]** Fear drew Bhutan away from China. That is slowly changing and some Bhutanese are keen to engage China for the economic opportunities it offers and to balance India's outside influence in the kingdom. Though few in number, this group is growing.

Conclusion

As small state sandwiched between China and India, Bhutan has borne the cost of their geopolitical rivalry. China, which has generally settled its border disputes with its smaller neighbors in the latter's favor, has shown little generosity in dealing with Bhutan due to its 'special relationship' with India. Given the strategic significance of the Doklam Plateau to China and India, settlement of the Sino-Bhutanese border dispute is likely only as part of or after India and China settle their border dispute.

Emerging pressure from its own population and China could see Bhutan move gradually towards establishing formal economic and diplomatic relations with Beijing. Both Bhutan and China

would need to tread carefully. Should this process stir unease in India Delhi can be expected to press Bhutan to pull back. More importantly, any Chinese aggression in the Himalayas, including military crackdowns in Tibet, would reawaken old fears of China in Bhutan. That would slow the establishment of Sino-Bhutanese diplomatic relations.

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Political Indoctrination in Chinese Colleges

By Zi Yang

In a system where ministers are incentivized to report only good news, China's Minister of Education public censure of failures in ideological and political education (思想政治教育; IPE) at

Chinese universities came as a surprise ([FRI](#), March 12). A campaign has been underway to intensify IPE since a December 2016 conference on ideological and political work in China's universities and colleges. At the conference Chinese President Xi Jinping strongly reaffirmed the supremacy of Marxism and socialism in Chinese institutions of higher learning, and pressed for strengthening of ideological and political work to indoctrinate the country's 37 million college students ([Xinhua](#), December 9, 2016). Yet the Minister of Education's criticisms indicate that IPE is not proving successful.

The Status Quo of IPE

Chinese colleges have a long history of radicalism that stirs fear among Party elites. Whether it was the Red Guard movement, the 1989 student demonstrations, or the recent nationalist protests, the college campus, with its proclivity for freethinking, is a place where the Party cannot afford to let go of the reins. Chinese universities are firmly controlled by the state through finances and appointment of administrative leadership. Even outwardly independent private colleges are falling under the control of newly installed Party secretaries with the clear intention of being the "backbone of ideological and political work ([China Wenming Online](#), January 13)."

According to surveys completed by Chinese researchers, the Party enjoys majority support among college students—with one poll showing that 73.3 percent "support" or "strongly support" the Party's leadership. **[1]** Although we must be aware that China's political climate deeply influences how interviewees answer a survey, research has shown that the Party does have a healthy level of support among college students. **[2]** Nonetheless, student support for

IPE, the Party's signature indoctrination program, is comparatively low.

Mixing Marxism, patriotism, and some traditional Chinese values, IPE aims to rally mass support for the Party, its ideology, and its governance. Taught as a required course, one study shows that 64.4 percent of students are "unsatisfied" with IPE, with another 17.9 percent "very unsatisfied." **[3]** Likewise, 50 percent of respondents in another study find IPE "almost pointless," but forced themselves to attend due to school rules. Plagiarism and cheating are common due to students' falling enthusiasm. **[4]** Despite interest in Red Culture (红色文化), a set of state sponsored cultural values based on the Chinese Communist Party's revolutionary experience—a notable minority (28.3 percent) of students find Red Culture events (a component of IPE) boring. Over half (53.2 percent) said they were forced to attend, and 60.5 percent view these events as irrelevant to real life. **[5]**

Why is IPE so Unpopular?

