

# FULCRUM GLOBAL



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## INTELLIGENCE BRIEF #5

**NAME OF PRIMARY ANALYST:** Brian Moody

**SUBJECT:** The Japanese Reaction to North Korea/United States Summit

**COUNTRY/REGION:** Japan/Asia

### **BACKGROUND OF SUBJECT:**

Korea and Japan have a historical relationship that has been fraught with hostility. In 1910, the Japanese government annexed the Korean peninsula and kept it under their control until the end of WWII in 1945. During this occupation the Japanese would subvert the Korean population and attempted to destroy their culture by assimilating them into Japanese culture. Korea was not unified after WWII and was divided into two occupation zones. The southern zone was occupied by the United States and the northern zone was occupied by the Soviet Union. In 1950, the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China backed the North when they invaded their southern neighbors, which began the Korean War. Currently there is an armistice between the U.S., North Korea, and South Korea since a peace treaty was never signed between the warring parties.

### **CUSTOMER QUESTIONS:**

1. Why did the United States have a summit with North Korea?
2. What are Japan's interests with the summit?
3. Are South Korea and Japan allies?
4. How did the outcome of the summit affect Japanese strategic interests?
5. Does Japan seek stronger partnerships with other Asian nations as a result of the NK/US summit?

### **CURRENT ASSESSMENT:**

The United States recently conducted a summit with the North Korean government after an increasing escalation of rhetoric occurred between the administrations of U.S. president, Donald Trump and North Korea Chairman, Kim Jong Un. The goal of the summit was to address the rapid advancement of missile technology and nuclear testing conducted by the North Korean government. The Japanese are in range of all but two of North Korea's suspected missile launch sites. Since Japan is allied with the United States and has a contentious history with the Korean nation as a whole, the Japanese assessment is that a nuclearized North Korea would be devastating to the region, as well as being a direct threat to Japanese national security.

Japan and South Korea share similar economic and governing structures as well as facing similar threats from regional neighbors such as North Korea and China. However, the Japan-South Korea relationship is tenuous at best and demonstrates the difficulties of putting past transgressions aside in favor of sound national security strategy. While the Japanese and South Korean governments conduct trade relations, a recent attempt of having a trilateral military exercise involving the U.S., Japan, and South Korea, fell apart when the South Koreans refused to participate with the Japanese. The Koreans have never felt that they have been given an appropriate apology for the use of “comfort women” during WWII. These women were used as sex slaves for the Japanese military and it is still a topic of contention to this day, so much so that a statue representing a comfort woman stands outside of the Japanese consulate in Korea.

The outcome of the summit definitely affected Japanese strategic interests, as the shocking announcement that the U.S. was willing to suspend military drills with the South Korean’s, was announced by President Donald Trump. It was also announced at the conclusion of the summit that North Korea would agree to complete the denuclearization process. While denuclearization of the Korean peninsula would eliminate the growing nuclear threat from North Korea, it still does not eliminate the conventional ballistic missile threat that the Japanese face. In addition, the suspension of U.S. military drills with South Korea will benefit the Chinese government, which will adversely affect Japan’s strategic policy. Recently, Japan has begun to strengthen its partnerships with other nations in the region in response to a perceived abandonment of the previous U.S. administration’s strategic pivot to Asia. As a result, the Japanese are quickly being sought after by regional partners as the leader in the region. This has been a regional attempt to strengthen a response to ongoing Chinese expansionism that is often seen as aggressive actions within the region as a whole.

#### **ANALYSIS OF ASSESSMENT:**

The NK/US summit yielded some surprising results, however, it remains to be seen how enforceable the agreement will be implemented. North Korean denuclearization does indeed remove a very serious threat to the Japanese, however Japan will still be in the range of all but two of North Korea’s conventional ballistic missile launch sites. Despite this progress, an aggressive and unchecked North Korea still remains a threat to Japanese national security. If the U.S. withdraws its forces from the Korean peninsula and halts joint military exercises with the South Korean’s, the Japanese may be forced to build a primary leadership role in the Pacific. If U.S. forces drawdown on the Korean peninsula, it is less than likely that U.S. forces will increase their presence in Japan, which already has a tense relationship between existing U.S. forces and the local population in Okinawa. Currently the U.S. has increased military rotations to Australia and has proposed expanding bases to increase forces on the island of Guam. This may help ease the tensions with Japan over the U.S. presence in Okinawa but would cause the U.S. to re-formulate its strategy in the Pacific.

As a regional leader, the Japanese could support regional partner nations by providing more vessels to patrol the waters around the Philippines and Vietnam. However, the Japanese military capabilities are limited to being a defensive role. They would be hard-pressed to engage in first strike options against a hostile North Korea or an aggressively expansionist China as it would require changing the Japanese national constitution. Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has proposed to change the constitution to realign the Japanese Self Defense Force by 2020 and give

the SDF legal status that they currently do not have. The NK/US summit has put the Japanese in a difficult situation in regards to Japanese national security. This summit and the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Trans Pacific agreement has left Japan and other regional allies struggling to fill a vacuum that has appeared due to the lack of a coherent U.S. foreign policy in Asia.

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#### **FINAL DATE OF ANALYSIS AND SUBMISSION:**

Monday, August 6, 2018 - 11:00 AM

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