Political indoctrination is rarely fun, especially for students living in a relatively open society. While students demand more discussions, debates and field work, IPE teachers can only continue with monotonous lectures because any exercise involving critical analysis will shatter the perfect image of Marxism. **[6]** Thus, while Chinese college students loathe IPE for being a "single-voice class" (一言堂) where the teacher dominates the conversation, changes are less likely to come as it could possibly destroy IPE in its entirety. **[7]**

IPE is fighting an uphill battle in three areas. The increasing Internet usage by Chinese college students is corroding the hold of official ideology. For example, the officially championed

myth of the Chinese Communist Party as the mainstay in expelling Japanese invaders is slowly losing believers, because more and more students are learning the truth from the Internet. **[8]** Eighty percent of Chinese college students spend more than two hours a day surfing the Web, 92 percent say they use the Internet as a source of information, and 88.9 percent use Weibo (Chinese equivalent of Twitter) and WeChat (Chinese equivalent of WhatsApp)—two apps that allow students some modicum of privacy when discussing current affairs. **[9]**

The arrival of organized religion to Chinese campuses poses another threat to official ideology. Besides offering mental comfort, organized religious groups serve as a social safety net for students, in comparison to communist political organizations that are fraught with corruption and exclusivism. Recent studies show that interest in religion is gaining strength in Chinese colleges, even in the Communist Youth League. **[10]** Forty-nine percent of students do not know that Party members must be atheists, and a third (31.4 percent) do not mind campus proselytizing—an act forbidden by the state. **[11]** While the growing interest in religion has not openly challenged the Party's dominance of campuses, one trend might spell trouble in the near future. In one survey of Xinjiang colleges, 5.8 percent of respondents believe one can force a religion on others. **[12]** More alarmingly, 8.6 percent agree with the extreme position that spreading one's religion using violent means is permissible. **[13]**

IPE educators face additional difficulties in areas dominated by ethnic and religious minorities, in particular among Tibetans and the Turkic Muslims of Xinjiang. Few of these groups played major roles in the events of the 20th century that conditioned the contemporary Chinese psyche.

Compared to Mongols and Hui Muslims that allied with Chinese communists in the fight against Japan, Tibetans and Turkic Muslims played next to no role in the in the War of Resistance Against Japan (1937–1945) which forms the core of the CCP’s national narrative. Moreover, Marxism’s anti-religion doctrine makes IPE difficult when teaching Tibetan college students who hold Lamaism in high regard. Most Tibetans live their entire life according to Buddhism precepts and hold deep reverence for their religious leaders. To teach religion as obsolescent is not only deeply offensive to Tibetans, but also counterproductive to IPE in general. **[14]** The same can be said for Xinjiang, where ethnic Turkic Muslims constitute more than half of the province’s population. Although students would pay lip service to the curriculum just so they can graduate, the doctrinaire system of pedagogy is not truly winning over hearts and minds.

The Role of Political Counselors

Outside of the classroom, Political Counselors (政治辅导员; PCs) take care of a student’s all-around needs while attending college, and are tasked with shaping his/her ideological and political values. As the “backbone of ideological and political education for college students,” PCs are “the organizer, implementer and mentors of college students in everyday ideological and political education and management” ([Ministry of Education](#), July 23, 2006).

Working closely with selected student cadres, the PCs spread the Party’s message when students are outside of the classroom. Although the law stipulates that there should be one PC to every 200 students, in reality, personnel shortage makes the ratio much higher. One to 300 or 400 is not an unusual number. In extreme cases, it has been reported that a PC have to take care

of 1,000 students, making the job impossible. **[15]**

Besides being over-encumbered, 56 percent of PCs are unsatisfied with their salary and benefits. To add to the already tense environment, PCs are governed by a dual command regime, where school and department leadership can sometime issue conflicting orders. **[16]**

Under these circumstances, it is not a surprise to find that some PCs do not even agree with the Party line themselves. One poll shows that 31.92 percent of PCs do not believe in the Marxist dogma that a communist society is inevitable. Straying from the government narrative, close to half (47.1 percent) of PCs do not believe that the income gap will close in ten years. **[17]**

The Role of Protection Divisions

If IPE teachers and PCs are the softer side of political indoctrination, then Protection Divisions (保卫处) are the “stick” that police political behavior. Present in every university bureaucracy, the Protection Division have several functions—public safety, fire prevention, registering visitors and temporary workers—and most importantly, political policing. Underneath each Protection Division there is a Political Protection Section (政保科; PPS). While taking on different names at different colleges, the mission of the PPS remain more or less the same—propagate official ideology and counter any attempts by “hostile forces” in influencing students. Although the PPS do not have law enforcement power, a power reserved for the public security police, it does have the power to investigate. **[18]** Political Protection Informants (政保信息员), selected from the student body, serve as the PPS’s “eyes and ears (耳目)” ([Xi’an Shiyou University](#), June 6, 2014).

Given the secrecy surrounding its work, most PPSs do not publicize their duties, but the PPS of the Harbin Institute of Technology, self-referred to as the Political Protection and State Security Office (政保国安办), openly declares its responsibilities as the following:

1. Responsible for propaganda and education of the national security concept, enemy awareness, and political stability.
2. Responsible for understanding, controlling, tracking, and ideological education of key people that can influence political stability.
3. Responsible for carrying out research and information gathering; grasp the ideological trends among faculty and students in a timely and accurate manner to provide the basis for higher-level leadership decision-making.
4. Cooperate with public security and state security police in detecting and investigating cases endangering state security.
5. Responsible for security of important leaders and foreign dignitaries. Assist relevant agencies in implementing security measures for foreign experts, teachers, exchange students, compatriots from Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan, and visiting foreign staff.
6. Assist relevant agencies to prevent and punish infiltration, incitement, and sabotage of schools by domestic and foreign hostile forces, illegal religious forces, and ethnic separatist forces.
7. Assist relevant agencies in secure management of the campus's com-

puter network system and identification of sources of harmful information.

8. Assist relevant agencies in confidential work.
9. Conduct political review of school staff in accordance with the requirements of relevant agencies.
10. Assist relevant agencies in managing student associations.
11. Conduct basic business work. Establish and improve the management of various data files.
12. Assist other sections and offices in completing tasks. Complete any other mission assigned by the division director
([Harbin Institute of Technology](#)).

In essence, PPS is the monitor of campus security and ideological uniformity, in addition to serving as the workhorse of counterintelligence. While IPE staff focus on pedagogy, it is the PPS's mission to keep out unofficial people and ideas. This repressive regime is likely to receive greater state investment due to the risks associated with liberalizing IPE.

Conclusion

Among Chinese college students, support for the Party and government remain strong—at least on paper. However, most students have shown their dissatisfaction with IPE and their inability to intake additional political coursework void of liberal teaching methods. In the future, the state will likely strengthen IPE in the following ways. Firstly, the state will try to assert greater control of the cyber sphere by clamping down on alternative sources of information popular among students—also by intensifying propaganda and counterpropaganda on Weibo and WeChat. Secondly, more PCs will be trained to

alleviate the current personnel shortage. Thirdly, greater attention will be diverted to indoctrination in ethnic areas, especially to the Tibetan and Turkic Muslims most susceptible to what the state calls the “three evils” of terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. Finally, there will be a renewed pushback against the spread of religion in colleges, a trend, if unchecked, will present significant challenges in winning over China’s brightest young minds.

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South Korea’s Presidential Election: Implications for China

By Darcie Draudt

The South Korean presidency was scheduled to change hands later this year, but Park Geun-hye’s official removal from office in March 2017 has accelerated the turnover in leadership, with elections scheduled for May 9 ([Joongang Daily](#), March 15). During her truncated tenure, Park initially sought warmer relations with China: barely two years ago, Park’s diplomatic overtures toward China raised questions over whether Seoul was in fact shifting toward Beijing and perhaps away from Washington ([China Brief](#), September 16, 2015).

However, scandals at home tied the diplomatic hands of Park’s administration, and increased tensions in North-South relations brought out the hardline core of Park’s policies and vision of Northeast Asian relations. In particular, the July 2016 South Korean-U.S. agreement to deploy the Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) missile defense system has been met with swift and multifaceted opposition from Beijing.

There are several ways that fallout from the president’s impeachment may affect South Korea’s relations with its neighbors. North Korea continues to make progress on its nuclear weapons development—it tested nuclear devices

three times during the Park administration—and flouts international sanctions against missile testing ([38North](#), September 12, 2016). And despite robust institutionalized cooperation that builds on the defense alliance established in 1950, new leadership in the United States has raised questions about the direction of the U.S.-ROK alliance. These two factors track closely with how Seoul and Beijing relate, and the next South Korean president will need a deft diplomatic hand if relations between the two are to be improved.

Domestic Politics and China

A newer issue for political debate within South Korea is how it will form its relations with China. The two normalized relations in 1992—until then, China’s special relationship with North Korea limited its relations with the South. Since normalization, Seoul’s dealings with Beijing might be characterized as pragmatic, working along diplomatic channels to help deal with North Korea, and working to expand trade and investment for economic growth. South Korea has arguably been more successful on the latter front: China is currently the country’s number two trading partner after the United States, surpassing the Japan in the fourth quarter of 2015 ([Yonhap News](#), January 17, 2016). According to the Korea International Trade Association, since 1992 South Korean exports to China increased astoundingly from \$2.65 billion to \$124.43 billion in 2016—though that’s down from the peak of trade—\$145.87 billion, in 2013 ([KITA](#), [accessed April 14]).

To achieve its own regional goals—increasing its trade profile throughout Asia, maintaining stability, and eventually working toward unification—Seoul would need a better relationship with China. Many policy planners in Seoul were

trying to form South Korea as a bridge to ease the growing pains as China and the United States renegotiated their roles in East Asia.

But a combination of factors—North Korea's threats; the Park administration's hardline response, including greater acquiescence to U.S. defensive measures; and the Park scandal—has weakened bilateral relations. Relations between the two have become considerably more rocky since the 2016 announcement that South Korea has agreed to deploy a contentious U.S. missile defense system. Indeed, THAAD permeates any conversation about the state of Korean peninsular relations with China. Chinese officials and scholars contend that THAAD radar system decreases China's nuclear deterrence capability because it could signal U.S. missile defense batteries elsewhere. (The United States insists that THAAD's radar range cannot extend into China.)

[2]

Prior to the July 2016 announcement, Beijing had said the decision to deploy THAAD would be a strategic choice for Seoul to choose its relations with the United States over its relations with China ([China Daily](#), July 15, 2016). China has since made it clear that regardless of who is elected, THAAD will still be seen as being aimed at China, disrupting the regional balance, and provoking North Korea ([Global Times](#), April 17). Now, the two appear to be making that framing a reality by severing several areas of Sino-South Korean exchange, from economic to educational to travel to cultural (SCMP, [February 1](#); [January 2](#)). On March 20, South Korea filed a complaint in the World Trade Organization against China on the grounds that China is violating some points of their bilateral trade agreement in retaliation for the THAAD decision.

And new polling data indicate the South Korean public attitude toward China has soured. China had slowly been seeing more favorability among Koreans, based on the pragmatic consideration that their economic future was tied up with their western neighbor. China's favorability rating among South Koreans, though, has declined rapidly: an Asan Institute poll released March 20 shows the rating (on a scale of 0 to 10) dropped over one whole point since January, from 4.31 to 3.21, putting China's favorability below Japan's (3.31) for the first time in years. The decline in public opinion is even more noticeable when looking at the year prior—in January 2016 favorability was well over 5 points on the 10-point scale.

Party Lines, North Korea, and the US-ROK Alliance

North Korea has tended to be a political issue divided along party lines, at least since democratization in the 1980s. Prior to that, the authoritarian governments each based their legitimacy on national security concerns in the contest with North Korea, making any talk of engaging with Pyongyang not only politically unwise, but also grounds for imprisonment. **[1]**

Progressive administrations from the 1990s have sought closer engagement with North Korea and greater independence from the U.S. alliance. The first opposition candidate elected to the presidency, Kim Dae-jung, sought great change in peninsular affairs with his Sunshine Policy, which led to the first inter-Korean summit in 2000. Roh Moo-hyun, his successor, continued that legacy by deepening engagement with North Korea while also building support by seeking greater autonomy from the United States ([Guardian](#), December 19, 2002). At the time of his election in 2002—like now—South

Korea also faced an “identity conflict” between the left and right, which at that time politicized relations with North Korea and the United States ([Washington Post](#), March 10).

Conservative administrations in South Korea have tended toward a stronger approach toward North Korea and fostered a close relationship with its security guarantor, the United States. Lee Myung-bak, who returned conservatives to the presidential Blue House in 2008, sought to diversify South Korea’s foreign policy portfolio with his “Global Korea” slogan, looking to move Korea past being mired in a contest with North Korea while continuing conditional engagement with the northern neighbor. [1] Park Geun-hye took a much stronger stance against North Korea, working diligently at home and abroad to promote the idea of imminent reunification ([Korea Herald](#), March 28, 2014).

These days, even for candidates who have continuously supported engagement, North Korea under Kim Jong-un has been less willing to talk than under Kim Jong-il, and the continued nuclear weapons and missile development programs make it difficult to talk about engagement with North Korea. The new U.S. administration, too, has sent largely reaffirming but nonetheless inconsistent signals about its intended Korea policy, which makes Korean policymakers from both sides of the aisle wary, if not nervous. During his Seoul visit in February, Defense Secretary Jim Mattis emphasized the importance of strengthening the U.S.-ROK alliance particularly as it pertains to deterring North Korea. But Secretary of State Rex Tillerson’s visit to Seoul in March met some mixed results in South Korea, where local media claimed he truncated his schedule (the State Department said the evening meetings had never been scheduled) ([Guardian](#), March 17). Regarding North Korea,

Tillerson said, “all options are on the table”—which some have interpreted to mean preemptive military action. This sentiment was echoed on April 17 by Vice President Mike Pence during his visit to South Korea: “the era of strategic patience is over” ([NPR](#), April 17). It’s important to recall that in South Korea, the politics of the U.S. alliance and relations with North Korea are considered *domestic* issues, and this year’s election has seen politicization of both.

Candidates and Regional Relations

Regional relations feed directly into these two issues, and they have become central to the politicking of candidates for next month’s election. Parties in South Korea regularly band around leading personalities for election, frequently changing names to garner support in presidential elections and remake voting blocs. Some conservatives broke off in December to found the Bareun Party (“Righteous Party”), which further weakens conservative organization for action ([Korea Herald](#), January 9). Reeling from the scandal of its now-ousted president, the conservative Saenuri, or “New Frontier”, Party renamed itself the Liberty Party Korea and has nominated Hong Jun-pyo, who is treading a line between rebranding and distancing himself from the Park scandal and protecting those from his former party ([Korea Times](#), April 4). But the scandal has smeared anyone associated with Park Geun-hye, and her party’s standing—which was partly built around her leadership via the efforts of the Pro-Park Coalition (*Chinbak Yeon-dae*) in 2008 in the National Assembly—has been shaken, making it difficult to elect a conservative candidate this May. Hong is currently polling at 7 percent. Yoo Seong-min, the candidate from the Bareun Party, is polling at 3 percent ([Gallup Korea](#), April 14).

The leading candidate—and long considered the shoo-in for election this year—is Moon Jae-in of the Minjoo Party, who ran on the progressive ticket and lost against Park in 2008. Moon is former National Assembly member who served as the Minjoo Party leader from 2015 to 2016. He faced some competition in the Minjoo primaries from Ahn Hee-jung, governor of South Chungcheong Province, who drew some of the moderate votes, particularly those who have a harder stance toward Korea's neighbors. Ahn said that South Korea should situate itself with international sanctions against North Korea to punish Pyongyang for its nuclear weapons program, though he has also indicated willingness to talk with North Korea if Pyongyang pulls back on its nuclear program. Ahn walks a moderate line compared to other left candidates, urging South Korea to develop its own defense capabilities while maintaining the U.S. alliance ([Yonhap](#), January 11)

Moon until recently has spoken out against THAAD deployment, nodding to China's objection ([Straits Times](#) [Singapore], December 15, 2016). But as China seems to be retaliating against deployment with "excessive pressure," Moon now says that Beijing should understand THAAD is a "South Korean security issue and falls within our sovereignty" ([Hankyoreh](#), March 13). On March 14, he called on China to stop its economic retaliation against South Korea over the THAAD deployment. In his January 2017 book, Moon wrote that South Korea should be able to "say no" to the United States ([Kyobo-Book](#) [Korea]). Many in the South Korean public, frustrated with the hardline policies of Park Geun-hye, welcome new thinking about engagement with North Korea and greater autonomy from its neighbors ([VOA](#), April 6).

While he has received some flak from conservatives who saw these sentiments as alignment with Beijing and Pyongyang, his campaign clarified that a Moon administration would seek a foreign policy based on South Korea's own national interests ([Hankyoreh](#), March 13). Some analysts have suggested that despite any talk of strong defense posture, Moon will ultimately seek engagement with North Korea, including restarting the Kaesong Industrial Complex. In the presidential debate on April 13, Moon said, "I will create a government most feared by North Korea, most trusted by the United States and most reliable for China."

Moon may be pulling 40 percent in the polls, but dark horse Ahn Cheol-soo has been gaining on him in the past couple weeks. Ahn has risen to 37 percent approval, two points up from the week prior ([Gallup Korea](#), April 14). Ahn ran as an independent in 2012 and then merged with a party that would become the Minjoo Party, only to leave later amid fallout with Moon Jae-in to form the People's Party in January 2016. Ahn attracts voters from the moderate and right, particularly those who were upset with the Park scandal but who do not trust Moon ([NYT](#), April 14). While many conservatives have indicated support for Ahn as a viable alternative, to Moon or Hong, South Korean political analysts point out they lack loyalty to Ahn and his party ([Korea Times](#), April 10). Ahn has stated his support of THAAD deployment, and suggests that more diplomatic work with China will be necessary to explain its centrality to counter the North Korean missile threat ([Reuters](#), April 4).

Conclusion

Until a few weeks ago, most analysts had been saying the May election is Moon Jae-in's to lose, making more attempts toward engaging North

Korea possible, at least on Seoul's end. But Ahn's recent and rapid rise in the polls suggests many in South Korea do not want to see change in their country's posture toward its neighbors. This portion of the electorate is concerned with North Korea's missile and nuclear testing as well as the U.S. ratcheting up pressure in the past couple weeks. Korean politics may be disrupted and the elections may have been sped up this year. The threats felt from North Korea's nuclear and missile weapons programs continue to challenge the political field domestically and also test South Korea's relations with China.

Despite some candidates indicating they would want to set relations with China back on track, Chinese sanctions and censure due to THAAD deployment have led to public distrust of Beijing. Given the security and political situation of the moment, an abrupt change in policy toward any of South Korea's neighbors is unlikely, particularly as any of the candidates will face limited options with pressure from the North, China, the United States, and its domestic constituents.

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Notes

1. Even now, the National Security Law makes too much sympathy for North Korea punishable, as shown as recently as 2014 when a party was dissolved and a lawmaker convicted of treason for supporting North Korea.
2. Scott Snyder, Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, Volume 21 Issue 1, March 2009. <https://asiafoundation.org/re-sources/pdfs/SnyderLMBForeignPolicyKJDA.pdf>

3. Jaganath Sankaran & Bryan L. Fearey, "Missile defense and strategic stability: Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in South Korea," *Contemporary Security Policy*, February 6, 2017 <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/13523260.2017.1280744>

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